



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

7th May 2024

Dear Contribute,

RE: HEDGEROWS

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns about hedgerows. I have read your comments with interest.

Hedgerows are important ecological building blocks in our farmed landscape, providing distinctive character to our countryside and crucial habitats and food for wildlife. Hedgerows can store carbon, improve local air quality, and benefit the rural economy by boosting job creation for hedgerow planting and management in local communities.

Protection of hedgerows is a key component of the Government's Environmental Land Management Schemes. Through the Countryside Stewardship schemes, Ministers are supporting farmers to maintain and restore over 10,000km of existing hedgerows while planting an additional 4,000km across the nation. I understand that as of January 2024, there were around 35,000 Countryside Stewardship agreements.

Further, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (DEFRA's) new Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) hedgerow standard will pay farmers to assess the condition of hedgerows and manage them in a way that will work for wildlife and improve biodiversity. I am pleased that SFI payments were increased by ten percent at the beginning of this year.

I am assured that this increased support for farmers will result in the creation of more hedgerows and flower-rich grass areas on headlands, assisting the UK's progress on environmental targets, including halting biodiversity loss by 2030.

I am aware that cross compliance rules ended at the end of last year. This is because gaps between cross compliance rules and regulatory requirements are already covered by existing and ongoing strong domestic legal frameworks, such as through generalised provisions in Farming Rules for Water and the *Water Resources Act*, guidance like the 'Code of Practice for the use of Plant Protection Products', and standards in the Sustainable Farming Incentive scheme. As a result of these, my DEFRA colleagues do not believe farmers will lower standards and there will not be significant negative environmental impacts in these areas.

Following a DEFRA consultation on maintaining and improving existing protections, the Government has set out plans for domestic hedgerow regulations. The regulations will include a two metre 'buffer strip' from the centre of hedgerows with no cultivation or application of pesticides or fertilisers, and a hedge cutting ban between the 1st March and 31st August to protect nesting birds.



The regulations will support the efforts of many farmers already carrying out vital work to protect hedgerows, providing important ecological benefits, including wildlife habitats, slowing soil erosion and water run-off, supporting crop pollinators, and absorbing carbon.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'TP', with a horizontal line underneath.

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**