

Public outcry at proposal to remove miles of hedgerow from historic Shropshire landscape

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Campaigners unite today to voice concerns about the future of England's hedgerows, which have been described by CPRE Vice-President Bill Bryson as the stitching that holds the fabric of the countryside together.



Hedgerows are a quintessential part of the Shropshire's countryside

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A landowner is seeking permission to remove over seven miles of hedges at Marrington Cottages Farm, near Chirbury in Shropshire, highlighting the importance of effective hedgerow protection. The groups are concerned that this proposal could be a worrying sign of increasing pressure on the farmed environment and its wildlife. Although it is a local case, it could have national implications. Both CPRE and The Wildlife Trusts, nationally and in Shropshire, have voiced their opposition to the proposal. Tomorrow marks the closing date for comments on this case [1], which has ignited a debate about how to reconcile the demands of modern farming and landscape conservation.

Emma Marrington [2] CPRE's Rural Policy Campaigner says:

'An application to remove all hedgerows on one farm is unprecedented in my experience. Hundreds of people, both in Shropshire and beyond, have voiced their concerns about the proposal and the effect it would have on the appearance and character of the countryside in this area and the wildlife it supports.'

Paul Wilkinson, Head of Living Landscapes for The Wildlife Trusts, said:

Hedgerows, one of the defining features of the countryside, are vitally important to wildlife. A recent survey of an English hedge revealed the presence of 1,671 species including butterflies, moths, bees, birds, small mammals and numerous invertebrates.

'If these hedges are ripped out, the impact will be felt far beyond the immediate locality; birds, bats, hedgehogs, bees and other creatures will lose feeding, nesting and sheltering opportunities across a wide area,' he added. [3]

'The destructive intent of this proposal is breath-taking' said Colin Preston, Director of Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

Emma Marrington continues 'For some time, CPRE has been pressing for landscape considerations to be added to the Hedgerows Regulations [4]. Such a measure would help to protect important hedges such as those at Marrington Farm. This would give councils more discretion to protect hedgerows that are important to local landscape character. The overwhelmingly critical response to the application to remove these hedges shows how much people care about maintaining the diversity, history and distinctiveness of our countryside.'

Notes to Editors

[1] For details of the case and to make an objection [click here](#). The deadline for comments is Thursday 17 January and a decision is due to be made by 31 January.

[2] Emma Marrington has no connection to Marrington Cottages Farm.

[3] The hedgerows also form part of the distinctive character of the landscape. The Vale of Montgomery has great beauty and historical interest, with remnants of fortifications, boundaries, settlements and field systems from prehistory to the medieval period. The field network is one of the most interesting elements of this. 37 individual fields could be lost if the application is granted, creating one vast stretch of grassland. Old field names such as Wood Leasow, indicate the ancient origins of some of them: the word 'leasow' means woodland clearance, suggesting that their existence dates back many hundreds of years.

[4] Many countryside hedgerows are protected by the Hedgerows Regulations. For a hedgerow to be deemed 'important' under the regulations, it must meet one of a nationally defined set of criteria for historic, wildlife or biodiversity value. A CPRE survey found that 42 per cent of threatened English hedgerows have been protected under the Hedgerows Regulations. Both CPRE and the Wildlife Trusts believe that there is room for improvement and that the regulations should be updated so they can provide even better protection for our hedges.

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