

Proposed Hedgerow Carbon Code could unlock more than £60m income for farmers, as development project receives £81k funding

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A ground-breaking project to unlock the environmental potential of hedgerows has been given the go-ahead with a government grant of £81,561. The scheme, being developed by the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) at its demonstration farm, The Allerton Project, will develop a **Hedgerow Carbon Code** which will encourage hedgerow habitat improvements and provide a tool to calculate the carbon capture potential of hedgerows. The project is one of just 27 to receive funds from the £10 million **Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund**.

Hedgerows sequester carbon at twice the rate of woodland because of their 3-dimensional structure and England's hedges already store 9m tonnes of carbon. The proposed Hedgerow Carbon Code will provide an innovative new approach to hedgerows. Similar to the Woodland Carbon Code, the new code will become the quality assurance standard for hedgerows and aims to generate independently verified hedgerow carbon credits.

The code will include a tool which will enable the carbon stored in a hedge to be calculated and verified, incentivising land managers to plant and manage hedgerows - an important part of the government's new Sustainable Farming Incentive. The tool will also have the potential to be developed further to monitor hedgerow biodiversity for calculating biodiversity credits.

"This award from the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund means our team at the Allerton Project, who are experienced in developing nature-based solutions, can push ahead with this innovative project," said Dr Alastair Leake, Director of The Allerton Project.

"Developing a Hedgerow Carbon Code has huge national potential to enable farmers to increase the amount of carbon stored in their hedgerows and to trade those carbon credits," continued Alastair. "Applied across a national scale, there is scope to deliver more than £60m of income to the farming community through carbon credits for hedgerow management and planting."

How will it work?

The size, structure and management regime all influence the amount of carbon stored in hedgerows. Carbon also builds up on the soil surface through hedge leaf-litter and is drawn down and stored in the soil by earthworms. The project team will create a matrix to enable land managers to calculate the contribution each hedge makes to carbon storage and submit their carbon potential for verification under the code.

Incentivising farmers, landowners and councils to maximise the potential of hedges will benefit much more than carbon storage. Well-positioned hedges can reduce surface run-off, improving water quality; remove harmful air pollution; provide flood mitigation and support over 600 different plants, 1,500 insects, 65 birds and 20 mammals species.

Latest figures estimate that there are over 400,000 km (250,000 miles) of managed hedgerows in England - 100 times longer than our motorways - with remnants of a further 145,000 km of hedges and tree lines. Increasing the height & width of England's existing hedges has the potential to boost the 9m tonnes of carbon already stored.

Ends

Note to editors:

The Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust gwct.org.uk - providing research-led conservation for a thriving countryside. The GWCT is an independent wildlife conservation charity which has carried out scientific research into Britain's game and wildlife since the 1930s. We advise farmers and landowners on improving wildlife habitats. We employ 22 post-doctoral scientists and 50 other research staff with expertise in areas such as birds, insects, mammals, farming, fish and statistics. We undertake our own research as well as projects funded by contract and grant-aid from Government and private bodies. The Trust is also responsible for several Government Biodiversity Action Plan species and is lead partner for grey partridge and joint lead partner for brown hare and black grouse.

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The GWCT Allerton Project www.allertontrust.org.uk/

The GWCT Allerton Project is a combination of commercial farming, research, demonstration and community engagement, based on a 320-hectare estate in Leicestershire, United Kingdom. The Project researches the effects of different farming methods on wildlife and the environment, sharing results of our research through advisory and educational activities.

We identify management that delivers multiple benefits for our rural landscape. Our work covers natural capital accounting, agri-environment schemes and regenerative farming systems. From soil and water, to woodland and environmental habitat that increases biodiversity, our aim is to build farmland resilience. Our own research team collaborate with other research organisations and help co-supervise numerous PhD and MSc projects.

Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund.

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