



## CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

### BUILDING AND REPAIRING CORNISH HEDGES

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**This document is the best practice method for the construction of traditional Cornish hedges and is regulated by the Guild of Cornish Hedgers. It has been created based on hundreds of years of knowledge, the in-depth experience of practitioners and provides a guide to promote the highest standards of professional practice and the standard of work expected in the proficient performance of the craft. Where deviations from this code are requested by clients, the conflicting details should be agreed in writing before work starts.**

#### Introduction

- A Cornish Hedge is a stone-faced earth bank.
- A Cornish Hedge is generally constructed by building the two side of stonework, systematically filling, and compacting this with earth as the build progresses. Where a solidly compacted earth bank is already in existence or constructed, additional infill material is consolidated between this and the face of stone.
- Cornish Hedges have had a significant impact on the character of the landscape for several thousands of years. The Guild of Cornish Hedgers believe the diverse geology of Cornwall that has informed the many distinctive styles of hedging should be paramount when building new Cornish Hedges in order to preserve and protect the cultural heritage of our landscape.

## **Planning**

- New Cornish Hedges should be built from materials that are local to the environment in which the hedge is being constructed. The hedge should also be constructed to be sympathetic to the characteristic style of the hedges in the surrounding area.
- Cornish Hedges are commonly built to a height of between 1.2m and 1.5m. When specifying dimensions, the height of the hedge should be measured from the ground level to the top of the stonework, with the domed soil and turf top adding extra height on top of this.
- Although hedges can be built higher than this, when doing so, it may be necessary to adapt the design, particularly in relation to the batter. The Guild can provide additional guidance on request.
- The base of a free-standing hedge is as wide as it is tall. The top width is less than the base width.
- For repairs, existing stone and fill should be considered the primary source of materials where usable. Extra materials should be brought in from as local a source as possible.
- Repairs should be sympathetic to the surrounding hedges, following the same style and sequence of coursing.

## **Batter**

- The batter, which is the profile of the hedge, is built in an inwards (concave) curve.
- Although there are countless variations of the curved batter used by different practitioners, the profile should generally get steeper as the hedge height increases, without ever becoming completely vertical.
- The batter of the hedge should inform the orientation of the stones placed in the hedge, with stones generally being placed at an angle of 90 degrees to the curve of the batter. This gives the hedge the arch-like compressive strength that is essential to its structural integrity.
- The Guild have an approved profile former that is used to train with, and which is recommended for use in both the planning of projects and construction. Additional information can be given on request.
- A larger than average free-standing hedge, or a large retaining hedge will require additional consideration in regard to batter at the design stage, further guidance can be given on request. The Guild also have an approved former for larger retaining hedges.

## **Infill Material**

- The ideal source of infill material for Cornish Hedges should be subsoil or rab, preferably local to the area. Where this is unavailable, a suitable granular soil should be used. Importing topsoil from other locations is discouraged in order to protect the native seed-bank.
- The infill material used should be damp and compactable in nature – a good test of this is to squeeze a small amount in the palm of one's hand and see whether it coheres sufficiently. Infill material that is either too dry or too wet will not compact sufficiently and is not suitable for use in Cornish Hedge construction.
- Infill material should be compacted in layers not more than 80mm. It should be compacted by hand especially around the back of stones, taking care not to move any stone in the process.
- Infill material should be free of any vegetation or loose stone.

## **Stone**

- The size and nature of the stone used in the construction of Cornish Hedges informs, to a large degree, the style that the hedge is built in. Choice of stone used in hedging projects should be taken into consideration, in order to build a hedge sympathetic in nature to the existing hedges in the vicinity.
- Stone should generally be laid with the longest axis into the hedge. This makes specifications for stretcher courses or bonding stones redundant. The two faces of stonework should be independent of each other; hedges do not have, nor require through-stones.
- Each stone placed in the hedge must have stone-to-stone contact with all adjacent stones. Stones may be bedded on infill material, but must have stone-to-stone contact at the face edge of the stone.
- Stone should be laid in the hedge at approximately 90 degrees to the curve of the batter.
- Stone should be graded throughout the hedge, decreasing in size as the height increases.
- Stones should cover all joints below them. There should be no running joints.
- Trigging (wedging a stone with a smaller one) is kept to a minimum, if at all. Front trigging (or face pinning) should never be employed.

## **Grounders**

- Grounders form the strong and stable foundations of a Cornish Hedge. They should always be the largest stones in the hedge.
- Wherever possible they should be placed with their longest axis into the hedge, providing the greatest possible surface area to the spread the weight of the rest of the hedge sat upon them.
- Grounders should be placed at least 50mm into the cleared ground, angled back to the correct batter.
- Large granite grounders may on occasion be laid on their edge (referred to as 'shiners'), but must have at least 1/3 of the height of the stone buried in the ground. It is important to ensure that long stones going back into the hedge are placed above them for support. Shiners must not be placed adjacent to another shiner.

## **Hedgers**

- Hedgers are the stones in a hedge that are laid vertically, or diagonally as in the case of herringbone pattern. When properly laid, tightly wedged against one another, they provide a lateral compressive strength, particularly to the top of the hedge, which is essential for the stability of the structure.
- Hedgers should never be seen merely as a decorative element in the planning/design of new Cornish Hedges.
- No less than two rows of hedgers must be laid as the final courses of stonework in hedges that incorporate a random middle section.
- When small stone is all that is available, the strongest method of construction is to employ hedgers throughout the entire build.

## **Topping Off**

- Once the stonework has been built to the specified height, it should topped with a compacted dome of soil. This should ideally be locally sourced topsoil, thereby re-establishing the native seedbank atop the hedge. This dome of soil acts to aid water run-off.
- The hedge can be further finished by laying lengths of turf along the domed soil, anchored down with twigs if necessary. This will further protect the top of the hedge from the elements. Best practice is to leave a bare strip of soil between the lengths of turf so that water can penetrate the root system of the turf to support its establishment.