

# Housing Services Garden Hedge Policy

Department	Housing Services
Responsible Person	Director of Housing
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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 With a growing infrastructure of built environment and an ever-growing population of people, there is need more than ever to retain the green space that can be found across the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham (the Council).
- 1.2 For instance, Barking and Dagenham have over 5,000 small green spaces across the borough, contributing to making 34% of the borough green. However, the importance of front and rear domestic gardens is not to be underestimated, as consideration of such spaces would significantly increase this percentage.
- 1.3 Garden hedgerows still make up a large proportion of the borough's domestic boundary lines, and the Council has every intention of protecting as many existing hedgerows as possible. Unlike fences and walls which only add to the urbanised setting, hedgerows play a very important and undervalued role across the borough for a variety of reasons, including:
- Having the natural ability to capture air pollution.
  - Having the natural ability to reduce noise pollution.
  - They can mitigate flooding by acting as natural drainage and soakaways for surface water.
  - They encourage wildlife to the borough by providing food and shelter.
  - Inadvertently, their need for maintenance encourages the physical health and mental wellbeing of those responsible for their upkeep, as well as having the potential to provide social benefits (i.e. encouraging engagement between neighbours).
  - Aesthetically, they have a softer and more natural look and help to retain the character of some of the boroughs oldest estates, such as Becontree ward.
- 1.4 For Barking and Dagenham, the pros associated with hedgerows far outweigh the cons, and for the reasons listed above, the Council has taken the stance that tenants or leaseholders seeking permission to remove garden hedgerows in order to replace them with fencing or walls will generally be denied.

## **2. Purpose**

- 2.1 The aim of this policy is to:
- Outline the benefits of retaining front garden hedges across the borough of Barking and Dagenham, and;
  - Outline scenarios whereby residents may be exempt from this policy, thus the Council may permit the removal of a hedge due to the circumstances specific to the case.

### **3. Policy Scope**

- 3.1 This policy applies to all general needs and supported housing property let by the Council.
- 3.2 This policy also applies to Leasehold properties who are responsible for the maintenance of boundaries.
- 3.3 This policy does not apply to freehold property within Barking and Dagenham.

### **4. Maintaining Hedgerows**

- 4.1 Under Section 1 of the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#), it is an offence to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built, or to intentionally kill, injure or take chicks or adults, or intentionally take or destroy eggs.
- 4.2 For this reason, it is recommended that tenants avoid hedge cutting during the main breeding season for nesting birds, which usually runs throughout March to August.
- 4.3 However, it is worth noting that some birds nest outside of this time period, so tenants should always be encouraged to check for nesting birds prior to cutting or pruning hedgerows no matter the time of year.
- 4.4 Disagreements between neighbours can often stem from disputes over the size and untidiness of hedges, and the person(s) responsible for not maintaining hedges, especially during the breeding season when hedges are likely to grow at a quicker rate.
- 4.5 Therefore, upon receipt of complaints of this nature, the Council would not look to enforce the trimming or pruning of untidy or oversized hedges during the breeding season.
- 4.6 Tenants responsible for maintaining hedgerows must take reasonable steps to stop them from becoming overgrown, therefore should look to prune back hedges outside of the main breeding season for nesting birds.

### **5. Exemptions**

- 5.1 As a general rule, the Council would look to prohibit the removal of garden hedgerows. However, the Council may permit the removal of hedges if:
- The hedge is deemed to be dead, dying, or dangerous as identified by the Council's Arboricultural and Tree Preservation Officer.
  - It is proven that the hedge is causing significant structural damage to property, roads, pathways, drainage or otherwise.
  - They are the source of infestation as confirmed by the Council's Pest Control Team.

- A request to remove the front garden hedge row is made in conjunction with an application for front garden parking.
- There is sufficient evidence to support the case for hedge removal where the Council are unable to offer garden assistance and cannot arrange voluntary assistance for those who are unable to maintain i.e. the elderly and/ or disabled.

## **6. Equality Impact**

- 6.1 Applying this policy consistently and sensitively will ensure that all tenants and their household members in Council owned homes who have protected characteristics and/or are deemed vulnerable for other reasons receive services that are based on a recognition of their vulnerability. The Council will make all appropriate adjustments to the services they receive in order to mitigate any potential negative impacts on them and to ensure they receive fair and equal treatment from the Council as their landlord.