

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR COMPLETING THE COMPLAINT FORM: HIGH HEDGES

General Notes

These guidance notes are to help you fill in the form to make a complaint about a neighbouring high hedge. You should also read the leaflet '*High hedges: complaining to the Council*'. Before the Council can consider your complaint, you should have tried mediation, which is a free service for all residents. East Surrey Community Mediation can be contacted by telephoning 01737 248 559.

Consideration of your complaint will be delayed if you do not complete the form properly or do not provide the information requested.

If you are still unsure how to answer any of the questions, please contact Customer Services on 01737 276000 or e-mail: hedgecomplaints@reigate-banstead.gov.uk.

You can obtain translations and large print versions of this guidance and the form through the Council.

1. **Attempts to resolve the complaint**

Please keep the descriptions brief but say how you made the approach (eg face to face, phone, letter) and what the result was. **Please note that this document is based on guidance published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and therefore the following examples may not be applicable to local circumstances.**

Example 1

- 12 March 2005 - phoned to ask if we could discuss hedge. Met on 19 March but we couldn't agree a solution;
- 15 April - mediators visited;
- 29 April - met neighbours and mediators. But still couldn't find an answer we were both happy with;
- 14 May - wrote to inform neighbour would be complaining to Council.

Example 2

- 12 March 2005 - wrote to ask if we could discuss hedge. 2 weeks later still no reply;
- 9 April - wrote to ask if would speak to mediator. 2 weeks later still no reply;
- 7 May - wrote to inform neighbour would be complaining to Council.

Example 3

- 12 March 2005 - saw neighbour in their garden and asked if we could discuss hedge. Neighbour came round on 19 March. Saw the effect of the hedge for themselves. Sympathetic but unwilling to reduce the hedge as much as we wanted;
- Neighbours willing to try mediation but discovered that neighbour mediation not available in our area. We live too far from the nearest service;
- 23 April - saw neighbour again and told them that, if we couldn't agree a solution, we would make a formal complaint to Council. Left it for a couple of weeks then confirmed in writing that we would be going ahead with the complaint.

It is not necessary to send copies of all correspondence with your neighbour about the hedge especially if the dispute is a long-running one. You need only provide evidence of your latest attempts to settle it.

2. Criteria for making a complaint

Who can complain

2.1 You must be the owner or occupier of the property affected by a high hedge in order to make a formal complaint to the Council.

If you do not own the property (eg because you are a tenant or a leaseholder), you can still make a complaint. But you should let the owner (eg landlord or management company) know what you are doing.

2.2 The property does not have to be wholly residential but must include some living accommodation otherwise we cannot consider the complaint.

3. Grounds of complaint

It will help if you provide as much information as you can but keep it factual. Remember that a copy of this form will be sent to the person who owns the site where the hedge is growing, and to the person living there if they are different people.

Concentrate on the hedge and the disadvantages you actually experience because it is too tall.

We cannot consider problems that are not connected with the height of the hedge. For example, if the roots of the hedge are pushing up a path.

Nor can we consider things that are not directly about the hedge in question. For example, that other people keep their hedges trimmed to a lower height; or that the worry is making you ill.

Please also provide a photograph of the hedge and a plan showing the location of the hedge and surrounding properties.

When drawing your plan, please look at the example below and make sure that you:

- Mark and name surrounding roads.

- Sketch in buildings, including adjoining properties. Add house numbers or names.
- Mark clearly the position of the hedge and how far it extends.
- Mark which way north is.
- Provide distances in metres of the hedge from your house/windows.

[Please see the example of a typical plan at the end of this guidance]

Please include copies of any professional reports that you may have had prepared. If you are complaining about the hedge blocking light, please mark which way is north on your plan (see note on section 4 above) and provide relevant measurements (eg size of garden, distance between the hedge and any windows affected). All measurements must be in metres (m).

4. **Previous complaints to the Council**

We only need to know about formal complaints, made under the high hedges part of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003. You do not need to tell us about telephone calls or other informal contact with the Council about your hedge problems.

5. **Who's who/The parties**

We need all these names and addresses because there are some documents that we are required, by law, to send to the owner **and** occupier of the land on which the hedge grows. These include our decision on the complaint.

- 5.1 Even if someone else is submitting the complaint on your behalf, it is important that we have the complainant's contact details.

Tick the 'yes' box if you prefer to be contacted by e-mail. We cannot send documents to you electronically unless you agree.

- 5.2 We need this information because we will have to get in touch with this person to arrange to visit the property so that we can see for ourselves the effect of the hedge.

- 5.3 Complete this section if you are a professional adviser, relative, friend or other representative.

This person will be our main contact on all matters relating to this complaint. We will direct all queries and correspondence to them. Please bear this in mind.

If you tick the 'yes' box, we will conduct all business relating to this complaint by e-mail. But we cannot send documents to you electronically unless you agree.

- 5.4 This will normally be the person you have talked to when you tried to agree a solution to your hedge problems.

If the site where the hedge is growing does not have a postal address, use the box to describe as clearly as possible where it is, eg 'Land to rear of 12 to 18 High Street' or 'Park adjoining Main Road'. We need this information because we will have to contact these people for their comments, and to arrange to visit the site where the hedge is growing.

- 5.5 If you are in any doubt about who owns the property where the hedge is situated, you can check with the Land Registry. The relevant form (313) is on their web site (www.landregistry.gov.uk) or can be obtained from the Local Office.

For Reigate and Banstead Borough the Land Registry's Local Office is:

Durham (Baldon) Office
Baldon House, Wheatlands Way, Pity Me, Durham DH1 5GJ
Telephone: 0191 301 2345.

The current fee for this service is £4, if you know the full postal address of the property.

Alternatively, Land Register Online (at www.landregisteronline.gov.uk) provides easy access to details of registered properties in England. Copies of title plans and registers held in electronic format can be downloaded in PDF format for £2 each. The register includes ownership details.

6. Supporting documents

Please make sure you have ticked all the relevant boxes.

If you have ticked the last box, please list these documents by date and title (eg January 2005 surveyor's report). This will help us to check that we have got everything.

If you are submitting this form by email but will be posting supporting documents to us separately, please include a covering letter and put a reference number or title on them all (e.g. hedge complaint, 12 High Street) so that we can match them up with your complaint.

7. Sending the complaint

You should make out your cheque for £370 to Reigate and Banstead Borough Council. This fee is based on an estimate of costs provided by the ODPM. If you are receiving certain low income benefits, the fee may be reduced, so please contact the Council for a High Hedge benefits form so that this can be verified.

8. Example of a typical plan

