

The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DEFRA, Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

20th December 2024

Dear Secretary of State

Re: Urgent reinstatement of hedgerow related capital grants

I am writing to highlight the urgent need to resolve the current review of the Capital Grants. People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) champions healthy hedgerows and supports farmers' efforts to rejuvenate [hedges](#) on their land. PTES's *Healthy Hedgerows* survey, recommended by Defra, links hedge condition and management needs. From a wildlife perspective well-managed hedgerows are the best habitat on most farms, providing homes, food, shelter and vital connectivity for wildlife. A single hedge has been shown to support over 2070 species. They also help us achieve multiple biodiversity and environmental targets.

Hedgerow management requires periodic rejuvenation and routine management. Rejuvenation - coppicing or laying - is required every 30-40 years, without which hedgerows die. Whilst the SFIs cover routine management well, the essential rejuvenation is only delivered through capital grants. ***The legitimacy of the SFIs is undermined by ineffective access to rejuvenation capital grants***; all CHRW2 management actions depend on periodic rejuvenation to ensure their efficacy.

The timing of the suspension is compounded due to uncertainties created by the slow and confusing changes to Defra's financial support. Farmers often pay for environmental work done under capital grants in advance of receiving funding; anecdotal reports suggest many are now less willing to take such risks. Huge efforts have gone into creating ELMs; it would be disappointing for the scheme to be weakened by lack of trust and uptake. When farmers no longer engage with environmental schemes, the ability to guide their actions is lost, and there is an increased threat that farming will be intensified to cover the income shortfall.

The capital grant freeze has also impacted wider businesses supporting agricultural work. Tree and hedge whip orders are being cancelled, hedgelayers have had contracts cancelled for this rejuvenation season and next. Capacity in these industries needs increasing to ensure we meet our national targets; this grant freeze is adding financial instability to industries that need securing.

Losing influence with the farming community and risking capacity to supporting industries threatens future environmental and biodiversity targets that rely on farmers. PTES urges Defra to unfreeze the capital grants that supports this conservation work as soon as is feasibly possible.

Yours sincerely



Nida Al-Fulaij
Chief Executive Officer