

The message is simple: I can offer you a system of countryside enhancement that will stretch the length and breadth of the country, it will provide habitats beneficial for almost all our wildlife, it will protect against topsoil erosion in an increasingly warm climate, it will provide millions of tonnes of carbon sequestration, it will provide tonnes of reliable and 100% renewable fuel, it will help prevent flooding by regulating the flow of water across the countryside, it will...Ah! I hear you saying “Hold on... wait up... this all sounds too good to be true ... in an ideal world we would love this wondrous system but surely it would cost millions or even billions to install this thing?”

No, it will in fact cost nothing to install, it is already in position and better yet, I have only scratched the surface of the benefits provided by our hedgerow system, so lamentably overlooked, hopelessly mismanaged, criminally destroyed but still struggling on and comparatively cheaply restored, creating sustainable jobs in the process.

The correct protection and management and restoration of our existing hedgerows combined with a process of planting new ones and reinstating old ones tick so many ecological/environmental/biodiversity boxes that their continued under-appreciation and lack of recognition is really quite incomprehensible.

If this consultation were to decide nothing else but to manage our hedgerows properly, and see this decision through, then it would probably be the most worthwhile and successful Departmental consultation in the history of the State.

But alas, I expect nothing at all of benefit to come from your process. 20 years of hedgerow policy observation in this country have taught me this. Since the well-intentioned plans of the original REPS got hijacked to become an unsubstantiated conduit of money, right up to the present day Heritage Bill 2016, where raw political muscle was allowed to triumph so disgracefully over science, evidence and fact, the recent history of the system I described briefly at the outset has been one of disaster.

I would love to be proved wrong in my expectation and I will assist you with any positive measures in any way I can.

Regards,

Mark McDowell, Secretary, Hedge laying Association of Ireland