

## Habitat Action Plan: Arable Field Margins

### Current status and Importance

- It is estimated that there are about 400,000 km of cereal field edge in the UK, potentially amounting to 200,000 ha of land assuming a strip width of 6 metres.
- The term "arable field margin" refers to strips of land lying between cereal crops and the field boundary, and extending for a limited distance into the crop. These can be actively managed to create conditions that benefit key farmland species.
- Arable Field Margins can take a variety of forms. The principal types are:



*An Arable field margin not presently managed for biodiversity in Kirklees*

- 'Wildlife Strip' which is approximately 6m wide adjacent to a cereal crop, with a 1 m 'sterile strip' between the wildlife strip and the crop (to prevent aggressive arable weeds spreading into the crop). It is cultivated once a year but not cropped.
- 'Conservation Headland' which is either a 6m or 12m wide strip can be developed, again with a 1 m wide sterile strip. This is cropped with cereals but managed with reduced inputs of pesticides so as to favour wild arable plants and invertebrates.
- Game crops, Stubble or Grassland which can take the form of fallow land lying between annually cropped areas and the field boundary.
- There are restrictions on spraying into hedge bases and on the outermost 6 metre wide strips of crops to protect adjacent non-cropped habitats including watercourses.
- Arable field margins are targeted under agri-environment schemes.
- Within Kirklees most cereal fields occur to the east of the district.

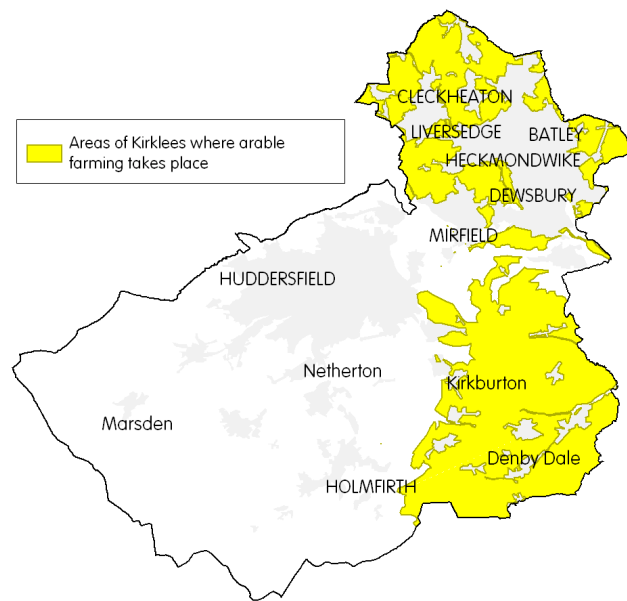
### Species Use

- Arable field margins provide nesting and feeding sites for game birds and some passerines, such as the yellowhammer (*Emberiza citronella*).
- Many species of butterflies, grasshoppers, and plant bugs are associated with such sites. Some 2000 species of invertebrate are commonly found in cereal fields.
- Even more dependent on Arable field margins are the rare arable flowers. Overall, some 300 species of plants can occur in arable fields.

### Conservation Issues

- Intensification of cereal production, including the use of herbicides to ensure a weed free monoculture, and summer use of insecticides.
- The shift to winter cropping and the associated loss of winter stubbles.
- The reduction in rotation of cereal crops with other land covers (including grass leys and fallows).

- The reduction in the undersown area associated with the shift to winter cropping. Undersown cereal crops are important for overwintering sawflies.



*The areas of Kirklees where arable field margins occur*

## Objectives

- Maintain areas already managed for wildlife.
- Restore by management the biodiversity interest of arable field margins on appropriate soil types.
- Diversify field margins to favour appropriate wildlife species.

It is likely that objectives will be met entirely through agri-environment scheme support and efforts should focus on this route.

## Target areas for habitat management and creation

- The habitat is primarily found within the Pennine Foothills where it contributes to an ecological network especially relevant to hedgerows.
- For further information, please see the Biodiversity Opportunity Zones Map at [www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity)

## Targets

- To be decided.

## Key Links and Organisations

Site protection: Kirklees Council (arable land may be subject to loss through development).

Management through Environmental Stewardship in Kirklees: Natural England, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.

Management and restoration: the Kirklees BAP: Guidance for the management of Arable Field Margins and Winter Stubbles: Kirklees Council Environment Unit.

Surveys: Kirklees Wildlife and Landscape Advisory Forum, West Yorkshire Ecology.

## See Also

- [UK BAP Cereal Field Margins Habitat Action Plan](#)

- [UK BAP Hedgerows Habitat Action Plan](#)
- Guidance for the management of Arable Field Margins and Winter Stubbles: Kirklees Council Environment Unit. (available at [www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity](http://www.kirklees.gov.uk/biodiversity))