

# Creation of Grass Strips and Water Margins in Arable Fields

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## Aim

The aim of this item is to improve water quality and benefit wildlife.

Grass strips located within or at the edges of arable fields provide cover and food for birds and small mammals as well as flowers for pollinating insects.

They can also help improve water quality by preventing soil erosion, intercepting surface water run-off and improving soil structure.

They are important for connecting habitats.

Different widths of strips will have different benefits for wildlife and water quality.

## Eligibility

Land that is in an arable rotation is eligible.

For the purposes of this capital item, arable land is land which has been in crop for at least three of the past five years.

You should not include areas of land covering rocks, scree, water, dense bracken etc. We will check this using the same approach we use to check land for the Basic Payment Scheme.

### Assessing your land eligibility

You can only use this capital item in support of the following management options:

- [Grass Strips in Arable Fields](#)
- [Water Margins in Arable Fields](#)

## Application requirements

You must identify on a map the locations of all proposed new grass strips and water margins.

## Requirements

- you can create **any** width of strip, but the following minimums apply:

Location of water margin	Minimum width of water margin
Adjacent to a watercourse with a bed width < 1.2 metres	3 metres
Adjacent to a watercourse with a bed width >1.2 metres	6 metres
Adjacent to still water	12 metres

*For water margins, the margin must start at the top of the bank.*

Location of grass strip	Minimum width of grass strip
Adjacent to a field boundary, or within field	3 metres

*For grass strips located adjacent to a hedge, the grass strip must start at the base of the hedge.*

- you must sow the area with a low productivity grass mix to establish a new sward. The seed mix must include at least four flowering species
- you must establish the sward by 1 June in the first year of your contract
- you must maintain a diary

## Payment

You can claim £333.51 per hectare.

The maximum width you can claim is 20 metres.

The maximum width you can claim next to a hedge is 18 metres. This is because only activity which is in excess of legal requirement (e.g. GAEC / GBRs) is eligible for payment. Under GAEC 7 you must not cultivate or apply fertilisers or pesticides within 2 metres of the centre line of a hedge. So for grass strips next to hedges, the eligible area under this option will start from the edge of this 2 metre strip. This will mean that if you create a 20 metre wide margin next to a hedge, only 18 metres of the margin (20 metres minus 2 metres you cannot cultivate) would be eligible for payment.

The maximum width you can claim is 18 metres next to a watercourse. This is because only activity which is in excess of legal requirement (e.g. GAEC / GBRs) is eligible for payment. Under GAEC 1 you must not cultivate or apply fertilisers or pesticides within 2 metres of the top of the bank of a watercourse. The eligible area for this option will start from the edge of this 2 metre strip. This will mean that if you create a 20 metre wide margin from the top of the bank of a watercourse, only 18 metres of the margin (20 metres minus 2 metres you cannot cultivate) would be eligible for payment.

## Inspections

The inspectors will check:

- the strip is in the correct location and of the correct extent
- the grass strip or water margin meets the minimum width, and that the minimum width of the water margins is compatible with the width of the water course
- that water margins start at the top of the bank
- that where grass strips are adjacent to a hedge, the grass strip starts at least two metres from the centre line of the hedge
- you have sown the area with a low productivity grass mix to establish a new sward. There may be an invoice check to ensure the correct grass sward mixture has been sown
- you have established the sward by 1 June in the first year of your contract
- you have maintained a diary

## Additional guidance

[Supporting guidance is available for this item.](#)

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