

- 
- Audit and Governance Committee
 - Ash Die Back
 - 27th September 2023

Ash Die Back: Purpose

- The committee are seeking assurance that an action plan is being worked on and is to be adopted and wants to scrutinise those plans to ensure that the risk of the onset of Ash Die Back within the County boundaries is dealt with appropriately
- If an action plan is not agreed, there is potential financial risk to meet the costs of removal of the tree stock under the responsibility of the council and potential risk of litigation linked to personal injury and third part damage claims

Ash Die Back: What is it?

- *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* is an ascomycete fungus that causes ash dieback, a chronic fungal disease of ash trees in Europe characterised by leaf loss and crown dieback in infected trees.
- The fungus was first scientifically described in 2006 under the name *Chalara fraxinea*.
- Estimated 100,000 Ash Trees in or adjacent to the public highway, 95% in private ownership.

Ash Die Back: Public Realm and Property Risk

- Trees in open spaces.
- Within the public highway – green infrastructure.
- Trees in private ownership adjacent to the public realm, highway, public rights of way.
- Trees in council owned land.

• Risk

- Falling limbs, trees – risk to life, property, infrastructure.

Ash Die Back: Background

- There are 4 categories which define the level of disease in the tree
 - **Category 1 (T1)** - A healthy tree with a good healthy leaf coverage 100% - may be minor signs of disease e.g. early leaf fall, some leaf browning.
 - **Category 2 (T2)** - A tree starting to show signs of disease - 75% leaf coverage/crown density with some other indicators, some leaf browning, lesions or brown keys.
 - **Category 3 (T3)** - A tree which is clearly diseased - 50% leaf coverage/crown density. Tips of branches die back, brown keys evident and foliage becomes 'clumpy'.
 - **Category 4 (T4)** - A tree which is clearly in terminal decline 25% leaf coverage/crown density may have larger dead branches.

Ash Die Back: Background



Ash Die Back: Council Actions

Actions	Timescale
<p>County Tree Strategy Partnership with key stakeholders</p>	<p>Approved and Implemented March 2024</p>
<p>Tree Guidance for Herefordshire Council Guidance for council owned /managed tree stock. Ash Die Back Action Plan: specific section and link to work on Local Nature Recovery Networks. Works to trees covered by a Tree Preservation Order or in a conservation area, full consideration to Ash Dieback. Recovery Plan</p>	<p>Approved and Implemented March 2024</p>
<p>Planning Applications Effects of AD on Ash trees linked to development is considered within comments made by the Natural Environment Team. (Trees, Landscape & Ecology) Proposed landscaping, tree planting and Biodiversity Net Gain associated with developments fully considers effects of AD and future Treescape of locality. Planning team to implement recommendations made by the conservation team.</p>	<p>Conservation Team responding as necessary.</p>

Ash Die Back: Council Actions

Actions	Timeline
<p>Ash Dieback and Trees Outside Woodlands (TOW): Working with The Tree Council, DEFRA and other partners on reviewing national guidance and development of AD recovery schemes for TOW</p>	<p>Attendance as required.</p>
<p>Local Authority Ash Dieback Working Group: Partnering to actively participate in national Local Authority Ash Dieback Action Group – Benchmarking and assistance.</p>	<p>Regular meetings as required.</p>
<p>Public Realm Contract Annual and Forward Programme Management of the network - inspections, routine reactive response to dead, dying and diseased trees.</p>	<p>Annual and Forward Plan meetings, works included in Annexes.</p>
<p>Council Property Survey of known ash trees surveyed – monitoring in place</p>	<p>Surveys completed, surveys undertaken as needed.</p>

Ash Die Back: Managing the Risk

Action	Timescale
Public Realm annual tree surveys.	Annual Programme
Road surveys set out in the Highways Maintenance Plan – all roads inspected annually as a minimum, monthly inspections for the A and B roads.	Programme of inspections as set out in the Highways Maintenance Plan.
Specific surveys to be undertaken by qualified arboricultural consultant.	As needed (As part of the annual plan)
Mapping of known Ash Trees County Wide – (In-development - A and B roads 40% surveyed, work in progress). Work to survey and understand the number of Ash Trees and action required.	Summer 2024/25
Public Rights of Way – reactive inspections and actions as required, liaison with Parish Councils and Parish Footpath Officers.	Ongoing with the Public Rights of Way team, 2024/25 for the Parishes.

Ash Die Back: Managing the Risk

Actions	Timescale
Additional budget approval for the next 4 years to be implemented 2023/24 £315k 2024/25 through to 2026/27 £367k per annum	Annual and Forward Plan
Programme of works to remove dead and/or diseased trees. Remove from Public Realm. Serve notice on adjacent land owners.	As required and programmed in the Annual Plan.
Ash Trees within the public realm and council land within scope of council works.	Identified through surveys.
Out of scope will be managed through informing adjacent land owners if identified as a risk through surveys	Identified through inspections.
If risk to life, the council may need to intervene and take immediate action.	On-going

Ash Die Back: Next Steps

- Recovery Plan
 - Re-planting trees – encouraging replacement of tree stock within the council owned or managed land and private landownership.
- Monitoring
 - Information sharing and reporting to council on line reporting if no immediate risk
 - Public to ring if immediate risk, council phones operate 24/7 – 01432 261800.
 - Surveys – council/BBLP
 - Dedicated council officer to support the Ash Die Back action plan.
 - Reports to update the Corporate Risk Register
 - Communication Plan continuously updated and improved.