

# **Title of report: 2025/26 Capital Investment in Managing Ash Dieback in Herefordshire**

**Decision maker: Corporate Director – Economy & Environment**

**Report by: Project Manager**

## **Classification**

Open

This report is open but an appendix is exempt by virtue of the paragraph(s) of the Access to Information Procedure Rules set out in the constitution pursuant to Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

## **Decision type**

Non-key

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

To authorise the spend/ investment in a programme of work in 2025/26 to help ensure the safety of the public by mitigating the Ash Dieback risk in Herefordshire. This decision follows the Council's resolution at the Full Council meeting of 10 February 2023 to approve the Capital Programme for 2023/24 through to 2026/27.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) The Capital Investment of £367k in 2025/26 be drawn down for the mitigation of Ash Dieback risk in Herefordshire, removing trees where required.**
- b) Authority be delegated to Delivery Director – Infrastructure to expend the funding and take all operational decisions in delivering recommendation (a) including authorising the procurement of services and award of any associated contracts**

## **Alternative options**

Not to invest in removing the diseased trees in the county, this has been discounted as the evidence from ongoing surveys have highlighted the issue. The funding is required to ensure

the tree stock on the highway networks remain healthy. Enhancing public safety and mitigating risk where and when necessary, will ensure safety for all users of the road network.

## **Key considerations**

1. Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) also known as Chalara dieback of ash, was identified in Herefordshire, first in 2015 and is now across the county within the Public Realm and within Council owned and managed estates.
2. The disease is widely spread by wind-born fungal spores and at present there is no effective way to prevent the spread of the disease. The council will undertake a programme of work identified following tree condition surveys carried out by external tree specialists. The disease is widespread within trees at various stages with a significant number identified for removal due to the poor health of the tree caused by the disease.
3. The council has developed an Ash Dieback Action Plan ("Action Plan"), which includes monitoring and recovery. The Action Plan was completed and made live in October 2024.
4. Part of the funding will be for the recruitment of a dedicated Graduate Tree Officer to support the Action Plan and associated work. A communications plan will support the project to inform the county of the issues, risks and inform local landowners of their responsibility in removing the risk.
5. The allocated budget for 2025/26 is to address the known concerns in relation to Ash Dieback risk in the county. The council have identified a four year programme of work to begin addressing the problem, and this is the continuation of the project which will require monitoring and managing to ensure the safety of the public.
6. Funding provided through this decision will also deliver phases of replanting during the life of the project.

## **Community impact**

7. The project aligns with the current Council Plan:
  - a. Environment: removing the diseased trees that pose a risk to the public, which will protect and enhance our environment and keep Herefordshire a great place to live.
  - b. Community: Improving safety protecting areas of recreation and links for communities ensuring everyone lives well and safely together.

## **Environmental Impact**

8. The decision supports the environment and the Council's environment policy commitments by removing the diseased trees with a programme of replanting, this will mitigate the loss in tackling and reducing carbon emissions and making it safer in the green spaces including routes to school. The project aligns to the following measures in the Council Plan.
  - a) Reduce the council's carbon emissions
  - b) Improve the air quality within Herefordshire
  - c) Improve residents' access to green space in Herefordshire
9. The project which involves phases of removing diseased ash tree stock impacted by ash dieback will be mitigated by replanting on the network where it is sensible. Where suitable sites

are not available on the highway network, alternative locations will be found in the Council's wider asset including public open spaces.

## **Equality duty**

10. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

11. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Our providers will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.

12. The project is aimed at removing the risk to the public from Ash Dieback. The funding is to be used in accordance with tree condition surveys and any necessary action to be undertaken, the project may identify adjacent landowners who will need to undertake work on their own property to safeguard the public realm. This will be treated on a case by case scenario. Land owners/ property owners may be vulnerable, therefore the Council will investigate and take appropriate action taking into account the risk and the personal circumstances of those involved.

## **Resource implications**

13. A procurement strategy has been developed for the programme ensuring value for money, the Councils Contract Procedure Rules will be adhered to with the support of the Commercial Services team. The project will be managed by the Council's Project Management team with the Delivery Director – Infrastructure being responsible for delivery.
14. The Council's Ash Dieback response will commence each year, the Council has identified a 4 year investment which will resource a Graduate Tree Officer to support the project. Competitive tender processes led by the Council's Highway and Asset Managers will be undertaken to deal with the necessary removal of diseased trees in the county. This will inform further procurement over the life of the identified risk.
15. Unique project codes have been created to each element so that the Corporate Project Manager can monitor and review progress to enable reporting to the Capital Project Board along with other any relevant delivery boards on each of the projects. The projects were approved at Full Council in February 2023 to be funded from corporate borrowing.
16. The funding for the response to Ash Dieback is Capital, the revenue funding required will be from the Annual Plan resource, if the situation deteriorates, further revenue investment will be subject to budget allocation or further budget bid.

The tables below are to support setting out the financial implications of the decision/ project:

Capital cost of project	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Ash Dieback Project		350			350
PMO Resource		17			17
<b>TOTAL</b>		367			367

Funding streams (indicate whether base budget / external / grant / capital borrowing)	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Total
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
<i>Corporate Funded Borrowing</i>	0	367	0	0	367
<b>TOTAL</b>	0	367	0	0	367

## Risk management

17. Ash Dieback is becoming prevalent in Herefordshire, the trees within the Public Realm and Council owned and managed land have the disease. The risk has been recognised and included on the corporate risk register.

18. The risks/ opportunities for the Council are identified below:

<u>Risk/ opportunity</u>	<u>Mitigation</u>
Funding not sufficient for the life of the project.	Continuous monitoring, removal works and surveys will inform the adequacy of the funding and possible future funding needs.
Potential of trees falling so as a result, possible threat to life or property.	Information from surveys will include the location and condition so swift action can be taken. Stewards, appointed Tree Specialists and Tree Surgeons will monitor the network throughout the life of the project.
Changing condition of trees on the public highway require investment.	Information from surveys will categorise trees condition based on a risk based criteria and this offer insights into current and any future requirements.
Improved tree stock.	Removal of diseased Ash trees will improve the wider tree stock with an opportunity to replant with more resilient and suitable species on the network.

**Consultees**

None.

**Appendices**

None.

**Background papers**

None.

**Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:**

**Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published**

Governance	John Coleman	Date 18/12/2024
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Finance	Karen Morris	Date 19/12/2024
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Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 13/12/2024
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Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 16/12/2024
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Procurement	Claire Powell	Date 16/12/2024
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Risk	Jessica Karia	Date 17/12/2024
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Approved by	Ross Cook	Date 19/12/2024
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