



FOR PUBLICATION

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - CLIMATE CHANGE,
BIODIVERSITY AND CARBON REDUCTION**

MONDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2024

Report of the Executive Director - Place

Management of Ash Dieback Disease

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee with information on the work being undertaken to manage the impact of Ash Dieback Disease across Derbyshire on Council and private land.

2. Information and Analysis

- 2.1 Ash Dieback is a fungal disease thought to have originated in eastern Asia and imported into mainland Europe in the 1990s. It has spread rapidly across the continent with the first recorded case in the UK in 2012. The disease is usually fatal for young ash trees and can kill saplings within one growing season. Larger mature ash with the infection is thought to be more tolerant or declines at a slower rate over several years.
- 2.2 In Derbyshire, as a whole, ash is the second most common tree after oak but, in limestone areas of the County, ash is the dominant species. Ash is the dominant tree in the woodlands of the limestone dales, where it may comprise up to 99% of the tree cover. Estimates for the number of ash trees in Derbyshire have been made based on data from the Tree Council, Forestry Commission and Derbyshire Lowland Biodiversity Action Plan 2011 - 2020. The data suggests there are around 9 million ash trees in Derbyshire.

- 2.3 Derbyshire, as a County, has a significant population of ash trees, which relates to its landscape character and geology. The cost of the outbreak to the Council over the next 20 years was estimated in 2022 to be between £22.5m and £40.5m depending on the lowest (50%) and highest (90%) mortality rate predictions.
- 2.4 A Corporate Working Group to support the planning and management of Ash Dieback (ADB) in Derbyshire was established in spring 2021 and an Ash Dieback Action Plan (ADAP) was formally adopted by Cabinet on 7 April 2022 (Minute No. 91/22 refers).
- 2.5 The Tree and Woodlands Team, within the Countryside Service, now manages ADB on behalf of the Council. The team consists of:
- Tree and Woodland Project Officer.
 - ADB Recovery Officer.
 - Tree Protection Order Officer.
 - Tree Inspectors (4 posts).
 - ADB Technician.
- 2.6 The current annual budget for ADB is £0.289m with additional funding bids made as required to meet specific project needs.
- 2.7 The ADAP identifies the importance of a base line survey to establish the extent of the disease across Council land and communication networks (roads) in Derbyshire. The surveying season for ADB is very short because of ash tree physiology. It is the last tree into leaf and the first to lose its leaves in Autumn, giving a survey season of June to September each year. The principal indicator of ADB is leaf loss and thinning of the leaf canopy of an infected tree.
- 2.8 In 2022, the Council commissioned WSP Ltd to undertake a survey of all 'A' and 'B' roads in Derbyshire to identify ash trees with the disease and assess the progression of the disease in identified trees.
- 2.9 This survey identified 1,246 trees in the later and terminal stages of the disease. Tree inspectors surveyed all trees (except those on the A5012 Via Gellia) in the winter of 2022-23 and commissioned management works (removal) and the necessary statutory permissions for trees on Council land. Much of this removal work on Council land has been completed with outstanding work planned for autumn/winter 2024-25. For trees on private land, a copy of the Tree Inspectors report and their recommendations for action in a defined timescale were sent to landowners following land registry searches.

- 2.10 The WSP survey identified a particular large concentration of dead and dying ash trees on the A5012 Via Gellia Road, between Cromford and Grangemill (around 4.3 miles). The work is being treated as a major project as the roadside woodlands are Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). There are 21 separate landowners along the route including Council highways land.
- 2.11 The plan is to remove all diseased and dying ash trees within falling distance of the highway and then replant with appropriate trees along the route. The necessary tree surveys, ecological surveys and scoping assessments are underway with a target to deliver the work in late January 2025 – February 2025. The estimated cost of these works is £0.600m. Funding of £0.550m was approved in the 2024-25 budget for the Via Gellia project by Cabinet on 1 February 2024 (Minute No.19/24 refers). The additional £0.050m required will be funded from the ADB base revenue budget.
- 2.12 Tree Inspectors are in the process of resurveying the 'A' and 'B' roads and other routes (Hierarchies 1-5) in line with the Highways Asset Management Plan for Trees (HIAMP) to establish the progression of the disease in trees previously identified in the WSP survey in 2022. This work will be completed by October 2024 and will inform work programmes for 2024-25 and 2025-26.
- 2.13 In addition, a survey of all Council premises has been commissioned and is currently underway with completion expected by early October 2024. Again, the results of this survey will inform work programmes for 2024-25 and 2025-26.
- 2.14 Countryside Teams are managing ADB on Countryside Sites with the support of the Tree and Woodlands Team on a reactive basis where individual trees are identified by staff. Full surveys and the development of management plans has been delayed due to resource and capacity issues in 2023-24. However, additional resource has recently been recruited and a priority will be to complete this outstanding work.
- 2.15 The Tree and Woodland Team has updated the Council's website with specific information regarding ADB, signposting other websites with helpful guidance and advice (Tree Council, Forestry Commission).
- 2.16 Work to identify suitable species for replanting has been undertaken with the Council's Conservation, Heritage, and Design Service to ensure that species selection reflect Landscape Character guidance.

2.17 Overall, good progress has been made with the implementation of the ADAP in terms of managing the disease on Council property, highway network and private land (adjacent to the highway). Wider coordination with partners has not progressed as planned due to resource and capacity issue in 2023-24, however, this will be mitigated in the upcoming review of the ADAP to be undertaken autumn 2024. A revised plan being ready for adoption in spring 2025.

3. Consultation

3.1 None.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 **Option 1:** No action - Taking no action to manage ADB in Derbyshire on Council and private land would mean that there would be a significant risk of injury or death to employees, residents, and visitors to the County. In addition, the Council could face prosecution for failing to undertake its statutory duties and suffer reputational damage. This option is not recommended.

4.2 **Option 2:** Ash Die Back Action Plan – Delivery of the ADAP to manage the impact of Ash Dieback Disease across Derbyshire on Council and private land as detailed in the report. This option is recommended.

5. Implications

5.1 Appendix 1 sets out the relevant implications considered in the preparation of the report.

6. Background Papers

6.1 Cabinet report, Ash Dieback Disease, dated 7 April 2022 (Minute No. 91/22 refers).

6.2 Cabinet report, Reserves Position and Reserves Policy, dated 1 February 2024 (Minute No.19/24 refers).

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1 – Implications

8. Recommendation

That the Committee:

- a) Notes the work being undertaken to manage the impact of Ash Dieback Disease across Derbyshire on Council and private land.

9. Reason for Recommendation

- 9.1 To ensure that the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee for Climate Change, Biodiversity and Carbon Reduction is informed of, understands and supports the work that is being undertaken to manage Ash Dieback Disease across Derbyshire on Council and private land.

Report Author: Richard Bonner

Contact details: richard.bonner@derbyshire.gov.uk

Implications

Financial

- 1.1 The annual revenue budget for ADB is £0.289m. There is an agreement (Minute No. 91/22 refers) that any remaining underspends within any one financial year are retained in a specific earmarked reserve to support work in the following year(s).
- 1.2 Additional revenue funding bids are made on an ad hoc basis to meet specific pressure or project needs.

The A5012 Via Gellia Road works, referenced in Paragraph 2.10, are estimated to cost £0.600m. One off funding of £0.550m was approved in the 2024-25 budget (Minute No.19/24 refers). The additional £0.050m will be funded from the ADB base revenue budget in 2024-25.

Legal

- 2.1 The Council has a responsibility to ensure trees on third party land, that pose an unacceptable risk to the Highway or other public property, are dealt with effectively.
- 2.2 Where trees are on private land, the Council will need to identify landowners whose responsibility they are. The Council, as Highway Authority, may serve notice on a landowner or occupier to remove a dangerous tree under Section 154 of the Highway Act 1980 within 14 days of service of the notice upon them. Should the landowner or occupier fail to comply with the notice, the Council may carry out the necessary work and recover the reasonable expenses incurred in doing so.
- 2.3 The delivery of the ADAP will contribute to ensuring that the Council fulfils its tree/woodland management health and safety, heritage, and habitat protection obligations, e.g. approvals from the Forestry Commission and respecting tree preservation orders.

Human Resources

- 3.1 None.

Information Technology

- 4.1 The use of IT will continue to be important to map, record and monitor action on identified diseased trees. It will also be used to enable the efficient delivery of tree works to ensure value for money.

Equalities Impact

- 5.1 Not applicable.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 6.1 The Council's effective management of ADB will support the delivery of all of the outcomes identified in the Council Plan 2021 to 2025 namely Resilient, Healthy and Safe Communities; High Performing, Value for Money and Resident-Focused Services; A Prosperous and Green Derbyshire.

Other (for example, Health and Safety, Environmental, Sustainability, Property and Asset Management, Risk Management and Safeguarding)

- 7.1 ADB may have significant negative habitat and biodiversity impacts which the Council will monitor. Based on the projection within the ADAP that 31,250 ash trees will need to be felled over the next 20 years, the loss of carbon capture per year will be 625 tonnes. However, the Council will be proactive in seeking to mitigate this loss by replacing the removed trees in accordance with its commitment to significantly increase the number of trees and woodlands in Derbyshire.