

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

DECISION

meeting date: THURSDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2021
title: ASH DIEBACK ACTION PLAN
submitted by: NICOLA HOPKINS – DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING
principal author: ALEX SHUTT – COUNTRYSIDE OFFICER

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 For Committee to consider the action plan / procedures the Council should put in place to manage Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) disease which is having a significant impact the Boroughs tree stock.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
- Community Objectives – To protect and enhance the existing environmental quality of our area.
 - Corporate Priorities – To comply with the adopted Core Strategy – Environment – Policy DME1: Protecting Trees and Woodlands,
 - Other Considerations – None.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* or more commonly known as Ash Dieback (ADB) has been infecting and killing the United Kingdom's ash tree population from as early as 2004. However, the disease was only first recorded in the UK in 2012 but it is now widespread across the whole country, it is thought to have been introduced to the UK through the importation of nursery stock. ADB is thought to be more prevalent in woodlands than urban and hedgerow trees.
- 2.2 ADB is a highly destructive fungal disease affecting ash trees. It causes leaf loss, branch and trunk lesions and canopy decline and, in most cases, causes the trees to die. The fungus damages vascular tissues that in turn block and prevent the nutrients and water the trees require to grow from reaching the branches, this results in crown dieback. This not only affects the trees' ability to grow but also to produce leaves and so begins a cycle of forced retrenchment. There is no known cure or treatment for ADB, however the fungal spores are thought to grow on the falling leaves so removal of leaf litter could slow down the disease or protect certain important trees
- 2.3 Ash trees are native to the UK and are one of the most common trees that are found in woodlands, hedgerows, parks and gardens across the country (please see Appendix 1, showing a healthy ash tree at Park Street play area 8 October 2021). Ash is classed as a pioneer species as they are fast growing and can quickly colonise an area. They are valuable habitats for a host of flora and fauna and have cultural and historic significance to the UK. (This and more information can be found at the Tree Council website information and direct links can be found in background papers.)

2.4 Initially ADB was referred to as Chalara fraxinea and was thought to only infect younger trees. However, it has become clear that mature trees are succumbing to the fungus. There is no known cure/treatment for ABD.

2.5 Some ash trees are showing signs of resilience, and this can be seen locally on the A59 corridor which bypasses Clitheroe (please see Appendix 2, pictures taken from Whiteacre Lane bridge). A huge number of young, primarily re-coppiced ash trees are infected by ABD and are either moribund or dead, but within a group of 20 infected trees there are some specimens that are showing no signs of infection and are flourishing. This could be due to natural resilience and local contractors are finding these trees stay resilient.

3 ISSUES

3.1 The UK could potentially lose most ash trees to ABD. Due to the sheer amount of ash trees present this is not only going to make a huge impact in the local and national treescape, loss of habitat for both native and European Protected Species but also in many cases cause unacceptable risks of failures in high target areas.

3.2 In mature specimens the life cycle of the fungus seems to range to around 10 years from initial infection to moribund/death. The process is a lot faster within the younger population due to the length of time the fungus must travel through the tissues/cells.

3.3 ABD is affecting the UK but due to the infestation a number of Treework Applications on protected trees are being submitted outlining ABD as a reason for felling. Sometimes this is not the case, or the tree is in the very early stages of ABD. As mentioned earlier the trees die back from the apical meristems which causes an increase in potential of failure of limbs shedding especially in high winds/extreme weather. One of the main issues of managing ABD is being able to safely climb and dismantle large trees in high target areas. There is a fine balance between retaining trees for monitoring and resilience reproduction and safe removal. Recently Network Rail had to utilise explosives to remove a mature ash tree from the side of a railway track that could not be safely climbed, felled or reached by crane.

3.4 Suffolk County Council devised an Action Kit (please see link below) that shows the decline of a mature ash trees in 4 stages. The guidance by the Government and arborists is that when a tree is within failing distance of a high target area and the crown is showing signs of greater than 25 -30% die back the tree should be removed whilst it is still safe to climb. Once an ash tree has reached this progressive stage of the cycle the amenity value will have been affected in some instances, it might be prudent to remove the upper crowns of protected trees if they have habitat value are veterans or have historical importance.

3.5 The Government advise “Land managers need to prepare their resources and manpower to manage any identified risks resulting from changes in ash tree condition. This should include obtaining an approved felling licence for trees on their land so that they can legally fell if they need to. “

3.6 The Council are subsequently re-surveying their tree stock, but this will take a number of years, so a more reactive approach has to be implemented. The Council own Whalley Road Plantation woodland, which is situated to the south of Barraclough House on the A671 (please see Appendix 3). This woodland was surveyed in 2017 and there were no signs of ABD reported at that time. It recently came to the Councils attention within in the

woodland there are 3 mature ash trees and a number of woodland suppressed ash trees that have been infected by ABD and the risk of failure has become intolerable due to the high target area (Whalley road and pavement). The trees require immediate removal to prevent failure, this will cost the Council £1200.00, which is in addition to the annual health and safety management works the Council carry out on its tree stock. An ADB management budget may need to be created in the future to deal with inevitable felling of the Councils Ash tree stock. The Council will monitor the Park Street Ash trees annually as part of the ADB action plan.

- 3.7 The Council have developed a flow chart (please see Appendix 1) that clarifies the process the Borough should follow once ADB has been confirmed. This should reduce the number of tree work and variation of condition applications submitted due to the probability an ash tree could potentially succumb to ADB. In some cases, this could result in a Tree Preservation Order being served on a tree that might not meet the approved justification as outlined in the Tree Evaluation Method For Preservation Orders (TEMPO) due to Safe Useful Life Expectancy or amenity value, however this will enable the Council to condition replacement planting once the trees have been felled or indeed enable the trees to be retained and monitor as long as it is safe to do so.
- 3.8 As mentioned earlier replacement planting is also an issue due to the initial loss of amenity and habitat value trees. Most ash trees felled within the Boroughs woodlands and groups should naturally regenerate, hopefully with resilient ash saplings but also other native species. There will be a number of prominent trees which will need replacing with specimen trees to mitigate the initial loss and secure the Boroughs future treescape, which species need to be decided. The Tree Councils advice is species that are common to the locality, within the northwest the giant species would be sycamore, oak, beech, willow, aspen and alder. Hawthorn, field maple and rowan are smaller growing but do offer bio-diversity value. Mature and Veteran Ash trees that must be removed should be left as habitat poles to retain the features important to EPS such as cavities and old pruning wounds to mitigate bio-diversity loss.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:
- Resources – Dealing with tree related issues form part of the Countryside Officers' duties, some financial implications in the long-term strategy.
 - Technical, Environmental and Legal – Decisions made about trees have to balance protection of the environment against quantifiable risks posed by trees.
 - Political – None.
 - Reputation – The Council's environmental and health and safety protection measures are being maintained.
 - Equality & Diversity – None.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 It is likely that in the foreseeable future Ash die Back will have a significant impact on the Boroughs tree stock, as a Council we need to provide clear and concise, up to date advice to landowners which will incorporate a management plan that will enable the Borough to retain as many trees as possible but legislate for the removal and replacement were this is not achievable. In some cases, it may be prudent to issue a Tree Preservation Order on an Individual/Group/Woodland that is succumbing/dying from ADB to enable the Council to condition/enforce replacement planting to ensure the Boroughs future treescape.
- 5.2 Through methodically surveying and monitoring the Boroughs Ash tree stock, the inevitable failure of retained trees due to altered exposure will also be minimised.
- 5.2 Replanting should be on a site-specific basis dependant on the surrounding factors.

6. RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 6.1 Approve the measures outlined above to mitigate and control the impact Ash Die Back will have on the Borough. The Council will carry out Tree Evaluation Method for Preservation Orders (TEMPO) surveys on trees that have contracted or succumbed to ADB and utilise the ADB flow chart in order to preserve the Boroughs Ash tree stock and future Treescape. Mature and Veteran Ash trees to be retained as habitat poles to mitigate habitat damage and loss and improve the possibility of the production of resilient seeds.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-ash-trees-affected-by-ash-dieback-operations-note-46a/managing-ash-trees-affected-by-ash-dieback-operations-note-46a>

<https://www.trees.org.uk/Trees.org.uk/media/Trees-org.uk/Documents/FC/Chalara.pdf>

<https://treecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Tree-Council-Ash-dieback-tree-owners-guide-FINAL.pdf>

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/planning-waste-and-environment/suffolks-countryside-and-wildlife/Chalara-Action-Kit.pdf>

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Park Street Play Area- Healthy Ash trees

Appendix 2 – Trees situated along the A59 corridor taken from Whiteacre Lane bridge

Appendix 3 – Whalley Road plantation

Appendix 4 – ABD Flow Chart

For further information please ask for Alex Shutt, extension 4505.

Appendix 1



Appendix 2





Appendix 3







Appendix 4

