

## RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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meeting date: TUESDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2024  
title: ASH DIEBACK RELATED TREE WORKS  
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES  
principal author: MARK BEVERIDGE HEAD OF CULTURAL AND LEISURE SERVICES AND  
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### 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform Committee about steps which need to be taken to address Ash Dieback (ADB) affecting trees on the Council's land.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives – Creating flourishing, healthy, and happy communities
- Corporate Priorities - Making the Ribble Valley a place we want to be, by creating a safer, stronger, greener and cleaner Borough.
- Other Considerations – Mitigating risks to the public.

### 2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Ash Dieback is on course to have a more devastating impact in the UK than Dutch Elm Disease [DED] which resulted in the felling of millions of elm trees.

2.2 As in the case of DED, Ash Dieback is a fungal disease which first arrived in this country probably in the first decade of this century. Despite warnings from the arboriculture industry and the Tree Council about the potential devastation, initially little was done. This was partly down to a lack of research data which lead to overly optimistic predictions about the impact of the disease and its future impact on Local Authorities.

### 3 ISSUES

3.1 Ribble Valley has not escaped the impact of Ash Dieback which now manifests itself on several council managed sites. This includes many high-risk areas such as paths, play areas and property where there is the threat of dead/dangerous trees falling on the public. Once beyond a certain amount of dieback, ash trees become increasingly dangerous and expensive to fell. The Council has been managing the impact of Ash Dieback in recent years on numerous Council owned sites across the Borough, removing trees where necessary using existing budgetary provisions.

3.2 Three priority areas have been identified by the Council's Countryside Officer as part of routine checks undertaken and acting on information provided by external sources. These are Crosshill, and Salthill in Clitheroe and Whalley Moor Community woodland where there are a significant number of ash trees that are dead and/or in a dangerous condition. Works at Salthill are largely complete, with one tree left to be removed which requires specialist equipment and sensitive handling of a power cable. Works at Crosshill and

Whalley Moor Community woodland have not started. The work in these areas will require specialist tree contractors for safe removal and to minimise the impact of felling operations on the existing network of footpaths, biodiversity and infrastructure.

- 3.3 A visual inspection has identified that the total number of dead/dangerous trees on the three sites which require attention is approximately 200, broken down into approximately 165 trees at Crosshill, 35 trees at Whalley Woodland and 1 tree at Salthill. Quotations for their removal from three reputable contractors have been obtained in accordance with the Contract Procedure Rules with contractors having visited the sites with the Countryside Officer. The Countryside Officer has also approached Whalley Friends Group and the Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT) who are aware of the issue and the extent of works required.
- 3.4 Due to the nature of the disease the trees need to be felled in their entirety as such it is not possible to leave the trunks for habitat purposes. However, there will be a combination of leaving the trees in piles in the areas to rot down, creating habitat for animals, insects and fauna, along with some limited removal from the sites. Removal is a costly activity and can in many cases cause more damage to the paths and surround areas, rather than leaving the wood in situ.
- 3.5 The combined felling cost for the three sites is estimated at £35,000. The high felling costs cannot be contained within existing budgets and as the works need to be carried out without delay, preferably before the bird nesting season starts next year, therefore it is recommended that a request be made to Policy and Finance for a supplementary estimate to allow this essential safety work to take place.
- 3.6 Once the trees have been removed the Council will take stock of any re-planting required. Natural regeneration means that a requirement for re-planting is likely to be limited, however where this is identified the Countryside Officer will work with Whalley Friends Group and the LWT to achieve this, looking at options within existing budgetary provisions or other grant funding opportunities which may be available.
- 3.7 Approval has been sought for the removal of 35 trees in Whalley Woodland which are covered by tree preservation orders (TPO 1996 Calderstones).

## 4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications
  - Resources – The existing budgets are not sufficient to cover the costs of this expenditure. There is an emergency tree works budget to manage trees that become unsafe, but no budget exists specifically in respect of Ash Dieback.
  - Technical, Environmental and Legal – The key risk is that of personal injury to the public due to a tree falling or branches falling. In this instance, we could be investigated and prosecuted by the HSE [Health & Safety Executive] if full or partial failure of a tree results in property damage, the council could be liable for damages.
  - Political – none applicable to this report

- Reputation – The Council has a public duty of care and would be expected to manage possible risks to the public effectively. Not all risks can be eliminated, due to the nature of the issue and ever-changing position, but such risks do need to be carefully managed and reviewed. This report covers immediate known risks, however ongoing assessments will continue on all council managed land. The Countryside Officer will work with the Council’s Communications Team, Whalley Friends Group and the LWT to ensure appropriate publicity is carried out before the works commence.
- Equality & Diversity – None.

## 5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

- 5.1 Request a supplementary estimate from Policy and Finance Committee for the sum of £35,000 to fell the trees affected by Ash Dieback in Whalley Woodland, Salthill and Crosshill Nature reserves.

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