

ASH DIEBACK ACTION PLAN

Head of Service:	Justin Turvey, Interim Head of Place Development
Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision?	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Appendices (attached):	1. Ash Dieback Action Plan 2. Ash Dieback Map

Summary

This report presents the Council's Ash Dieback Action Plan and seeks support for its adoption.

The Ash Dieback Action Plan sets out a framework for how the Council will manage Ash Dieback on trees within the borough, including removal of trees and replanting.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Agree to adopt the Ash Dieback Action Plan set out in Appendix 1.

1 Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 There are approximately 20,000 Ash Trees located within the borough, well over 6,000 of which are on Council owned and/or managed land. Ash Dieback presents a serious risk to the health of Ash trees within the borough and nationwide.
- 1.2 Following on from the Council's Tree Management Plan, which was adopted earlier in the year, the Ash Dieback Action Plan sets out how the Council will deal with Ash Dieback through taking a risk based approach to tree inspections and works, focusing primarily on works where there is a risk to the health and safety to the public.

2 Background

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- 2.1 Ash Dieback is the most significant tree disease to affect the UK since Dutch Elm Disease and has the potential to infect more than two billion UK Ash trees (from saplings to mature trees) and lead to the death of approximately 75-90% of them. The disease is spread by fungal spores and was first discovered in Poland in 1992 where more than 90% of Ash trees have died. The disease spread across Europe and was first recorded in the UK in 2012, with the first case in Epsom & Ewell recorded in 2014.
- 2.2 There are around 20,000 Ash trees within the borough, and the Council is responsible for well over 6,000 of them. The most immediate threat from the disease is to public safety from mature Ash trees dying and subsequently falling or shedding large limbs, but there are also implications in terms of impacts upon biodiversity and impacts on the quality and appearance of the borough's landscape.
- 2.3 The Council adopted a formal overarching tree management framework, the 'Tree Management Plan' earlier this year, and also a Tree Risk Policy in 2015. The Council has an agreed Tree Management contract in place in respect of works to trees, including any emergency works to Ash Trees. The Tree Management Plan identified that Ash Dieback would have a significant impact on trees within the borough, and this Ash Dieback Action Plan provides further detail in respect to how the Council intends to deal with the issue.
- 2.4 Recognising that it is a considerable financial challenge to deliver a robust plan to manage the effects of Ash Dieback across the borough, the Ash Dieback Action Plan sets out how the Council will deal with Ash Dieback through taking a risk-based approach to tree inspections and works, focusing primarily on works where there is a risk to the health and safety to the public.
- 2.5 The Ash Dieback Action Plan also recognises the financial challenges faced in terms of replanting. It promotes natural regeneration as a preferred approach, but also sets out that, where possible and within resource levels, the Council will aim to plant replacement trees with new specimen trees, doing so through measures such as bidding for central government grant funding. It should be noted, however, that current grant funding does not cover the cost of felling trees, and is limited to
 - Road closures and traffic management – 60% of the cost;
 - Facilitation (i.e. access works etc) – up to £24 per hour;
 - Protected Species Surveys – 80% of the cost;
 - Restocking – up to £6,000 per hectare for ancient woodland, £4,720 per hectare for other woodlands, up to £270.44 per tree or £2.29 per whip outside of woodland.

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- Maintenance - £350 per hectare in woodland, up to £189 per large tree or £0.14 per whip outside of woodland.

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

3.1.1 None arising from this report

3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 None arising from this report

3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 None arising from this report

3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 None arising from this report

3.5 Other

3.5.1 Health and Safety

- Dead and declining large trees will pose a risk to nearby residents, property, and people using sites for recreation
- Ash, especially when dead and declining, can be extremely brittle and unstable, elevating the risk for the safety of contractors.

3.5.2 Reputational

- Public anxiety over the loss of trees and changes to the landscape, risk of harm, inconvenience of closed access, potential temporary loss of electricity, telephone, broadband etc (for trees close to utilities)

3.5.3 Environmental

- Impacts on recreation and amenity through loss and change of landscapes, ecosystems and biodiversity.

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4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The Council recognises that it is a considerable financial challenge to deliver a robust plan to manage the effects of Ash Dieback but cannot be complacent with this issue. We will therefore take a risk-based approach to managing unsafe Ash trees, focussing on those trees that may cause harm to the public.
- 4.2 The Plan proposes natural regeneration, but grant funding will be sought to help cover the costs of planting and management for areas where planting is proposed.
- 4.3 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** The Council's annual budget for tree maintenance is in excess of £160,000. The budget target report on this agenda highlights a projected Council wide funding gap of £1.1m in 2024/25, rising to £2.5m in 2027/28. Consequently, any additional resources required to support the proposed Ash Dieback Action Plan should be identified initially from external sources such as grant funding and existing budgets. Where trees are managed by the Council on behalf of other bodies, these costs should be recovered.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 This proposal enables compliance with obligations required by the Occupiers Liability Act 1984 and by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- 5.2 **Legal Officer's comments:** None for the purposes of this report

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

- 6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:
- 6.1.1 Green & Vibrant, Safe and Well
- 6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is not included within the current Service Delivery Plan.
- 6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** The plan supports objectives in the Biodiversity Action Plan and Climate Change Action Plan, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and contributing to increased carbon sequestration and meeting the Council climate change targets.
- 6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** No specific implications
- 6.5 **Partnerships:** No specific implications

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7 Background papers

7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- None

Other papers:

- DERFA: Grants for ash with ash dieback, February 2023;
- Epsom & Ewell Tree Management Plan 2023