Great Aycliffe Town Council
Ash Dieback Action Plan

January 2020

Background

Since first being described in Poland in 1992 the disease commonly known as Chalara Ash Die Back has been sweeping westwards through Europe and arrived in the UK in 2012. Since this time the disease has been spreading rapidly through most parts of Britain.

As Ash trees were coming into leaf around the Parish in the spring of 2019, several trees around Aycliffe were exhibiting typical signs of the Disease. It was later confirmed by Durham County Council's Tree Officer that several trees around School Aycliffe were suffering the Chalara Ash Die Back disease.

What is the disease?

The Disease is a fungus which affects the entire tree; roots, stem, branches and leaves. It is spread naturally from infectious spores of the fungus and can be wind blown over long distances. It is thought the spores can also be transported manually via infected timber and leaf matter. Once the spores land on the host's leaves or other part of the tree, the fungus can make its way through the entire trees circulation system resulting in rapid Die Back and likely tree death.

Nationally there is an acceptance that this Disease is now well established and is likely to spread rapidly, naturally through the UK's Ash tree stocks.

Potential effects on the Town Council's tree stock

It would be easy to underestimate the scale of the potential impact of this Disease. It is known that Ash is the predominate 'landscape' and 'historic field boundary' tree within the County which helps to define much of the character of the area whilst also providing a key resource particularly for wildlife. At this time, it is difficult to determine the percentage of Ash trees which will be lost due to this Disease. Most authorities are working on an 85% to 90% loss in Ash tree stocks.

Ash Dieback is therefore now a huge problem across the UK. The Tree Council has concluded that: *"Only several years after its official identification in the UK, Ash Dieback has already started having significant impacts on the country's treescape. Although it is still too early to understand whether any trees will prove to be resistant to the fungus, the stark reality is that over 90% of the 2 billion ash trees across the UK are likely to be infected and lost in the years to come."*

Apart from the cost of removing dangerous trees, Ash Dieback has the significant potential impact on causing harm to people and their property. This is before giving consideration to the environmental concerns it raises for UK wildlife, landscapes and ecology.

There is therefore a clear need for all landowners with ash trees to consider how best manage trees affected by the disease. For this reason, an Ash Dieback Action Plan is critical. This document will provide a better understanding and framework to offer guidance in how the Council should manage the ash tree stocks within its management.

Key elements to the Ash Dieback Action Plan are:

1. Education
2. Basic principles on how the Council will deal with affected trees
3. Identifying trees which pose a significant risk to life or property on Council land
4. Results of mapping exercise
5. Establish a monitoring regime
6. Establish potential costs to the Council
7. Guidance to operatives and Managers managing affected trees

Education-

The Council has been proactive in alerting the local public to the fact Ash Dieback has been identified within the parish. Initial news articles were released in the local papers and social media, this was later followed up with a lengthy article in the Councils Newsletter detailing how to identify the disease and an initial indication as to how the Council plan to deal with affected trees. Part of this information sharing process serves to reassure residents that the Council are considering this issue.

News articles should be placed in the local media on a regular basis, particularly when substantial tree works are planned in prominent locations or on mature specimen ash trees.

Basic Principles-

The Council will not fell a diseased tree simply due to infection of Ash Die Back. The priority will always be to determine if the tree poses a risk to life or property.

Standing dead wood is a major benefit to biodiversity and consideration should be given to retaining standing dead wood if safe and appropriate to do so.

If the tree needs to be felled for safety reasons consideration should be given to retaining some of the large stems and/or creating habitat piles.

Retaining timber on site has the added benefit of limiting the spread of the disease by transporting affected timber. If timber must be transported off-site it is critical that the timber is only transported locally and does not enter areas that currently have no recorded incidents of the disease. However, there are no restrictions on the movement of ash timber, branches or leaves, but a plant health order made in 2012 prohibits all imports of ash seeds, plants and trees into GB, and all inland movements within GB of the same material.

In some areas it will not be practical, appropriate or safe to retain large volumes of dead wood. This may be because of the risk of arson, anti-social behaviour, theft of timber or an inappropriate location such as in a park or play area.

"Tree owners need to take a balanced and proportionate approach. Not all infected ash trees will need to be removed and pruning shouldn't be ruled out as a management option, particularly where trees show a tolerance to the disease,"- Arbocultural Council- July 2019

Consideration should be given to removing dangerous branches and retaining standing stems particularly in large veteran specimens.

"Natural regeneration will encourage the process of natural selection for tolerance, so healthy trees should be maintained for as long as possible to ensure regeneration from tolerant mother trees." Defra – June 2019

Natural regeneration should be encouraged where possible to do so. Reframing from stump grinding and retaining large stumps to encouraging regrowth and potentially the chances of survival of veteran species.

Plant three trees for each large tree lost.

Considering it will not be appropriate to replant ash trees and those closely related to this family it will be essential to plant appropriate species by considering local factors such as soil type, and by planting native species that help support wildlife and the landscape.

It is important to understand that in losing large numbers of Ash trees, biodiversity will inevitably be affected. So, to minimise the loss of species supported by Ash trees, we must plant other trees that support those same species previously reliant on Ash trees.

Plant a diverse range of native species to promote resilience against future diseases.

Only plant trees sources from within the UK to avoid diseased stock.

Identifying trees of particular risk-

To ensure the Council can effectively be a responsible land owner it is critical to identify the location of significant trees which may pose a risk to life or property. This will allow the Council a way forward in monitoring and managing the trees stock, attempting to predict the resources required to manage the problem both in terms of operative's time and/or cost provision of specialist arborists who can safely manage high risk trees.

It is important to note that most of the ash trees within Council management will not pose a significant risk to health or property and so these will not be part of the mapping exercise.

Only trees which:

- Are located close to third party boundary properties where there is the potential risk of damage to life or property.
- Are located close to a public highway (including footpaths) where there is the potential risk of damage to life or property.

- Are located close to street furniture, lighting or other structure.
- Have a potential complicated felling process due to structure of the tree or confined location.
- In a high-profile location.
- Have significant historic value and/or physical size.

Results of mapping exercise-

During autumn and winter 2019 maps were produced of all the Council's land holdings. Council Officers were then tasked with identifying all ash trees on Council land which may pose a significant risk to the Council as previously set out above.

The table below gives a site by site breakdown of the number of trees which pose a significant risk to the Council.

Name of site	Potential number of significant ash tree
School Aycliffe wetlands and woodland	10
Oakleaf complex and golf course (including West Cemetery)	6
West park	1
Rail Halt	3
Simpasture Park	4
Horndale Park	2
Simpasture Nature Line	2
Nature Park	0
Seven Hills	0
Stephenson Way Cemetery	2
Woodham Burn (Stephenson Way- Humphrey Close)	0
Woodham Burn (Humphrey Close- Burn Lane)	23
Woodham Burn (Burn Lane to Kendrew Close)	12
Woodham Burn (Kendrew to Woodham Academy)	22
Woodham Park	0
South Agnew Planation	16
Byerley Park play area	1
Cobblers Hall Play area	0
Town park	0
Cobblers Hall Plantation	5
St Oswalds Park and allotments	0
Moore Lane Park	0

The mapping exercise has therefore identified approximately 109 significant ash trees on Great Aycliffe Town Council owned land. As the most prevalent species within the area, there are clearly many smaller, less significant or easily felled ash tree which have not been recorded within this plan which will still require management.

The aim of this plan is simply to highlight the key specimens which are more likely to pose a significant risk to the Council.

Proposed monitoring regime-

Once the trees have been identified and mapped, this forms the basis of a database to ensure these trees are monitored on a regular basis.

The Councils Tree Management policy set outs that high risk trees will be surveyed by an independent arbocultural expert with a visual walk through to identify any obvious disease or defects every three years.

This will continue to be the case for all tree species but in addition to this survey, the Council will complete a similar walk through inspection every 6 months on the ash trees identified in this plan, this will be completed by a Council Officer with day to day experience in the management of woodlands.

The main reason why more regular inspections are required in this situation is because Ash Dieback can result in rapid decline and so there is a clear increased risk that trees in decline from ash dieback may go undetected.

Ideally the 6 monthly inspections should take place in April and September.

Establishing possible costs-

Most ash trees within the Councils ownership and management that are affected by ash dieback can be managed using suitably qualified Works Section Operatives, which would be completed within existing budgets. However, if there is a significant risk that any tree requiring work poses a risk to neighbouring property or persons then an expert tree surgeons will be employed to complete the work safely, these are the potential trees identified within this report.

It is impossible to establish an exact cost for the safe dismantling of all affected trees, but a sensible useful indication would be a day rate of £450 for a team of skilled arborists.

Depending on complexity of the job; this may depend on the location of the tree, access issues, composition and size of the tree and level of decay within the tree a good team should be able to dismantle on average 2 trees in a day.

Further consideration should be given to replanting. It has already been established that three trees should be replanted following the removal of a large ash. In general, the best success rate will be achieved using small to medium mixed species trees at a cost of about £5 each. However, in prominent locations like parks or village greens the Council should be considering planting more established standard trees which will generally cost in the region of £50- £100 depending on size and species selected.

Not all ash trees will die as a direct result of ash die back infection. A tree may be weakened so it becomes susceptible to other pests and diseases, some trees will potentially survive infection.

Potential projected cost implications to Great Aycliffe Town Council-

The percentage loss of ash tree stocks on Council land cannot be accurately forecasted or indeed over what period of time the trees will be lost. That said, if the loss of trees is similar to that experienced in Europe the decline will be rapid and most trees will die in the first 5 years of the disease being identified.

A worst-case scenario is the loss of all ash trees identified in the table above. This would result in 109 trees needing attention from professional contractors resulting in an approximate cost of £24,525.

There will be the need to purchase and plant replacement trees as set out within this action plan. The cost of replanting with appropriate trees could cost approximately:

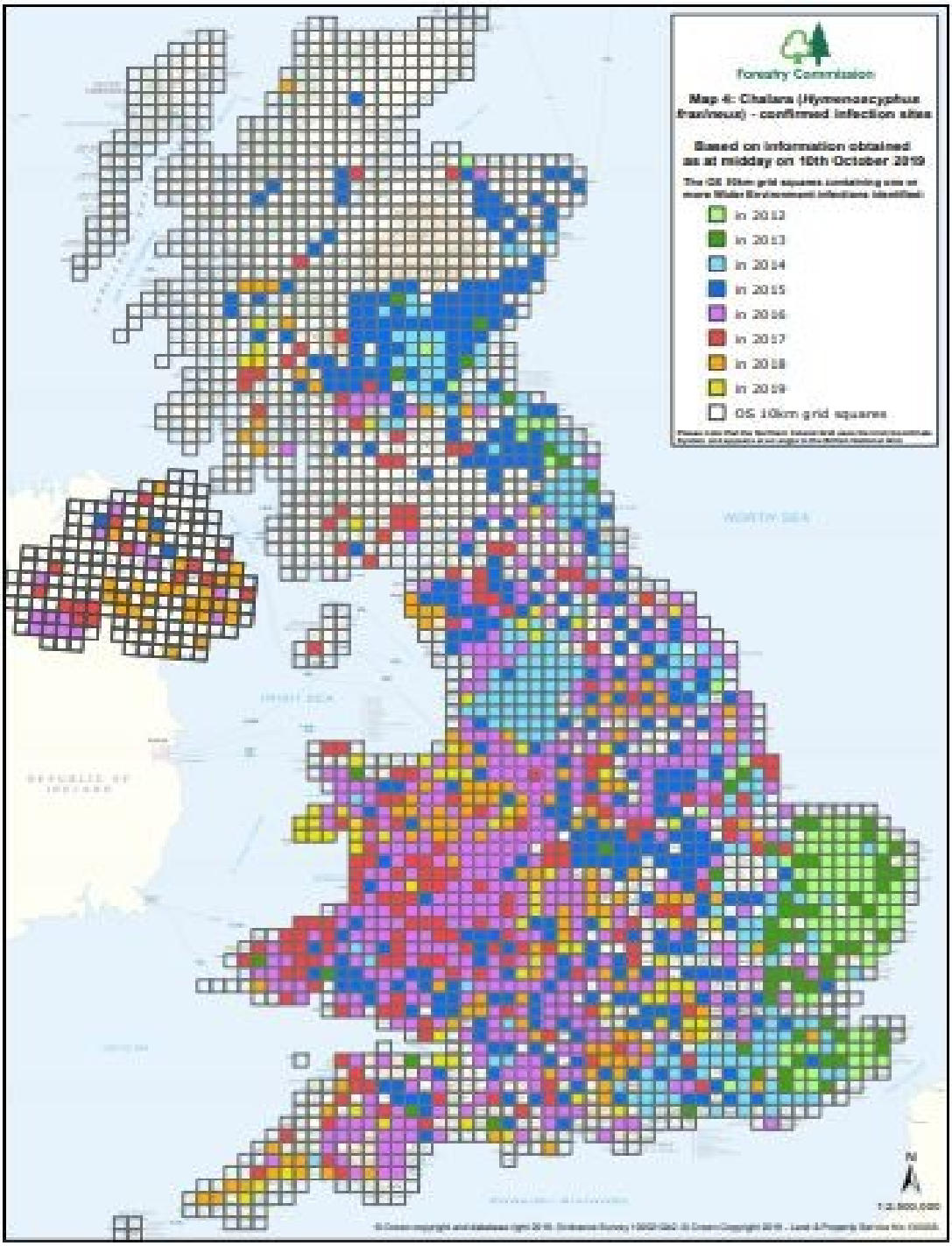
- £7500 for approximately 1500 medium sized whip replacements.
- £3000 for approximately 30 standard sized replacement trees.

This would provide a potential conservative cost of approximately £35,000 for the management of the trees identified within this plan.

It must be made clear that significantly more trees will be felled using the skills of Council Works Operatives. These felled trees will also require replanting; the cost of replanting these trees will be in addition to the £35,000.

A provisional sum of £25,000 has therefore been put into the Councils 2020-21 budget. It is unlikely that all this budget will be required within the first financial year, and any underspend would be proposed to be rolled over and re allocated to an ongoing Council committed budget for Ash Dieback in the medium-term financial plan.

Distribution of ash dieback and year confirmed



Forestry Commission

Chalara dieback of ash

Symptoms associated with **Chalara dieback** of ash (1–7)

Diseased saplings typically display dead tops and/or side shoots.

At the base of dead side shoots, lesions can often be found on the subtending branch or stem.

Lesions which girdle the branch or stem can cause wilting of the foliage above.

Mature trees affected by the disease initially display dieback of the shoots and twigs at the periphery of their crowns. Dense clumps of foliage may be seen further back on branches where recovery shoots are produced.

In late summer and early autumn (July to October), small white fruiting bodies can be found on blackened rachises (leaf stalks) of ash in damp areas of leaf litter beneath trees. These do not necessarily belong to the pathogen but can be tested to determine their identity.

If the disease is well established, some trees may have tongues of bark killed by *C. fraxinea* at the base of their stems.