

The Tree Council – Ash dieback: an Action Plan Toolkit A summary

In February 2019 The Tree Council published an Action Plan Toolkit concerning Chalara (Ash dieback disease) primarily aimed at authorities and big landowners.

While the Action Plan Toolkit might not be directly applicable to all parishioners of Brightling and Dallington, there are landholdings in the parishes containing a great number of Ash trees some of which are near to public roads, bridleways and footpaths and may pose a risk when they become infected.

The document also outlines the responsibilities and actions expected of local authorities and so it will provide a useful checklist against which our own local authorities' performance can be monitored.

This summary aims to pick out information from the 'Toolkit' that is relevant or of interest to people of our two parishes.

Why the fuss about Ash Dieback?

Ash dieback, *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (also known as *Chalara fraxinea*), is the most significant tree disease to affect the UK since Dutch Elm Disease which was first recognised in the 1960s. It will lead to the decline and death of the majority of ash trees in Britain and has the potential to infect more than two billion ash trees (over 1.8 billion saplings and seedlings to more than 150 million mature trees) across the country.

Given that ash is widespread across the High Weald AONB, including alongside roads and byeways, managing ash dieback will lead to a shift away from 'business as usual' for landowners and authorities.

As trees become infected and begin to die, some that pose risks to buildings or to public roads, bridleways and footpaths will need to be pruned or felled and the resulting timber and brash managed appropriately. The cost of this will be borne by the landowner. Bearing in mind the prevalence of Ash trees in our parishes costs are likely to be substantial.

Should I cut down all my Ash trees as a precaution?

No. Safety permitting, trees should be left because they provide valuable deadwood habitat for many smaller species of wildlife. In addition, it is expected that some trees will show resistance to the disease and so cutting down all Ash trees would destroy these valuable trees.

You are advised to engage professional help to assess Ash trees on your land so that those posing significant risks can be identified to save unnecessary costs of felling otherwise safe trees.

Please do ensure that any professional advice you receive is backed by the advisor's Professional Indemnity Insurance.

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What should I do if my trees are infected?

Suspected cases should be reported to the Forestry Commission via Tree Alert, their online reporting tool.

Tree surgeons should adopt biosecurity measures to avoid onward spread of the disease. Ash logs or firewood may only be moved off infected sites with permission from the Forestry Commission. Ash wood may, however, be used on site as fuel.

Leaves from infected trees or trees suspected of being infected should not be removed from the site, so do not put them in green waste bins for composting, for example, as this risks spreading the disease. Forestry Commission advice is that burning them on site is the best option.

Where can I find more information about Chalara?

The Woodland Trust and the Sussex Wildlife Trust have some useful information about Ash Dieback and what actions are needed (and not needed) if your Ash trees show signs of Chalara infection: -

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/tree-diseases-and-pests/key-threats/ash-dieback/your-questions-answered/>

<https://sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/campaign/ash-dieback>

Here is a link to a website with more information about general pests and diseases threatening our trees and how you can identify them: -

<https://www.observatree.org.uk/tree-health/pests-and-diseases/>

What should our local authorities be doing?

The Tree Council's Toolkit lays out a number of actions to be taken by local authorities to manage Chalara in their areas. Here's a summary: -

1) Raise awareness

To make the case for organisational time and resources to be spent on developing an Ash Dieback Action Plan (ADAP), it is necessary for each interested body to understand the potential impacts on its organisation or area.

2) Preparing an ash dieback action plan

The development of an ADAP requires a number of different approaches depending on available staff and resources. The length of time to produce a Plan will also vary depending on the complexity of the organisation/area and the resources available to undertake the work.

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An ADAP is essential to address the following: -

There will be dead/dying ash trees: the spread of ash dieback will cause a significant proportion of all ash trees to decline or die. This will financially and practically impact every organisation responsible for vegetation management.

There is only a short period for preparation: death of mature trees may happen after only a few years of infection, so an organisation may not have long to prepare for the impacts of ash dieback and its additional costs.

The scale of the impact must be assessed: the scale of the problems posed by ash dieback is likely to be significantly greater than the impact of Dutch elm disease (as there is at least twice the number of ash trees in public spaces as there were elm trees). This includes the additional costs attached to managing the decline of ash. Being reactive to the problem is likely to be more expensive than planning the authority's response through an Action Plan.

It will impact corporate risk: ash dieback will impact corporate risk registers particularly in respect of risks to statutory functions or service delivery, increased potential for deaths or injuries, budget impacts, risks to infrastructure, increased liabilities, risks to staff and 'user' communities, as well as political and reputational risks.

There will need to be changes in management practices: changes to tree management practices will be necessary as ash dieback spreads.

Working with others for efficient joint responses: the response to ash dieback needs to be planned, to avoid working in silos and conflicting with other local policies such as landscape and biodiversity policies.

Communication and collaboration is key: a plan will provide better opportunities for communication and discussion and provide opportunities for agencies to work strategically together to share costs and responsibilities.

3) How to take action and respond to ash dieback

Once an Ash Dieback Action Plan (ADAP) has been developed, the response to ash dieback will move into the Action phase where the focus will be around activity (e.g. felling trees) to remedy the problems faced because of ash dieback.

4) Recovery and adaptation

The aim of the recovery phase should be to create a treescape resilient to any future pest and disease issues. As ash dieback develops there will be a need to produce not only a tactical

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response to the Action phase (Figure 1 on page 7) but also a strategic response to wider treescape issues during the adaptation and recovery phase.

Have our local authorities (County and District) produced their ADAPs yet?

A search of the ESCC site in April 2019 brings up some general advice given by Forestry Commission about identifying and reporting Chalara infections and about biosecurity advice for woodland managers and countryside workers. Apparently, 'Orange signs will be displayed at entrances to publicly accessible wooded sites that are within 10km² (sic) of a confirmed infection. Blue signs will be displayed in other areas.' Have you seen any of these signs? A search for 'Ash Dieback Action Plan' draws a blank.

A search of the Rother District Council brings up even fewer results connected to Ash dieback; just a single mention in two landscape assessment reports connected with planning reviews.

Chalara is already affecting Ash trees in our parishes; I believe an ADAP needs to be in place and operating as soon as possible.

If you have any concerns about Ash dieback in the parishes of Brightling and Dallington please contact our Tree Warden, Doug Edworthy.

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