

ASH DIEBACK TOOLKIT

KENT TREE OFFICER GROUP (KTOG)

Ash Die-back is a fungal infection of Ash trees including European Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), and non-native Narrow-leaved Ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*), Manna Ash (*Fraxinus ornus*), Black Ash (*Fraxinus nigra*) and Green Ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), which is spreading within the UK. Experience from Continental Europe indicates that the disease can be devastating for Ash in woodland settings, but that trees growing within heavily modified urban landscapes, which do not favour the development of fruiting bodies on the previous year's fallen leaf rachises, are less susceptible to infection.

We don't know for sure what the impact of the disease in the UK will be, but we are the first country to take an early and planned approach to provide information and advice in an attempt to try to slow the pace of infection, manage our reaction to the disease in a precautionary yet pragmatic manner, and take a longer view in how we replace Ash in the landscape.

We have considered this to be important for a number of reasons, including:

1. Taking a robust precautionary approach on a regional and national basis gives a sense of confidence to professionals, community leaders and to the public that we are managing our reaction to minimize the impact in as cost effective way as possible;
2. Having a planned approach may help us to retain more Ash trees for longer so that individuals with genetic resistance can be identified;
3. Retaining Ash trees for longer may help to slow down the pace of landscape change, allowing replacement trees the time to grow before Ash becomes scarce;
4. Retaining Ash for longer may help to reduce the impact on biodiversity and associated species, particularly if it serves to bridge the gap until genetically resistant Ash can be re-introduced.
5. Taking a planned approach may help us to budget time and costs more effectively.

The Guiding Principle

Ash die-back may well have a huge impact on our present Ash population. Currently trees appear to be under threat for a variety of reasons, and whilst we do not downplay the potential impact of this disease, it is just one more factor that has to be taken into account when assessing trees. Because of this, the presence of Ash die-back will not of itself necessarily be considered as a reason for early pruning, felling, or intervention.

Where infection of an Ash tree is suspected or known, each situation will be judged on its individual merits taking into account the amount of die-back, the visual amenity that the tree or trees provide, and any health and safety considerations. Whilst it may appear to make economic sense, if one or more trees in a wider group do require intervention, removal of the whole group will not necessarily be considered to be justified.

Arisings, such as leaves and leafy brash, from works to Ash trees should continue to be dealt with in accordance with current guidelines relating to biosecurity.

The guidance is set out in the following pages. This advisory guidance is designed to give a template of how authorities within the Kent area could deal with the disease in the form of a working summary of the “**Urban & Suburban Ash Management**” section found in the joint Kent publication: **Managing Chalara Ash Dieback in Kent (April 2014)** which is available on the following [link](#).

The following toolkit summary will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure its relevance following any changes in the situation.

ASH DIE-BACK TOOLKIT – SUMMARY (KTOG)

Infected Ash on Local Authority/KCC owned or controlled land

Inspections should be timed appropriately (i.e. when Ash is in leaf) to make the best assessment of the condition of trees where possible, and the frequency of inspections should be increased if considered to be necessary.

Where infection is present, action for each tree should be considered on its individual merits, taking account of its condition, position and importance.

Trees near the highway

When considering works to infected Ash on or near the highway, each tree should be considered on its merits, and works carried out because of the disease should only be for those trees where it is necessary. Other Ash which may be close should not be pruned/removed purely because they have a potential for new infection or for a worsening of existing infection. There may be a requirement to serve Section 154 Notices if there are trees which are considered dangerous to the highway user, and investigations/interventions may need to be made on unregistered land.

PROTECTED TREES AND ASH DIE-BACK

TPO Applications for infected trees.

The presence of the disease does not necessarily mean that a tree should be felled/pruned. Each situation should be taken on merits, taking account of the condition, position and importance of the tree. It should also be borne in mind that new growth arising from pruning cuts/pollarding appears to be more susceptible to infection.

The decision on the application may be best taken at the end of the 8 week application period, when the most up to date assessment of the tree(s) can be made.

Conservation Area Notifications for infected trees.

As for TPO applications. However it is possible that in some situations it may be necessary to make a TPO on a tree when it is considered that the degree of infection does not warrant the tree being felled/pruned. This decision on the notification may be best taken toward the end of the 6 week notification period, when the most up to date assessment of the tree(s) can be made.

5 Day Notifications for infected trees.

Infection of a tree does not necessarily mean that it is dead or dangerous. It is likely that such notifications will require additional scrutiny, and where the works are not appropriate, advice given that a full TPO application/211 (Conservation Area) Notification will be required.

TPOs on Ash trees

When assessing an Ash for a TPO, the presence of the disease should be taken into account as one guiding factor, but does not necessarily make a tree unsuitable for protection. The health of the tree should however be re-assessed before the TPO is confirmed.

Requests to carry out works under the Miscellaneous Provisions Act

Each case should be assessed on a tree by tree basis. Whilst a Local Authority may have a duty to investigate, they do not have a duty to act. The presence of the disease does not necessarily mean that a Local Authority should take action.

Planning Applications and Ash trees

Ash should continue to be recorded in the same way as other trees in tree surveys. Proposals for retention/removal of Ash in development schemes should be taken on their merits in a balanced manner, with the overall value of the contribution each tree being considered in isolation from any infection.

Forestry Commission/Woodlands and Felling Licenses

The Forestry Commission have an evolving approach to the presence of the disease, and each application for woodland management works and management plans should be considered on a case by case basis.

Biosecurity

Arisings, such as leaves and leafy brash from works to Ash trees should continue to be dealt with in accordance with current Kent and Forestry Commission guidelines relating to [biosecurity](#).

Recovery

Recovery of Ash in the landscape both in terms of alternative species and genetically resistant Ash (when provably identified) will be considered in the Kent Tree Strategy, and in general the choice of replacement (as with TPO applications and Conservation Area Notifications) should seek to make an equivalent contribution in landscape and ecological terms.

Communications

KTOG

KTOG will ensure that it works with other groups and forges new links as necessary to ensure that all actions taken are made on up to date information. Our work will be passed on to other organisations as requested or required on a neutral basis to keep them informed of our position, and to foster a unified approach.

Informing elected members of the situation regarding the disease and managing public perception/opinion

A clear action plan will help to keep community leaders informed of the approach being taken, and should help to give confidence that a planned approach is being utilised, thereby helping to manage public opinion and expectation. This will be helped by wide support of the action plan.

Costs

Where possible, all time and costs to each Authority that result from the disease will be recorded separately from other costs, so that a monetary value can be attributed to the cost of dealing with the disease. This may help with cost recovery.