

Kent Resilience Forum (KRF)
Ash Dieback Outbreak
Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG)

ACTION PLAN

Introduction

At the initial Kent Resilience Forum (KRF) Ash Dieback Outbreak Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG), held on 16th November 2012 it was agreed that an Action Plan would be drafted to provide clear direction to local, cross-border & national partners as to the response to be implemented across Kent & Medway in support of the agreed multi-agency Gold Strategy and the Interim Chalara Control Plan.

Background

Media reports widely cite the impact of the fungus Ash Dieback (in Denmark, where a 2010 estimate stated that some 60-90% of ash trees were affected and may eventually die¹. Since the announcement in October 2012 of confirmed cases in the UK, the outbreak has been reported widely by national and local media with much speculation as to the fate of our Ash trees. The latest reports² quote Danish scientists as suggesting that up to 95% of UK Ash trees could eventually be affected. However, annual tetrad surveys undertaken in Kent are indicating a clear and sustained geographical variation in local infection rates (with east Kent and semi-natural habitats such as wet woodland and scrub, and woodland on thin and free-draining soils, such as on the chalk, hardest hit). Trees in urban situations, such as street trees, are not generally exhibiting the rates of infection seen in trees growing in semi-natural habitats.

Such headlines have generated significant local concern as Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) is the most widespread tree species found in Kent, with records from 930 of the county's 1,043 tetrads (or 2km squares)³. Some 112 invertebrates feed directly upon ash, and this figure increases significantly when associated predators and parasites are considered⁴. In addition, some 255 lichens have an especial association with the alkaline substrate afforded by Ash bark⁵. The tree forms a component of high forest, coppice woodland and hedgerow habitats across Kent, and is also a prominent feature of our urban landscape, as street trees and within parks and gardens. Kent also supports the largest extent of surviving ancient woodland within the UK. If Ash Dieback takes hold in the UK at the rate and extent experienced in Denmark, and elsewhere within Continental Europe, it will bring profound change for the landscape, ecology and rural economy of Kent.

Practical challenges are posed by the threat of unprecedented numbers of deteriorating trees, growing on private and public land, and to the safety of public spaces, pedestrian and bridle routes, the railway network and highways. The risk that "rogue traders" will seek to profiteer from the outbreak is another key concern.

¹ European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (2010)

² Denmark's ash disease dieback toll poses warning to UK. Jeremy Cooke (BBC Rural affairs correspondent) – 20th November 2012

³ A New Atlas of the Kent Flora. E.G. Philp 2010

⁴ UK Biological Records Centre Database of Insects and their Food Plants and T. Harwood

⁵ Pasture and woodlands in Lowland Britain and their importance for the conservation of the epiphytes and invertebrates associated with old trees. Nature Conservancy Council & The Institute of Terrestrial Ecology

Local Action Plan

Responsible Owner (Tactical Co-ordination): **Chair of Kent Resilience Forum Ash Dieback Strategic Co-ordinating Group**

| | Key Targets | Performance Measure | Accountability | Timescale | RAG |
|-----|---|--|--------------------------------------|---|--------------|
| 1. | Command, Control & Co-ordination (C3): Establish robust C3 arrangements (incl. relevant plans & protocols) to support effective & proportionate local, cross-border & national response arrangements | | | | |
| 1.1 | Effective multi-agency C3 structure, Gold Strategy and Action Plan in place, being implemented, monitored and communicated. | Regular SCG meetings and information sharing with local and national partners. Engagement with Defra Ash Dieback Health and Safety Task Group. | Strategic Co-ordinating Group | Ongoing | Green |
| 1.2 | Bio-security tool-kit / guidance to seek to contain level of Ash Dieback spread within county, with specific focus upon tackling spread from natural environment into parks, gardens and other urban green space. | Ash tree management guidance note produced and circulated in paper and electronic format. Focus on preventing movement of potentially infective material. Local eradication of infected trees where sporadic outbreaks identified | Strategic Co-ordinating Group | 1st May 2014 (with updates as required) | Green |
| 1.3 | Ensure measured, cost-effective systems in place for ongoing monitoring and assessment of Ash Dieback spread. | Systems in place: Annual (June) tetrad monitoring (x9) of symptomatic Ash; Co-operation with Kew, John Innes Centre, Mendelova Univerzita v Brne, Queen Mary University London on development of methodology to calculate rate of attack. | Strategic Co-ordinating Group | Ongoing | Green |
| 1.4 | Ensure baseline asset and tree safety audit data for Ash on public land informing identification of required staffing / contractor / financial resources. | Audits in place. | Strategic Co-ordinating Group | Ongoing | Green |

| | Key Targets | Performance Measure | Accountability | Timescale | RAG |
|-----|--|--|-------------------------------|--|-------|
| 1.5 | Plan and deliver multi-agency tree health awareness training events, addressing identification and bio-security. | Events delivered on rolling programme. KCC e-Learning tool developed. | Strategic Co-ordinating Group | Ongoing | Green |
| 1.6 | Public information signs produced and installed at entrances and on notice boards at publicly accessible sites supporting ash across Kent and Medway. | Circa 4,000 Chalara public information signs circulated to key stakeholders and installed at suitable locations. | Strategic Co-ordinating Group | Signs installed from end of calendar year 2012 (and ongoing) | Green |
| 1.7 | Tree strategy for Kent and Medway, incorporating re-planting, natural regeneration and dead wood retention (saproxylic wildlife) policies. | Incorporated into Kent Environment Strategy. Draft Tree Strategy published. | Strategic Co-ordinating Group | Final draft presented to KES June 2018 | Green |
| 1.8 | Monitor and address financial recovery implications of outbreak for key partners, including financial record keeping and investigation of Bellwin scheme, HLF bids and other potential reparation options. | Financial recovery strategy agreed. | Strategic Co-ordinating Group | Ongoing | Amber |