



ADUR & WORTHING
COUNCILS

Joint Strategic Committee
8 October 2019
Agenda Item 6

Key Decision [Yes]

Ward(s) Affected: All

Proactively managing our Natural Resources - The Councils planned approach to the threat of Ash Dieback

Report by the Director for Communities

Executive Summary

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform and make recommendations to the Joint Strategic Committee over the proposed management approach to the known risk of Ash dieback to our ash trees.
- 1.2 Adur and Worthing Councils' tree stock has already being affected by the disease and going forward it is essential that we plan to manage the current and future risks of this disease spreading. Defra and the Tree Council have created a tool to assist land managers in the effective and safe management of their tree stock and the disease.
- 1.3 The report recommends to the committee that both Councils adopt this tool/approach to enable us to prepare and manage for the spread of the disease.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Joint Strategic Committee;

- 2.1. Approve the approach in using the DEFRA tool kit as best practice.
- 2.2. Approve the removal of infected tree stock where needed.
- 2.3. Approve to commit to a replanting programme to preserve our landscapes and work towards climate change mitigation.

3. Context

- 3.1 In December 2016, the Councils adopted a three year strategy 'Platforms for our Places' the third platform being the stewardship of our natural resources. Over the intervening period the Councils have contributed much to supporting our people and places to thrive, from developing our biodiversity around Brooklands Lake, to being successful in the plant heritage project at Highdown Gardens and supporting our parks and open spaces to be celebrated places to visit and spend time in. Unfortunately the role of the Councils is also to deal with the risks of change and disease in our natural world, and in our tree stock in particular. This report therefore outlines the apparent risk of Ash dieback in our tree stock, and provides recommendations as to the way forward.
- 3.2 Across Adur & Worthing we have 700 middle aged, to mature, stand alone ash trees. We have two woodlands made up of majority ash trees, numbering approximately 1,000 to 1,200 trees. One woodland, in Adur Lancing Ring and McIntyres field and one in Worthing, The Gallops and Bost Hill. Both of these woodlands provide not only the major lungs and filters for our communities, but also offer soak away spaces for localised flooding, roosting for bats and form part of Local Nature Reserve and areas within the South Downs National Park.
- 3.3 Ash dieback is a disease that is already infecting and killing our ash trees, and was first confirmed in Worthing in 2014 and 2015 for Adur. Experience from Europe is that once infected, trees are, on average, dying within a two year period. The trees become brittle and branches then snap and fall.

- 3.4 Given the number of ash trees across our areas, it is imperative that we have
- A full understanding of the risks and issues
 - A full management and future planting plan and
 - A comprehensive communication plan
- 3.5 DEFRA, The Tree Council and The Forestry Commission have recently launched a management tool to support councils to monitor and manage the impact of ash dieback. Officers from the Parks and Foreshore team attended the launch of this tool in order to understand best practice, the impacts of the disease and the potential future risks. The tool will enable us to collate a record of all of the key issues and risks, and ensure we follow best practice in managing these.
- 3.6 Whilst we are aware that ash dieback is present, we do not at this time have a full understanding of the extent of the issues for us as the owner of Council land, or as a leader for other landowners across Adur & Worthing. Consequently, the key outcome of these proposals will be the development of a full ash dieback plan, the aims of which will be as follows:
- Development of an overarching plan to identify, communicate with members, key stakeholders and our communities how we will address the risks of ash dieback disease in our area.
 - Identify and manage the risks from the disease to
 - the environment (landscape and biodiversity),
 - to public safety (falling trees) and
 - communication networks (roads and overhead cables)
 - Identify actions that are a priority because they pose a short-term major risk, (e.g. to public safety) that need to be addressed first, and those that pose a longer-term risk (e.g. to the environment) which will require longer term planning and budgeting.
 - For non-woodland trees, consider and plan for a number of scenarios such as;
 - a worst-case scenario, where over 90% of ash dies or are clearly dying within a ten-year period, and
 - a less severe scenario, where about 50% of non-woodland ashes are affected Identify the likely costs of responding to the disease, and thereby identify where extra resources will be needed going forward.

Our work will be to minimize the impact of large scale ecosystem

services loss by replanting a diverse tree stock.

4. Issues for consideration

4.1 Health and Safety

4.1.2 We have identified all of the ash trees within our parks, open spaces and cemeteries that are managed by Environmental Services and have mapped and recorded them as part of our tree management system. All inspections for these trees are up to date and are in accordance with the inspection frequency recommended. Adur Homes also have all of their tree stock mapped and recorded on their behalf by Environmental Services.

4.1.3 Woodlands and other land that Adur and Worthing estates teams are responsible for, that may have ash trees present, do not currently have their tree stock mapped or recorded, however discussions are underway to resolve this before the ash dieback tool is implemented .

4.1.4 The adoption and implementation of the ash dieback tool provides an ideal opportunity to:

- Implement a training plan for internal staff to assist with awareness and raising of concerns regarding this specific species.
- Ensure all risks to the public and/or members of staff are assessed and management actions are identified.
- Prepare a communications plan to respond to any issues relating to Ash dieback
- Carry out surveys of remaining land that we are responsible for so that all areas of risk are understood and fall into the management plan.

4.1.5 The challenges we will face are;

- The speed with which trees decline varies from tree to tree.
- Trees on private land and the need to serve section 154 notices in partnership with the County Council for trees that are risk critical with no management from a private land owner.
- Ability to adapt quickly throughout.

4.2 Reputation

4.2.1 We are in a strong position to prepare for ash dieback given the early stages of it being present within our area. Given that the level of disease

is currently low and we have time to prepare, we have the following opportunities:

- The ability to prepare a robust approach to managing our ash tree stock to manage all risks.
- To create and implement a communication plan regarding the disease of the tree stock, to support landowner and public awareness and activity. In the worst case scenario, the Councils may have to be responsible for significant levels of tree stock being removed, which will undoubtedly cause concern, therefore enabling an open and transparent communication plan will help to inform our local residents of the reasons for drastic action, should it be required.
- To brief elected members as and when we notice the disease in their areas so they are kept informed of the situation.
- Ensure that from the outset we are working in partnership with key stakeholders such as West Sussex County Council, The South Down National Park, bat societies, friends groups to start to plan and capitalise on opportunities when they arise, ensuring transparency.

4.2.2 The challenges we may face are;

- It is difficult to manage a 'moving beast' such as the spread of this disease, which has lots of variables.
- Clearly engaging with and ensuring the public understand the reasons for our actions will be critical, as it is foreseeable that some groups will see the removal of trees as untenable, regardless of the situation.
- There are protected species within some areas and we will also areas that we will need to do work - need to consider the impact of trees with Tree Preservation Orders

4.3 Environmental impacts

4.3.1 As indicated above we have 700 middle aged, to mature stand alone ash trees within our area and two woodlands. As part of this work going forward, we will review the stand alone trees and their locations and take the opportunity to re-plant close by so that we are future proofing the loss of the mature tree, as and when this occurs. This will give the new tree time to establish and reduce the impact of the loss of a feature tree. We also plan to capitalise on standing dead wood in appropriate locations such as where bats roost, in order to minimize the need for tree removals.

4.3.2 Working with key partners we will ensure that we make informed decisions and collaborate with appropriate stakeholders to prepare for working in restricted areas and with protected species. Collectively we need to understand and share our responsibilities, legal requirements and actions that must follow.

4.3.3 Some of the challenges we will face are;

- Managing the risks to protected species due to habitat loss, such as bats
- The risk of loss of significant numbers of ash in woodland areas, which will require replanting in order to prevent entire areas being lost. Such replanting however carries the additional risk that trees are competing for nutrients and light, as well as the budgetary implications of purchasing smaller trees which may not survive, against larger ones that are likely to have better rates of survival.

4.4 Resources

4.4.1 Ash dieback spores are spread through leaf litter, so clearly part of the future management plan, must be a focus on activity to clear leaf litter to slow down the spread of the disease. We will need to review what resources are required within the parks teams to undertake this work as we develop the management plan.

4.4.2 Live monitoring of our places and tree stock will also greatly assist in the management of the spread of this disease. Our plan therefore at present is to train a wider group of parks staff on the signs and symptoms of ash dieback to assist with the real time monitoring of our tree stock across and to develop a plan of replanting in different locations over a number of years to spread these costs.

4.4.3 The Councils will also work closely with local friends of and Greenspace partnership groups to help us do this work as well as to exploit any opportunities for external funding to support this work. At present there is no additional government funding to enable this, however we will continue to stay connected to Defra in case any funding opportunities become available.

4.4.4 We know that we already have recorded accounts of the disease in the area, how quickly it will spread is hard to predict with present scientific knowledge. Currently we have limited in house resource to manage a large scale risk, however as part of the development of this plan, we will

be able to engage others to support this work, as well as better quantify what is required for the future.

- 4.4.5** As part of the development of a coherent action, management and communication plan, the team will consider a range of options that allow us to better understand the cost implications for the future as well as the environmental ones. For example, we may decide to leave some trees in appropriate locations as standing dead wood by pollarding. This will reduce the costs as well as reducing the negative impact on habitat and biodiversity loss.

5.0 Financial implications

- 5.1** Our Woodland locations have between 1,000 and 1,200 trees. The progression of the disease is uncertain but over the next 10 years, the Council will need to survey, dead wood and, potentially, remove and replant diseased trees to ensure that there is no net loss in tree stock.
- 5.2** The range of costs is significant depending on the corrective action needed. At this time it is difficult to quantify the full cost to the Councils until we have assessed the impact of the disease on the existing tree Stock.
- 5.3** However, to ensure that there are sufficient resources in place to address the issue, it is proposed that as part of the 2020/21 revenue budget process a new Arboriculturist post is established which will be responsible for surveying the trees, minor tree surgery works, and establishing which areas will require replacement. In addition to the post, a small budget will be needed to fund any specialist bat surveys, road closures, and major tree surgery or removal.

	Total £	Adur £	Worthing £
Arboriculturist	18,960	7,580	11,380
Supplies and Services	10,000	4,000	6,000
Total	28,960	11,580	17,380

This budget will be kept under review to ensure that it is sufficient for the emerging programme of work

- 5.4** In addition, as part of the 2021/22 capital programme development, bids have been received for the replanting of affected areas as follows:

	2021/22 £	2022/23 £	Total £
Adur	25,000	25,000	50,000
Worthing	25,000	25,000	50,000
	50,000	50,000	100,000

This bid will be considered as part of the capital programme approval report in December. It is likely that the Council will need a rolling programme of tree replacement works for some years to come.

6.0 Engagement and Communication

- 6.1** Tree removal is a very emotive topic, having a comprehensive communication plan for this programme of work will therefore be essential. A team including the Communications team has already been convened, and the first wave of information was released on the 29th July 2019 and can be found here

<https://www.adur-worthing.gov.uk/news/archive/pr19-116.html>

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1** If the Councils fail to manage their tree stock prudently resulting in tree or limb failure, they could be exposed to potential legal claims for damages
- 7.2** If a tree is in imminent danger, section 154 Highways Act 1980 provides the Councils with the power to carry out works in default and recharge reasonable costs from a private landowner, after having given the required notice.

Background Papers

- Health and Safety Board minutes 24.06.2019
- <https://www.treecouncil.org.uk/What-We-Do/Ash-Dieback>

Officer Contact Details:-

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Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1. Economic

- There will be a financial impact on the management of this project in additional costs to the council.
- Increased tree felling outside of the usual scope of works.
- Increased tree planting needed to ensure no net loss. Working with local community groups to access funding and free trees is an option that can be explored to reduce the impact financially.
- Increased officer time in carrying out the additional duties. Considerations of exploring present staffing resources and skill sets to review appropriate provision is covered is an option to consider

2. Social

2.1 Social Value

- Certain areas will be affected more due to the disparity of tree locations and the impact that this loss will have locally.

2.2 Equality Issues

- If there is a no net loss approach, there will be no equality issues as everyone will have the same levels of replacement stock.

2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

- Research connected to areas having reductions in crime with well managed green spaces and tree lined locations. With a no net loss approach, we will still be creating locations with this outset and approach.

2.4 Human Rights Issues

- Matter considered and no issues identified.

3. Environmental

- Significant stock loss.
- Loss of all associated ecosystem services provided by our tree stock.
- Loss of historical landscape features.
- Habitat Loss.
- Reduces our ability to adapt to climate change.
- Tree replacement programme will take years to recover the loss of tree stock.

4. Governance

- Climate emergency this is the first signs of the impacts on the ground. How we respond to this is important for our ongoing approach to this topic as our landscapes change around us.
- Reputation on how we respond to this approach will be scrutinised by our communities.
- Part of the management of this process is connected to health and safety and it is vital that our approach takes into consideration the accurate recording of our actions.
- Resource implications regarding skill set / present structure and resource.