Agenda No

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SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
4 November 2026

Officer: Jim Goldsmith – Countryside and Greenspace Manager.

ASH DIE BACK SURVEY 2026

Purpose

To provide an update on the 2026 ash dieback survey, the winter works programme and associated operational considerations. This report summarises the 2026 ash dieback survey and identifies trees requiring work during winter 2026. Results are presented for countryside sites (CS) and non-countryside sites (NCS).

Background

Following the complete count of ash trees undertaken in 2025, the 2026 survey returned to inspecting trees located near to potential targets. The survey was completed during an exceptionally hot summer. The contribution of Adam Clifford, Countryside Ranger in carrying out the survey is acknowledged.

Survey Findings

Category	2026	2025	Change
Countryside sites: trees requiring work	156	301	48% decrease
Non-countryside sites: trees requiring work	18	24	25% decrease
Total ash trees requiring work	**174**	**331**	**47% decrease overall**
Replanting	25	28	3 fewer trees

Countryside Sites

Of the 156 countryside ash trees requiring work, 134 are expected to be dealt with by the countryside team. A further 22 will require climbing work by the tree team, compared with 5 in 2025.

Non-Countryside Sites

There are 18 ash trees requiring work on non-countryside sites in 2026, compared with 24 in 2025.

Assessment of Ash Dieback

Ash dieback appeared less conspicuous during summer 2026. The following factors may have contributed:

- The fungus sporulates between June and September, with fruiting bodies appearing on the previous year's fallen leaves. The last two summers have been very dry.
- The dry summer of 2025 may have reduced spore load and infection of new trees.
- A similar cycle may occur in 2027 following the drought conditions experienced during summer 2026.
- Ash dieback spores are short-lived; in dry conditions they may desiccate and die or fail to sporulate.
- Trees require a high spore load to become infected, and dry conditions over the last two summers may have inhibited that load.
- Following the removal of many trees in previous years, the remaining population may include more resilient trees.

Risks and Uncertainties

The lower level of visible disease in 2026 should not be regarded as the end of ash dieback. A sequence of wet summers, or rainfall occurring at a critical point in the fungal life cycle, could lead to renewed infection.

Many trees, particularly ash, have also shown signs of drought stress during 2026. Environmental stress can reduce a tree's ability to defend itself against pests and disease. The longer-term effects remain uncertain.

Operational Implications

A greater proportion of the trees requiring work in 2026 appear to be larger specimens. This is likely to explain the increase in countryside-site cases requiring specialist tree team involvement, from 5 in 2025 to 22 in 2026.

The two accompanying maps identify ash trees over 30 cm diameter at breast height (DBH) that require work: 21 on countryside sites and 12 on non-countryside sites. These 33 trees represent almost 20% of the total works programme.

This group includes one veteran ash measuring 101 cm DBH within falling distance of a footpath, a house and a play area. The tree is to be removed and six replacement trees planted.

Approximately 222 replacement trees currently require aftercare, with a further 25 scheduled for planting during winter 2026. The exceptionally dry summer necessitated repeated watering visits. In total, one member of staff spent approximately five weeks, distributed across the summer period, undertaking tree-watering duties.

Replanting

The 2026 programme provides for 25 replacement trees, compared with 28 in 2025. This total includes the six replacement trees associated with removal of the veteran ash described above.

Conclusion

The number of ash trees requiring work has reduced substantially in 2026, from 331 to 174. However, ash dieback remains an ongoing management issue, and the increased number of larger trees requiring specialist intervention has operational implications. Continued inspection, monitoring and appropriate replanting remain necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

(i) That Committee notes the findings of the 2026 Ash dieback survey;
(ii) That Committee note the planned winter works programme, including the increased requirement for specialist tree team involvement on countryside sites;
(iii) That Committee note the proposed replanting programme;
(iv) That Committee note that continued monitoring remains necessary because future wet summers could increase infection levels.