Agenda No

14(i)

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
RECREATION & LEISURE COMMITTEE
6 MARCH 2024

Officer: Adam Clifford (Countryside Ranger)

ASH DIEBACK UPDATE

Purpose of Report

To update the Committee on progress in addressing Ash Dieback during 2023

Introduction

I have completed the annual ash die back survey for 2023 and work is well under way in completing the tree work that has been identified.

The 2023 survey was a safety survey as in the previous 2 years in 2021-2022. This means that trees are assessed on a risk basis for example falling/ striking distances to-

- Footpaths
- Cycle ways
- Roads
- Outdoor furniture
- Boundary lines
- Properties
- Foot fall
- Play areas

These targets are in vast amounts on the land we maintain considering that in certain terms overall they are small sites. The footfall over all our sites is high on a yearly basis and considering that much of it has neighbouring properties.

Equipment used for surveying

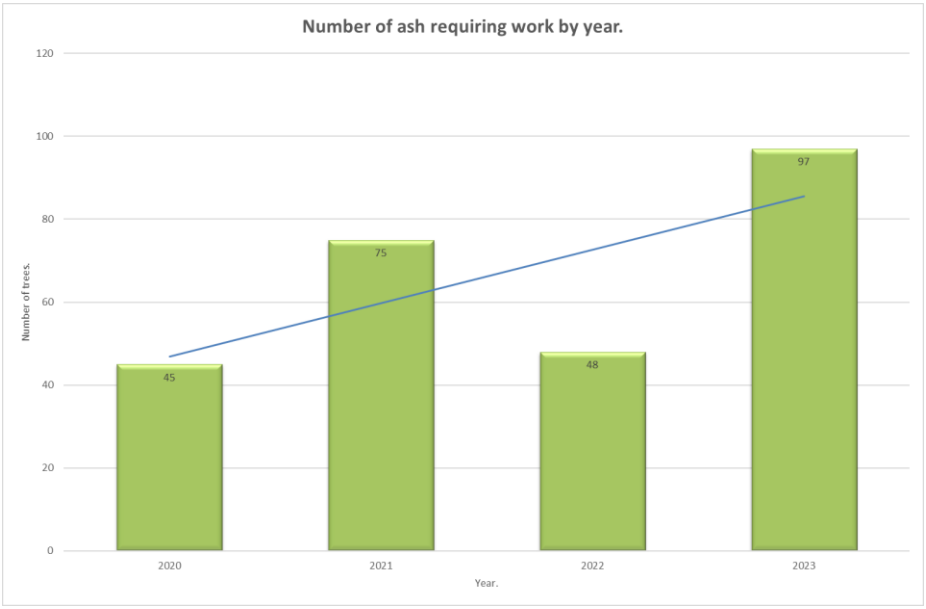
Tree plotter software has been integral to the whole process. This allows the person carrying out the survey to not only have up-to-date maps of the areas to survey, boundaries, conservation areas etc. The software allows the user to accurately plot the tree using GPS, so it is easily located for the team carrying out the work later and can be allocated to the correct team and given a risk priority. Photos are taken and full description of tree and worked needed, the information is also compiled into an individual tree report that can be shared with the tree officers if you are applying for work to be completed on trees with TPOs, within conservation areas or if a trees may be contentious and need to be used to back up reasons for any work carried out.

Agenda No

14(i)

Survey kit bag

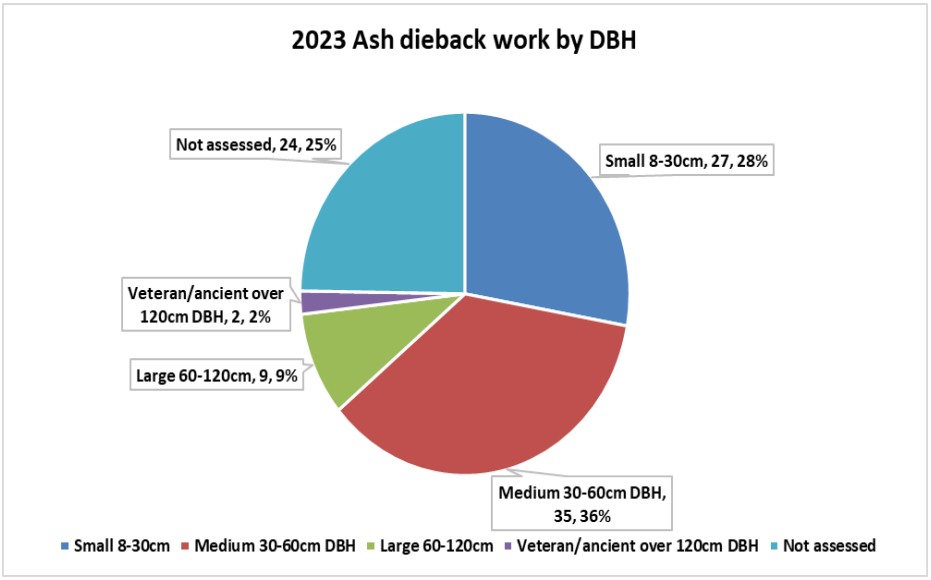
This year's survey has identified 97 trees across Countryside and Town Council land; this is roughly double the amounts that were identified in 2022.



As can be seen from the graph there is an increase in the rise of ash die back trees needing work. 2022 was a blip in the trajectory down inexperience in surveying and not wanting to be seen to be removing too many trees. Greater surveying confidence will result in better and more accurate results.

The work that has been identified is varied. Each task/tree has its own obstacles that need to be overcome. Whether this be location, type of work, size of tree etc. The process of working on an ash tree that has die back can be very unpredictable and dangerous; this is down to how the disease effects the tree health also making the tree very brittle which is why working on them highlights the danger.

This year has seen an increase in all size categories needing work



Agenda No

14(i)

As you can see from the above chart these are the numbers and sizes that have been identified as needing work. All the above work must be completed in the winter months, work is categorised on a risk basis (high, medium and low) with work being carried out in that order. All work has to be completed in a six-month period and outside of the bird nesting season.

You can see there is a large percentage of small and medium trees that need work. These trees are of a decent size even though on here on as small and medium.

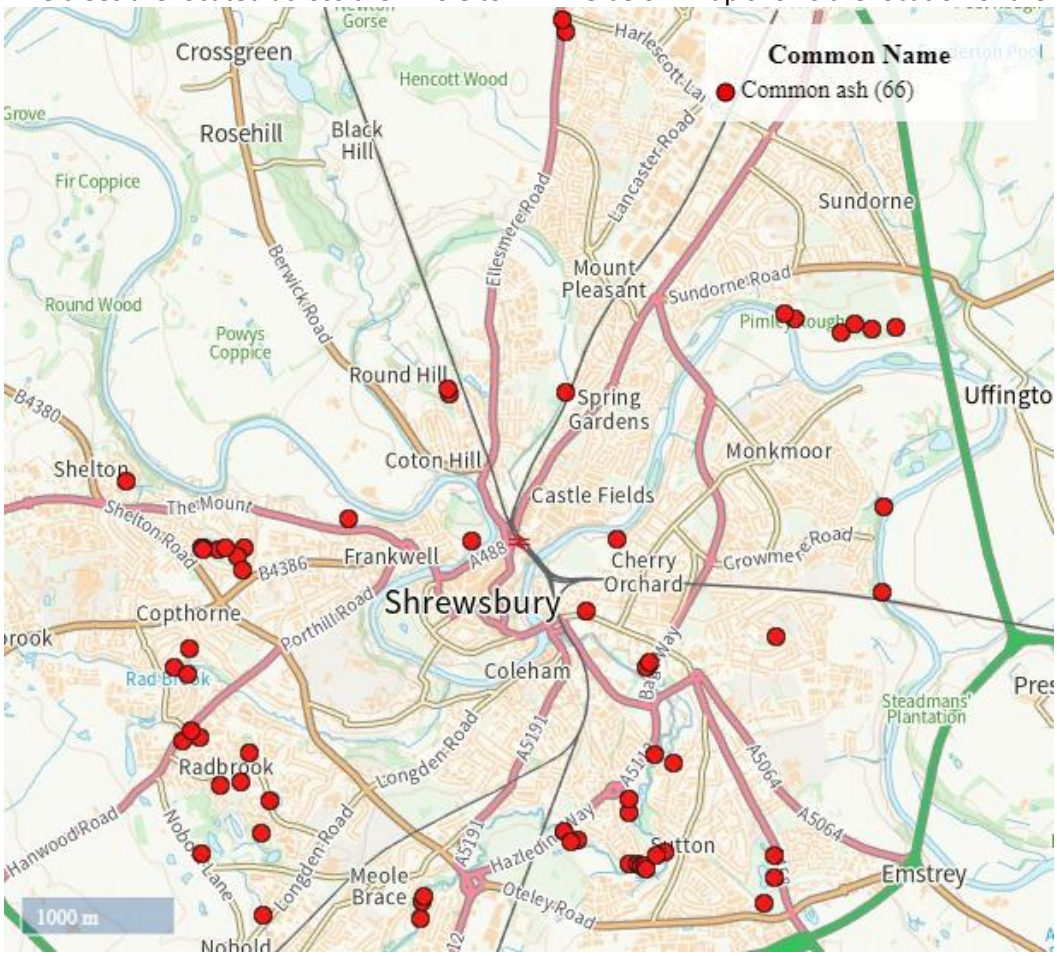
A lot of the community woodlands/countryside sites were planted in the 1990s so this would make these trees roughly 30 years old this would put those trees in the small DBH category.

Medium size trees are roughly 30-80 years old so may have also been planted around the same time as the smaller trees but had better growing conditions, less compaction etc.

Large trees, age-wise are 100-200 years old and are very substantial trees in any landscape and are monitored for a long period of time. Decisions on these trees are not taken lightly and is a last resort but safety has to come first.

Veteran and/or ancient trees are roughly up to 400 years old and are likely to covered by a TPO. If this is the case the decision for any work would be down to a tree officer. Veteran/ancient percentage is small compared to others, but will only get higher as the years pass as they deteriorate in health class.

The trees are located across the whole town. The below Map shows the location of the remaining.



All the sites visited which have ash trees have die back at different stages. The majority of sites surveyed have seen an increase in die back from last year. The remaining trees may not be at the stage this year that they need work, but it is highly likely they will in the near future, or the same ones may need other work.

Worst hit sites this year have been-

Rea Brook Valley LNR	25 trees needing work.	Covers 36 ha.
Radbrook Pool	21 trees needing work.	Covers 1.37 ha.
Sundorne woodland	12 trees needing work	Covers 11 ha.

The survey has identified ten large trees requiring work these are-
Copthorne Park
Abbey Church Yard
Rea Brook Valley LNR

Any work that is carried out is for safety reasons (the tree is dangerous or diseased and within falling/striking distance of footpath, boundaries, furniture etc). Where a tree has limited access for machinery such as a MEWP and needs to be climbed, a decision may have to be made to remove the tree early for the safety of the climbers.

At this point in the tree season ash die back work has been carried out by:
Countryside Team (12 days)
Tree Team (3 days)
Contract work (2 days)
This number will increase dramatically until all the allocated worked is completed.

Replanting

The Council operates a policy to replant where any ash trees are removed with tree species that share characteristics as ash. This is to help the habitats that will eventually be lost with the spread of ash dieback. These species include Alder, Field Maple, Sycamore, Birch, Rowan and Native Oaks.

When replanting trees, operates need to consider all the challenges that ground conditions and surrounding land use may pose. The aim is to grow the right tree in the right place.

At a minimum the Council operates the 3,2,1 formula when planting replacement trees. This is at least 3 new trees for the loss of a large tree, 2 for a medium tree and 1 for a small tree recognising that it will take many years for replacements to perform the same functions as those lost. Natural processes will also play its part to thin out some of the replacements.

In 2022, 35 trees were replanted and in 2023, 42 trees. Even though more trees need work this year than last the replanting has only risen by 7 because any work within woodlands or wooded areas with a large number of trees remaining has been classed as woodland thinning which in itself contributes to biodiversity.

The cost of 42 trees alone is in the region of £4,200 with additional costs for tree stakes, hessian tree ties, mulch mat, transportation costs and planting with potential watering in dry weather.

We have been able this year to replant 30 trees (Silver Birch 15, Field Maple 6, Alder 6, Rowan 1, Oak 1) using trees grown on at our own tree nursery. The plan is to continue to purchase small whips to grow on in the nursery for future years, saving money in the long term.

The strain on staff resources with after care of any newly planted trees is growing year on year with numbers increasing and the existing trees already planted. Watering alone will now take one person a week to complete, with the changing climate, watering looks to becoming more frequent. The first 3 years of a newly planted tree is critical, therefore after care needs to be considered.

Where we are at with ash die back

The data shows we are on a rising trajectory in the numbers of ash trees that are requiring work year on year. This will impact the amount of man hours/resources that are needed to be deployed so we can keep up to date and carry out work in the appropriate timescale.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

(i) That the Report be noted