



**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL  
RECREATION & LEISURE COMMITTEE**

Agenda No

**16(ii)**

**Responsible Officer:** Helen Ball (Town Clerk)

**Ash Die Back**

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**Purpose of Report**

- (i) To update members on the prevalence of Ash Die Back in Shrewsbury
- (ii) To determine an appropriate & reasonable Action for the Management of Ash Die Back
- (iii) To recommend to Finance & General Purpose Committee an appropriate budget for 2020/21 to deliver the Action Plan

**Background**

Ash Die Back or Chalara Ash Die Back (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) is the most significant tree disease to effect the UK since Dutch Elm Disease. It will lead to the decline and death of the majority of Ash Trees in Britain and it is estimated it has the potential to infect more than 2 billion ash trees across the country. This equates to some 5million in Shropshire with a significantly large sum in Shrewsbury. 10% of the treestock in Shrewsbury is Ash and there are 20% Ash amongst the mature treestock. Many of the Community Woodlands in Shrewsbury were planted with a prevalence of Ash in the 1990s and due to their proliferation in seed production there are considerable numbers of self-set Ash. The Forestry Commission reports that there is unlikely to be any 10km square in England that does not have evidence of Ash Die Back.

Given that ash is widespread across our landscape, including alongside roads and streets, in parks and in the countryside sites, there needs to be a shift away from business as usual towards new demands and priorities for resources

Ash Die back is an airborne fungal pathogen which arrived in mainland Europe in the 1990s and has spread rapidly across much of Europe decimating the tree stock in Denmark and Germany. Over the last few years evidence of the disease has grown from east to west and large areas of Shrewsbury & Shropshire are showing signs of the disease.

The rate of spread of the disease in the last year alone has been significant with the following Town Council areas showing evidence of disease:

- Coton Hill Community Woodland
- Hereford Road Woodland
- Greenfields Recreation Ground
- Old River Bed
- Castlewalk Recreation Ground
- Underdale
- Mousecroft
- Sundorne
- Copthorne Park
- Rea Brook Valley



Initially only self-set seedlings and young trees were affected but now more mature trees are showing signs of the disease.

Evidence of the disease include:

- Basal Lesions
- Browning of the bark
- Leaf Loss
- Significant Epicormic Growth
- Increase in Seed Production

Mortality rate is between 70-85%. The speed of decline is not known however local trees are having to be felled within 3 years of the first signs of the disease.

Unlike Dutch Elm where a dead tree stays very stable and can stand dead for many years, a dying Ash tree becomes very brittle and depending on location can pose a public risk.

### **Development of an Action Plan**

This is something that will not go away; therefore an Action Plan needs to be created to identify and deal with the disease but also to establish a recovery plan where tree cover is likely to be decimated.

### **Corporate Risk**

Ash Die Back is the second biggest risk to Safeguarding of young people on our risk register. Creating an Action Plan to manage these risks is the simplest way to ensure the Council can effectively combat Ash Die Back and the problems it brings. Risks include:

#### ***Health & Safety***

- Potential for death/injury to the public from falling limbs
- Potential for death/injury to workforce from treating diseased trees
- Risks to usage of roads, paths, country parks, schools, cycleways
- Damage to buildings and infrastructure from falling limbs

#### ***Economic***

- Insurance Claims
- Inadequate staffing levels and the ability (or inability) to undertake the work
- Inability to recruit staff due to increase demand for tree workers
- Increased staff costs to deal with the problem
- Additional disposal costs
- Increased flood risk due to significant tree loss
- Costs of replanting
- Increased liability as a result of risks to adjacent land/buildings



**Reputational**

- Likely disruption in managing the problem including closing parcels of land/road closures
- Negative press
- Public anger/anxiety

**Environmental**

- Changes to landscape
- Loss of ecosystems
- Potential increase in flooding
- Biodiversity loss
- Loss of tree stock that mitigates against noise/sightlines
- Loss of carbon storage & sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere

All sites would need to be risk assessed in terms of Impact and Likelihood to determine course of action

		LIKELIHOOD				
		1 Very Unlikely	2 Unlikely	3 Possible	4 Likely	5 Certain
IMPACT	1 Insignificant					
	2 Minor					
	3 Moderate					
	4 Significant					
	5 Catastrophic					

**ACTIONS**

- 1 Assessment of Ash Trees population in Shrewsbury** – We have already identified the extent of the issue in a number of locations but further investigation of all sites is necessary. Ash has a very short period of leaf cover with the first leaves not appearing until June/July and dropping leaves in October/November at the first indication of frost, therefore much of this assessment work will not begin until the summer season. The Operations Manager will have to determine whether additional resources will be required to undertake this assessment.
- 2 Sample locations to determine prevalence of disease**
- 3 Identify issues with trees to identify the extent of the problem, including:**
  - (i) Percentage remaining Canopy** – this shall determine regime
  - (ii) Extent of basal lesions**
  - (iii) Extent of stress growth (epicormics growth, seedlings)**



### Ash Health

All Ash tree canopy cover should be inspected to determine the course of treatment; this should be as follows:

Class	Remaining Canopy	Action
1	100-75%	100% - Inspect in line with Tree Management Policy
2	75-50%	95% - Inspect in line with Tree Management Policy 5% - Increased Inspection and possible work
3	50-25%	5% - Inspect in line with Tree Management Policy 85% - Increased Inspection and possible work 10% - Detailed & specialist inspection and/or work
4	25-0%	80% - Detailed & specialist inspection and/or work 20% - Fell/remove

- 4 **Establish Priority Zones/Locations** – In the same way that the Tree Management Plan identifies strategic sites, work would need to be specific on areas of key concern including proximity to roads, water courses, key infrastructure/buildings, adjacent premises, areas of high footfall
- 5 **Seek discussions with other key partners including SC Head of Service, Biodiversity Officers and Planners** – this will be key to determining whether there is room for collaborative working, but also understanding the approach of Planners in relation to trees in the Conservation Area
- 6 **Develop an Ash Die Back Action Plan**
- 7 **Develop a Communication Plan**
- 8 **Develop a Recovery Plan** – the aim going forward should be to create a treescape that is resilient to any future pests and diseases. Therefore focus will be need on working to improve the extent, condition, diversity and connectivity to trees and enhance protection to minimise the risk of new threats occurring.

In developing a Recovery Plan the Tree Council have developed 8-key principles to follow:

1. Act now to minimise the landscape impact of ash tree loss – start promoting new trees and taking better care of existing trees
2. Use the 3-2-1 formula – 3 new trees for the loss of a large tree, 2 new trees for the loss of a medium tree and 1 new tree for the loss of a small tree
3. Promote natural regeneration wherever possible, particularly woodlands
4. Grow the right trees in the right places in the right ways and give them the right aftercare
5. Encourage a diverse range of trees to develop a resilient landscape
6. When choosing species, consider local factors such as what trees are characteristic of the area, soil type, management requirements, local stresses etc.



7. For wildlife, landscape and wood fuel, choose native species or those well established in the British Isles such as sycamore, wild pear, crab apple or white willow. In urban areas it is more acceptable to use species from other parts of the world
8. Reduce the risks of introducing new diseases by only planting trees sources and grown in Britain

### **Conclusion**

This is one of the biggest operational issues to affect the Town Council's Grounds Maintenance Team for decades. There is no "Do Nothing" option as the tree stock is showing signs of the disease taking hold. We need to work with our Colleagues at Shropshire who are currently working on the County approach to managing their tree stock. This too will have implications on the Horticultural Service Level agreement as we will be required to take action on both the Town Council's tree stock and Shropshire Council's tree stock. We need to develop awareness of all staff, members of the Council and the public to Ash Die Back to ensure we can maximise the support and resource.

### **Recommendations**

1. That this report be noted
2. That Officers begin to assess the Ash Tree Population in Shrewsbury
3. That an Ash Die Back Plan be prepared in consultation with colleagues at Shropshire Council for future consideration by this Committee
4. That Officers determine resources required (in terms of budget, staff, skills, equipment) to address the Ash Die Back Problem
5. That Council sets aside a sum of £100,000 in the 2020/21 budget to deal with Ash Die Back assessment, management and recovery