DRAFT Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership
Ash Dieback position statement

About the Disease

The future of Ash is threatened by ash dieback; a disease caused by the fungus (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*), which has a fatality rate of at least 70-85% over a 20-year period [1]. Ash is a common and important tree in woodlands, open habitat and hedgerows. Ash is estimated to account for more than 10% of the canopy in 90% of woodlands in Gloucestershire and in some cases forms 80-100% of the canopy.

First identified in the UK in 2012, by early 2019 the disease had been recorded in 84% of the 10 km grid squares which wholly or in part cover Gloucestershire. This is a 63% increase since 2016, so it is reasonable to assume that ash dieback will soon be ubiquitous across the county.

Ash dieback will have a significant impact on wildlife and landscape character. In woodlands, ash leaf structure and canopy allow a considerable amount of light to reach the woodland floor, thus facilitating a rich ground flora. Ash trees provide habitat for over 1000 species. Some of these species can only live on ash trees and 50% of such species are at risk of extinction within 100 years [2]. However, a smaller number of species, particularly those associated with deadwood habitats, may thrive in the conditions temporarily created by ash dieback. Given the prominence of ash in hedgerows, ash dieback will also impact on ecological connectivity.

At present there is no way to eradicate the causal agent of the disease and there is little that can be done to prevent its spread. Identifying resistant trees is a major strand of research and the national strategy to address the disease, however, this solution will not be in place before a considerable proportion of ash trees have been lost. Mitigation must also account for the impact that climate change is likely to have on the UK's tree assemblages.

Early experience of our partners highlights particular dangers from falling branches and trees, due to fragile crowns and hidden rot in the base of infected trees. Thus, Health and Safety is a primary concern of partners when considering decisions relating to management of the disease, as reflected by our zoned approach.

A Zoned Approach

GLNP partners acknowledge there is a need to proactively manage the impact of ash dieback on their own landholdings, as well as promoting good management across the wider county. As a core principle, infected ash trees should be left standing except where there is a material safety risk, as guided by the zoning approach outlined below.

Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership partners will take management decisions relative to their strategic priorities, functions, services and will be dependent upon the specific circumstances. These decisions will be guided by a zoned approach to classification of risk. The risk zones from high to low are classified as below:

1. Major roads (based on both speed and usage)
2. Car parks, minor roads, high-use public facilities and major public rights of way such as national or promoted trails.
3. Public rights of way that have medium or low usage and permissive paths.
4. Areas with no defined footpaths or bridleways but public access.

In high-risk locations partners may consider proactively felling ash trees where they would pose an unavoidable and significant threat to public safety. Trees felled early in public places may not show signs of ash die-back disease but works could be advanced so that tree surgeons can operate safely. Delaying action increases risks to the public and can also be likely to incur higher financial and environmental costs.

Mitigating the Wildlife and Landscape Impact

Partners will also seek to take early action to reduce the impact of the disease on landscape character and biodiversity:

- Protected species surveys will be undertaken where necessary and replacement habitat or structures provided if needed;
- Where possible, disease resistant trees will be identified;
- Where appropriate, allow dead wood to remain and new open habitats to be created as ash trees die or are felled;
- Allow natural regeneration opportunities for replacement tree cover and consider planting locally typical native broadleaves if this better serves specified management;
- Replanting would normally be on a 2 for 1 basis for established dead or felled ash trees.
- When planting, partners will source locally-grown trees where possible, to avoid the spread of disease.

Strategic Considerations

Partners will consider the following strategic priorities when making decisions about managing Ash Dieback:

- Endeavour to use the loss, management and replacement of ash trees as an opportunity to develop and enhance natural biodiversity, contributing to Gloucestershire's Nature Recovery Network;
- Replanting for Ash Dieback mitigation to be aligned and integrated with, but not counted as, tree-planting for climate change mitigation or woodland creation targets;
- The 'right tree in the right place' is acknowledged so that trees and shrubs will grow well where they are planted, enhance local ecology and contribute to landscape character. Large blocks of trees and shrubs will be considered as well as planting in hedgerows. Trees will not necessarily be planted where trees have died/been felled.
- Consider cross-boundary coordination between parishes, districts and counties where appropriate.
- Work closely with private landowners on adjacent land to communicate how ash die-back can be managed by offering guidance and providing support.

Useful resources

DEFRA Strategy -
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/806872/ash-research-strategy-2019a.pdf

The Tree Council's Ash Dieback Toolkit –
https://www.treecouncil.org.uk/Portals/0/Chalara%20docs/The%20Tree%20Council%20Ash%20Dieback%20Action%20Plan%20Toolkit%20FINAL.pdf

Woodland Trust –
https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2019/10/managing-ash-dieback-on-woodland-trust-sites

Forest Research –
https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/pest-and-disease-resources/ash-dieback-hymenoscyphus-fraxineus/

References

[1] T. L. R. Coker, J. Rozsypálek, A. Edwards, T. P. Harwood, L. Butfoy, and R. J. A. Buggs, "Estimating mortality rates of European ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) under the ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) epidemic," *Plants, People, Planet*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 48–58, 2019.

[2] S. Mitchell, R.J., Bailey, S., Beaton, J.K., Bellamy, P.E., Brooker, R.W., Broome, A., Chetcuti, J., Eaton, S., Ellis, C.J., Farren, J., Gimona, A., Goldberg, E., Hall, J., Harmer, R., Hester, A.J., Hewison, R.L., Hodgetts, N.G., Hooper, R.J., Howe, L., Iaso, "The potential ecological impact of ash dieback in the UK," 2014.

[3] J. J. Stocks, C. L. Metheringham, W. Plumb, S. J. Lee, and J. Laura, "Genomic basis of European ash tree resistance to ash dieback fungus," *bioRxiv*, vol. pre-print, 2019.