

EDT Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Ash Dieback (Chalara) - Project Update
Date of meeting:	10 November 2017
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe Executive Director Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact Ash dieback disease, caused by the fungus <i>Hymenoscyphus fraxineus</i> , (formerly known as Chalara) has the potential to kill 95% of Norfolk's ash trees over the next 20 years. As a major landowner with responsibility for the safety of users of the highway network, the County Council have set up the three year Ash Dieback Project to find out the number and condition of ash trees on, and within falling distance of Highway and all other NCC land to inform the Council's strategy, which will set out how NCC will meet its Duty of Care and ensure landscape recovery and connectivity.	

Executive summary

Recommendations: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Members to note this update and continue to support the ash dieback project.2. Members to support the recruitment of an additional support post to enable the Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Highways Act with regard to tree safety.

1. Proposal

An update on the achievements and results of the Ash Dieback Project to date, focusing on highway trees, is set out below. An update providing more information on trees on non-highways land owned by NCC will be taken to the Business and Property Committee in January.

2. Evidence and progress

From the project work being carried out, it will be possible to get an evidence based estimate of the cost and resource implications of dealing with this disease for NCC.

2.1. Letter to Central Government - DEFRA

Following recommendations of the [EDT Committee in September 2016](#) and the Policy and Resources (P&R) Committee in October 2016, a letter was sent from members to Central Government highlighting the potential cost implications of this disease to the Council both in dealing with diseased trees and the costs of replanting (see Appendix 1).

The response from Defra (Appendix 2) noted that they have invested £37 million into research on the disease and stated that there are Countryside Stewardship schemes that may support woodland owners with replanting. Defra stated that the ash dieback taskforce made up of key national stakeholders had been created to examine the issues relating to trees in non-woodland situations. The Senior

Arboricultural Officer regularly attends these meetings.

2.2. **Additional Arboricultural Officer**

In October 2016, P & R Committee approved additional resource for a part time (3 days a week) Arboriculture and Woodland Officer on a two year contract to coordinate the ash surveys of trees that are on non-highway NCC land (such as Schools, County Farms, Libraries, Fire Stations, Corporate Property).

2.3. **Communications**

- We have developed a Communications Plan, web pages on the NCC and schools websites and produced material in several Council newsletters
- Presentations, training and information have been given internally, including to the County Farms Advisory Board
- We have set up a working group comprising representatives from all Council departments with responsibility for land to steer the project
- We provide updates on the project to all district tree and landscape officers including the Broads Authority through the Norfolk Tree and Landscape Officers Group meetings (NOTaLOG)
- We have updated 15 other County Councils and cities across the UK of our work as part of an update to members of the London Tree Officers Association
- We have made contact with regional groups including the RSPB, Natural England and Norfolk NFU and so far have given presentations to Norfolk CLA, the Environment Agency, Easton College and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust
- We have contributed to studies assessing the economic impact of ash dieback being carried out by Oxford University.
- We have regular meetings and share information with DEFRA, Tree Council, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, Suffolk, Kent and Hertfordshire County Councils.
- Our survey methodology has been publicised nationally by the Tree Council and has already been adopted by other councils such as Devon County Council. We have given survey training to Hertfordshire County Council staff.

2.4. **Statistical analysis**

- DEFRA have commissioned FERA (Food and Environment Research Agency) to provide NCC with support to plan and analyse ash dieback surveys.

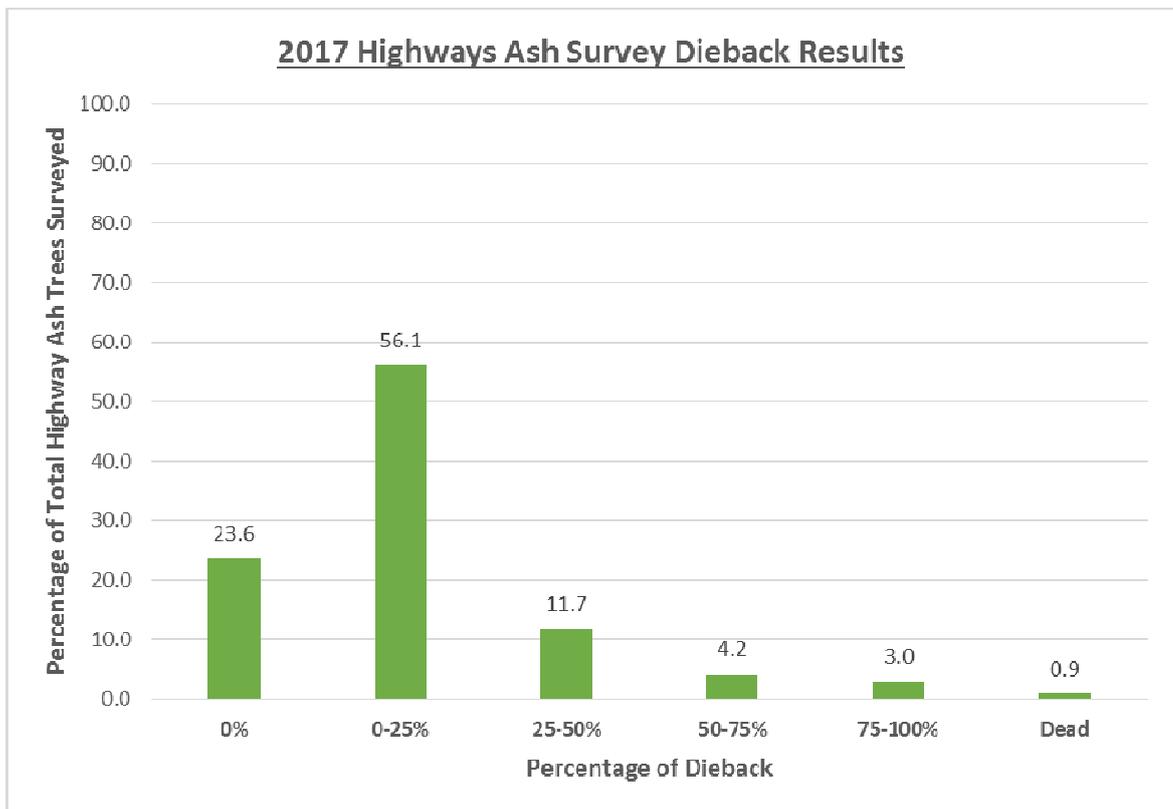
FERA work to date:

- Analysed the 2016 survey data and produced a statistically robust re-surveying plan which NCC have implemented.
- Agreed to provide support in spatially analysing the 2016 and 2017 survey data and explore correlations with other data sets.
- Aim to better predict the impact of ash dieback and where to cost effectively target resources for surveying and managing ash trees as part of an evidence base for NCC's 20 year ash dieback strategy.
- Use this analysis to contribute to work with other government departments and NGOs to assess the impact of ash dieback on green infrastructure including ecological, landscape and flood resilience benefits provided by ash trees. A well planned, evidence based multi organisation landscape recovery plan can then be designed and implemented.

2.5. Update on Highway surveys

Over the last two years we have carried out vehicle based inspections, recording ash trees within falling distance of all the A and B roads, 95% of HGV routes and all roads within eight parishes. This covers 19% of the highway road network. In addition, all NCC owned main walking and cycling trails in Norfolk have been surveyed. The location of ash trees, their height, % dieback, likely ownership (private or NCC) and recommendations for work were recorded as part of the surveys.

These are the initial findings from the highway surveys:
See Appendix 3 for photos of % dieback.



Summary data for 2016-2017 highway surveys:

Distance surveyed	Number of ash trees	Trees<15m tall	Trees>15m tall
1157 miles	31579	19770	11809

Extrapolating this data to cover the whole HW network:

Total road network	Number of ash trees	Trees<15m tall	Trees>15m
5965 miles	162850	101952	60898

Initial analysis indicates that:

- The total projected number of ash trees adjacent to our road network is 162,850
- Current data indicates that 12% of roadside ash trees are NCC owned
- There are fewer trees on B and HGV routes compared to A roads
- Trees on A roads are younger and smaller than other road type
- Under 5% of surveyed ash trees require felling

The majority of roadside trees are currently in a condition where intervention is not required (see graph above), however over the course of the next 20 years it is predicted, based on evidence from Continental Europe, that 95% of ash trees in the UK will die. NCC have a duty under the Highways Act to ensure the safety of

highway users. As well as dealing with dangerous NCC owned highway trees, NCC's has an enforcement role to serve notice on landowners with dangerous trees.

2.6. **Highways Resurvey results**

FERA have produced a bespoke statistically valid re-survey methodology for NCC to study changes in tree condition between 2016, 2017 and future years. This is required to gain a better understanding on the rate of change of decline, identify any factors that may influence decline and contribute to an evidence based strategy for ongoing management.

3005 ash trees at 225 roadside locations have been resurveyed. Initial findings indicate a general decline in the range of 0 to 5% between 2016 and 2017. This is in line with findings in other areas in East Anglia. Studies by Suffolk County Council estimate that year on year decline is typically 5 – 10%. 2017 can be considered to be a year of below average decline.

2.7. **Update on non-highway CES sites**

A total of 13,671 ash trees have been surveyed of which 4% have required work to date to make them safe

Libraries and Fire Stations

All libraries and fire stations have been checked and those that have ash trees have been surveyed and the trees recorded on our database

NCC owned Norfolk Trails:

100% of Marriott's Way and Pingo Trail surveyed, 40% of Weavers Way surveyed. Three felling licences applied for and emergency work carried out along 20 linear miles of NCC owned trail. Many of these trails are along disused railways where ash trees have populated the old track bed, embankments and cuttings. A combination of poor soil conditions, even age woodland structure with little genetic variation have contributed to higher levels of dieback compared to roadside trees. To date around 2,000 semi mature trees have been felled on NCC owned trails to improve levels of safety and to make these linear woodlands more resilient.

Gressenhall Museum

The grounds have been surveyed and the ash trees recorded on our database.

2.8. **Update on Schools**

All schools, including academies, were sent a Management Information Sheet in June 2017 giving them information about ash dieback and guidance notes were placed on the Tree Information page on the schools website. Schools that are still maintained by NCC were asked to fill in a questionnaire asking them to tell us whether there were any ash trees in the grounds and what % dieback they have. To date the response has been low but that is partly because the summer holidays coincide with the majority of the time that ash are in leaf. We have sent reminders out in September 2017 and will aim to target schools again in 2018 earlier in the year so that they can participate before the school holidays.

2.9. **Update on County Farms**

All roads on the Burlingham, and Lingwood Estates have been surveyed. These areas were prioritised because use of these areas is actively promoted by NCC.

2.10. **Update on Adult Social Services**

All sites have been checked and those that have ash trees have been surveyed and the trees recorded on our database.

2.11. Update on other Council sites

Holt Hall grounds have been surveyed and the ash trees recorded on our database.

We are compiling a spreadsheet of all Council sites not yet surveyed which will be surveyed in 2018.

2.12. Supporting scientific research into resistant ash trees

NCC have supported Forest Research in large scale national screening trials of ash trees to identify resistant trees. The trials at the two NCC owned sites at Dell Corner Lane (County Farms) and Strumpshaw (Closed Landfill) have been so successful that the 5 year trials are being extended.

The John Innes Centre (JIC) are also carrying out research to identify trees with resistant traits and have studied trees on the Marriott's Way (NCC owned trail). Cuttings from NCC owned trees have been taken and propagated as part of a wider study. The JIC will plant propagated material at the Dell Corner and Strumpshaw sites this winter to study response to ash dieback outside of laboratory conditions. The JIC are also looking at the susceptibility of resilient trees to other pests and diseases such as ash emerald borer which is forecast to be an issue in the future should it continue to spread across Europe.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1. Funding of £50,000 was identified for the Ash Dieback Project in 2017/18 from highways budgets to enable project commencement..

The resource has enabled us to start to formulate the most cost effective approach for managing the disease and dealing with the parties responsible. This will form the basis of the management strategy.

- 3.2. There are resource implications relating to staff time to deal with the enforcement of the Highways Act where privately owned trees adjacent to the highway require work to make them safe. We anticipate that a support role would be required to deliver NCC's legal responsibilities with regards to enforcement of the Highways Act.

- 3.3. In the current market it is unlikely that significant revenue will be made from the sale of wood or wood products from diseased trees. Ash is only commercially viable if removed from a woodland with a harvester as part of woodland thinning operations. As soon as roadside costs are factored in (traffic management and arborists) there will be a net cost. Chalara is therefore not a commercial opportunity for a landowner but a liability.

- 3.4. In addition to the cost of felling ash trees or making them safe, there will be costs associated with replacing the trees we have lost and restoring landscape connectivity. NCC's Tree Safety Management Policy requires replacement planting to be carried out when trees are removed. Nationally, we are working closely with the Tree Council and the Woodland Trust who are looking at ways to address how this may be funded.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. The risk to the County Council in not taking action to deal with the issues raised in this report are varied and include a legal challenge on the exercise of the power to serve statutory notices under the Highways Act 1980. Also investigations by the Coroner on the use of our statutory powers in the event of a fatality as a result of a falling tree of which we were or reasonably ought to be aware and complaints

