

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member, Community Services
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To: Communities Cabinet Committee – 18 September 2013

Subject: **Ash Dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) Outbreak: Update**

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Division: All

Summary: To update Communities Cabinet Committee on the KCC and wider response to the Ash Dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) outbreak in Kent.

Recommendations: Members are asked to:

- (a) note the potential level of the threat that Ash dieback poses to public safety and the environment and economy of Kent;
- (b) endorse the KCC, and wider-partnership, approach outlined within this report; and
- (c) contribute any additional matters arising from debate by the Cabinet Committee.

1. Background

1.1 A report was presented to the 14 March 2013 Communities Cabinet Committee providing technical background on current scientific knowledge of the fungal tree pathogen Ash dieback, and a briefing on the strategy formulated by KCC and our partners to manage the outbreak. At its subsequent meeting on 11th June a further update was requested addressing the evolving understanding of the impact of Ash dieback in Kent, and the emerging response.

1.2 It is estimated that some 4% of KCC highway trees are Ash, equating to 20,000 individual trees. The numbers of Ash trees growing on private land abutting KCC property and transport routes are higher still. Indeed, an August 2013 survey of Ash growing on or adjacent to publicly accessible land in Kent yielded a total of 2,574 trees within a single tetrad (2 km square), covering the urban-edge of Maidstone, with totals of 422 and 523 respectively for rural tetrads to the south and east of the County Town. To place these totals into a wider context, Ash is the most widespread tree species in Kent, with records from 930 of the county's 1,043 tetrads. Significantly, the same survey data indicates that trees growing within urban-edge locations are less likely to be actively managed than those within rural settings.

1.3 Defra launched a Chalara Management Plan in March. The focus of this publication is those parts of the country not yet significantly affected by Ash dieback. Therefore, its recommendations are largely inappropriate for Kent.

2. Latest situation

2.1 East Kent continues to be the most severely affected part of the County, with the majority of our 45 confirmed Ash dieback sites. Our understanding of the epidemiology of this pathogen is improving. Evidence from the KCC estate suggests that Ash, which first exhibited symptoms of Ash dieback in 2011 (then attributed to environmental stress), is now affected by crown die-back to an extent where arboriculture advice recommends felling on safety grounds.

2.2 On 11 July KCC Emergency Planning attended a Defra Tree Health summit, representing the Local Government Association. At this event KCC Emergency Planning raised the practical and financial implications arising from the response, and undertook direct discussion with the Under-Secretary of State at Defra. An application to DCLG for financial support under the Bellwin scheme has also been submitted. To inform any future bid, financial systems have been established to capture all costs arising from the response.

2.3 In response to the growing realisation that the national Chalara Management Plan is not fit for purpose within a Kent context, agreement has been reached with partners on the production of local guidance. A bespoke Kent Management Plan is scheduled to be launched at a multi-agency workshop on 16 October 2013 which was agreed at a meeting of Kent stakeholders held on 4 September 2013.

2.4 As an interim measure the KRF Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) produced local bio-security documentation, which has informed service specific guidance. Indeed, the guidance prepared for Kent schools is cited as best practice by DCLG in their national 'REDistribute' newsletter.

2.5 The KCC response to Ash dieback has been supplemented through recruitment of a student placement, hosted by Flood Risk and Natural Environment Team. Additional staff resources are also being sought through a multi-agency "pathfinder" bid, being prepared by the Forestry Commission.

3. Next Steps

3.1 KCC will continue to co-ordinate activities of the SCG to implement agreed strategy. Further, KCC will continue to liaise with Defra, in order that Kent's experience of this outbreak may inform the wider national response.

3.2 Members will continue to be updated on the evolving situation.

4. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- note the potential level of the threat that Ash dieback poses to public safety and the environment and economy of Kent;
- endorse the KCC, and wider-partnership, approach outlined within this report; and
- contribute any additional matters arising from debate by the Cabinet Committee.

5. Background Documents

5.1 Report to Communities Cabinet Committee held on 14 March 2013

5.2 Forestry Commission Website: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara>

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