

**By:** Matthew Balfour, Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste  
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**To:** Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 30 November 2017

**Subject:** Ash Dieback Impacts – Update

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past pathway of paper:** N/A

**Future pathway of paper:** N/A

**Summary:** To provide an update for Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee on Ash Dieback impacts in Kent and the local response to manage the outbreak.

**Recommendation(s):**

Cabinet Committee is recommended to:

- Note and comment on the serious threat *Ash Dieback* poses to the environment and economy of Kent and;
- Endorse the KCC approach outlined within this report.

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 It was agreed by Environment, Highways and Waste Cabinet Committee at their meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> January 2012 that the Committee should receive periodic updates on the local response to ongoing Ash Dieback outbreak. The last update was reported to the Environment & Transport Cabinet Committee at their meeting on 12 January 2017. This report reports on actions undertaken since that report.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 Since the first Kent cases of Ash Dieback were confirmed in 2012, KCC has provided a direct link between the national response, led by Defra, the Forestry Commission, and local partners. This approach has ensured a co-ordinated and consistent approach across the county and has enabled KCC to influence national policy direction.
- 2.2 KCC has also set up a Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) to develop a Local Action Plan designed to contain the outbreak, limit its spread and mitigate against potential consequences.
- 2.3 Actions previously reported to this Cabinet Committee include:

- Printing and distribution of Ash Dieback public information signs to relevant teams and partners;
- Production of biosecurity guidance which has informed a unified approach by Kent Fire & Rescue Service, Environment Agency, Highways England and utilities companies working within infected areas;
- Production of guidance for residents and businesses;
- Production of Ash Dieback guidance for schools - cited as best practice by DCLG; and
- Distribution of a 'Trading Standards Alert' warning the public and businesses of the 'rogue traders' seeking to profit from the outbreak, and generating useful local media coverage.

### 3. Additional Actions

- 3.1 Annual monitoring of the health of our Ash populations within randomly selected 2km squares was undertaken in July by the KCC Resilience and Emergency Planning Service. [Analysis](#)<sup>1</sup> indicates that the outbreak remains most severe in east Kent and that trees growing on free draining sand or chalk are more prone to infection than those growing in more hospitable environments. This suggests that drought, amongst other stressors, is a key factor in susceptibility to the infection. The data reaffirms the observation that Ash growing in urban locations is significantly less vulnerable to infection than trees growing in more natural situations, which favour development of the spore-producing fungal fruiting bodies.
- 3.2 As a component of the Kent Environment Strategy, the Ash Dieback SCG has been tasked with drafting a Kent Tree Strategy, to ensure a sustainable future for Kent's trees and woodland. The Strategy could then be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document by districts and boroughs and there are indications that our approach could inform a national template.
- 3.3 Enhanced corporate awareness of Ash Dieback and other animal and plant health threats has been achieved through the recent launch of a '[Biosecurity: Animal and Plant Health](#)'<sup>2</sup> e-Learning course. More than three hundred KCC staff have already completed the course. The package is now being marketed externally to raise awareness amongst partners and to help recoup research and development costs.
- 3.4 The wider landscape, biodiversity and cultural impacts of Ash Dieback in Kent are the focus of the Ash Project, managed by Kent Downs AONB Unit and funded by the Arts Council England, the Heritage Lottery Fund and KCC. The Project has recently launched a [website](#)<sup>3</sup> addressing the scientific and cultural significance of Ash and is

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/75801/Ash-Dieback-survey-data.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/75801/Ash-Dieback-survey-data.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://cpd4-secure.webbased.co.uk/cpd4-kentelearning/courses/admin/default.asp?pagefrom=elearning/learning\\_journeys.asp&subdomain=e-learning.kent.gov.uk&gServiceId=14&sitePortNumber](https://cpd4-secure.webbased.co.uk/cpd4-kentelearning/courses/admin/default.asp?pagefrom=elearning/learning_journeys.asp&subdomain=e-learning.kent.gov.uk&gServiceId=14&sitePortNumber)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.theashproject.org.uk/>

progressing parallel public art, educational outreach and literary initiatives.

- 3.5 KCC and the Kent Downs AONB Unit have further identified a need to co-ordinate activity and knowledge on Ash Dieback at a national level. As such, an Ash Dieback conference or 'ChalaraCon' is currently being planned for 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March 2018 at Imperial College in partnership with the Woodland Trust and other key stakeholders. The Tree Council is working with Defra to produce an Ash Dieback response toolkit which will be launched at the conference.
- 3.6 The Kent Downs AONB unit is also participating in a national HLF scheme led by the Woodland Trust which is seeking to promote, conserve and enhance Trees Outside Woodlands. The Unit hopes to secure a proportion of the £10m funding available for Kent.
- 3.7 Finally, the Kent Downs AONB Unit and KCC Resilience and Emergency Planning Team have hosted visits from the South East Forestry and Woodland Advisory Committee (a Defra appointed committee). The Committee is in the process of providing advice to the Forestry Commission as to the national response to Ash Dieback.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There is an upward trajectory of KCC Highways costs for Ash Dieback. In 2015/16 £6,339.50 was spent on safety critical works; associated with Ash Dieback. The figure for 2016/17 was £20,718.18 and the 2017/18 spend so far is already £3,121.00. However, this level of spend must be viewed in the context of an overall annual safety critical tree works budget of £500k. Indeed, KCC and partners across Kent operate a policy whereby minimum required interventions are undertaken to address any identified safety concerns. This approach is encapsulated within the Kent Tree Officers Group Ash Dieback Toolkit<sup>4</sup>, adopted by KCC and Kent Districts. KCC Highways does not currently have a tree replacement budget, and felled street trees are therefore not routinely replaced.
- 4.2 As previously reported, in recognition of the potentially significant costs which may arise from the Ash Dieback in the future, KCC submitted an 'expression of interest' for a claim against the DCLG-administered Bellwin scheme of emergency financial assistance. Where the criteria of the scheme are met, the grant is normally payable to authorities at 85% of eligible costs incurred above a threshold set for each authority (for KCC this is £1,829,114).

#### **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 It remains the case that the susceptibility of young trees to Ash Dieback is preventing recruitment of new generations of Ash, and that

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<sup>4</sup>[https://www.kent.gov.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/65935/Kent-Tree-Officer-Group-KTOG-Ash-Dieback-Toolkit.pdf](https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/65935/Kent-Tree-Officer-Group-KTOG-Ash-Dieback-Toolkit.pdf)

Kent is currently undergoing an **Ash decline** which will result in changes to our landscape and wildlife as profound as those experienced during the historic Elm and Lime declines.

- 5.2 For KCC, a further key issue is the rising cost of tree safety works and associated administration.
- 5.3 However, monitoring indicates that effective local multi-agency outbreak management and tough biosecurity measures have reduced the spread of Ash Dieback in Kent, making the local response both more manageable and affordable.

## 6. Recommendation(s)

- 6.1 Cabinet Committee is recommended to:
- Note and comment on the serious threat *Ash Dieback* poses to the environment and economy of Kent and;
  - Endorse the KCC approach outlined within this report.

## 7. Background documents

- Report to Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 12 January 2017  
<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/ecSDDisplay.aspx?NAME=SD5273&ID=5273&RPID=18574138>

## 8. Contact details

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