



REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE

ASH DIEBACK

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update for Committee on the current position with regard to the management of Ash dieback (Chalara) in the County's tree stock and the services being delivered by Via East Midlands Ltd on behalf of the County Council.

Information and Advice

Background to service

2. The last report on the implications of Ash dieback and other tree related diseases was received by Transport and Highways Committee on 21 March 2013. This report resolved to outline the management strategy and potential impacts of the disease on the County's tree stock.
3. This was followed by a report detailing the current position of Ash dieback to Corporate Leadership Team on 5 April 2016.
4. The first identification of a tree affected by Ash dieback in Nottinghamshire occurred in October 2014. As a result of this an allocation of £500k was provided from reserves for the 2015/16 financial year in order to conduct surveys across the entire County tree stock. This was continued into the 2016/17 financial year.

Current position

5. The disease is present in Ash tree stock Countywide and this reflects the general position across the UK.
6. The current strategy on managing the disease is based on a reactive approach where diseased trees are identified following site visits in the course of customer enquiries, works planning or following the normal inspection regime. This approach complies with current guidelines issued by the Forestry Commission. Confirmed cases of the disease are also reported through the Forestry Commission to allow UK wide monitoring.

7. Presence of the disease will not automatically result in an order to fell the tree. All diseased trees will be assessed and treated depending on the level of risk. This may involve reduction, pruning or felling as necessary.
8. The normal inspection regime currently concentrates on trees affecting the highway. However, initial surveys have also been carried out on all NCC school sites and a programme is currently being produced to undertake surveys on NCC owned land.
9. All schools have received a report detailing the health and condition of the tree stock with advice on remedial measures required. The highways forestry team are not undertaking these works.
10. Due to the nature and size of the land asset identified as being in the ownership of NCC, inspections of such areas will initially concentrate on the areas bordering highways, schools and other publicly accessible land.

Previous works

11. There have been numerous sites where Ash has been removed as part of widespread felling in 2015/2016.
12. However, sites on the A617 at Averham and the A6117 New Mill Lane at Mansfield resulted in significant local reaction and resultant media attention much of which did not reflect well on the authority or represent a correct position.
13. It is important to note that whilst cases of diseased Ash trees were identified in both of these sites, the presence of the disease was not the overriding reason for felling. A number of other risk factors were identified, including dead trees and dead tree limbs, which created hazards to the adjacent highway.
14. It is recognised that more could have been done in these areas to promote the reasons behind such widespread felling so that there was greater awareness of the reasons for the action.

Future works

15. As previously referred to, there are no plans to undertake widespread felling of Ash trees during 2016/17 in order to manage this disease outbreak, however, it is intended to undertake further largescale works at:
 - A617 Newark to Mansfield
 - B6034 Carburton
 - A6117 Old Mill Lane
 - A57 Worksop
 - A611 Hucknall

Due to the nature of these works, including removal of large areas of shrub and self-set trees and the fact that to reduce costs and timescale of the works it is economic to use large tree removal machinery, the initial visual impact can be severe.

Management strategy

16. In line with current Forestry Commission guidance, the management of the disease will be to undertake the minimum work necessary to retain a safe tree stock.
17. Where works are likely to result in widespread loss of tree or vegetation, early liaison will take place with affected stakeholders, including local residents, local County Council Member, district council tree officers and Via's Communications Officer. Such liaison will detail the works being undertaken and the reasons for removal. Efforts will also be made to engage local media through press releases.
18. It is recognised that the disease places an additional burden on the highways team to maintain a safe highway tree stock constrained within existing works budgets with an additional allocation to undertake inspections of the entire County asset.
19. Currently, there is no allocation of funding to undertake works outside of the adopted highway and where issues are identified, this is the responsibility of the asset owner, i.e. the school or corporate property team, to instruct and manage remedial works.

Other Options Considered

20. The provision of a service to maintain the highway in a safe condition and to maintain the highway is a statutory duty under the Highways Act 1980, as such the County Council as highway authority must provide this service.
21. Previous management arrangements in response to Ash dieback have included more widespread tree felling on order to remove the risk associated with diseased trees, however the visual impact of such work has resulted in significant negative reaction. As a result of this, and of revised national guidance, the approach in relation to the County Council's Ash tree stock has changed to one of management of the trees and monitoring of their condition and any associated risk. However, safety continues to be the priority for the Council and trees will still be felled, where absolutely necessary, to protect people and property from risk.

Statutory and Policy Implications

22. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATIONS/S

It is **recommended** that Committee:

- 1) Note the continuing work in response to Ash dieback disease.

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Name and title of report author

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For any enquiries about this report please contact

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Constitutional Comments (SLB 7/10/2016)

This report is for noting only.

Financial Comments – (SES 16/09/16)

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from this report.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All