

REPORT TO: NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES COMMITTEE – 9 JANUARY 2023
REPORT ON: UPDATE ON ASH DIEBACK DISEASE IN DUNDEE
REPORT BY: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES
REPORT NO. 5-2023

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To update elected members on the status of ash dieback disease in Dundee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that elected members note the contents of this report.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications resulting from this report, there will be significant revenue funding implications associated with the removal of severely affected ash trees over the next few years. The monitoring of the disease and recovery projects identified will also have revenue implications, which will be more fully scoped following the initial completion of a full citywide tree survey being planned over the next 12 months.

4. MAIN TEXT

4.1 Background

4.1.1 Reference is made to Article II of the minute of meeting of the Environment Committee of 10th June, 2013, updating elected members on ash dieback disease ([254-2013](#)). At the time ash dieback had not been found in Dundee and the Forestry Commission (now Scottish Forestry) had published guidance on the subject. Since 2013, knowledge and understanding of the impact of the disease on ash trees has increased dramatically. As ash dieback is further advanced in England, experience from south of the border is informing the approach taken in Scotland.

4.1.2 Ash dieback is the most significant tree disease to affect broadleaved trees in the UK since Dutch elm disease in the 1960s. Unlike Dutch elm disease however, ash dieback is caused by a wind-borne fungus, which leads to a more rapid spread throughout the country's ash trees. Over the next two decades, it is predicted that up to 90% of ash trees in Scotland will be affected, potentially requiring the removal of millions of trees.

4.1.3 In addition to the environmental, economic and amenity impacts, infected and dying trees have a significant health and safety risk. This is not only to road users and pedestrians, but also to those who are involved in the removal of the trees.

4.1.4 As anticipated, over the last few years ash dieback has been found in Dundee's trees. A decade ago, it was understood that younger trees would be infected more than mature trees. However, it is now acknowledged that all ash trees can be infected. The rate of infection and severity of infection is variable and depends on a multitude of other factors. The severity of the disease is categorised at class 1 – minor infection to class 4 – severe infection, which is estimated using physical evidence and percentage leaf cover.

4.1.5 In June 2021 Scottish Forestry published ash dieback guidance which described key issues and considerations required for managing the disease. This has subsequently been underpinned by the publication of an ash dieback Action Plan Toolkit by the Tree Council, which advises landowners to produce an Ash Dieback Action Plan.

4.2 Dundee Context

4.2.1 Recently ash dieback has become more apparent throughout Dundee and it is estimated that there are tens of thousands of young to mature ash trees on private and public land spread throughout the city. As recommended by Scottish Forestry and the Tree Council, Dundee City Council should now plan to manage the disease on its land, so that the impact on biodiversity and local people is minimised whilst managing the risk to public safety. The Council also has role to play in sharing information about ash dieback with its community. The message from experience in Europe highlights that effort should be directed at monitoring the health of ash trees and focusing on those trees exhibiting severe infection and which are located in higher risk locations.

4.2.2 In October 2020 an interdisciplinary working group of officers was established to ensure that a coordinated, robust and planned response to the disease is taken. Thus far the group has:

- Set up a comprehensive survey system – information about Dundee’s tree asset is very limited. An understanding of location, maturity, severity of infection and numbers of ash trees is necessary to plan for action. A tree management app within the Council’s existing GIS environment is being utilised.
- Identified in-house surveyors – training has been given to existing officers enabling them to survey and upload information to the tree management app. Surveying commenced in 2023 from June until the end of October, concentrating on areas of highest risk. Survey work will continue during the winter months identifying locations of ash trees. Condition surveys will again commence once the leaves emerge on the ash trees.
- Commenced the drafting of a specific Ash Dieback Action Plan for Dundee which clearly follows the guidance contained in the Action Plan Toolkit referred to in 4.1.5 above.
- Commenced a detailed analysis of resources required to manage ash dieback in Dundee.
- Developed a set of key messages which will be promoted on through existing communication channels.
- Included ash dieback on the corporate risk register.

4.2.3 At this early stage there are a number of conclusions which should be highlighted:

- To date all major roads, schools and sheltered housing areas have been surveyed to assess ash dieback.
- Approximately 1,100 ash trees have been surveyed for condition. Of these approximately 100 ash trees have been found to be at stage 4. Felling and removal of Ash trees categorised at stage 4 condition, deemed to be in high risk areas has commenced. Due to the health and safety implications, this felling will continue to be prioritised until all risks associated with trees in this condition have been adequately mitigated.
- All Ash trees at stage 4 condition, within lower risk locations will also be urgently prioritised for removal before the end of March 2023.
- It is unlikely that all works necessary for tree removal will be able to be contained within existing resources and work will initially need to be outsourced in the short to medium term. Demand for these services may be high.
- It is acknowledged that there is insufficient resources within the Council’s arboricultural and forestry team to manage the additional tasks associated with ash dieback disease. This, combined with the lack of consistently available external contractor resources, provides the opportunity to upskill existing in house staff to undertake this specialist work. The Neighbourhood Services workforce development plan has also identified the need to consider introducing opportunities for young people to join the service, and embark upon arboricultural training through the creation of a specialised apprenticeship.
- In addition to surveying for ash trees in Dundee, annual monitoring of ash trees to assess the progression of the disease is necessary.
- A recovery plan to replace lost ash trees is a necessary strand of an action plan.

- 4.2.4 In order to ensure that the council meets its health and safety obligations relating to ensuring duty of care, there will be an ongoing additional revenue allocation required to support this programme of work, over at least the next 10 years. The severity and scale of impact of ash dieback in Dundee has significant financial implications for Dundee City Council which are not contained within existing budgets. Estimations based on the limited amount of information available about Dundee's ash tree resources have indicated that the cost to the council could be between £400K and £800K per annum.
- 4.2.5 As further information about ash dieback in Dundee becomes available a more detailed analysis of resources necessary to manage the impact of ash dieback will be carried out. A further update report advising on progress in managing ash dieback disease in Dundee, will be brought for the consideration of a future Neighbourhood Services Committee during 2023/24.
- 4.2.6 Officers are aware that there is a coordinated approach to the Scottish Government seeking additional support to combat the effects of ash dieback nationally.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report has been subject to the screening tool and does not make any recommendations for change to strategy, policy, procedures, services or funding and so has not been subject to an Integrated Impact Assessment. An appropriate senior manager has reviewed and agreed with this assessment.

6. CONSULTATIONS

- 6.1 The Council Leadership Team have been consulted on the preparation of this report and agree with its contents.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 None.

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29 November 2022

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