

# Report

Report to:	<b>Community and Enterprise Resources Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>17 September 2024</b>
Report by:	<b>Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)</b>

Subject:	<b>Ash Dieback Disease (ADD)</b>
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## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ provide an update on the work undertaken regarding Ash Dieback Disease (ADD)

## 2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Community and Enterprise Resources Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the work undertaken to date be noted;
- (2) that the ongoing risk, management and financial implications associated with ADD be noted; and
- (3) that the Ash Dieback Disease Action Plan (ADAP), as shown in Appendix 1, be agreed.

## 3. Background

3.1. ADD remains the most significant tree disease to affect broadleaved trees in the UK since Dutch elm disease gained prominence in the 1960s. It has spread rapidly in South Lanarkshire, with only a small fraction of trees proving resistant due to genetic factors which give them disease tolerance. This incurable disease affecting only ash species is caused by the fungal pathogen [Hymenochaete fraxineus](#). European data continues to suggest it will lead to decline and death of 50%-75% of ash trees in Scotland over two decades and has the potential to infect more than 75 million ash trees across the country. ADD was first recorded in the UK/South Lanarkshire in 2012.

3.2. Risks are site specific, but tree viability is questioned at +/- 50% remaining canopy (Ash Health Class 3-4) which is also the same point that climbing by arborists becomes unsafe. Tree death in under 4 growing seasons is not unknown.

3.3. This report provides an update on the work undertaken in relation to ADD over the last 18 months.

## 4. Progress over the last two years

4.1. To help inform the Ash Dieback Action Plan (ADAP), a 2022/2023 pilot project was completed with £100,000 additional budget. The scale and impact of the disease on high use parts of the road network from the earlier virtual survey and high use routes in high population settlements were also investigated.

- 4.2. Additional funding of £500k was included in the capital program for 2023/2024 to continue the assessment and operational work on ash trees posing the highest level of risk ('not acceptable') for example Ash Health Class 3-4 (or other dangerous trees) in high target areas. Operational work focused on reducing the 'not acceptable' risks posed by Council ash trees to an 'acceptable' level.
- 4.3. The additional funding provided the opportunity to review current operational practices and incorporate ADD into the existing workload and move towards managing trees pro-actively. It has enabled the purchase of specialised plant, access machinery and procurement of contractors. It has also allowed the appointment of temporary tree assessing Officers and temporary 'grow your own' operational staff, targeting the recruitment of young people through employability and apprenticeships. This has allowed the service to address pre-existing recruitment challenges and will provide a level of succession planning in an aging workforce. This also goes some way to addressing market concerns as the general commercial arboricultural industry will not be able to meet the expected demand over the coming years. A further £0.200m was allocated in 2024/2025 and this has allowed this work to progress further.
- 4.4. In addition, there has been a broader restructure within the arboricultural service with the creation of a strategic function to focus on ADD, pro-active management and the Clyde Climate Forest; and an operational function focused on the day-to-day arbor service and tackling the current lengthy back log of reactive tree work. This has been delivered within the existing budget of the service. As the service modernizes further opportunities to commercialise and generate income are also being actively pursued. The service is trialling a timber station to store and investigate potential revenue streams associated with timber and biomass products.
- 4.5. A Tree Risk-Benefit Management & Assessment approach is also being developed to manage the risk from trees and branches falling, to meet the Council's duty of care. This approach uses traffic light risk ratings and development of a proportionate and balanced 'Tree Risk-benefit Management position statement'. An asset management approach is being applied to trees using costs, benefits, and alignment with the Council's overall objectives.
- 4.6. Central to maintaining easy-to-use tree records and meeting the Council's duty of care, is the [Tree Asset Management software](#) - Treeplotter. This is an evidence-based tool that helps accurately target and manage resources to an acceptable level of risk. It also enables a better understanding of our tree resource, impact of current/future threats, and associated ecosystem services for proportionate replacement planting. Strategic planning, working smarter and directing resources based on actual needs are progressing well along with the provision of meaningful benchmark for monitoring.
- 4.7. To help channel shift, customers are now directed to website [guidance](#), illustrative guide on [Obvious Tree Risk Features](#), [general public online form](#), Housing online form, [Frequently asked questions guide](#) and 'general management advice' on Ash Dieback. Overall, the enquiry backlog is decreasing and compliments increasing.
- 4.8. In line with the [Ash Dieback Toolkit \(Scotland\)](#), an Ash Dieback Action Plan (ADAP) has been developed and is presented in Appendix 1. This plan addresses the risks presented by the impact of Ash Dieback on people and property, as well as the ecosystems ash trees are found across South Lanarkshire. It prepares for a positive recovery phase to achieve a net biodiversity gain by 2034 and landscape recovery by 2054. This planned approach will also help us retain more ash trees for longer so that we can reduce the impact of ADD and manage time and costs more effectively.

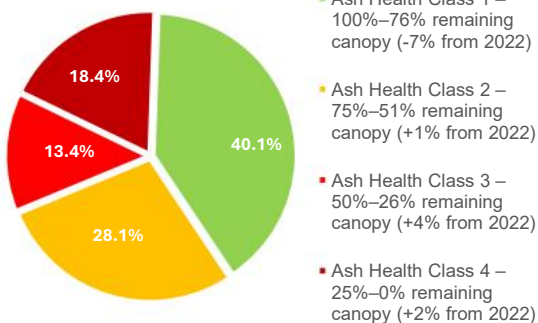
4.9. With 2022/2023 Climate Emergency Funds of £100,000, an initial ADD – Recovery and adaptation project was progressed. Alongside other drivers such as [Clyde Climate Forest](#), approximately 23,700 trees have been planted between 2022 and 2024, many with community participation. Kickstarting the ‘ADD Landscape level recovery’ gained notable community support.

4.10. The Council is an active member of the Ash Dieback Risk Group (Scotland) that advises the Scottish Government on associated policy and plans. As Chair of the Scottish Tree Officers Group (STOG), the Council hosted an ADD webinar and associated working group. This working group services practitioners from 15 Scottish Local Authorities and has developed a technical [Knowledge Hub](#) and STOG rebranding. The ‘KHub’ now connects Tree Officers digitally across Scotland, shares knowledge, and collective ways of working.

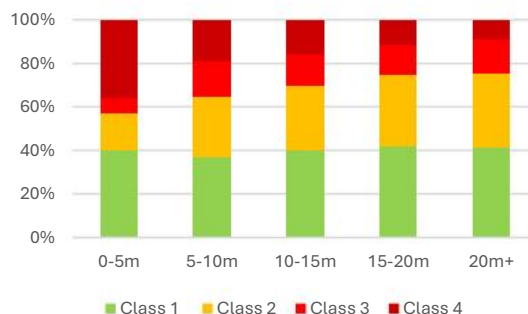
## 5. Current Position – South Lanarkshire

5.1. The Council’s assessments have identified approximately 124,530 (85%) Ash trees from a best estimate population of approximately 145,977 that may impact on the Council’s duties. These are trees either managed or owned by the Council, or in private ownership within falling distance of the road/public area. Below is the summary of the findings.

**Ash Health Class**



**Trees by Height Band (meters)**



Ash Health Class 1	Ash Health Class 2	Ash Health Class 3	Ash Health Class 4	Est. total regardless of risk category	of Estimated statistics of assessment areas
8,374	5,902	2,836	3,969	21,081	Estimated number of ash trees in <b>private ownership</b> and within falling distance of the Road
9,213	7,063	3,622	4,375	24,273	Estimated number of ash trees <b>managed or owned by the Council</b> that are within falling distance of either a road or public area target
40,905	28,116	13,217	18,385	100,623	Estimated number of Council owned or managed <b>woodland/group</b> ash trees
<b>58,492</b>	<b>41,081</b>	<b>19,675</b>	<b>26,729</b>	<b>145,977</b>	<i>Figures illustrate both assessed trees, and estimated trees that have not yet been assessed</i>

5.2. Last year’s spend focused on reducing the risk to an ‘acceptable’ level for those Council trees categorised as posing the highest level of risk (‘not acceptable’) for Ash Health Class 3-4 in high target areas such as the core road network, emergency access routes, high use parks and footpaths etc. This work continues with resources being progressed by risk rating. Roadside private ‘not acceptable’ trees will be progressed similarly, working in partnership with Roads colleagues, alongside new processes, and practices.

- 5.3. The extent of the disease continues to steadily progress by tree size/age (see above). 60% of the identified ash trees have been assessed as Ash Health Class 2, 3 or 4, 32% as Ash Health Class 3 or 4, and 290 trees unaffected (100% alive). Of those individual trees and groups in Ash Health Class 3 and 4, 37% are on private land. The precise speed of decline of any individual ash tree is currently impossible to predict and will be influenced by several factors. The targeting of long-term resource at monitoring the health of ash trees and focusing on those trees with severe symptoms, including root and stem decay, in higher risk locations will require continued funding.
- 5.4. Financial estimates are based on the average price to remove a diseased tree with high value targets such as roads, buildings, and utility lines or a 'woodland' type settings with lower value targets. Following the increased survey work, estimates for worse case tree works suggest that the Council's potential financial costs associated with dealing with 50-75% ADD mortality on land it manages or owns has now decreased from the previous estimate of £11.000m, to between £5.100m - £9.600m respectively. This estimate excludes traffic management costs and replacement planting.
- 5.5. Additionally, there are significant numbers of ash trees not owned by the Council within falling distance of the Road that could incur additional costs for the Council to remove if deemed dangerous and not removed by the owner. Unfortunately, there is no simple answer in terms of what is/is not a public road verge. Each case must therefore be decided on its own merits by Roads and Transportation/Legal Services and the economic impact must be mindful of these unquantified financial implications.
- 5.6. The delivery plan of the attached ADAP identifies the key actions required to try and address and mitigate the consequences of this issue. Given the ongoing risk, additional funding will be considered through future capital programmes to allow ongoing assessment of the spread of the disease and the removal of those trees most at risk. So far, the Scottish Government has not provided any additional funding for this work. However, the scale of the problem is such that Councils will not be able to manage ADD safely and effectively without additional financial support. Going forward, it will be important for the Council's political leadership, through CoSLA and other forums, to apply pressure for a financial commitment from Government in support of the issue.

## **6. Employee Implications**

- 6.1. Additional funding of £0.500m was allocated for 2023/2024 and this has been used to target the recruitment of young people through employability and apprenticeships (Grow our Own) and for the recruitment of two temporary assistant Arboricultural Officers. Further detail has been provided in section 4. As a direct result of the 'grow our own' initiative, one trainee has been permanently employed as a Council Arborist. This has also allowed the service to address succession planning concerns.

## **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1. The financial implications are set out in detail in section 5, with current estimates suggesting a potential cost of £5.100m to £9.600m over the long term to deal with ADD on Council land safely and effectively. However, as the Councils' ADAP and developing 'Tree Risk-benefit Management position statement' embed, it is hoped that current estimates can reduce further over time. Additionally, there are significant numbers of ash trees not owned by the Council within falling distance of the Road that could incur further costs for the Council, as set out in section 5.5.

- 7.2. There is no additional external funding from the Scottish Government to assist Local Authorities manage or mitigate ADD, despite this now being registered as a high risk for all Local Authorities. Scottish Forestry continue to advise that there is no statutory plant health duty to manage ash dieback and that the safe management of trees remains an existing statutory duty under Section 3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act, and Roads (Scotland) Act. etc.
- 7.3. Additional funding of £0.500m was allocated in the capital programme for 2023/2024 and £0.200m for 2024/2025. As the planned approach through the action plan will help the Council retain more ash trees for longer, it is hoped the impact of ADD can be mitigated further. Consideration to additional funding will be made through future capital programmes to allow implementation of the action plan, retention of employees for ongoing assessment of the spread of the disease and the removal of those trees at most risk.

## **8. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications**

- 8.1. If not effectively managed, ADD has the clear potential to lead to long lasting changes in our landscape, tree populations and canopy cover, loss of ecosystem services and may potentially increase effects such as flooding and reduce carbon lockup.

## **9. Other Implications**

- 9.1. ADD tree failures could translate into an increase in road network disruptions, the number of people harmed/killed by trees and a potential significant increase in vehicle/property claims. Failure to act could see the Council face an increase in liability claims as well as reputational damage.

## **10. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements**

- 10.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and therefore, no impact assessment is required.
- 10.2. There is no requirement to undertake any consultation at this time in terms of the information contained in this report. However, as detailed proposals are developed, these will be subject to appropriate consultation arrangements.

**David Booth**

**Executive Director (Community and Enterprise Resources)**

30 August 2024

### **Link(s) to Council Values/Priorities/Outcomes**

#### Values

- ◆ Focused on people and their needs
- ◆ Accountable, effective, efficient and transparent
- ◆ Ambitious, self-aware and improving
- ◆ Fair, open and sustainable

#### Priorities

- ◆ We will work towards a sustainable future in sustainable places
- ◆ We will work to recover, progress and improve

### Outcomes

- ◆ Good quality, suitable and sustainable places to live
- ◆ Thriving business, fair jobs and vibrant town centres
- ◆ Caring, connected, sustainable communities
- ◆ People live the healthiest lives possible

### **Previous References**

- ◆ None

### **List of Background Papers**

- ◆ None

### **Contact for Further Information**

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:

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