

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

Date of Meeting: 12 January 2021

REPORT TO COUNCIL

Date of Meeting: 23 February 2021

Report of: Director Net Zero Exeter & City Management

Title: Tree replanting programme following Ash Dieback Disease in Exeter

Is this a Key Decision?

No

Is this an Executive or Council Function?

Council

1. What is the report about?

Effects of this Europe wide tree disease now means that additional trees and associated works are needed to ensure that our tree canopy cover is maintained in Exeter as this will contribute to our Net Zero aspirations and will also ensure the diseased trees do not pose an unacceptable risk to people and property.

2. Recommendations:

That the Executive Committee recommends that Council approves a capital budget to allow our Tree Management Team to undertake replanting of new trees in place of diseased Ash trees following the Ash Die Back emergency and additional Ash tree works in accordance with the recommended actions by the Service Manager Public & Green Spaces at Exeter City Council to maintain our tree canopy cover. Below is the table outlining the required budget.

	2020/2021	2021/22	2022/2023	2023/2024	
Tree replanting and associated tree works	£34,920	£93,140	£150,481		
Total	£34,920	£93,140	£150,481	25,000	£303,541

3. Reasons for the recommendation:

The extent and pace of the impact of this disease within Exeter is becoming more acute. In 2018 a survey of the valley parks showed less than 10% positive identification of ash dieback, whereas Devon Highways authority have seen a higher proportion of infected trees earlier. Summer 2019 gave us a better idea of the progression within the city. Ash Dieback has an overarching carbon sequestering (carbon seizing) impact. Managerial and financial impact on ECC is becoming a more immediate task. 2020 has seen a

substantial increase in diseased Ash trees on ECC land. We need to take action over the next 3-4 years to ensure tree canopy cover is maintained on Council land and the wider city. The way we can do this is to replant those Ash trees lost to the disease and carry out associated tree works.

Financial impacts have now been estimated since our survey of tree numbers on ECC land was completed in 2020. It is estimated that we have around 193 Ash trees that have been inspected and identified as high (red) or medium (amber) risk of being lost and 445 Ash trees are currently in the low (green) category at present out of a total tree stock of 7,577 plotted single stem trees and tree groups that are not part of a woodland.

4. What are the resource implications including non financial resources.

As the majority of the physical work is undertaken by our contractor, it is estimated that there is limited impact on resources to Exeter City Council.

5. Section 151 Officer comments:

The financial implications are noted and the programme will be financed from usable capital receipts meaning that there is no impact on the Council's revenue position. If approved, the funds will be added to the capital programme for each of the respective years.

6. What are the legal aspects?

A 2012 Plant Health Order bans the movement of both ash seed and trees for planting. Ash logs can continue to be moved except for circumstances where a Plant Health Notice has been served.

The Town and Country planning Act 1999 and the legal framework relating to Tree Preservation Orders and Conservation areas remains unchanged by the presence of ash dieback and each tree will be judged on its own merits. The existing exemptions for the removal of dead and dangerous trees allows for the speedy removal of the most dangerous trees.

The Forestry Commission Felling Licence rules (the Forestry Act 1967) remain unaltered by the existence of the disease.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 has not changed as a result of ash dieback and the normal rules apply. There are exemptions for safety, however these should only be used in exceptional circumstances.

7. Monitoring Officer's comments:

Members need to have careful regard of the risk rating set out in paragraph 8 of this report to ensure that the public entering council land are not exposed to an unacceptable risk of harm.

8. Report details:

8.1 It is estimated that the rate of Ash Die Back by ward and by risk rating is:-

Currently Low Risk	Number of Trees
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Alphington	36
Duryard St James	7
Exwick	87
Heavitree	27
Mincinglake & Whipton	27
Newtown St Leonards	14
Pennsylvania	18
Priory	100
St David's	44
St Loyes	12
St Thomas	27
Topsham	46
TOTAL number of trees evaluated at low risk	
445	
Currently Medium Risk	Number of Trees
Alphington	7
Duryard St James	12
Exwick	6
Heavitree	6
Mincinglake & Whipton	20
Pennsylvania	1
Pinhoe	13
Priory	14
St David's	1
St Loyes	22
St Thomas	7
Topsham	16
TOTAL number of trees evaluated at medium risk	
125	
Currently High Risk	Number of Trees
Exwick	50
Pinhoe	1
St Thomas	2
Topsham	15
TOTAL number of trees evaluated at high risk	
68	

8.2 We are aware that some of the Ash trees identified in the green table will need further inspections and will no doubt need to be dealt with in future years. The Tree Team know we have Ash trees that are part of a woodland group of trees and these trees will need to be identified as soon as possible and risk rated to identify the risk and then manage the risk.

8.3 Generally speaking, the effects of this disease mean that crown reduction will not be an option. As a result, the majority if not all of the works will involve tree removal rather than pruning or reduction and replanting. There will of course be the occasional site where it is possible to reduce or monolith Ash trees. Removal of a diseased Ash tree is in most cases going to be the most sensible approach, as leaving dead or dying Ash trees will incur ongoing costs associated with inspections and the risk that an Ash trunk could still fall and cause damage. Ash dieback can leave Ash trees susceptible to secondary pathogens that can contribute to an increase risk to whole tree failure.

8.4 All plotted remaining Ash trees will continue to undergo annual inspection and we will continue to plot currently unrecorded trees. This in turn will provide us with a more comprehensive database and a better understanding of those trees that require risk management works and replacement planting. ECC has an estimated 40 ha of broadleaved woodland. In 2019 a survey was undertaken of these woodlands which found there to be estimated 730 ash stems per ha. The cost of managing trees in woodlands differs from those in Public Open Space, as many of the trees in woodland settings can be felled. There will also be some trees in woodlands that can be left altogether because they are not diseased or do not pose a significant threat due to their position. There will however be woodland boundary trees that will require replanting and associated works. Woodland trees will be assessed using sample plots to maximise efficiency where individual tree assessment and plotting is not necessary or appropriate.

8.5 We are working as part of and in association with the Devon Ash Dieback Resilience Forum convened by Devon County Council. We will be open to sharing information gathered where it is requested and keep up to date with the latest advice and assistance provided by other Local Authorities as well as DEFRA, National Tree Safety Group, Forestry Commission, Forest Research, Arboriculture Association, The Tree Council and any other recognised industry bodies. We are also part of Saving Devon's Tree Scapes and have already contributed to funding for replacement trees to mitigate against the loss of these Ash trees.

8.6 The ongoing costs associated with Housing trees have already been identified and included within their existing budget profile.

8.7 At present we are uncertain as to when the Ash trees in the green category will move to medium or high categories. There is a requirement to continue with regular inspections and at the current assumptions that at least 90% of Ash trees will sadly succumb to this disease and therefore will need replacement in line with the current amber and red Ash tree categories at some point in the future.

9. How does the decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan?

- Contribute to net zero targets
- Promoting active and healthy lifestyles
- Building great neighbourhoods
- Provide value-for-money services despite continuing central government budget reductions

10. What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

The risks of not undertaking the work to the diseased Ash trees is well documented across the UK and beyond. Diseased Ash trees will at some point fail catastrophically. This can occur without warning, and the consequent weaknesses in the tree as a result of the disease, are likely to be exacerbated by windy weather and other outside influences. Depending on the size and position of the tree concerned, it has the potential to cause a great deal of damage to life and or property. If an Ash tree on Exeter City Council land is identified as posing significant threat, it is Exeter City Council's duty to take all reasonable action to prevent foreseeable harm and or damage. It is entirely appropriate to introduce a replanting scheme to compensate for the loss of these affected Ash trees.

11. Equality Act 2010 (The Act)

In recommending this proposal no potential impact has been identified on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act because the diseased Ash trees are in most circumstances naturally occurring on Exeter City Council land.

12. Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

In light of the Council declaring a Climate Emergency it is considered that the loss of Ash trees affected by the disease will result in a reduction of tree canopy cover on Council land. It is therefore important that a programme of replacement planting be ongoing. Exeter's tree canopy cover currently is above the national average. But we should not allow this tree canopy cover to reduce.

Where it is possible Ash trees that have been removed as a result of Ash dieback disease will be left on site to contribute to the biodiversity of the immediate area, in line with guidance from the Tree Council.

13. Are there any other options?

There are no other practical options available to the Council other than dealing with the diseased Ash trees in accordance with industry guidelines to reduce the risk to citizens and property.

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Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:-

Ash Dieback Action Plan V2.

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