

Report of the Head of Nature Recovery

Subject: Update on the Management of Ash Dieback Disease on the National Park's Estate

1. Purpose of Report

To update members on the progress with the Authority's management of trees with ash dieback across the Authority's estate since the last report to both the Operational Review Committee and the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee on 17 March 2021 and 12 May 2021 respectively.

2. Introduction/Background

Ash dieback is a chronic fungal infection that is affecting ash populations across Europe and the UK. It is predicted that over 90% of ash trees in the UK will be infected. This is currently and will continue to fundamentally change our landscape where ash trees are within hedgerows, and also as standard trees. Ash dieback impacts biodiversity in terms of those species which are reliant on ash trees (e.g. invertebrates, lichens and mosses, and some bat species). Risks to public safety also need to be considered whereby ash trees are shedding limbs or becoming unstable and falling.

The background to the Authority's approach is detailed comprehensively in the report update provided in 2021 (see link below):

[03_21-Ash-Dieback-update.pdf \(pembrokeshirecoast.wales\)](https://pembrokeshirecoast.wales/03_21-Ash-Dieback-update.pdf)

Surveys of the Authority's estate were undertaken to identify specific trees, which were classified according to the priority relating to the risk posed. Survey results are shown in the report link above. This current report updates on actions undertaken since this report.

3. Update on management of trees with ash dieback

3.1 Survey method

Targeted ash dieback surveys have been completed on all PCNPA owned sites with zoning according to the usage of these sites and hence the risk to public safety. Surveys need to be undertaken when trees are in leaf to determine the presence of ash dieback and its progression. Diseased ash trees are managed in the same way as other diseased tree species, within the Authority's guidelines. The Biodiversity Officer and Tree and Landscape Officer are consulted prior to proposed felling as part of this process.

Tree management options are determined by criteria based on:

- the estimated footfall in the 'drop-zone' of a diseased tree;
- an estimate of the percentage of the crown affected by the disease;

- and basal symptoms.

Four outcomes are possible depending on the progress of the disease and the zone the tree is located (zone 1 refers to high use/user numbers, zone 2 is frequent use, zone 3 infrequent use), including:

- Annual survey to continue.
- Undertake 6 month survey.
- Undertake 3 month monitoring.
- Removal of the tree.

Survey work, in terms of the condition of the tree and the outcome are recorded and managed via an application ('app') on a mobile phone. Trees were tagged with unique references. The app also allows for photos and the spatial location to be recorded. The app links to a web-based portal for monitoring and reporting purposes.

3.2 Results

There were 154 individual trees surveyed in the report of 2021. Mainly in zone 1 sites at Amroth Car Park, Castell Henllys, Oriel y Parc, Sychpant Woods, Plantation Woods (Saundersfoot) and Manorbier Car Park. At Carew Castle ash dieback survey and management work had already been ongoing prior to this.

The 2021 report highlighted that of the 154 trees, 23% had no ash dieback present (34 trees) and 77% candidates for felling or further monitoring (117 trees). Further decisions were that 42 of the trees were to be felled and 112 required management through inspection over the following years. Half of these could remain in the annual inspection policy with the other half needing closer monitoring.

3.3 Action taken since 2021

Over 200 trees have been tagged and surveyed. Felling/lopping has also been undertaken at a number of sites.

3.4 North – survey update

Currently the sites that have been surveyed completely include:

Sychpant – all ash trees that are close to any public access including permissive routes have been tagged and surveyed.

Castell Henllys – all ash trees that are close to any public access including permissive routes have been tagged and surveyed.

Nevern Castle (Management Agreement site) – all ash trees that are close to any public access (definitive or permissive routes) have been tagged and surveyed.

Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre – all ash trees on site have been tagged and surveyed.

Cilrhedyn Woodland – Boundary identification and surveying has been completed. There are trees within the site which still need to be tagged and surveyed.

Pengegin woodland – Roadside trees have been tagged and surveyed, but remainder of the site still needs to be surveyed. Target July 2023.

Penlan – site surveyed for ash – no issues

Poppit Sands – all ash trees on site that will affect public access have been tagged and surveyed.

3.5 North – felling update

Sychpant – seven smaller sized trees have been felled at Sychpant. There are mature ash trees growing in Sychpant that have lichens growing on their bark. PCNPA manage this site and hence the ash trees; by moving the permissive paths and part of the car park away from these trees, away from the ‘fall zone’, this means that the trees and the lichens which are growing on them are preserved. Paths have been moved away from the trees to reduce the overall risk to any visitors.

Cilrhedyn Woodland Centre – two trees have been felled although another 2 are due to be felled following consultation with adjacent landowners.

Cilrhedyn Woodland – two trees have been felled with a few others highlighted.

Castell Henllys – twelve trees have already been felled around this site although there are at least four others along the back road boundary that are very large and will require a road closure in order for works to take place. This is planned for Autumn 2023.

Many of these trees are in places where, in order for the trees to be felled safely and with the least damage to the surrounding environment, they will need to be felled in sections using a MEWP (mobile elevated working platform) which is a slow process. Castell Henllys site and fort was closed for works in March 2023 in order for works to be undertaken safely (see Photos 1 and 2 illustrating works at Castell Henllys with the MEWP and two of the Authority’s Woodland Wardens).

Honey fungus has also been found in some of the infected trees making their character very unstable and difficult to manage during the felling to ensure a safe fell. Some trees will therefore not be in a safe enough condition to be able to climb and delimb the tree without the use of a MEWP (see Photo 3 of a cut stem where the infection can clearly be seen as a darker stained portion of the tree).

3.6 South – survey update

All identified sites in the south area have been completed, namely:

Plantation Woods (Saundersfoot)

Amroth Car Park

Manorbier Car Park – at Manorbier CP a group of ash have been zoned based on the zoning methodology and these are monitored annually and / or after high wind events. They have been kept due to their ecological value as standing deadwood.

3.7 South – felling update

Plantation Woods, Saundersfoot – Ash dieback work was completed February 2023 at Saundersfoot Plantation. All trees in the wood highlighted in the October 2022 level 3 survey have been removed. Additionally, a single mature tree that was earmarked for removal has been reduced to a 6-metre monolith for standing deadwood. By reducing the tree height to 6m the target zone was reduced in size

which enabled the tree to be left as standing deadwood habitat, annual monitoring will be implemented.

Cwm Gwennol – Ash dieback work has been completed on a strip of woodland at Cwm Gwennol housing estate on the main B4316 entering Saundersfoot in 2022 all trees highlighted had advanced ash dieback and have subsequently been reduced in height and left as standing deadwood habitat.

3.8 Forward look – surveys

Sites programmed to be surveyed as part of the programme going forwards are: Pontfaen Woods, Garn Woods, Pengegin Woods (roadside trees completed), Pentre Ifan Woods, Penralltygaredde, Clyn Woods, Cilriffeth Woods; as well as re-surveying existing sites and surveyed trees. Some of this work is due to be undertaken summer 2023.

Further survey work will be undertaken in line with the monitoring program and works identified as necessary.

3.9 Forward look – tree works

Felling work this past winter (2022/23) has been delayed due to other urgent priorities, changes in personnel, as well as a comprehensive programme of essential refresher training (including chainsaw training) for the Countryside Team which was completed at the end of February 2023.

Freshwater East – further planned work has been programmed at **Freshwater East**, this work has been given a 12-month timeframe and is due to be started after the bird nesting season in 2023. In addition to the work highlighted in the October 2022 tree survey, a site survey is being progressed with the Fire Service to determine risk with standing deadwood within the tree stock at Freshwater East. A site meeting was held in March 2023 with specific actions identified, as well as a further nine trees identified for removal. This work will be undertaken in line with advice from the Fire Service and with appropriate processes and consents in place.

Felling works for those trees already identified for management/removal will be undertaken during Winter 2023/24 – contractors will need to be employed to fell some of these ash trees, particularly where trees are close to power or phone lines.

Medium to longer term future plans are to scope out a policy approach for replacement trees for diseased trees that have been removed on the Authority's estate, as well as looking at considering:

- climate change, species migration and plant disease in the Authority's [Trees-and-shrubs-native-to-Pembrokeshire](#) guide.
- Reflect on the mapping of affected ash trees on the Authority's estate, and identify apparently healthy (potentially resistant) ash trees.
- Scoping potential options and partners for identification of land for and delivery of tree planting.

4. Financial considerations

Works are currently carried out as part of the Countryside Team's work programme and additional specialist work is carried out by contractors. Financial considerations are therefore in terms of these staff resources and contractor costs.

5. Risk considerations

Risk to public safety if the management programme of trees on the Authority's estate is not continued. Potential legal and financial risk of personal injury claims brought by a member of the public. Dead trees also pose a greater risk during the undertaking of felling works.

6. Compliance

The management of ash dieback by the Authority on its estate complies with Park purposes and/or policy and/or corporate objectives.

7. Human Rights/Equality issues

No human rights or equality issues.

8. Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

There is biodiversity value gained in leaving dead wood. The loss of ash trees contributes to biodiversity loss and whilst the Authority does undertake tree planting more generally as part of existing and other programmes, scoping a clear and defined approach in relation to replacing felled trees with different native species will be explored and developed.

9. Welsh Language considerations

No Welsh language consideration identified.

10. Conclusion

A comprehensive programme of surveys and monitoring of the Authority's estate for ash dieback disease is in place and ongoing. Surveys will take place this summer when the trees are in leaf and the disease is visible. Work to trees already earmarked for tree management work will be undertaken at the appropriate time later in 2023. This work will be kept under review to scope future plans on the medium to longer term actions for the Authority's approach to ash dieback, tree replacement, and the ongoing impacts on the landscape and biodiversity.

Recommendation:

Members are asked to NOTE the update on the management of trees with ash dieback on the Park's estate.

Background Documents

[03/21 Progress report to the Operational Review Committee on the management of trees with Ash dieback disease, 17 March 2021.](#)

*For further information, please contact Michelle Webber
Consulted with (internal stakeholders): Area Countryside Managers, Access Team
Leader, Biodiversity Officer, Tree Officer comments to be received after 9 May 2023,
Research and Sustainability Appraisal Officer, Management Plan and Marine Officer.*

Photo 1: Woodland Wardens undertaking works to ash dieback tree using MEWP (mobile elevated works platform) at Castell Henllys



Photo 2: *Woodland Wardens undertaking works to ash dieback tree using MEWP (mobile elevated works platform) at Castell Henllys*



Photo 3: Cut stem of ash tree – the darker stained portion shows the infection.

