

BCT's recommendations on managing trees affected by ash dieback along highways, roads and woodland rights of way

The Bat Conservation Trust is a dynamic, influential and growing national charity devoted solely to the conservation of bats and their environment. To achieve our vision of a world rich in wildlife where bats and people thrive together, our work focuses on discovering more about bats and how they use the landscape, taking action to protect bats and enhance the landscapes on which they rely, inspiring people about bats and their environment, engaging them in their conservation and strengthen our work by building skills, resources, motivation and understanding.

Ash is the third most common tree in the UK, a key component of our landscape and woodlands and of great importance to our biodiversity, including its potential to provide roosting opportunities for bats.

Since it was first reported back in 2012, ash dieback has become a significant threat to one of UK's native broadleaf native trees. The spread of ash dieback is now clear to see, with trees affected suffering from leaf loss and crown dieback and over time can lead to the death of the tree. This has meant that in recent years diseased trees have become a big concern when addressing the health and safety risk, especially in areas open to the public.

Though decisions regarding the management of diseased ash trees should be done on a case by case basis, and health and safety is paramount, the Bat Conservation Trust believe that the following alternatives should be considered to help reduce the impact to our biodiversity, when dealing with diseased trees along highways, roads and woodland rights of way.

- If it is not a health and safety risk, wherever possible do leave the tree alone. From a bat perspective this would be preferential. Dead limbs, snags, broken branches can provide suitable roost features for the future. This is also recommended by Forest Research <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/pest-and-disease-resources/chalara-ash-dieback-hymenoscyphus-fraxineus/> for reasons of increasing ash tolerance to the disease.
- If possible fence off the diseased trees to prevent public access to the area or divert footpaths away from the trees.
- If in a woodland environment, consider the possibility of closing off areas of the woodland to prevent public access to the area.

If work is needed:

- Where it is suitable and safe to do so, consider monolithing trees to allow standing deadwood to develop. If safe to do so, create artificial crevices and holes using hand tools or power tools that will over time provide potential roost features for bats. Not only will this benefit bats but also saproxylic invertebrates, lichens and other wildlife.
- Putting up bat boxes in place of felled trees that supported medium/high potential bat roosts may help. However it is worth considering which bat boxes are most appropriate in the context of the site and the bat species assemblage there (if known).
- Pollarding younger trees is an option to consider as a means to ensure ash is kept in the landscape for the future. The risk will be greatly reduced, and future cost would be manageable.
- Consider replanting but avoid planting near roads and paths to avoid problems in the future. Further information about replanting can be found within The Tree Council Ash Dieback Action Plan Toolkit.

The Forestry Commission and Defra have produced a new leaflet '[Managing ash dieback in England](#)' for anyone who owns or manages ash trees. It summaries current advice and signposts to more detailed guidance produced by government, the FC and others.