



Herefordshire Ash Assessment

The Issue

Ash trees adjacent to the highway or in council owned land could become a problem if they die and fall into the highway or onto public space.

During the summer of 2016, Herefordshire County Council staff therefore collected **data to determine the potential number of ash trees within the county.**

The steps undertaken

There were no dedicated staff or financial resources allocated to this process and all data accessed was freely available or available internally within the authority. The Officer collating the information utilised 'spare' time over several months estimated at about 18 hours and their extensive local knowledge to complete this element of data capture

Through a desk based approach the potential local, regional and national sources of existing, relevant, data were determined including investigating sources identified in the developing Devon Chalara Action Plan and ongoing work in Suffolk, Norfolk and West Sussex. Data was then sourced, read and relevant information and figures extracted.

The Outcome

Taken from a Draft Report produced by Herefordshire Council: **Ash Dieback in Herefordshire**

5. Ash trees in Herefordshire

- 5.1. Ash is an abundant tree in Herefordshire featuring highly along linear features such as hedges, roads, railways and riversides. Ash is also our dominant woodland tree species. Best available figures suggest there are now in excess of 500,000 full grown or nearly mature ash trees outside woodlands in the county and that ash is our most numerous hedgerow tree¹ these provide over 50% of the non-woodland tree canopy cover of the county. Ash dominated woodland covers over 6500ha (>25%) of all broadleaved woodland¹. Ash is also present within urban areas – council managed public open space for example has been shown through tree surveys to contain over 2600 recorded mature ash².
- 5.2. In a British context, the density of ash trees within Herefordshire's woodlands and woody linear features (for example hedges and tree belts) is considered medium-high. Across Britain, Herefordshire is in the top 10 counties for its % coverage of ash canopy in woodland.
- 5.3. In heritage and landscape terms, potentially the most valuable trees are those which are either ancient, veterans (e.g. hollow) or very large. The Ancient Tree Inventory³ currently lists 8328 "ancient, veteran or notable" ash trees in England with over 6% (531) being recorded in Herefordshire; by comparison Devon which is also a stronghold for ash only has 157 entries. Of all the trees recorded in the inventory for

¹ National Inventory of Woodland and Trees (Hereford & Worcester), Forestry Commission, 2003 (data 1997)

² Herefordshire Council Public Realm Tree Safety Surveys 2010 and 2012

³ <http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/> (data as at 25/11/2016)

Herefordshire over 10% are Ash. 171 of these have a girth greater than 4.71m (the threshold for potential national significance according to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee) with 7 trees reaching the extraordinary girth of over 7m. Many more large trees exist but are as yet unrecorded. Ancient and veteran ash trees are mainly found within the county's large rural estates, parkland, nationally rare wood pasture, hedges and other landscape features, rather than within closed woodlands.

- 5.4. The biodiversity value of ash as a host species is vast, as identified in the problem of finding alternative species to replant but the JNCC report identifies 69 Obligate species (has to use ash as a host or within its lifecycle) that are most likely to become extinct through the loss of ash trees in the environment. Over the past 10 years there are 451 records held by the Herefordshire Biological Records Centre⁴ for species on this 'red' list – 2 species of Galls, 5 species of fungi and 5 species of insects. With a dominance of ash in the county the real number is likely to be higher but records haven't been submitted or they just haven't been noticed! There is an even greater number of species who are partly ash obligate and a vast number who utilise ash as it is such a dominant species in the Herefordshire landscape.
- 5.5. Nationally and in particular in counties like Herefordshire where ash is a dominant tree species there are many other 'benefit' associated with the species such as Carbon sequestration – estimated by the Forestry Commission in 2012 to be 1 million tonnes per annum; sound screening and mitigation; temperature management (shade) and wind screening and filtering air pollution. Tree and woodlands are also shown to have positive effect on people's mental health and well-being and are a key part of education and initiatives such as 'Forest Schools'. The table⁵ shows the aggregated value of ash tree in the UK based on estimated numbers and values in 2012.

| Type of benefit | Value (£ million per annum) |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Social (recreation, landscape, biodiversity) | 150 |
| Environmental (carbon sequestration and air pollution) | |
| Commercial value | 22 |
| TOTAL value of ash per annum | 172 |

- 5.6. It is estimated that there are in excess of 120,000⁶ ash trees beside Herefordshire's >3250km of public roads and equal or even greater number potentially impacting the 3360KM of public rights of way in the county. It is thought that over 95% of these trees will be the responsibility of private landowners.
- 5.7. Ash is a common species across the parks and more formal open space of the county and since Dutch elm disease has been one of the key tree species included in landscaping schemes for all types of development. This applies to a major linear feature of the county – the A49 Trunk Road where the dominant roadside tree between Leominster and Ludlow is the ash; the screening planting of the "new" Leominster bypass section comprising almost solely of ash.
- 5.8. Self-seeding very well, ash has also come to be a tree often found in peoples' gardens – either by design or accident. Some of these 'accidents' growing to become mature and significant trees in the urban landscape.
- 5.9. Ash species are included in the descriptions of 79% of the council's registered Tree Preservation Orders. These ash may be individual 'specimen' trees, identified in 'group' orders or within larger area TPOs such as copses and woodland.

⁴ HBRC, <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/environmental-protection/conservation-and-sustainability/environmental-services-ecology-and-geology/what-is-herefordshire-biological-records-centre> (data supplied November 2016)

⁵ DEFRA: Chalara in ash trees- a framework for assessing ecosystem impacts and appraising options; May 2013

⁶ Based on data extrapolated from highway surveys in Devon and Norfolk