Hart District Council

Ash Dieback Plan for Odiham Common 2020

To be used for monitoring and decision processes for ash dieback management at Odiham Commons until an overall Tree Strategy that addresses ash dieback has been formalised and agreed for Hart District Council.

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1.0 Overview

The following plan has been developed utilising the latest guidance from Forestry Commission, as well as direct consultation and site visits with Hart's designated Forestry Commission Advisor.

2.0 Odiham Commons current condition

Odiham Common with Bagwell Green and Shaw SSSI is a large area of woodland, wood pasture and grassland mosaic in North Hampshire, designated in 1992 for its invertebrate assemblages and supporting habitats, including a mosaic of woodland and wood pasture, lowland dry acid grassland and purple moor rush pasture.

The active work by Hart District Council in recent years has included creating more rides and glades, whilst enlarging existing rides. This has developed the mosaic habitat effect across the site and created multiple open spaces to link habitats throughout the woodland.

Its current condition has been ungraded to favourable, following a recent assessment by Natural England (Odiham Common with Bagwell Green and Shaw SSSI Integrated Site Assessment Report, 2019).

It is important to look after the mosaic of open and closed canopy space throughout the woodland, whilst maintaining links between them, to enable the important invertebrate assemblages to be retained and enhanced.

Like many sites across the UK, Odiham Common has a large proportion of ash trees that have been identified as having ash dieback disease. Whilst there would be benefit to creating further existing space at the site, it has been agreed with Natural England and the Forestry Commission that the

current levels are adequate. Therefore, in the majority of cases where possible, preference will be given to encouraging natural regeneration of the woodland where ask dieback needs to be managed. This plan sets out the approach Hart District Council will be taking to identifying and managing ash dieback across the site, in a way that compliments the overall composition and condition of the site.

3.0 Management Principles

Management for Odiham Commons woodland, in relation to managing ash dieback disease, is based on joint guidance from Natural England and the Forestry Commission on SSSI management under such circumstances (Managing woodland SSSIs with ash dieback *(Hymenoscyphus fraxineus)*, April 2019). Where information has been taken directly from this document, it is italicised below.

- Specimens with less than 25% of their crowns affected can be considered as having *a good level of disease tolerance where they are within a known area of infection and surrounding trees are more severely affected.* Therefore, noting the condition of surrounding ash trees will also be beneficial and where groups of ash trees are surveyed, it is important to retain those with grade 1 rating, to help with the retention of potentially tolerant individuals. In addition, *tolerance of disease is highly heritable and will be passed onto new generations of trees*.
- *Trees with more than 50% of the crown affected will show little or no annual growth increment and are likely to die*. Therefore, where trees are recorded as grade 3-4 and within falling distance of people or property, there needs to be a plan for active removal.
- It is important that the monitoring programme includes monitoring trees that do not currently show signs of ash dieback (i.e. grade 1), as it can take years to identify more tolerant trees and baseline data sets a useful benchmark for ongoing monitoring.
- Where there is a high proportion of grade 1 and 2 trees, it may be *several years* until more serious level of dieback occurs. If ash is removed before looking for resistant specimens, we will not be allowing a resistant generation to develop. Therefore, there should be a limit of ash removal over the next ten-year management plan cycle, with the majority of ash-specific works focusing on grade 3 & 4, where ash dieback is the main reason for the works. This should be sufficient, providing there is good management (removal) of grade 3 and 4 specimens.
- Furthermore, *955 species make use of ash trees as a habitat on one site. Some of these are obligate or highly dependent on ash*. *These species re vulnerable and likely to decline if suitable alternative habitat is not provided when ash dies*. This supports Hart's monitor and response approach, which gives the woodland an opportunity to grow new species or ash trees to replace felled ash, as part of natural woodland regeneration. Planting will only be supported where regeneration is not apparent within the first 3 years.
- If there is an unpredicted catastrophic rate of decline in the health of ash on site over the next ten years, this will need to be taken into account with the 5-year management plan review.
- Ash dieback disease affects woodland most where there are existing issues and challenges, such as
    - *Reduced diversity of tree/shrub species*
    - *Unsuccessful natural tree regeneration due to lack of light grazing/browsing by deer and other animals*

- *Lack of structural diversity across the wood in terms of tree size/class/shrub layer/open space/dead wood*
- *Damage to trees and regeneration by grey squirrels/other pests and diseases*
- *Non-native species*
- *Climate change impacts*

Therefore, it is imperative that the overall management of the woodland continues for these other features, to promote structural diversity and ensure the overall health of the woodland does not suffer

- Ash trees and stands that affect the health and safety of people should be considered as the priority.

4.0 Recording, Monitoring and Implementation Plan

Regular monitoring is recommended to map the progress of the disease, *at least annually….recommended between late July and early August*. Therefore, monitoring will ideally adhere to these timescales, particularly in areas deemed to be high risk to members of the public. Ash trees and ash stands will be monitored regularly and recorded according to their graded condition. Location risks will also be applied, using an appropriate risk zoning system. Where ash poses a higher potential health and safety threat (e.g. adjacent to main paths, roads, buildings, neighbouring properties, infrastructure items), the ash will be inspected annually. Where ash stands are present and are away from areas considered to be high risk (see above definition), they will be monitored every 2-3 years. If areas in low risk areas reach grade 3, they should be inspected more frequently i.e. annually, to help monitor and control spread to the wider area.

The overall impact on a stand will be less in mixed stands. Therefore, grade 3&4 trees that are 'stand alone' should be removed as well as those in groups of grade 3&4 ash, but the single species group should be prioritised if any priorities need to be made. Annual felling works should be prioritised in the following order:

1. H & S (adjacent to paths, buildings, etc)
2. Groups of trees with high proportion of ash
3. Individuals
4. Groups of mixed species containing ash

However, *felling a large proportion of mature, diseased ash in the same stand…can make the remaining (more tolerant) trees more vulnerable to infection by honey fungus.* It is therefore preferable to retain more mature trees where possible by felling smaller sections of ash rather than large areas all at once, to help retain the woodland's overall structural diversity.

Trees and groups will be graded according to their current condition, to enable the recorder to compare with previous years of data (Table 1). Other useful information such as percentage of growth on a tree or stands of trees should also be noted to assist with comparing with historical records and building up a long-term picture of tree health.

Table 1. Grading and proposed activity for inspection and recording of ash dieback.

Grade	State of health	Dieback cover	Inspection frequency	Recommendation (where rate of decline is steady)
1	Good	0-25%	Every 3 years	Continue to monitor as per frequency outlined in above management principles

2	Reasonable	26-50%	Every 3 years	Continue to monitor as per frequency outlined in above management principles
3	Poor	51-75%	Annually	Plan for removal of tree within following 2 winters if within area of high health and safety concern
4	Very poor	76-100%	Annually	Definite removal within following winter (or sooner if appropriate), if in area of high health and safety concern

It is also important to take into account the rate of decline, as those individuals declining at a higher rate will need a more rapid decision and response. Such examples may require an increase in frequency of inspections, for example where a tree or group of trees show a significant change in percentage dieback between one annual inspection and the next. Table 2 is an example of the level of information that should be considered for ash dieback records. At present, a software mapping system is used to record tree safety issues.

Table 2. Hart DC use a software mapping system (currently Ezytreev) to record data and the type of information that is recorded is demonstrated in the example table below.

Tree ID (or group of trees)	Dieback cover percentage (%)	Grade (1-4)	Location risk zone (1-3)	Other notes (e.g. condition of surrounding trees)	Recommendation	Timescale
1						
2						
3						
4						

According to the guidance document, *if the loss of native species is greater than 10% over a 5 year period, then the condition is unfavourable*. Therefore, recording and monitoring should include the diversity of native species within the woodland, every 5 years.