

# Understanding ash dieback: responsibilities for landowners and land managers

It's a legal requirement to maintain your land so that it doesn't harm visitors or trespassers. You may be liable for any damage to property or personal injuries which occur on your land. Which is why being aware of the state of any trees on your land is so important.

## What is ash dieback?

Ash dieback is a fungus that originated in Asia and arrived into the UK prior to 2006 when the fungus attacked UK ash trees including the Common ash also known as European ash. The resultant damage and tree death has been sweeping.

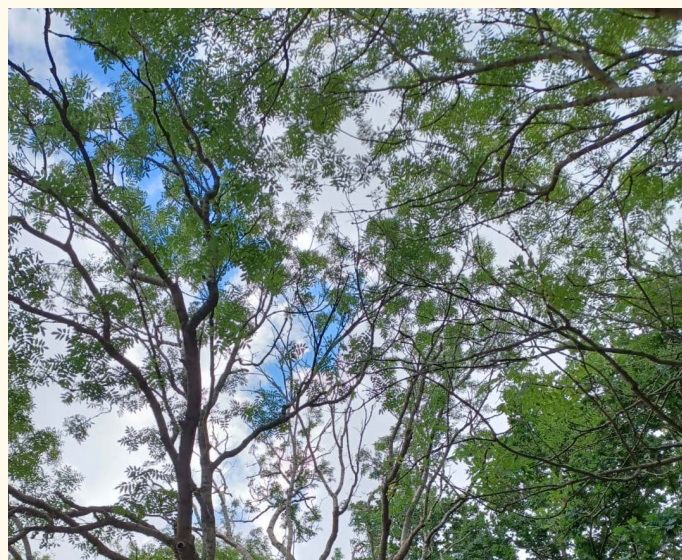
The disease is now widespread throughout the UK and Europe. It's thought that it will affect around 60 million trees in the UK alone. The Woodland Trust estimates that we will lose around 80% of our ash trees in the UK. This is going to have a devastating impact on the landscape and the biodiversity of our woodlands, as well as a major loss in connections between habitats as we lose hedges and individual trees outside of woods.

Ash dieback is a fungus spread by spores from infected leaf litter. These spores are then blown to the next tree to infect. Once infected it does not take long for the newly infected tree to show signs and symptoms. The fungus will attack its leaves, get into the tree's systems and block the water transport system. Trees can then die or become brittle.

Whilst healthy trees have a flexibility and bend in the wind, branches and limbs on trees with ash dieback will fracture and snap in the wind.

## Infection classifications

Ash trees with ash dieback should not be felled the moment it shows symptoms. There should be a monitoring process activated whereby each tree and scenario should be treated individually.



The extent of infection in individual trees is usually completed by assessing the tree canopy when each tree is supposed to be in full leaf, and measuring the amount of dieback compared to an expected healthy tree canopy.

There are other symptoms which include basal lesions, wilting of new shoots and cankers which can be identified on closer inspection of trees.

Depending on the overall health of the tree, trees with up to 60-70% of crown dieback have been known to live without posing an unnecessary health and safety risk, depending on several factors including the individual situation, monitoring regime and the tree in question.

#### **How do I know if my trees have ash dieback?**

You should contact a qualified arboriculturist to carry out a survey and assess the situation. This should take place between July and September as trees need to be in full leaf to give an accurate reading.

Our team of trained arboriculturists can undertake Phase 1 surveys during this time.

Below is our process for assessing the impact on large estates and for large groups. We carry out ad hoc inspections on individual trees and create a treatment and monitoring plan accordingly.

### **Ash dieback survey process**

#### **Phase 1 surveys identify:**

- Areas of significance, levels of infection, clearance impact and classify the percentage of any dieback if found.
- The clearance impact is important because removing one tree in a woodland will not have as significant an impact on the landscape as removing a lone tree in a field.

#### **Phase 2 surveys identify:**

- The number of stems that need to be removed, a management plan if appropriate and restocking levels.
- Depending on the size of the plot, a Phase 2 survey can also be done at Phase 1 stage, or on a return visit.

After each survey phase we provide a full report with our findings.

#### **How can Chevron Green Services manage ash dieback?**

Chevron Green Services offers a number of solutions to manage any ash dieback found on your land.

We will always aim to retain the tree if retention is possible. We create and consult on a management plan to improve the state of the environment, focusing on keeping the trees as healthy as possible and reducing the possibility of a secondary infection. In the optimum environment, there is a good case that the ash can live and grow alongside the infections.

We have a full mechanised arboricultural service with trained operators and equipment to remove damaged trees.

#### **Why do I need to manage ash dieback?**

There are several benefits to dealing with any ash dieback in a timely manner. Not only does it save you money in the long run, but you will be potentially dealing with a smaller number of infected trees before the disease spreads more widely through your trees.

It also protects your mature trees and woodlands. From an ecological perspective, keeping well established trees disease-free and healthy means that they are able to store more carbon, more quickly than their younger, newer counterparts.

It will also fulfil your duty as a responsible tree owner. The tree owner/manager has a duty under the Occupiers' Liability Act to take reasonable steps to ensure visitors or trespassers on their land are safe and a common law duty of care to not injure their neighbour through acts or omissions.

In other words if a tree fails and causes damage to a person or property then the tree owner/manager may be liable if negligence can be proved for failing to act to prevent an accident for a known/obvious diseased and/or unsafe tree.

**If you're concerned about any trees on your land, or would like a survey for peace of mind, please contact our Arboriculture Team: [consultancy@ChevronGS.com](mailto:consultancy@ChevronGS.com)**