



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Ash Dieback (<i>Chalara fraxinea</i>) Update
Date:	14 March 2013
Reporting Officer:	Rose Crozier, Asst Director, Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Alan McHaffie, Senior Woodland and Recreation Officer

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	On the 26 October 2012 the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) wrote to the Council informing us of recent confirmed outbreaks of Ash Dieback in England, Scotland and in the Republic of Ireland. The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the current situation with regards to Ash Dieback in terms of how this relates to the Council's and city's tree population.
1.2	Ash Dieback is a serious disease affecting ash trees and is caused by a fungus called <i>Chalara fraxinea</i> . The disease can manifest itself through leaf wilting, shoot, twig and branch dieback and bark lesions which ultimately lead to the death of the tree. It is particularly destructive of young ash plants, killing them within one growing season of symptoms becoming visible. Older trees can survive initial attacks, but tend to succumb eventually after several seasons of infection (See Appendix 1).
1.3	This disease can spread from plant to plant, from fallen leaves via leaf mould and through wind borne spores which can move up to 30 kilometres in one year spreading the disease.
1.4	Ash dieback has already caused widespread damage to the ash tree populations in continental Europe and is particularly prevalent in Denmark where up to 90% of trees have been infected. If the disease became established it has the capacity to inflict on common ash what Dutch elm disease did to our elm tree population in the late 70's early 80's - that is to essentially wipe out the species as a forest, woodland, amenity and landscape tree.

2.	Key Issues
2.1	DARD has taken the lead role in co coordinating and mapping any outbreaks throughout the province and has set up a protocol for reporting any suspicious symptoms on ash trees.
2.2	To date there has been 26 <i>Chalara fraxinea</i> confirmed infections in Northern Ireland, all of which that have been linked to recently planted young ash trees and there has been no confirmed cases of a wider infection of the environment (See appendix 2, Map)
2.3	<p>Due to the real threat to our natural environment, DARD has introduced two new pieces of emergency legislation to prevent the introduction and spread of Ash Dieback within Northern Ireland through the movement of ash plants and seeds for planting and from the movement of ash wood and bark:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Plant Health (Amendment No3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 • The Plant Health (Wood and Bark) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012.
2.4	<p>An internal working group has been set up within the Parks and Leisure Department and to date we are in the process of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying any young ash tree planted over the past five years and inspecting these for any stem/shoot lesions, leaf necrosis and fruiting bodies associated with Ash Dieback when symptoms are most likely to be observed • Identifying the number and location of our ash tree population from existing and ongoing tree survey data throughout our parks • Installing information posters throughout our parks (Appendix 3) • Running toolbox talks for key staff, user groups, contractors etc on biochemical measures and good working practices if and when these are required
2.5	We have also banned the import and planting of all ash trees within our parks and open spaces.
2.6	Ash Dieback is potentially a very serious threat and we have no reason to believe that the consequences of its entering the natural environment here would be any less serious to our ash tree population as is the case in Denmark and throughout continental Europe. It is important to stress that all the reported outbreaks here are associated with young plants linked by trade imports and DARD are dealing with these infections.
2.7	At present we do not have any <i>Chalara fraxinea</i> Ash Dieback infections within any of our sites and it will not be until spring/summer that we will know if this disease has reached any of our ash trees. The advice received from our colleagues in DARD is to be very vigilant and if we observe symptoms of Ash Dieback, we should inform DARD immediately.

2.8	To enable us to report any suspect ash trees the internal working group which is made up of Parks Managers, the Council's Biodiversity Officer and Arboriculturalists, is in the process of setting up a reporting mechanism which will be managed directly by the Arboriculturalists within the Landscape, Planning and Development unit and they will be liaising directly with the DARD team in relation to any suspected outbreaks.
2.9	DARD have confirmed that if any infections brought to their attention by the Council are confirmed through their laboratory analysis, DARD would then issue a 'statutory notice' on the Council and would work closely with officers of the Council offering guidance and advice on how best to manage an outbreak.
2.10	DARD are satisfied with the proactive approach the Council is taking and have suggested working closely with their own surveyors which we recommend doing once we have all the necessary tree data compiled which will identify where our ash trees are located.

3.	Resource Implications
3.1	If an outbreak of <i>Chalara fraxinea</i> Ash Dieback is confirmed by DARD, there will be costs associated to deal with the management of affected trees and their disposal however we cannot predict what these might be at this time.

4.	Equality Implications
4.1	There are no known equality implications associated with this update report.

5.	Recommendations
	<p>Members are asked to note the content of this report and;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note that Council is in the process of taking all necessary steps to inform staff, user groups and the public of the possible threat of <i>Chalara fraxinea</i> Ash Dieback infection and will continue to work closely with DARD. • Agree to resource any remedial work necessary to deal with an outbreak of Ash Dieback • Note that Officers will undertake inspections of our ash tree stock when symptoms are most likely to be observed and will report back to DARD.

6.	Decision Tracking
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7.	Key to Abbreviations
	DARD – Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

8.	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Symptoms of Ash Dieback Appendix 2 – Map - Confirmed Infection Sites Appendix 3 - Bio Security Guidance Poster