

Devon ash dieback action plan - key facts, impacts and actions

Ash tree numbers

- Outside woodlands there are c. 1.9 million full grown or nearly mature ashes in Devon. The total number of ash trees is much higher. Only oak is more numerous – narrowly so.
- Within woodlands, ash dominates about 11, 000 ha. This is 22% of all broadleaved woodland in the county.
- In urban areas ashes are frequent. In Torbay there are c. 95,000 ashes (with trunks >2.4 cm in diameter). Only Leyland cypress is more numerous, and ash has the greatest leaf area of all species. Figures are not available for other major conurbations.
- Alongside roads there are c. 448,000 ash trees with trunks bigger than baked bean can size (7.5cm), excluding Torbay and Plymouth. The average number of ashes per km is estimated as 12 for A class roads, 21 for B roads, 36 for C roads and 33 for unclassified roads.

Responsibility

- 99% of the 448,000 ash trees within falling distance of highways are the responsibility of farmers and other landowners. The Highways Authority is responsible for only about 6,300 trees.

Anticipated impact of ash dieback disease

- In woodlands, the consensus is that over 90% of ashes will be either dead or severely affected within 5 – 15 years.
- Outside woodlands, the current majority view is that c. 50% of ashes will be severely affected within 5 to 15 years, to the stage where they are at least likely to shed large limbs. There is considerable uncertainty about this, however, and over 90% may be so affected.
- Loss and damage of non-woodland trees will have a greater impact on landscape and biodiversity than that of woodland trees.

Key actions to take *now* to address high risk impacts and to boost landscape resilience

1. Establish a steering group to promote, coordinate, monitor and integrate plan delivery.
2. Develop a communication plan, to raise awareness, to promote engagement and to inform all sectors affected.
3. Assess likely costs and resource needs more accurately, including highways authorities and telephone, electricity and railway operators. Plan accordingly.
4. Establish mechanisms to facilitate the planting and growth of replacement trees, using a diversity of species.
5. Provide advice and support for farmers and woodlands managers, especially those with land adjacent to roads, so they can prepare for the disease.
6. Provide training for tree professionals and those involved in survey, inspections and giving advice.
7. Identify sites with key wildlife species dependent on ashes and take action to promote habitat resilience.
8. Exchange knowledge with counties already heavily affected by the disease.
9. Remove unnecessary blockages or uncertainties in current regulatory systems (eg felling licences).