Gloucestershire Highways

Ash Dieback Action Plan






Document Control Sheet

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Background

Ash Dieback is an infection of Ash trees caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (*Chalara fraxinea*). It is a fungus native to east Asia, including Japan and China. Most parts of the United Kingdom are now experiencing the impacts of Ash Dieback and following the importation of ash trees into other parts of the country, the county of Gloucestershire is now severely affected. The disease is causing the widespread decline of ash trees, and this is expected to continue. It is likely that the majority of our native ash trees will exhibit symptoms of Ash Dieback. It attacks trees quickly and there is currently no efficient prevention or curative treatment available. The disease may kill a young sapling in only a single year, but older trees may take several years to succumb, but this is very variable. The fungus causes gradual crown dieback and can also attack the root collar of susceptible trees. A susceptible ash tree may take many or only a few years to eventually die depending on site conditions, as well as size and genetic make-up of the tree. It is expected though that not all of them will die.

As ash (Fraxinus excelsior) is a common species of tree found in Gloucestershire, its loss will have a significant impact on the County. Ash trees are an important and significant part of both our rural and urban landscape. They help provide a valuable habitat for a range of wildlife within woodlands and along corridors, such as hedgerows and roadsides. Healthy trees are important to farm businesses and nature, also providing shelterbelts and helping to reduce water run-off and soil erosion. Biodiversity will be severely affected by the loss of ash. It will have a negative impact on and will be counterproductive to the goal of us planting more trees to combat climate change.

Ash Dieback will affect many users of the network within Gloucestershire. The immediate concern for the County Council is to protect users of our Highways and County Council land from the danger posed by numerous dying ash trees. The current consensus is that between 75% and 95% of ash trees in the UK may eventually become affected by the disease. Some resistant trees are likely to occur, but it will take time to confidently identify these.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euZ8P9vSRdg – Forestry Commission Ash Dieback video

Current Situation for Gloucestershire Highway Network:

Although there are no exact figures for the number of Ash trees located on the Gloucestershire highway network (or within falling distance of the network) a survey was undertaken during the Summer of 2019 to estimate the number of infected trees. This includes noting the various stages of infection to determine the ongoing risk to users of the highway.

The results of the survey are as follows:

	Total no. trees	Infection level stage 1	Infection level stage 2	Infection level stage 3	Infection level stage 4	Total infection
Total for survey area	2701	800 (29.6%)	160 (6.0%)	90 (3.3%)	48 (1.8%)	1098 (40.7%)
Extrapolated total for whole county	89943	26640	5328	2997	1598	36563

An assumption has been made that 40% of the trees identified are highway trees (i.e. the highway authority has a responsibility for maintenance) and the consensus of an anticipated 75% to 95% loss has been followed. This means Gloucestershire County Council has a potential of 27,000 to 32,000 highway trees requiring attention over the coming years.

Strategy to ensure safety on the Highway network and to consider options for environmental recovery:

Inspection Regime

Using a risk-based approach we can determine which locations should be addressed more urgently. This prioritisation will be based on the result of tree failure combined with the category of infection and tree condition.

- Classification of roads helps identify where the risk is greatest to highway users. Trees on an 'A' class highway present the greater risk due to it being used by a larger number of people. When combined with the factor of speed we can identify which highways represent the highest priority, A, B, C and so on.

- Properties such as schools, libraries and offices present an elevated risk due to the number of people likely to pass close to trees and remain close to them for prolonged periods of time. A falling tree could also potentially cause damage to buildings and other property.

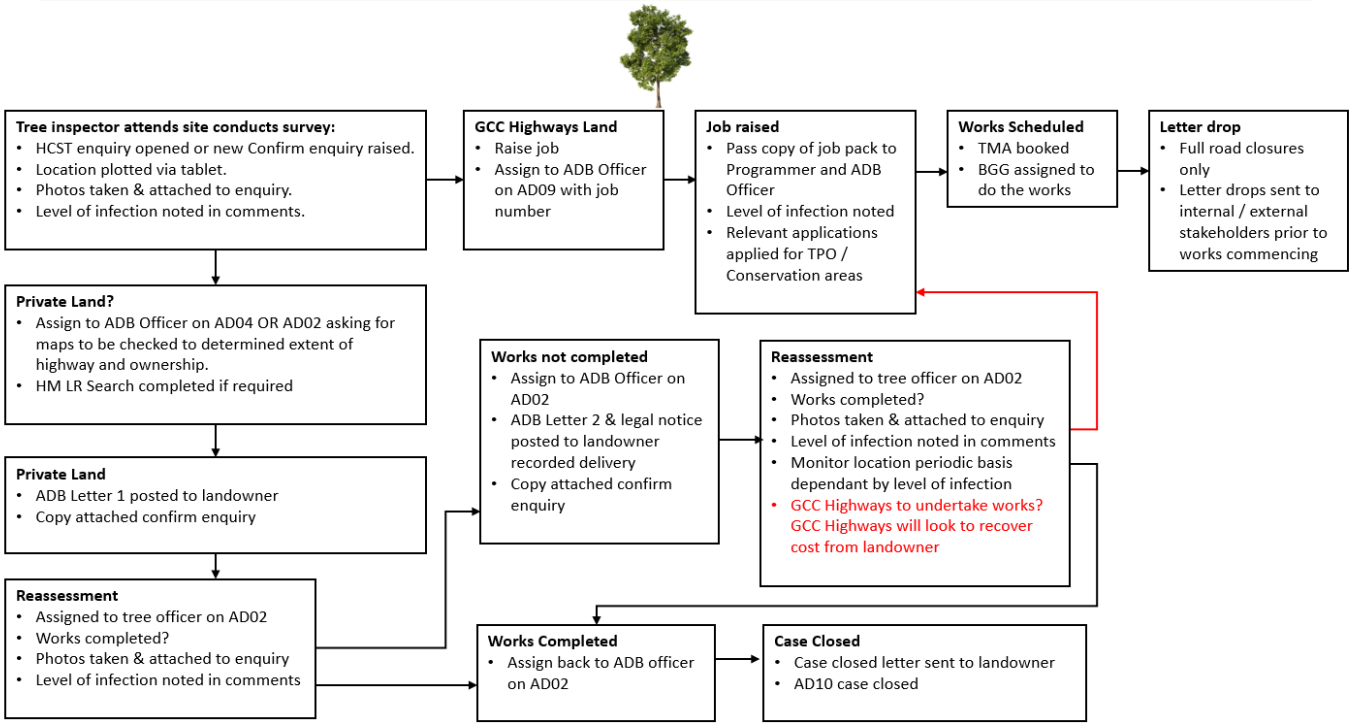
- Trees adjacent to highways and properties which are not in the council ownership are also recognised as significant but require a different approach. In this situation we must identify ownership and ensure that action is be taken by those landowners to reduce the risk to acceptable levels. We will use the legal mechanisms available to us to inform landowners of their responsibility of making the tree safe. This presents a range of complexities which will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

- The disease is widespread across the County therefore the intention was to undertake work in all districts and boroughs using the risk-based approach described above. However, it has become apparent that the disease is more prevalent in the east and southeast of the county, presenting higher numbers and higher infection levels. As a result, these areas will in general be prioritised.

Initial inspections have concentrated on High-Speed roads (Gloucestershire A and B road network) as well as publicly reported locations of infected trees. Whilst we will move through the classification of roads, we will continue to monitor our A&B roads, inspecting and re-assessing for new infection.
These inspections will be undertaken by a qualified Tree inspector. The ideal time for inspections to be undertaken are from June to November, when the trees are in full leaf.

Zone	**Risk level**
Major roads (based on both speed and usage).	High Risk
Car parks, minor roads, high-use public facilities and major public rights of way such as national or promoted trails.	Medium Risk
Public rights of way that have medium or low usage and permissive paths.	Low Risk
Areas with no defined footpaths or bridleways but public access.	Very Low Risk

Ash Dieback: Inspection process



We currently intend to concentrate on trees infected to level 3 or 4 as these pose the most risk of shedding limbs or catastrophic failure.

Levels of Infection

Level	Infection
Minor	Early-stage infection
Level 1	0% to 25% Canopy loss
Level 2	25% to 50% Canopy loss
Level 3	50% to 75% Canopy loss
Level 4	75% to 100% (dead)

Felling operations

A programme of felling work will be produced by our term maintenance contractor based on the surveys completed by the inspector. We have one team of tree surgeons operating across the whole of the County.

Infected trees could require the need for mechanical felling, as climbing may not be a safe option. Appropriate machinery will be called upon as required. The use of this machinery will in most cases require the implementation of road closures. This will allow work to be completed more efficiently and will minimise the time required to undertake the work, resulting in less disruption to the local vicinity.

To make best use of any Traffic Management (road closure, temporary lights etc.) every effort will be made to co-ordinate work with any private tree owners at the same location but only if it does not have a detrimental effect on our programme of work. This may involve GCC undertaking the work at the landowner's cost.

Due to the nature and spread of the disease, where we identify several infected specimens within a group of Ash trees, the whole group will be felled. This follows similar practice used by the Forestry Commission and Wildlife Trusts.

Liaison will continue throughout the year with partner organisations to coordinate and communicate environment strategy and policy and to ensure best practice across Gloucestershire.

The Highways Act 1980

Under provisions of Section 41, 58 and 154 of The Highways Act 1980, a local authority has a statutory duty to maintain the public highway for all to use, to allow safe passage. Where any hedge, tree or shrub is dead, diseased, damaged, or insecurely rooted, and that by reason of its condition it, or part of it, is likely to cause a danger by falling on the highway, road or footpath, the authority is required to take such care as in all the circumstances was reasonably required to secure that the highway was not dangerous.

Bird Nesting

Legal Protection

All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Section 1 of this Act makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly* kill, injure or take any wild bird, including to intentionally or recklessly* take, damage, or destroy the nest of any wild bird, nest or egg while that nest is in use or being built. Some exceptions to this are possible using defences such as under Section 4 and/or under licencing provisions.

In addition, certain bird species listed under Schedule 1 Part I of the Act, receive extra protection including any disturbance whilst at the nest.

Exceptions:

- An authorised person (i.e. someone who has the written consent of the landowner or occupier or highway authority), may fell or prune a dangerous tree or work on another structure that may harbour birds or eggs to preserve public health and safety. However, it is still recommended you record any measures considered or attempted to try and avoid or mitigate harm (if practical to do so and without causing undue delay). If Schedule 1 birds (see below) would be affected, then consult an ecologist immediately as a licence is likely to be required.
- Accidental (not intentional or reckless) injury, killing or disturbance of any wild bird, because of a lawful operation may not be an offence, provided it can be shown that the harm could not have been reasonably avoided (that is it could not have been anticipated as likely and appropriate measures could not be put in place or implemented).
- Species causing a public health nuisance or agricultural damage can be controlled under licences (general or individual). See the government website at https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/bird-licences for more details.

Works Timetable

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Operations & site work permitted	✓	?	×	×	×	×	×	×	?	✓	✓	✓
Normal bird nesting period												
Birds feeding on fruits and seeds												

Optimum time

Activity period may vary due to changing climatic conditions

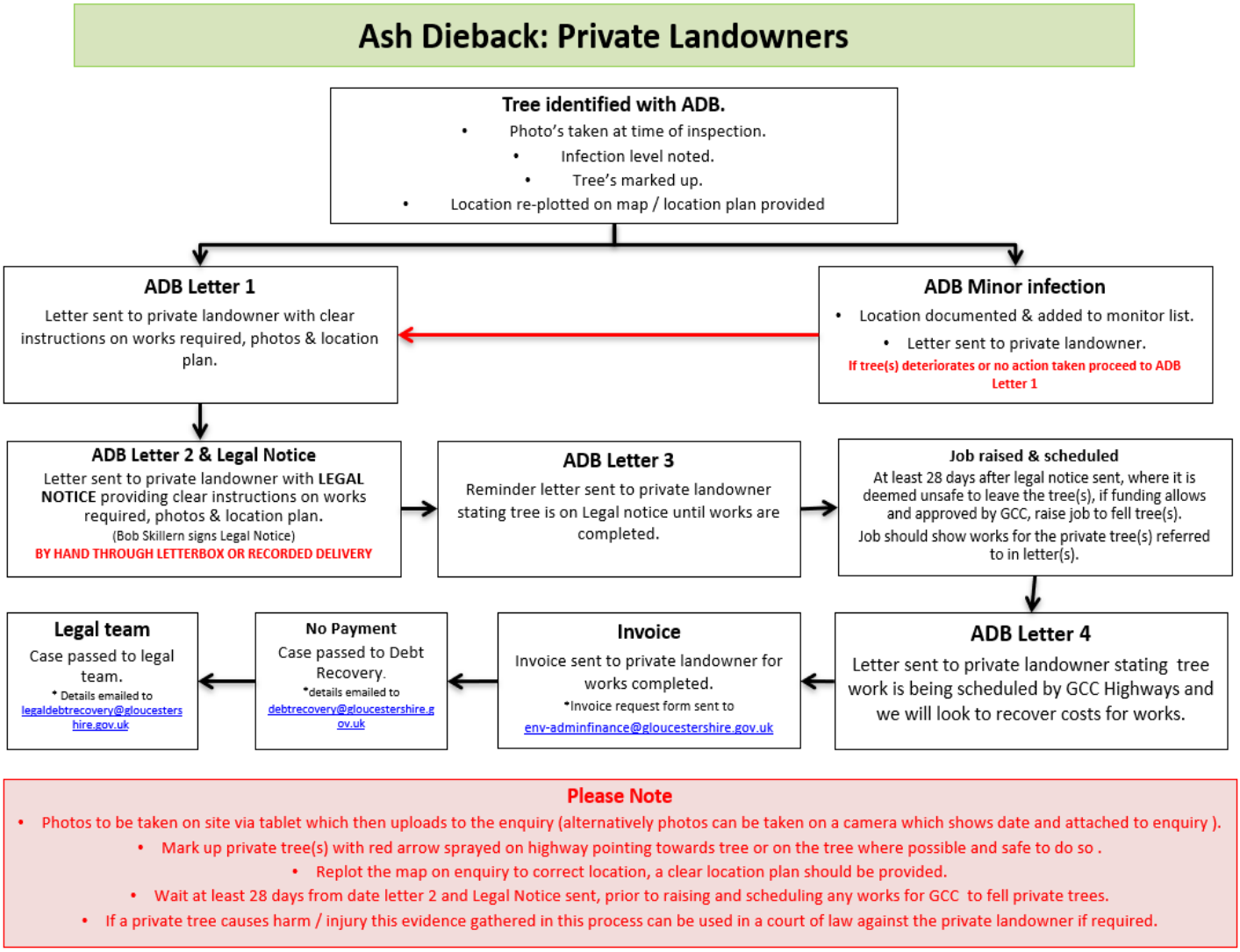
Non-optimum time

Due to the quantity of infected Ash trees adjacent to the Highway network, the quantity far outweighs the resource available to complete all the works outside the bird nesting season. We therefore make a full programme of work to address those trees with the highest risk rating for work throughout the year, leaving only minimal work for the nesting season where we can assess each tree as per the legal guidance. Trees identified as housing nests are marked by the tree inspector prior to felling.

Private Landowners

Where our inspector identifies Ash Dieback in Ash trees which are privately owned and are endangering the Highway or GCC property, contact with the landowner will be made by the Ash Dieback Officer or GCC Customer Support Officer. This will be to inform them of the specific condition of their tree and their responsibilities with regards to maintenance and to ensure Highway safety. Any legal action required will also be co-ordinated by GCC.

Initial contact will be made by standard letter.



Planting Strategy

This strategy has been developed to reflect the Gloucestershire Tree Strategy (see link https://www.gloucestershirenature.org.uk/glos-tree-strategy) which the County Council has recently signed up to. The first principle of this is to ***Establish the right tree in the right place for the right reason, through both active planting and natural regeneration as appropriate.***

We are following Forestry Commission guidance and propose to plant two trees for each one felled, recognising the valuable amenity and environmental impact of trees in our landscape. We must however carefully consider the location for replanting and demonstrate the benefits of an alternative position for the trees in the County.

The County Council is already working with partner organisations in various tree planting projects, and the money allocated for tree planting to replace felled ash trees will be most effective if it is used to supplement the planting through these projects, rather than to try to establish additional projects.

Where possible we would like to plant on Highway land, however this approach must be carefully considered for the following reasons:

- Many of the ash being felled are self-seeded and not situated in the most appropriate or safe location on the highway verge.
- Our own monitoring and survey work has shown a good level of regeneration in areas where mass felling of Ash trees on wide highway verges has taken place. Natural regeneration increases species diversity. Planting may compromise this natural reestablishment of flora.
  We should be taking a risk based and long-term approach. Trees in the highway verge can create a visual hazard to motorists, and any replanting in these areas needs to be carried out responsibly.
- Alternative sites away from the Highway give us the advantage of working with partners who have more expertise than us in terms of where and how the best replanting can benefit the natural regeneration of areas, flora and fauna, as well as those essential corridors for wildlife migration/movement routes which have been eroded over the years.
- The Million trees challenge project gives us an ideal opportunity to plant large numbers of trees in a short timescale and allows easier ongoing care and maintenance.

Note: Replanting with ash trees is not permitted due to the current embargo on ash plant movements. General advice is to restock from a variety of site-suitable tree species that are appropriate to the sensitivity of the local landscape, and which will help replace the variety of ecosystem services that ash had previously provided.

Planting actions

Identify areas of Highway land where appropriate planting can occur. Highway locations with wide verges where trees can be planted at an appropriate distance from live traffic are the main sites are being considered. We will also:

- Follow the approach outlined in the Gloucester Tree Strategy (GLNP) to help deliver an effective countywide approach to tree planting by contributing funding to enable the planting and maintenance of Native tree species.

- Work with The Million trees project and partners (Glos Wildlife Trust, NFU, FWAG, Woodland Trust) to undertake a programme of planting on sites around the County.

- Work with Town and Parish Councils to identify possible community tree planting locations.

- Continue to liaise with the partner organisations throughout the project to coordinate and communicate environment strategy and policy and to ensure best practice across Gloucestershire.

GCC approved list of trees:

Scientific Name	Common Name	Large tree - Often over 15m at maturity	Notes
Acer campestre	Field maple		Particularly within hedges but not exclusively so
Acer pseudoplatanus	Sycamore	Yes	Maybe worth considering but away from ancient woodland or protected sites and semi-improved/unimproved grassland and where horses present nearby.
Alnus glutinosa	Alder	Yes	Wet and damp sites plus next to watercourses/ditches where appropriate.
Betula pendula	Silver birch	Yes	Particularly where already known to occur and appropriate.
Betula pubescens	Downy birch	Yes	Damper sites
Carpinus betulus	Hornbeam	Yes	Occasional use where appropriate to location and its history.
Castanea sativa	Sweet chestnut	Yes	Particularly where already known to occur and appropriate.
Corylus avellana	Hazel		Good choice in many locations
Crataegus monogyna	Hawthorn		Particularly within hedges but not exclusively so
Fagus sylvatica	Beech	Yes	Particularly where already known to occur and appropriate.
Ilex aquifolium	Holly		Good choice where already known to occur
Juglans regia	Walnut (English)	Yes	Probably as specimen trees only - looks very similar to ash
Ligustrum vulgare	Privet		Mainly within hedgerows
Malus domestica	Apple (cultivated)		Occasional use where appropriate to location and its history. Known cultivars grown on M25 rootstock
Malus sylvestris	Crab apple		Occasional use where appropriate to location and its history.
Pinus sylvestris	Scots Pine	Yes	Occasional use where appropriate to location
Populus nigra	Black poplar	Yes	Occasional use in wetter sites/valley bottoms and vales usually where previously known
Populus tremula	Aspen	Yes	Particularly where already known to occur and appropriate.
Prunus avium	Wild cherry	Yes	Particularly where already known to occur and appropriate.
Prunus domestica	Plum (cultivated)		e.g. such as Pershore & Blaisdon cultivars or smaller ssp. insititia (Damsons)
Prunus padus	Bird cherry		Occasional use where appropriate to location and its history.

Prunus spinosa	Blackthorn		Particularly within hedges but not exclusively so
Pyrus communis	Pear (cultivated)	Yes	Esp. Perry Pear cultivated hybrids
Quercus petraea	Sessile oak	Yes	Particularly where already known to occur and appropriate.
Quercus robur	Pendunculate oak	Yes	Good choice in many locations
Salix caprea	Goat (Pussy) willow		Damper sites
Salix cinerea	Common willow		Wet and damp sites. Also, subspecies of Grey and Rusty Willow may be appropriate in a few locations if already known.
Sambucus nigra	Elder		Particularly within hedges but not exclusively so
Sorbus aria	Whitebeam		Occasional use where appropriate to location and its history
Sorbus aucuparia	Rowan		Particularly where already known to occur and appropriate.
Sorbus torminalis	Wild service tree		Occasional use where appropriate to location and its history.
Taxus baccata	Yew	Yes	Particularly where already known to occur and appropriate
Tilia cordata	Small leaved Lime	Yes	Particularly where already known to occur and appropriate
Tilia platyphyllos	Large leaved lime	Yes	Occasional use where appropriate to location and its history
Ulmus Procera/Glabra	Wych & English Elm	Yes	Particularly where already known to occur and appropriate

Communication

Here in Gloucestershire, the Local Nature Partnership (GLNP), combines over 30 organisations from public, private and third sector bodies from across the county, all working together as an informal partnership. GCC Highways will continue to engage and work together in this partnership and revise the plan as necessary.

We attend regular Ash Dieback Group meetings, where authorities get together to share knowledge and experience in management of Ash Dieback within their county.

Communication will be made through the website to inform the public of our actions and reasons for the felling of numerous trees. Information will be sent to those living or operating businesses in areas identified for or affected by programmed felling and road closures. We also utilise this as an opportunity to send out information about funding for planting projects.

We work with the local parish councils to raise awareness, including publishing articles to go in the parish monthly newsletter.
Website https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/highways/roads/road-maintenance/trees/ash-dieback/

Actions

Section 1: Delivery, communication and strategic planning Section
Section 2: Short term risks, to public safety
Section 3: Longer term risks, to the environment
Section 4: Survey and monitoring, and biosecurity
Section 5: Training
Section 6: Regulation

Section 1: Delivery, communication and strategic planning

Number	Topic	Key people / bodies affected	Actions	Priority	Cost
1	Delivery of Project	Gloucestershire County Council and Partners	Establish a team to coordinate and promote the work, and to monitor it, revising as necessary	High	Medium
2	Communication	All partners, general public, farmers, and other land managers.	Develop and deliver communications. To promote engagement and provide information and guidance to landowners/managers and the public, with ownership of trees adjacent to the Highway.	High	Low
3	Communication	General Public	Consider establishing a county website for the disease. To provide updates and information. Letter drops for upcoming road closures.	Medium	Low
4	Knowledge exchange	Gloucestershire County Council	Exchange knowledge with authorities in Devon, Somerset, Oxford, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, West Sussex including holding regular meetings and workshops.	High	Low
5	Strategic planning	Policy makers and shapers	Revise and update strategic plans.	Medium	Low
6	Finance	Gloucestershire County Council	Make detailed assessments of likely costs and press for continued funding as appropriate.	High	Low

Section 2: Short term risks, to public safety

Number	Topic	Key people / bodies affected	Actions	Priority	Cost
7	Ash trees along public roads, PROW and Community areas	Highway Authority, Landowners and managers,	Undertake inspections of Ash stock to determine infection levels	High	Medium
8	Ash trees along public roads, PROW and Community areas	As above	Assist private landowners to recognise their obligations and to meet them.	High	Low
9	Ash trees along public roads, PROW and Community areas	As above	Fell trees as prudent for public safety, following best practice guidance.	High	Low Worst case £100M across county
10	Ash trees along public roads, PROW and Community areas	As above	Develop site-specific ash management plans so work is phased, practical and can be adequately resourced.	High	Low

11	Ash trees along public roads, PROW and Community areas	As above	Provide advice specifically for Landowners on how to manage the disease, including regulatory requirements.	High	Medium
12	Ash trees along public roads, PROW and Community areas	As above	Plant or encourage replacement trees, following best practice guidance, to promote landscape resilience	High	Medium
13	Ash trees along public roads, PROW and Community areas	Highways Authorities	Review and refine data on ash tree distribution and number alongside roads, building on sample work already carried out by Gloucestershire Highways	Medium	Medium
14	Ash trees near overhead cables	Telephone and electricity distribution network operators	Survey, plan, inspect and notify Utility companies	High	High
15	Ash trees away from roads	Landowners and managers, including farmers and woodland managers	Provide advice for farmers on how to manage the disease, including regulatory requirements.	High	Low
16	Ash trees along public roads, PROW and Community areas	Highways Authorities	Ensure all wildlife legislation is adhered too in the process of felling.	High	Low

Section 3: Longer term risks, to the environment

Number	Topic	Key people / bodies affected	Actions	Priority	Cost
17	Biodiversity impact	Highway Authority, Managers of nature conservation sites, especially SSSIs and County Wildlife Sites	Identify sites or individual Ash trees with exceptionally important veteran features.	High	Low
18	Biodiversity impact	As above	Take action to conserve these key trees, including remedial work, and any important linked species.	High	Medium
19	Biodiversity impact	Highway Authority Managers.	Promote the healthy, sustainable, management of hedges and Roadside trees to increase their resilience to ash dieback and other diseases.	High	Medium
20	Landscape restoration	Landowners and managers, both private and public	Identify parts of the county where loss of ash from hedges, etc. will have landscape impact.	Medium	Low
21	Landscape restoration	As above	Provide National Character Area specific advice on suitable replacement trees	High	Low
22	Landowners and managers, both private and public	As above	Develop a scheme to encourage land managers to plant/encourage replacement trees, in advance of the disease.	Medium	Medium

Section 4: Survey and monitoring, and biosecurity

Number	Topic	Key people / bodies affected	Actions	Priority	Cost
23	Survey and monitoring	Gloucestershire County Council Volunteers, foresters, and tree professionals	Track and map the spread of disease across Gloucestershire and identify any high resistance trees.	Medium	Low
24	Survey and monitoring	Gloucestershire County Council	Establish a baseline of frequency and distribution of ash trees on the Highway Network in Gloucestershire, to guide landscape restoration, informed by National Character Areas.	Medium	Medium

25	Biosecurity	Professionals and visiting infected woods, then moving into areas currently unaffected	Advise people to wash boots, vehicles, etc.	Medium	Low

Section 5: Training and communication

Number	Topic	Key people / bodies affected	Actions	Priority	Cost
26	Training	Tree professionals (surgeons, etc), tree wardens, volunteers	Provide guidance and training opportunities (e.g. workshops) for those involved in surveys, inspections, giving advice, tree felling, etc.	High	Medium
27	Training	Highway Authority Managers	Assess whether there are sufficient Tree professionals available to the Highway Authority to meet the likely high level of demand.	Medium	low

Section 6: Regulation

Number	Topic	Key people / bodies affected	Actions	Priority	Cost
28	Regulation	Farmers, woodland managers and landowners	Clarify the need for Felling Licences where appropriate	Medium	Low
29	Regulation	As above	Ensure tree owners are made aware of the regulations regarding Conservation areas and tree preservation areas and the requirement for consultations and notices.	Medium	Low
30	Regulation	All Landowners and Tree professionals	Ensure tree professionals are aware of the protection afforded to nesting birds and of necessary procedures.	High	Low
31	Regulation	As above	Ensure tree professionals are aware of the protection afforded to bats and of necessary procedures.	High	Low