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Facing up to ash dieback

If you have ash in your woodland, it is likely you will be facing tough management decisions sooner rather than later, writes Simon Lloyd

There is no single prescribed management solution for dealing with ash dieback (ADB). The decisions you take will be guided by your woodland and your management objective. Safety is the only obligatory intervention. Very different approaches have been taken in two RFS woods, and I am currently wrestling with options in my own woodland in Herefordshire which showed the first signs of ADB this year.

Ash has long been a significant element in our woodland both as a reliable timber crop and for the biodiversity it supports. Its loss will be significant. However, it also offers opportunities to plant more and different species to build resilient woodland for the future.

ADB was first noted in 2014-15 at the RFS Battram Wood in the National Forest, Leicestershire. The woodland had been planted in 1998-2000 to provide an example of professional management and silviculture to create best quality timber. Ash is a significant



ASH DIEBACK

- Ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*), formally known as Chalara, is spread by wind borne spores and on infected stock, and is usually fatal
- Trees become brittle and unstable and need to be removed for safety alongside areas of public access
- To see 10 case studies by the RFS and the Forestry Commission go to [rfs.org.uk/about/publications/rfs-research-reports/](https://www.rfs.org.uk/about/publications/rfs-research-reports/)

component, both in pure and mixed stands and it was decided to fell 75% of young ash before ADB became too well established.

Felling in small coupes was an opportunity to introduce age diversity as the wood matures and to develop glades. Restock species, agreed under the Felling Licence, include wild cherry, silver birch, black walnut, Douglas fir, pedunculate oak, hawthorn and hazel planted with the aid of a Countryside Stewardship Woodland Tree Health Grant.

The RFS Hockeridge Wood in the Chilterns, on the other hand, is well established. Ash is a small component, primarily in two compartments of mature trees within an ash/sycamore/hazel mix. Here we selectively thinned affected trees this year. In total around 15% of trees were removed, providing more space and airflow for healthy ash to continue to grow and possibly show resistance to ADB. Remaining trees will be regularly monitored, particularly on road and ride sides.

In my own woods, ash is a significant component in both pure and mixed stands and of all age classes. I am considering a combination of pre-emptive felling to maximise timber returns, selective thinning, and a wait-and-see approach depending on each site's characteristics. I may apply for the Tree Health Restoration Grant, but am concerned it lacks flexibility to plant the range of productive species necessary to make the woodland financially sustainable and resilient to climate change projections. ¹⁵

CLA ADVICE

For advice on dealing with ash dieback contact your local CLA office