

# Battle plan to save 60 million trees from ash dieback launched in Leicestershire

[www.leicestermercury.co.uk](http://www.leicestermercury.co.uk) 25/02/19

The fight will need an army of volunteers



Ash tree: File picture

Your countryside needs you.

A four-point plan to fight the deadliest threat to the UK's trees since Dutch Elm disease emerged in the 1970s has been launched in Leicestershire - calling for an army of volunteers.

The battle is on to save the Ash tree - the third most common tree in Britain - with up to 60 million of the trees outside woodlands in the UK.

Ash dieback was first recorded in the UK in 2012, with only a small fraction of trees proving resistant.

The Ash Dieback Action Plan Toolkit, devised by The Tree Council, Fera Science Limited, and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), brings together guidance and case studies from local authorities already tackling the issue.



Ash tree: File picture

More than £5 million has already been set aside by Leicestershire County Council to deal with the effects of a disease which affects Ash trees.

A report in the summer said that the majority of the 500,000 or so ash trees in the county could be lost to ash dieback over the next five to 15 years.

The plan calls for an army of volunteers to monitor report and help replant the at-risk trees.

The plan is designed to raise awareness of the disease, help councils create local action plans, identify best practice for managing non-woodland trees and advise on recovery and creation of alternative treescapes.

It encourages authorities to recruit volunteer local environmentalists to help in identifying the scale of the problem.

Sara Lom, CEO of The Tree Council, said, "It's essential we support local authorities to manage the risks posed by the death of ash trees throughout the country.

"We want our volunteer tree wardens to work with local authorities to help monitor and report on diseased trees and support replanting efforts."



Ash tree: File picture

Defra's Chief Plant Health Officer Nicola Spence, who announced £6m has been spent on research, said : "This toolkit draws together practical guidance from that body of research and from the local authorities that have taken a lead in managing non-woodland trees.

"We believe this will help all authorities develop responses to the threat at a local level."

Blake Pain, lead member for environment and transport at Leicestershire County Council, one of the participating local authorities, said developing the plan "has enabled us to understand the potential scale and level of risk that the disease poses across Leicestershire".

"It allows us to put in place a proportionate and considered response from across the council," he said.

"This will allow us to prioritise resource where needed, and tailor our approach as we learn more about the disease."



Ash tree: File picture

Ash dieback is caused by the *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* fungus.

It results in leaf loss, crown dieback and bark lesions.

Mortality rates of up to 85% have recently been reported on some sites across Europe.

However, a small proportion of trees are showing tolerance to the disease, and Defra are funding research which may allow tolerant UK ash trees to be bred for the future.