

Surrey to fight Ash dieback

6 September 2023



Surrey County Council will undertake a programme of woodland management across its countryside estate this autumn, with a focus on tackling Ash dieback to protect public safety where needed, as well as identifying current and future nature recovery opportunities.

As England's most wooded county, Surrey is heavily affected by Ash dieback, a non-native fungus which weakens the structure of Ash trees, making them liable to fall in an unpredictable way. Unfortunately, there is no known cure for Ash dieback and the disease spreads rapidly, with around 80% of the nation's ash trees anticipated to succumb to it.

While trees in higher risk areas will need to be felled in the interest of public safety, Surrey County Council recognises the amount of ecological, historical and cultural importance that woodland has in the county, as well as its contribution to biodiversity and carbon sequestration.

Residents had previously raised concerns about getting the balance right between protecting the public and protecting nature. As part of the planning process for this year's upcoming works, several local experts have been consulted to support in developing an appropriate approach and methodology, including Surrey Bat Group, Surrey Badger Group, Surrey Dormouse Group, Save Surrey's Countryside, Surrey Botanical Society and Butterfly Conservation Surrey amongst others. The Council will continue to liaise with local experts throughout the season in addition to its work with organisations such as Natural England, the Forestry Commission and Surrey Wildlife Trust.

Recognising the guidance provided, the Council's approach will now focus on higher risk areas around public rights of way, car parks and roads. This approach has led to around 2400 metres of permissive path being removed from the felling programme at Sheepleas in West Horsley. Notices to divert the public away from some quieter permissive paths have been installed, an approach which follows similar action on National Trust land to minimise disturbance to biodiversity and encourage areas for wildlife to thrive.

A number of other measures are being put in place to minimise the impact of necessary works on nature including:

- Having a qualified ecologist on site throughout the works;
- Investing in specialist equipment and using specialist contractors to minimise disturbance;
- Undertaking work outside of ground nesting bird season;
- Creating new habitats for protected species such as Dormice;
- Development of new long term woodland plans linked to the Council's nature recovery strategy;
- Replanting or encouraging natural regeneration of suitable tree species wherever appropriate.

Following extensive arboricultural and ecological surveys, works are anticipated to focus around targeted areas of **Sheepleas** (West Horsley), **Newlands Corner** (near Guildford), Park Ham (near Bletchingley), **Norbury Park** (Leatherhead/Dorking), **Brockham Quarry**, **Beech Avenue** (Effingham) and areas of the **Downs Link** path. All works are subject to all necessary permissions and licenses being secured, so may be subject to change. Where Ash dieback works are taking place, tree species other than Ash may also be removed for safety reasons.

Marisa Heath, Surrey County Council Cabinet Member for the Environment comments: "Ash dieback has had a devastating effect on ash trees not only across Surrey but nationally. Over the coming months we will be undertaking safety works across our countryside estate, however we will be managing this carefully and have minimised felling where we can.

"We will also be looking at how we can improve the overall quality and biodiversity of our woodland in order to develop long term woodland habitat management plans, as we understand the important role that trees play in helping us reduce the impacts of climate change and also in providing important habitats to a range of species. We have facilitated the planting of over 385,000 trees and we have plans to plant more during this tree planting season, but also to ensure we have a range of habitats for nature recovery."

As part of Surrey's ambition to be a carbon neutral county by 2050, Surrey County Council has a target to facilitate the planting of 1.2 million new trees (one for every resident) by 2030. Tree planting season is underway and more details on how to get involved can be found online.

‘Show and tell’ walks are being offered to the public as an opportunity to find out more about Ash dieback and the Council’s plans to address it. Details of the events are below:

- **Beech Avenue, Effingham:** 9 September, 9.30am to 11am. Meet on corner of Beech Close and Beech Avenue, KT24 5PQ. Please park respectfully in nearby roads.
- **Sheepleas, West Horsley:** 9 September, 12pm to 1.30pm. Meet at Green Dene car park, KT24 5TA.
- **Newlands Corner, near Guildford:** 16 September, 9.30am to 11am. Meet at White Lane car park, GU5 9BQ.
- **Norbury Park, Leatherhead:** 16 September, 11.30am to 1pm. Meet by Wild About Coffee (please note there is no parking at the coffee van – use Young Street, Fetcham or Crabtree car parks and follow signs)

Booking is not required, simply turn up at the meeting location shortly before the start time. For those unable to attend site walks, there will also be public drop-in sessions during September and October with details available online.

Further details on Ash dieback works are available at www.surreycc.gov.uk/ashdieback , including a short information video. Onsite information will also be available at each site throughout the works.