

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Depute Chief Executive and Director
of Housing, Operations and Development
to Cabinet
of 17 February 2026**

Subject: Ash Dieback – Update Report

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an annual report relating to the implementation of the Ash Dieback Plan and seek Cabinet approval for year 4 funding of the Council's Ash Dieback Plan.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1.1 approves the carry forward of £10,071 Ash Dieback allocated funds in the Neighbourhood Services budget to financial year 2026/27 for year 4 of the programme;**
- 2.1.2 approves funding of £140,000 from Housing Development and Operations projected underspend for financial year 2025/26 to enable Neighbourhood Services to undertake a fourth year managing trees that pose a significant risk, this includes re-inspection of all Ash trees; and**
- 2.1.3 approves funding of £70,000 from Housing Development and Operations projected underspend for financial year 2025/26 to enable Ayrshire Roads Alliance to undertake a third year of managing trees that pose a risk to South Ayrshire Council roads, this includes re-inspection of all adopted 'A' and 'B' class roads within the boundary of South Ayrshire.**

3. Background

- 3.1 Ash Dieback first came to notice in Europe some 30 years ago and has devastated the European Ash. It was first recorded in the UK in 2012 and spread prolifically throughout England. The disease is now established in Scotland and has been identified in South Ayrshire
- 3.2 Cabinet approved the South Ayrshire Council Ash Dieback Plan in March 2023 and has allocated Neighbourhood Services and Ayrshire Roads Alliance funding for the past 3 years to implement the Plan.

3.3 Since 1st April 2025 we have felled and removed 767 trees taking the total number of Ash trees removed to date to 2432 and 13 trees have been positively managed by crown reducing or shaped.

3.4 The table below details the number of trees removed in each category. ([Appendix 1](#) describes the different categories)

Category	Total	Description
Category 1	60	100%-76% remaining canopy
Category 2	317	75%-51% remaining canopy
Category 3	1169	50%-26% remaining canopy
Category 4	858	25%-0% remaining canopy
Category unspecified	28	Between Category Status
TOTAL TREES FELLED	2432	Equates to 32.92 %
Crown Reduced or Shaped	13	Positively managed without felling

3.5 The teams have continued to focus on Categories 3 and 4 as you will see from the table above. Also removing Cat 1 & 2 within high risk areas that required specialised equipment.

3.6 Due to increased contractor and specialised machinery costs all scheduled works cannot be completed. Approximately 35% of Golf Course scheduled work will be complete and the remaining tree work will be scheduled as priority in 2026/27, if the Service is allocated additional funding.

3.7 It was planned to remove the overhanging into Queen Margaret Academy, Ayr from neighbouring private. However, when the trees were reassessed, it was deemed unsafe to remove the overhang, as this could potentially cause destabilisation of the trees, which would risk causing damage to the private properties and garden. Therefore, working with Education, we have erected Heras fencing to stop children and or staff entering into the at-risk zone. It has impacted on a very small area of the school grounds and has had no significant impact upon how the school grounds are used.

3.8 Below details the works scheduled to be complete by March 2026:

- Ash tree removal along Monument Road, Ayr;
- Continue to progress works within golf courses as weather allows; and
- Continue to focus of Cat 3 & 4 trees.

3.9 Ayrshire Roads Alliance undertook survey work and has started on the process of managing high risk roadside trees identified within South Ayrshire.

3.10 Neighbourhood Services anticipate a total spend of £219,876 in financial year 2025/26 with Ayrshire Roads Alliance anticipating a spend of £65,906. Resulting in a £10,071 underspend for Ayrshire Roads Alliance.

3.11 To date there has still been no notification of any planned funding from the Scottish Government to Local Authorities to deal with Ash Dieback.

4. Detail

4.1 There are now 508 category 4 and 329 category 3 trees. There is an importance of re-surveying annually to assess the progression / deterioration of the trees to the disease, which in turn will determine the Health and Safety risk posed.

4.2 It is proposed that Cabinet approves budget of £140,000 for financial year 2026/27. This would provide the funding to undertake a fourth year of implementing the South Ayrshire Council Ash Dieback Plan. Works for 2026/27 would focus on.

- Undertake a re-survey of the remaining trees to record their category and their risk factor;
- Completion of priority works within Golf Courses; and
- Continue to focus on Cat. 3 & 4 trees.

4.3 It is also proposed that Cabinet approves funding of £70,000 for the continuation of the Ayrshire Roads Alliance works to allow for re-inspection of all adopted 'A' and 'B' class roads within South Ayrshire and removal of trees within road limits that pose a risk to our road network.

5. Legal and Procurement Implications

5.1 If South Ayrshire Council were found not to have fulfilled its duty of care under the Occupiers' Liability (Scotland) Act 1960, the local authority could be held liable for injury or damage caused as a result. A failure to mitigate the risks posed by Ash Dieback could also result in criminal prosecution caused by a failure to adhere to obligations imposed by Health and Safety Legislation.

5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Ayrshire Roads Alliance require the projected £10,071 underspend for 2025/26 carried forward to financial year 2026/27.

6.2 The continuation of the Ash Dieback plan will require funding of £0.210m. Members are requested to approve earmarking of £0.210m of the HOD Directorate underspend of £0.601m as Reported to Cabinet of 20 January as part of the Budget Management – Revenue Budgetary Control 2025/26 – Position at 30 November 2025 Report to meet this cost and note that the Period 10 Revenue Budget Management report will be updated accordingly to incorporate this earmarking request.

7. Human Resources Implications

7.1 There will be a requirement to contract in an arboriculture team to assist in the delivery of the Ash Dieback Plan.

8. Risk

8.1 *Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations*

8.1.1 There is a risk that the Council will not be able to fund the required action and recovery plan over the next 5 years without financial support from the Scottish Government.

8.2 *Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations*

8.2.1 There is a risk that in rejecting this proposal the Council will fail to deal with a known health and safety risk within its assets that could have serious or fatal consequences breaching its duty of care. If South Ayrshire Council were found not to have fulfilled its duty of care under the Occupiers' Liability (Scotland) Act 1960, the local authority could be held liable for injury or damage caused as a result. A failure to mitigate the risks posed by Ash Dieback could also result in criminal prosecution caused by a failure to adhere to obligations imposed by Health and Safety Legislation

8.2.2 There is a risk that the Council would fail to manage one of the actions identified on the Council Risk Register.

9. Integrated Impact Assessment (incorporating Equalities)

Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) considers the following areas:

- Public Sector Equality Duty, Human Rights and Fairer Scotland Duty;
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC);
- Sustainability, climate change and biodiversity;
- Potential impact on older people;
- Rural communities;
- Health and wellbeing;
- A trauma informed organisation; and
- The Promise.

9.1 The proposal is in relation to day-to-day operations or maintenance of existing assets therefore an Integrated Impact Assessment is not required.

10. Sustainable Development Implications

10.1 ***Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*** Given the urgency of situation from a Health and Safety perspective an SEA will be developed to mitigate the loss of the trees and the associated biodiversity and environmental loss.

11. Options Appraisal

11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

12. Link to Council Plan

12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to the Council strategic objective of Spaces and Places 'Play Sport and Recreation' and Civic and Community Pride 'Pride in South Ayrshire'.

13. Link to Shaping Our Future Council Yes No

13.1 Not applicable.

14. Results of Consultation

14.1 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Alec Clark, Council Depute Leader and Policy Lead for Commercial/ Operational Services, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

15. Next Steps for Decision Tracking Purposes

15.1 If the recommendations above are approved by Members, the Depute Chief Executive and Director of Housing, Operations and Development will ensure that all necessary steps are taken to ensure full implementation of the decision within the following timescales, with the completion status reported to the Leadership Panel in the 'Council and Leadership Panel Decision Log' at each of its meetings until such time as the decision is fully implemented:

<i>Implementation</i>	<i>Due date</i>	<i>Managed by</i>
Undertake implementation of Ash Dieback Plan and report progress annually	January 2027	Service Lead – Neighbourhood Services/ Head of ARA

Background Papers Report by to Cabinet of 14 March 2023 – [Ash Dieback](#)
Report to Cabinet of 16 January 2024 – [Ash Dieback](#)
Report to Cabinet of 18 February 2025 – [Ash Dieback – Update Report](#)

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Date: 21 January 2026

Ash Dieback Categories

Category 1 - 100%-76% remaining canopy



Category 2 - 75%-51% remaining canopy



Category 3 - 50%-26% remaining canopy



Category 4 - 25%-0% remaining canopy

