



Press release: 01/10/23

Ash Dieback - woodman spare that tree

Is clear felling really the best strategy to combat ash dieback when there is growing evidence that mature ash can survive infection (see References)? At a recent woodland seminar (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0-WxVi_fZI) Vikki Bengtsson, a researcher and recently-appointed chair of the Ancient Tree Forum, found that very few mature trees actually die from the disease. Her research suggests that avoidance of tree surgery on older trees and maybe pollarding in younger trees gives them a chance to recover and grow.

Many advisory bodies already quote survival rates of all trees of up to 30% (Forestry Commission, Forest Research, Tree Council, Woodland Trust, Association of Public Service Excellence to name just a few). And the numbers of fatalities seem to be decreasing each year. The government's own research body - Forest Research - makes clear recommendations:

- With the exceptions of felling for public safety or timber production, **we advise a general presumption against felling living ash trees, whether infected or not.**
- They go on to say: there is **good evidence that a proportion will tolerate infection.** And that proportion is growing!
- Even better, they note that : a proportion of **trees become diseased, but then recover to good health.**

Even the Forestry Commission recommends keeping as many as possible where there is no danger to life or property. Pollarding or crown reduction might be a better option*.

The danger of felling as the only control for ash dieback is that the end result is the worse than leaving trees to die naturally, leading to the loss of one of our most important native trees from our woodlands, countryside, streets and gardens. We will do untold damage to unique ecosystems with unknown ecological impacts with knock on effects for people, wildlife and landscapes. And we leave no individuals or stands where resistance might develop.

Many of us are in a privileged position of being out in our native woodlands regularly and most of us probably know enough to be able to recognise the presence of die back in our woods, villages, gardens, streets. We can do something to help: Join the Living Ash Project where you can report the condition of trees that you see regularly. In this way perhaps one of us can be the one to identify a resistant individual or stand which will lead to the conservation and restoration of one of our most iconic and important native trees. <https://livingashproject.org.uk/reportatree/>

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* See References