

Perching Wood; Ash Dieback woodland restoration project

Woodland restoration works are planned at Perching Wood, this note provides background to the forthcoming works to restore an area of local woodland infected by ash die back disease.

Ash dieback is a disease caused by the *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* fungus, it has been present on the continent for a long time and was first discovered in the UK around 15 years ago. Based on experience on the continent, experts now expect that up to 95% of ash trees in the UK will eventually succumb and die.

The fungal disease first becomes obvious as the leaves on the extremities of the tree start to wilt and turn black as they die. This is where the name 'dieback' is derived from. As the trees ability to photosynthesise is reduced, it becomes stressed and is then open to attack from a host of secondary infections which often accelerate the trees terminal decline. Once dying and dead, the limbs, branches and whole tree will start to rapidly decay and collapse, the result being a serious risk to life and property. Despite intensive and prolonged research, there is no hard evidence that this disease can be cured.

In order to maintain healthy woodland conditions, the recommended course of action is to carefully fell the infected trees and replant them with a mixture of species of broadleaved disease resistant trees and shrubs. This is the course of action that is being undertaken in Perching Wood, where advanced ash dieback has decimated the canopy of the woodland. Woodland operations have been planned to be undertaken outside of the nesting and breeding season for other species and whilst ground conditions are firm enough for timber extraction.

Perching Wood has a perimeter of other native broadleaves not threatened by ash dieback including oak, field maple, birch, hazel hawthorn and alder. These will be sensitively retained in the landscape to minimise the impact of the ash removal. The felled area will be replanted this autumn with a mixture of species that will be supplemented by coppice regrowth and naturally regenerating tree and shrubs.

The works will be completed this autumn and are part of a long term woodland plan developed by woodland management specialist Mike Chapman (Pryor and Rickett Silviculture) with input, approval and licenses from the Forestry Commission, Natural England and the South Downs National Park.

Mike Chapman

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Email: Mike@silviculture.co.uk

Telephone: 07388b940 062