Agenda item 6c

Dear Clerk,

Please forgive the impersonal title, but I am contacting all Town Councils in Shropshire with the same email.

I am writing as an exploratory email to ask whether as a Town Council you have considered the possible impacts of Ash Die Back disease (ADB) within your Council’s area. Ash is one of the most common trees within our towns and countryside and ADB is expected to kill at least 75% of the ash trees in England. It will have an impact greater than that of Dutch Elm Disease, in terms of numbers of trees disappearing from our streets, gardens, parks, fields, hedgerows and woodlands. More information about the disease can be found here:

<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/pest-and-disease-resources/ash-dieback-hymenoscyphus-fraxineus/>

The vast of majority of ash trees are in private ownership, but your Council may own land with a number of ash trees on it. As trees become infected and start to die they may present a risk to people or property which necessitates remedial safety works. Depending upon the type and quantity of work involved, and considering factors such as ease of access, the potential needs for specialist equipment, traffic management measures and highway licenses etc, the cost could vary from a few hundred pounds to  thousands of pounds per tree. This could obviously have significant consequences for your Council’s budgets. As well as the direct financial cost, you also need to consider the administrative burden of dealing with potentially multiple cases of tree works and the enquiries / claims from the public and affected parties.

ADB is already present and becoming increasingly prevalent throughout Shropshire and we need to take action now to prepare for its impact. For example, does your Council have an idea of the numbers of ash trees on or potentially affecting your land? Have you made any assessment of the risk that the trees may pose, based on the consequences of whole tree, or partial tree, failure? (The risk depends in part upon the nature of the ‘target’ that may be struck by a failing tree or branch – the type of land use, frequency of occupancy, value of property etc. If there is no target, there is no risk).

I am interested in developing a county wide network or Forum of key local stakeholders to come together to agree a co-ordinated, measured and proportionate response to ADB within Shropshire – raising awareness, sharing and disseminating information and developing ADB Action and Recovery Plans as appropriate. I am initially contacting Town Councils throughout the county, both because you are likely to have landholding of your own with possibly significant numbers of ash trees on it and also because you might already have established networks with neighbouring Parish Councils which could be used to communicate wider.

At this stage I am merely asking the question as to whether your Council would be interested in engaging with a possible ADB Forum, which I hope could be fairly quickly established to meet  ‘virtually’ (at least initially) via a conference call type mechanism. If so, I would be grateful if you could let me know at your soonest convenience and ideally nominate a contact for further correspondence.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Martin

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