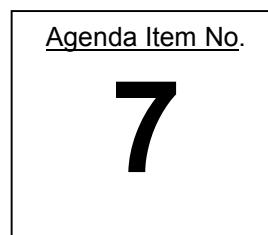


## HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**AUDIT COMMITTEE  
WEDNESDAY, 30 NOVEMBER 2016 AT 10.15 AM**



### **RISK FOCUS REPORT – TREE HEALTH**

*Report of the Chief Executive & Director of Environment*

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Service (Tel: 01992 556028)

Executive Member/s:- D A Ashley, Environment, Planning and Transport

#### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To provide further information regarding the risk and associated controls recorded on the Hertfordshire County Council Corporate Risk Register relating to Tree Health, specifically ENV0142; Chalara Ash Die Back and a number of other tree health issues have the potential to impact on the future of trees and woodlands in the County.

#### **2. Summary**

- 2.1 The Audit Committee has requested a report on the above risk, the assessment and rating of this risk and the controls in place to minimise or avoid its occurrence. These are summarised in Appendix 1 to the report along with a description of the risk and its possible consequences.
- 2.2 There is currently no way to effectively stop the spread or treat/cure Ash Dieback, and it is already present in the county, so the likelihood of a significant impact is almost certain. Other tree health issues exist such as Oriental Chestnut Gall Wasp, Oak Processionary Moth and old age and others are visible on the horizon, necessitating the County Council to refine its approach to tree management.
- 2.3 The County Council has a significant number of trees growing on land within its ownership or for which it has a management responsibility. There is a risk of a large number of these trees being affected which may result in significant unplanned costs, potential dangers to the public and/or service users, impacts on the landscape and loss of biodiversity.

- 2.4 There is a public health risk associated with the tree health issues that are the subject of this Corporate Risk Assessment. The council's Public Health Department are engaged in assessing and responding to this.
- 2.5 To date, the indication from government is that there will be no financial help available to deal with the problem.

### **3. Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Audit Committee is invited to note and comment on the information provided within this report.

### **4. Background**

- 4.1 This risk was first recorded in April 2016. This followed a series of reports to Environment, Economy and Community Safety Cabinet Panel (Nov 2012) and Resources and Performance Cabinet Panel (08 July 2015) on the developing tree health issues faced at a national level and their likely impact for the county and the county council. The Environment, Planning and Transport Cabinet Panel is due to receive a further update report in December 2016.
- 4.2 The UK is currently under threat from an increasing number of tree pests and diseases, due in part to the world trade in plants and plant materials but also possibly exacerbated by climate change providing more suitable conditions for the survival of pathogens.
- 4.3 Two particular tree health issues, Chalara (Ash Dieback) and oak processionary moth (OPM) were the focus of earlier reports. However, it was recommended that the implications of these two should be considered against the backdrop of the increasing risk from a wider collective of plant pathogens as well as other pest species and climate change.
- 4.4 In late June 2015 Oriental Chestnut Gall Wasp (OCGW) was identified by a member of the public as being present in an Hertfordshire County Council owned roadside verge in St Albans. The Forestry Commission (FC) contacted the County Council and St Albans District Council, issuing the County Council with both a containment notice and a Statutory Plant Health Notice. The OCGW is responsible for forming galls on sweet chestnut trees which can lead them to become weakened and more vulnerable to other diseases. The wasp was found to be present in 6 of 9 trees and all of the trees were removed at a cost to Hertfordshire County Council of around £52,000.
- 4.5 As reported to the July 2016 Highways Cabinet Panel, the Environment Department is responsible for the maintenance of approximately 150,000 trees on the public highway (highway trees) approximately 142,000 of these are located within urban areas and have been surveyed. The vast majority of trees seen from the road in rural areas

are not highway trees, albeit Hertfordshire County Council has an interest in those which are in falling distance of the highway.

- 4.6 Some Districts and Boroughs undertake tree management on behalf of the highways department under an Agency Agreement. Condition survey and maintenance form a component of each agreement.
- 4.7 The 3,000km of Rights of Way (RoW) have also been considered in relation to this risk. Trees, where present, are usually located adjacent to rather than within any RoW, where it may otherwise form an obstruction. Trees located on land adjoining the highway, whilst not the responsibility of the authority, will be of interest to Hertfordshire County Council where they are in falling distance of the RoW.
- 4.8 The County Council also owns land on which trees grow for which its Property Department is responsible. This includes but is not restricted to 'in use' and 'out of use' as well as tenanted land (generally held for the purposes of agriculture).
- 4.9 An internal audit on Hertfordshire County Council's Tree management issued in March 2016 gave a moderate level of assurance and made a number of medium and merits attention recommendations to improve the risk. These are followed up by Shard IAS and a summary is included in their update report to this Committee
- 4.10 Through the damage caused to the trees by various pathogens, this can leave them weakened and more susceptible to falling and damaging property and causing serious injuries.
- 4.11 OPM is a non-native insect that may defoliate oak trees, leaving them vulnerable to other pests, diseases and environmental stresses. The caterpillars have thousands of hairs which contain a toxin, thaumetopoein. This can cause highly irritating skin rashes and, less commonly, sore throat, breathing difficulty and eye problems.

## **5. Supporting information**

- 5.1 As a result of the report to Resources and Performance Cabinet Panel (08 July 2015) a number of recommendations were agreed. These have formed the basis for the controls subsequently set out in the Corporate Risk Register.
- 5.2 The Corporate Risk is owned within the Environment Department by the Assistant Director for Transport, Waste and Environmental Management. However, controls are coordinated by staff responsible for Property, Highways, Hertfordshire Business Services and Countryside Management Service.

- 5.3 Controls set out within the Corporate Risk are intended to reduce the impact of the tree health issues faced. Prevention is not a realistic option or strategy. They focus on a number of strategic approaches.
- a. Ensuring that Hertfordshire is aware of current issues as these develop.
  - b. Establishing a tree health network for Hertfordshire and ensuring it is informed of these developments.
  - c. Informing the local community of prevention and symptom information where OPM is present, through Public Health colleagues, tailoring regional press information to the local context.
  - d. Completing the Highways asset records update, assessing and planning for the financial implications of Chalara for highways trees.
  - e. Ensuring all departments with tree assets have appropriate tree risk policies and procedures in place that follow good practice.
  - f. Developing and sharing good practice for responding to tree health issues throughout Hertfordshire.
  - g. Working at a national level to lobby for support and assistance in responding to tree health issues in the county, including seeking appropriate financial contributions to offset expenditure.
- 5.4 With the exception of ENVO0142/014 (Work with partners to plan for restoration of the post-ash dieback landscape) which is at an early stage, all of the controls as set out in the table below have been reported through the quarterly Corporate Risk Review Process as In Progress.
- 5.5 Key achievements to date include:
- a. Activity to draw together Hertfordshire County Council tree inspection data and that gathered from the relevant Districts/Boroughs, relating to trees on the maintainable highway is nearing completion. This will enable analysis to inform further survey needs and future service development. £250,000 has been budgeted to survey for and address Ash Dieback, with regard to the location of tree stock in relation to people or property on the public highway.
  - b. Surveys have been undertaken across County Council non-highway property in Hertsmere (most heavily wooded area in property portfolio). The results are being analysed and works planned and scheduled. All County Council occupied property has been scheduled and Lambert Smith Hampton is working on a survey programme for Corporately Managed Properties.
  - c. The Highways Land Boundary Team, together with Property colleagues has reviewed over 70% of the land held by Hertfordshire County Council adjacent to the managed Highway to ascertain land management responsibilities. The work will complete by March 2017. Fifteen small land parcels (2.5%) have been identified as Property lands rather than Highways to date. There is no evidence that this percentage will rise.

- d. Property has updated the Schools Grid with information regarding schools responsibilities for the management of trees within their boundaries.
- e. £50,000 has been budgeted to enable CMS to lead the County Council tree health network, manage information gathering, enable training in tree risk surveying, attendance at conferences, and maintain regular contact with regional and national policy makers.

CMS have also:

- o Established a Hertfordshire County Council Tree Health Network and provided regular updates on tree health issues as they develop. A wider network has also been developed engaging with tree officers, greenspace managers and representatives from appropriate 3<sup>rd</sup> sector organisations.
- o Created a public facing web based information hub on tree health issues in Hertfordshire, updating when new information is acquired. This will move to the new Hertfordshire.gov.uk web site later in the year <http://www.hertslink.org/cms/treehealth/>
  - f. Letters have been written by the Chairman of the Performance and Resources Cabinet Panel (Cllr C Haywood) to Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Forestry Commission and Local Government Association raising concerns and requesting support.

5.6 The Forestry Commission's interactive map shows recorded and confirmed infection sites now across the majority of England, Wales and Scotland. In 2015 recorded sites were generally restricted to the East and South of the United Kingdom. Nationally, a significant number of research projects are underway, funded by Defra and others. These aim to establish strains of Ash that exhibit some resistance to Chalara infection. In the longer term it is hoped that this work will provide a seed source for replacement planting. Evidence from Denmark suggests that around 1% of Ash is demonstrating increased resistance.

5.7 Communication between this council and the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2015 raised up their agenda the threat posed to Local Authority budgets by tree health issues. A subsequent national media release from the LGA in turn raised this threat in the context of already stretched budgets and show cased the work undertaken by Hertfordshire County Council to date to address the risk  
[http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/7520588/NEWS](http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/7520588/NEWS)

## Appendix 1.

<b>CORPORATE RISK REGISTER</b>		
<b>Risk Number</b>	<b>Risk Owner</b>	<b>Department</b>
ENV0142	Simon Aries	Environment
<b>Date risk first included on risk register</b>	<b>Risk treatment (response) to manage the risk</b>	<b>Executive Member</b>
01/04/2016	Reduce	Derrick Ashley
<p><b>Short description of the risk</b>            Chalara Ash Die Back and a number of other tree health issues have the potential to impact on the future of trees and woodlands in the County. There is currently no way to effectively stop the spread or treat/cure Chalara Ash Dieback, and it is already present in locations across Hertfordshire.</p> <p><b>Consequences of the risk</b>            There are high numbers of Ash trees across the county. Evidence from the continent is that a considerable percentage will succumb with significant cost implications for individuals, landowners and local authorities. There is also a risk to human health most particularly associated with trees on highway land or on privately owned land adjacent to the highway. Other tree health issues such as Oak Processionary Moth pose a lesser risk to human health.</p>		
<p><b>Current controls</b></p> <p><b>ENV0142/001</b>            Raising awareness of the issues including Tree Health pages on website; articles in relevant publications; engagement with partners</p> <p><b>ENV0142/002</b>            Establishing extent and potential liability of ash tree population on Highways Hertfordshire County Council is responsible to manage</p> <p><b>ENV0142/003</b>            Monitoring of the national and local tree health situation and specialist advice to feed into plans and actions</p> <p><b>ENV0142/004</b>            Developing a framework for sharing best practice including the county council's internal Tree Health Network</p> <p><b>ENV0142/005</b>            Lobbying the government for support and assistance in responding to the tree health issue in the county</p> <p><b>ENV0142/006</b>            Identify the financial pressures and secure resources through the Integrated Planning Process where appropriate</p> <p><b>ENV0142/007</b>            Establish extent and potential liability of tree population on non-Highway HCC land including Property Hertfordshire County Council is responsible to manage</p>		

**ENV0142/008**

Develop and undertake a coordinated approach across Hertfordshire to deliver a cost effective, proportionate, efficient response

**ENV0142/009**

Appropriate tree inspection regimes on highway land; summer inspections; staff trained to identify symptoms of relevant diseases

**ENV0142/010**

Appropriate tree inspection regimes – Hertfordshire County Council land; staff trained to identify disease

**ENV0142/011**

Raise awareness and share best practice amongst public, staff, schools (Schools Grid), including to employ a 2 year Tree Health Officer

**ENV0142/012**

Ensure all relevant departments in the county council have appropriate tree risk policies and procedures in place

**ENV0142/013**

Development of a plant procurement protocol for HCC

**ENV0142/014**

Work with partners to plan for restoration of the post-ash dieback landscape

**Current Risk score based on effectiveness of current controls**

<b>Probability score:</b>	<b>Impact score:</b>	<b>Overall score:</b>
5 - Almost certain	8 –High	40 - Severe

**Reason for inclusion on Corporate Register**

The risk met the corporate risk criteria; in particular there are significant financial and public health implications.

**Direction of travel (overall risk score for previous three quarters)**

N/A	40	40
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**Target risk score**

<b>Probability score:</b>	<b>Impact score:</b>	<b>Overall score:</b>
5 – Almost certain	4 – Medium	20 – Significant