

## **Supporting Local Woodlands**

Over the coming months, Forestry England will be carrying out a range of forestry tasks at three local woods - Micheldever Woods, Itchen Woods and Blackwood Forest. The measures are designed to help the woodlands respond to a number of challenges including climate change, pests and diseases, and the need to encourage more natural tree regeneration.

Like many other areas around the country, these local woodlands have all been affected by chalara, or ash die back as it is more commonly known. This disease, caused by a fungus, blocks the tree's water transport system with devastating effects. It spreads via spores blown by the wind and that can travel at least 10 miles.

Chalara ash die back was first discovered in the UK in 2012 and evidence suggests that it could lead to the loss of around 60 -180 million ash trees across the UK. Ash trees represent 12% of broadleaf woodland in the UK and there are a further 60m ash trees outside of woodlands in UK. Almost 1000 wildlife species are associated with ash trees and rely on these trees for food or shelter.

Ash die back has been identified in woodland at Micheldever, Itchen and Blackwood Forest. Ash trees affected by this disease that have become unstable or are cause for concern will be felled and removed from the areas. Removing these trees not only helps to make the woodlands safer, but also helps to manage the spread of the disease and allows more light into the forest to help new, healthier and more diverse native trees to grow.

Michael Ullman, Forester for the area with Forestry England, said; "We closely monitor our woodlands for cases of ash die back and where necessary remove badly affected trees. Doing this helps us to control the spread of this disease and to ensure our woodlands remain safe for everyone using them. Finding ash die back doesn't mean we have to take out every ash tree. Those trees showing tolerance are kept and

monitored, and the gaps left by felling will benefit those young seedlings on the forest floor by giving them more light and space to grow."

At Micheldever Wood, works are also being done to encourage the next generation of Oak trees to thrive in this ancient woodland. Small areas of the woods will be selectively thinned to allow more light to reach the forest floor to stimulate and support seedling trees. Oak being removed from the woods will be cut by hand and left in situ until next summer in order to limit any disruption to the natural habitat and local archaeology. Similar thinning will take place at Itchen Wood to encourage the natural regeneration of Beech trees.

Whilst these works are being done, for safety reasons there will be some closures of paths within the wood and on waymarked trails. These will be clearly signposted and marked.

Visitors can also do their bit to help local woodlands. Forestry England's 'Keep it Clean' campaign encourages us all to be mindful to clean our dogs, buggies, bikes and feet each time we visit a woodland, lessening the potential for spreading infections like chalara.

Forestry authorities are also keen to get reports of possible sightings of ash die back in areas not yet recorded. This will help them get a full picture of the spread of the disease. Sightings can be reported at <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/tree-alert/>

For more information about Forestry England's operations in the local area please contact [southern.reception@forestryengland.uk](mailto:southern.reception@forestryengland.uk)