ASH DIEBACK IN PITCHCOMBE

The first symptoms of Ash Dieback were observed in Poland & Lithuania in the early 1990s but were not apparent in the UK until February 2012. It seems that it may have come in trees imported from Europe and/or by heavy weather from that direction.

However it arrived, it seems quite clear that it is now here in the Cotswolds and this will significantly affect the landscape as recent trials and experience suggest that 98% of ash trees have some susceptibility to the disease.

Of particular concern are ash trees in public places, especially highways which are estimated to have several million ash trees alongside them many of which are, of course, adjacent to private property and buildings.

Pitchcombe has its share with several ash trees prominent in the lane round the village including a few close to power lines that complicate the issue further. The ash tree at the junction of Halfway Pitch and Lurks Lane is an obvious example.

Diagnosis is one problem particularly at this time of year: dealing with it is quite another as the very brittle timber, as well as the propensity for rot in the lower stem, means a chainsaw operator is at risk of being hit by stems reacting in unpredictable ways. This creates an incentive to reduce the risk by felling before infection takes hold. For this reason landowners are being advised that it may be prudent to remove ash trees in particularly vulnerable locations without waiting for adverse diagnosis.

Hopefully the 2% that are expected to survive may eventually facilitate the development of a new generation of disease-resistant ash trees to complement all the other species that can fill the gap in the shorter term.

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