

Media Release: 21/03/24

## Derbyshire Ash Trees Playing Vital Role in Protecting Species

### Samples collected by Natural England will protect trees species from ash dieback.

Ash tree samples from Derbyshire woodlands are being collected by Natural England as part of a national project to protect the tree species from being devastated by disease.

Natural England is playing a key role in helping secure the future of the ash tree by supporting the Living Ash Project. Including Future Trees Trust, the project is collecting samples of ash that show resistance to ash dieback.

Ash dieback is a fungus which originated in Asia and its introduction about 30 years ago has devastated the European ash. The disease is predicted to kill up to 80% of ash trees across the UK, changing the landscape forever and threatening many species which rely on ash.

Future Trees Trust is collecting samples from across the country to grow in its national archives including ash trees which show high tolerance to ash dieback. The samples will be used for breeding work, field trials and genetic research.

So far more than 1000 tolerant ash trees have been sampled and planted within a public forest estate in Hampshire to start the first national archive.

The Trust is now gathering more samples from ash trees, showing a strong tolerance to ash dieback in the Derbyshire Dales and asked woodland site managers to keep track of any ash trees on their sites, where samples could be collected. This included sites in the Peak District Dales, owned by the National Trust and Chatsworth Estate.

The sample collection in Derbyshire was supported by Natural England's LIFE in the Ravines partnership, which is using EU LIFE funding to restore ravine woodlands in the Peak District Dales Special Area of Conservation (SAC), which is dominated by infected ash trees.

So far, the project has planted over 51,000 trees across the Peak District Dales SAC, restoring ravine woodlands in areas including the iconic five dales of the Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve, such as the well-visited Lathkill.

### Neil Ford, Wooded Habitats Specialist at Natural England, said:

*“Ash Dieback is having a devastating impact across the country and on the ash dominated ancient woodlands of the Peak District Dales. The LIFE in the Ravines Project Partnership has been working hard to secure the future of these sensitive habitats through a systematic approach to replacing the thinning ash canopy with native trees species that once thrived in these special places.*

*Working together with the Living Ash Project, they've been able to use their extensive site knowledge to support Future Trees Trust to collect samples from trees*

*less susceptible to the disease. This is a fantastic collaboration that means one day we will be able to reintroduce disease resistant ash back into the iconic limestone dales of the Peak District”.*

**Leon Hayward, Lead Ranger for National Trust in the White Peak, and LIFE in the Ravines partner, said:**

*“Ash dieback has severely impacted many of the woodlands in our care, including the much-loved woods of Dovedale National Nature Reserve. For years, we have been working to create healthier woodlands of the future in a variety of different ways.*

*As part of that, it’s great to help the Living Ash Project select and collect samples, so we can monitor potentially tolerant ash trees”.*

While the Life in the Ravines project is removing some of the infected ash trees to replace with a diverse mix of healthy tree species, the project team is also keeping track of any trees showing signs of tolerance to ash dieback, with an aim to protect a population of ash trees in the Dales.

A total of nine trees were identified on the heavily affected SAC, as they showed strong resistance to the disease. Samples from these trees were collected by Future Trees Trust, with support from the LIFE in the Ravines site team.

To be confident that the ash trees chosen for testing were exposed to the disease, the Trust’s team looked for ash trees within woodland sites heavily dominated by infected ash. A list of tolerant ash trees was compiled after five years of searching, ready for sampling earlier this year.

**John Everitt, Forestry Manager at Chatsworth Estate and LIFE in the Ravines partner, said:**

*“Both in the SAC and at other Derbyshire sites, we’ve been tracking the damage caused by ash dieback. As a follower of the Living Ash Project, we were more than happy to help Future Trees Trust collect samples from our sites. We’re excited to hear more about the project’s next steps and welcome the opportunity to offer further support”.*

Samples collected across the country, will be grafted on up to 5,000 trees to be planted at both the Hampshire archive and a newly created site in Scotland. As a result of monitoring and testing their planted trees, they hope to create a more sustainable ash population in the UK, helping woodland managers preserve their sites.

**Dr Jo Clark, Head of Research at Future Trees Trust said:**

*“In order to find the right trees and collect samples for our breeding program, we’ve worked with site managers from many different organisations. Collaboration with*



*others including LIFE in the Ravines has been brilliant and shows how important it is to share knowledge and resources between projects”.*

With so many projects hoping to protect and conserve ash trees for the future, it's important we all work together and support each other through resource and knowledge sharing, to give us all the best chance of success. This will help ensure that ash trees remain a part of our environment for years to come, securing their survival in an uncertain future.

The Living Ash Project is DEFRA funded and involves many organisations including Forest Research, Future Trees Trust, Royal Botanical Gardens Kew, Fera and Natural England.

For more information on the Living Ash Project visit <https://www.futuretrees.org/>

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**For comment and media opportunities, contact:**

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**Images and Video: Single use only**



Future Trees Trust employee, collecting samples on Derbyshire sites. Photo taken by Natural England.

.....Additional Notes for Editor.....

**LIFE in the Ravines – The Project**

This £5m partnership project, led by Natural England, is restoring 876ha of *Tilio-Acerion* (ravine) woodland within the Peak District Dales Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This is 16% of the UK's ravine woodland, a European Priority Habitat. All the project sites are now heavily infected with ash dieback caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, which usually leads to tree death. Without intervention, in some areas the whole woodland would be lost. LIFE in the Ravines will replant trees historically found in the woods such as *Tilia cordata* (small leaved lime), *Tilia platyphyllos* (large leaved lime) and *Ulmus glabra* (wych elm), alongside others such as *Populus tremula* (aspen) and *Salix* (willow). The woods are too far from seed sources for these species to rely on natural regeneration. The project will also seek to retain ash in the woods.



## Project Partners

Project partners are the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, the National Trust and the Chatsworth Estate.

The project will also work with the Peak District National Park, Derbyshire Dales District Council, the Forestry Commission, and the Woodland Trust.

## EU LIFE Funding

The EU's LIFE fund had agreed to support this £5 million project prior to the UK's exit from the EU. EU LIFE has given £3.6 million funding. The rest of the funding has come from project partners and supporters.

## About Natural England

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide.

Within England, Natural England is responsible for:

- Promoting nature conservation and protecting biodiversity
- Conserving and enhancing the landscape
- Securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment
- Promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open-air recreation
- Contributing in other ways to social and economic well-being through management of the natural environment
- Find out more on Natural England's website and follow us on Twitter: @NaturalEngland
- Natural England leads several other ambitious conservation projects that have benefitted from LIFE funding. These include Dynamic Dunescapes, working to restore sand dunes across the UK; and LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES, saving seagrass and other delicate underwater habitats around our coasts.

## About Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, a Registered Charity, is the only organisation working to protect all wildlife across the county. We are one of 47 in The Wildlife Trusts Partnership, a nationwide network of local trusts. We manage 47 nature reserves



throughout Derbyshire, advise local authorities and landowners on nature conservation issues and run a range of conservation and education projects. We are committed to The Wildlife Trusts' strategy of creating Living Landscapes – robust, connected landscapes that address the challenges facing our wildlife and countryside. Find out more at [www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.derbyshirewildlifetrust.org.uk)

### **About Staffordshire Wildlife Trust**

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, a registered charity, is the leading nature conservation body in the County of Staffordshire. It protects and enhances our wildlife and wild places and promotes involvement, enjoyment and understanding of the natural world. With the support of over 17,000 members, it manages 31 sites covering over 4,000 acres including sites of international, European and national importance. As part of The Wildlife Trusts, the Trust is the local face of the largest organisation in the UK concerned with the conservation of all forms of wildlife.

### **About Chatsworth Estate**

Chatsworth is home to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire and is located in the Peak District National Park. The house, many of its contents and much of the surrounding landscape are leased to a registered charity, the Chatsworth House Trust. The Duke and Duchess pay rent to the charity to live at Chatsworth and work with the charity and others to welcome Chatsworth's visitors. Every penny of visitor admission goes directly to the Chatsworth House Trust, which is dedicated to the long-term preservation of Chatsworth House, the collections, garden, woodlands and park for the long-term benefit of the public. The charity promotes the study and appreciation of Chatsworth as a place of historic, architectural, and artistic interest and of natural beauty, and encourages the use and enjoyment of Chatsworth by visitors for education and recreation.

### **About the National Trust**

The National Trust is a conservation charity founded in 1895 by three people, Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley who saw the importance of the nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. The Trust has committed to achieving carbon net zero emissions by 2030 and establish 20 million trees to help tackle climate change, creating green corridors for people and nature near towns and cities, running a year-long campaign to connect people with nature and continuing investment in arts and heritage. Ensuring everyone who visits feels welcome, and more people can access its places continues to be another key aspect of the charity's work. Entirely independent of Government, the National Trust looks after more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 780 miles of coastline and hundreds of special places across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The National Trust receives more than 26.9 million



visits each year to the places it cares for that have an entry fee, and an estimated 100 million visits to the outdoor places looked after by the charity. Together with 5.9 million members and more than 65,000 volunteers, they help to support the conservation charity in its work to care for nature, beauty, history. For everyone, for ever.

### .....Additional Information.....

To find out more about LIFE in the Ravines:

- [WWW.LIFEintheRavines/Storymap](http://WWW.LIFEintheRavines/Storymap)
- [www.LIFEintheRavines.co.uk](http://www.LIFEintheRavines.co.uk)
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