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Mr Cliff Jordan
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Dear Mr Jordan,

Thank you for your letter of 12 April to the Permanent Secretary about ash dieback disease. I have been asked to reply.

Defra has been managing ash dieback based on science, international best practice and the advice of the UK Chief Plant Health Officer. We have invested over £37 million into tree health research and have been conducting screening trials to identify a disease-tolerant strain of ash trees. Where there is a limited risk to safety of the general public, we do not advocate the immediate removal of infected ash trees, as they continue to provide recreational and biodiversity benefits for some time as well as playing a vital role in protecting our environment for example, through providing habitats for our native wildlife.

Support is available for some landowners for the replacement of infected ash trees with alternative species in woodland situations under the Countryside Stewardship scheme, subject to grant conditions being met. JNCC has published advice on which tree species landowners could select when restocking, in order to maintain the same level of environmental benefits. Other organisations such, as the Woodland Trust, are offering free 'disease recovery packs' of native trees for this purpose. Alongside this we have funded research to develop tolerant strains of ash trees.

In response to health and safety issues in non-woodland situations, we convened an ash dieback taskforce with a number of key stakeholders and local authorities to develop action plans for local authorities to aid planning and preparedness. We would particularly like to thank Norfolk County Council for its input and support as an active member of the taskforce.

Yours sincerely,

Joseph Payne
Defra - Ministerial Contact Unit