

GOVERNMENT ARRANGES ASH GRANTS (BUT NOT FOR GOLF COURSES)

The recent Chalara Management Plan released by DEFRA lacks any uniform and equitable assistance for landowners and organisations affected by the disease.

Grants will be given for removal, destruction and disposal of recently planted common ash and replanting with alternative tree species, but this only applies to a selective swathe of counties (Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire and up through the Midlands). The aim is to slow down east to west disease spread and help create a 'chalara free' zone in westernmost England. The Royal Forestry Society describes the plan as a 'postcode lottery' but worse still it excludes the amenity and landscape sector and therefore golf courses.

Simon Ellis, marketing director at Crowders Nurseries in Horncastle Lincolnshire, which currently holds 250,000 healthy ash trees, told Greenkeeper International:

"We are about to destroy the entire stock. They are unsalable and difficult to manage. Many are

up to ten years old which means a decade of investment down the drain with no compensation from government.

"This plan is selective, divisive, inequitable and unfair. Grant aid will only be available to forestry sector landowners with planted ash sites funded under the Rural Development Programme for England. It excludes the amenity and landscape sectors but it is they who buy our larger trees. I don't see why grants should only be given to the 'landed gentry' and withheld from entrepreneurs building and maintaining leisure complexes, golf courses and other sporting facilities."

Small trees planted by big forestry landowners are typically purchased at around 20 pence 'a throw'.

Simon and others in the nursery trade met with Defra and put forward specific plans to assist the amenity and landscape sectors, including golf courses, but this has clearly been ignored.

Dr Terry Mabbett



Grant aid for recently planted ash sites in high priority areas but none at all for golf courses. Courtesy of the Forestry Commission



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