

220 TREES FOR PRISTON IN 2020: A RESPONSE TO ASH DIEBACK

Thanks to everyone who has shown interest in '220 Trees for Priston in 2020'. We are keeping a list of offers of and requests for help. Richard has started a file of pictures on the Priston website showing native and fruit trees planted in Priston so far. Please send your photos. It will be a record of something positive to have happened this year.

The project is a small, local response to the very real Climate Crisis. Among many good reasons for planting more trees, especially since the UK has one of the lowest percentages of tree cover by country in Europe, is ash dieback. There are about 150 million mature ash trees in the UK. It is believed nearly all of them will die. This is not like Dutch elm disease, where young elms start growing only to be got by 'the beetle' eventually. Ash dieback will kill the trees completely. It will have a massive impact on how our countryside looks and on its biodiversity. According to the Woodland Trust, 'Over 1000 native wildlife species use or rely on ash in some way, at least 45 of which depend entirely on it for their survival. Some species are expected to become locally rare or even extinct.' **Ash dieback is here in Priston.**

There are significant ashes in the village: e.g. in Maggie and Howard's garden covering Church Lane and the church gateway; by the Cricket Club gate; in the Manor grounds. There are many large ash trees in Long Wood, the wood beside Lammas Field, and Priston Wood, and in field boundaries and along roads in and out of Priston.

As they have come into leaf this year, it is obvious that many of these trees are already dying. As with Dutch elm disease Priston's landscape will be markedly changed. Planting trees to make the next generations of mature trees seems a positive response to this sad event.

Amongst other things, ash dieback has significant safety and economic implications. Ash trees are prone to shedding limbs or collapsing completely, either directly due to the ash dieback fungus or a secondary pathogen such as honey fungus infecting the weakened tree. Felling the 4 million ash trees lining the UK's roads will be expensive and involve road closures and power and communications outages. The Tree Council UK has suggestions for replacement trees (spot yet another fact about the value of the ashes):

- Ash trees have a big impact on soil quality because their leaves are nutrient and base rich, and decompose rapidly. Alder and lime leaves have similar qualities, as to a lesser extent do sycamore, field maple and aspen. In terms of pollen and nectar production, flowering time, fruit type and tree height, elm is the closest match, followed by birch and rowan.
- Many of the generalist animal species that feed on ash can also be found on oak and beech, along with sycamore, birch and hazel. However, for specialist insects, mosses and lichens, elm is the best substitute, followed by sycamore, aspen, oak and hazel.
- No one species alone can substitute ash. However, aspen, alder, field maple, sycamore, birch, rowan, disease-resistant elm and native oaks are good contenders.

Do let us know if you are interested in this project in any way. Thank you.

Owain

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