

New £5 million project to save woodlands

- The project will restore the ravine woodlands in the Peak District National Park
- The project will tackle ash dieback in the ravines

The future of the beautiful ravine woodlands in the Peak District is looking brighter thanks to £5 million in funding.

The LIFE in the Ravines partnership project, led by Natural England, will tackle the threat that ash dieback poses to the forested river valleys of the Peak District. The project has received £3.6m in funding from the EU LIFE programme, with the remainder coming from project partners.

The Peak District's scenic ravines are treasured by locals and visitors alike, especially during the pandemic where more people have been seeking solace in nature. LIFE in the Ravines will save several woodlands, including the iconic 5 dales of the Derbyshire Dales National Nature Reserve, such as the well-visited Lathkill. All the sites are part of the Peak District Dales Special Area of Conservation, recognised as of international importance.

Lathkill Dale, Peak District

Natural England's chief executive Marian Spain, said:

I'm so pleased that Natural England and its partners are able to work together to support Nature's Recovery. This innovative project will help restore the landscape and wildlife of this much-loved area of the country following the devastation of ash die back. That means people who live and visit the Peak District will be able to appreciate the natural beauty of the woodland habitats once again and for generations to come.

Project partners include the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, the National Trust and the Chatsworth Estate. The project is also working with the Peak District National Park, Derbyshire Dales District Council, the Arkwright Society, the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust.

Ash dieback disease, caused by a fungus lethal to ash trees, arrived in the Peak District in 2015. The ravine forests of the Peak District are dominated by ash, so the whole woodland area could be devastated without intervention. The woods already have high levels of infection and have lost mature trees. The loss of ash threatens all the woodland wildlife, from rare beetles and moths to birds such as redstarts.

LIFE in the Ravines will help 900 hectares of forest survive this threat with a programme of tree planting and woodland management. Small and large-leaved lime and wych elm trees, historically present in the woods, will be planted to step into the spaces left behind when ash trees die. The project won't give up on ash, it will seek out trees that might be resilient to the disease and give a helping hand to natural ash regeneration. Planting aspen, willow and other trees will build resilience and add to the diversity of wildlife in the woods.

The project will pioneer some specialist techniques, including using drones for the first time in the Peak District to aid planting on the steep, rocky slopes of the dales.

The LIFE in the Ravines programme will help these special ravine woodland ecosystems survive beyond ash dieback, thrive into the future and help counter other threats such as climate change and flooding.

The lessons learnt from the programme will be useful for others battling ash dieback across Europe, especially in other ravine woodlands in the UK such as those of the Mendips.

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.

Dave Savage, Derbyshire Wildlife Trust regional manager (Dark and White Peak), said:

We are really excited to be involved in this scheme to reduce the impact of this potentially devastating disease. The woodlands managed by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust in the White Peak are dominated by ash trees meaning we will lose a great deal of our tree cover. LIFE in the Ravines will have a dramatic impact on the wildlife in the woodlands, increasing the diversity of trees but also the biodiversity of the woodlands themselves.

Julian Woolford, chief executive of Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, commented:

At the end of a difficult year we are very excited about the project's funding success. Ash dieback is really hitting hard across the UK. LIFE in the Ravines will make a big difference to protected woodlands across the White Peak.

John Everitt, forestry manager at Chatsworth Estate, added:

We are very excited at Chatsworth about working alongside the other partners on this project to help restore some of the most important

woodlands within the Peak District. We have observed and tracked the rapid decline of these internationally significant habitats over the past 3 years due to the onset on ash dieback. It will be fantastic to help diversify these woodlands and create resilient habitats that will hopefully stand the test of time, benefiting the environment for years to come.

Ian Clemmett, lead ranger for the White Peak Estate, National Trust, said:

It's inevitable we are going to see some big changes in our ash woodlands over the next few years because of ash dieback. LIFE in the Ravines is a tremendous opportunity to tackle those changes and to futureproof our woodlands through careful management. The National Trust is delighted to be a partner in this work, helping to conserve and enhance our woodlands here in the White Peak for the benefit of wildlife and people alike.

Sarah Fowler, chief executive of the Peak District National Park, said:

Ash woodlands in the White Peak are amongst our most cherished places in the Peak District, providing sanctuary not only for wildlife but people too. Such areas have never been more crucial to our wellbeing and 'green recovery' than during the recent months of the pandemic. LIFE in the Ravines will be at the forefront of sustainable and resilient woodlands where there is a very real risk of the landscape picture we have known for generations being dramatically altered in the years ahead. I'm delighted to see so many partners coming together on such a pioneering approach to nature recovery in the National Park.

The River Dove about Ilam Rock

Image credit: National Trust

Notes to editor

- This £5m partnership project, led by Natural England, will restore 876ha of 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 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 aspen *Populus tremula* and willow *Salix* species. 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: the Derbyshire Wildlife Trust, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, the National Trust, the Chatsworth Estate. The project will also work with: Peak District National Park, Derbyshire Dales District Council, the Arkwright Society, the Forestry Commission, the Woodland Trust.

EU LIFE funding

- The EU's LIFE fund has agreed to support this £5 million project prior to the UK's exit from the EU. EU LIFE is giving £3.6 million funding. The rest of the funding will come from project partners and supporters.
- In August 2016, the government guaranteed EU-funded projects where UK organisations bid directly to the European Commission on a competitive basis, while we are still a member of the EU. Where EU LIFE funds are awarded to UK organisations they will be underwritten by the Government, even where projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU.

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

- Media enquiries: contact the media team at Derbyshire Wildlife Trust on 01773 881188.

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

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 3 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. This year, the charity celebrates its 125th anniversary, and these values are still at the heart of everything it does. To help mark this significant moment in its history, the Trust has committed to achieving carbon net zero emissions by 2030, and establishing 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.