

Ash Dieback in West Lothian 2026

Method

The progression of ash dieback disease has been monitored in West Lothian through repeated surveys throughout the county. This year, sites were resurveyed that had previously been surveyed both in 2021 and again in 2023 or 2024. Surveys took place in summer months, mainly June and July, and sites were resurveyed at approximately the same time of year to reduce potential variability caused by the changing seasons. Results were recorded on West Lothian Councils 'Treeplotter' system.

Trees were classified based on the cover of foliage in the canopy, using a system suggested by The Tree Council¹ and widely adapted as a method of monitoring ash decline. 4 classes are used based on the remaining foliage in the canopy, described below, from Class 1 (good condition) to Class 4 (poor condition).

- Ash Health Class 1 – 100 – 75% Canopy
- Ash Health Class 2 – 75% -50% Canopy
- Ash Health Class 3 – 50% - 25% Canopy
- Ash Health Class 4 – 25% - 0% Canopy

When analysing the data, the total number of trees within each canopy score classification was calculated and compared, as well as the change in canopy crown score (e.g. improving from Class 2 to Class 1 or declining from Class 3 to Class 4).

Results

2.1. Climate

It is possible that climate conditions including rainfall and temperature may have influenced tree condition. For example, drought or flooding can increase stress on diseased ash trees or make them more susceptible to the disease. The summer months in 2026 were warmer than average across the UK²

Using weather records from World Weather Online³, average monthly temperatures for Livingston from June-August can be seen in Table 1, along with total rainfall from April – June.

Ash dieback spores are active from June to September and weather at this time may affect the spread of spores. Rainfall between July and September 2025 was 77.3mm, slightly below the long-term average of 84.1 mm. Rainfall from October to December 2025 was 48.4mm, almost half the long-term average of 94.8mm.

¹ <https://treecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Suffolk-Canopy-Description.pdf>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/articles/cn8n9pg54m1o>

³ <https://www.worldweatheronline.com/livingston-weather-averages/west-lothian/gb.aspx>

Table 1. Average temperature and total rainfall in years covered by this report: 2021, 2023, 2024 and 2026

	Average	2021	2023	2024	2026
Average Temperature (June – August)	13°C	14°C	14°C	12°C	15°C
Total Rainfall (April – June)	64.5mm	51.2mm	56.5mm	102.5mm	77.6mm
Total Rainfall (July-Sept)	84.3mm	65.3mm	123.7mm	77.3mm	80.3mm
Total Rainfall in proceeding autumn (July-September)	84.3mm	96.4mm	66.5mm	123.7mm	77.3mm

2.2. Total number of trees within each canopy class

A total of 4027 points were surveyed in 2026. Survey points do not always represent individual trees; some survey points represent groups of ash trees recorded as a single feature within TreePlotter. Out of this total, 3372 points were re-surveyed, having been previously surveyed in 2023 or 2024. A further 655 were surveyed for the first time in 2026.

Out of a total of 4027 ash trees surveyed in 2026, most were Class 1 (Figure 1). The highest percentage of trees surveyed (42%) were Class 1, and the lowest (11%) were Class 3 (Figure 2).

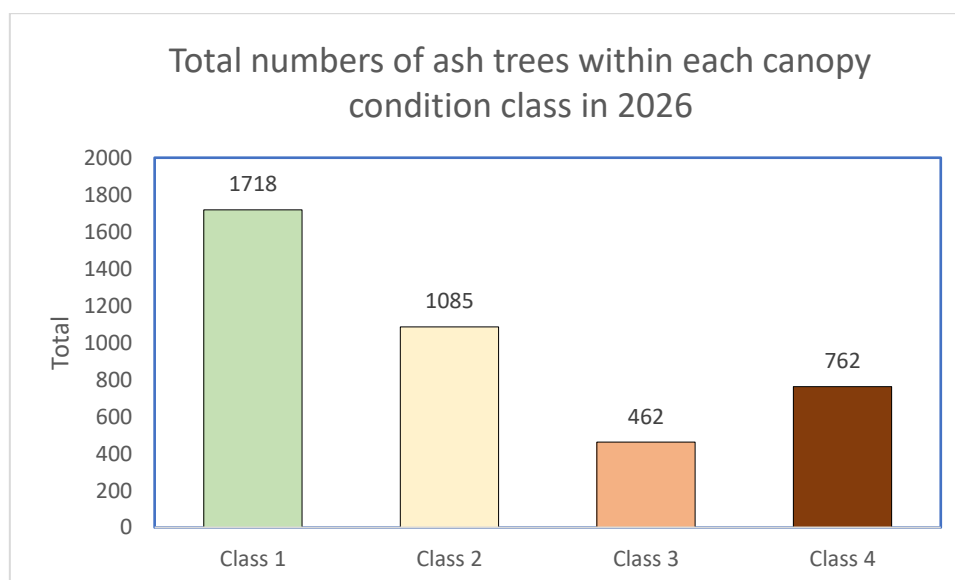


Figure 1 - Total number of ash trees in each canopy classification in 2026

This is the fourth year of a summary report, allowing data from 2026 to be compared to that from previous years. The data collected also gives an opportunity to compare changes in conditions of ash trees within the county over 5 years while previous reports have examined changes over 3 years.

The percentage of trees classified into each canopy condition score each year from 2021 to 2026 can be seen in Figure 2. There is some variability in the percentage of trees within each condition class, but the majority of ash trees were consistently classified as either Class 1 or 2. The highest percentage of trees were classified as Class 1 (good condition) in each year from 2021 to 2026. Around a third of trees are classified as either Class 3 or 4 (poor condition) each year.

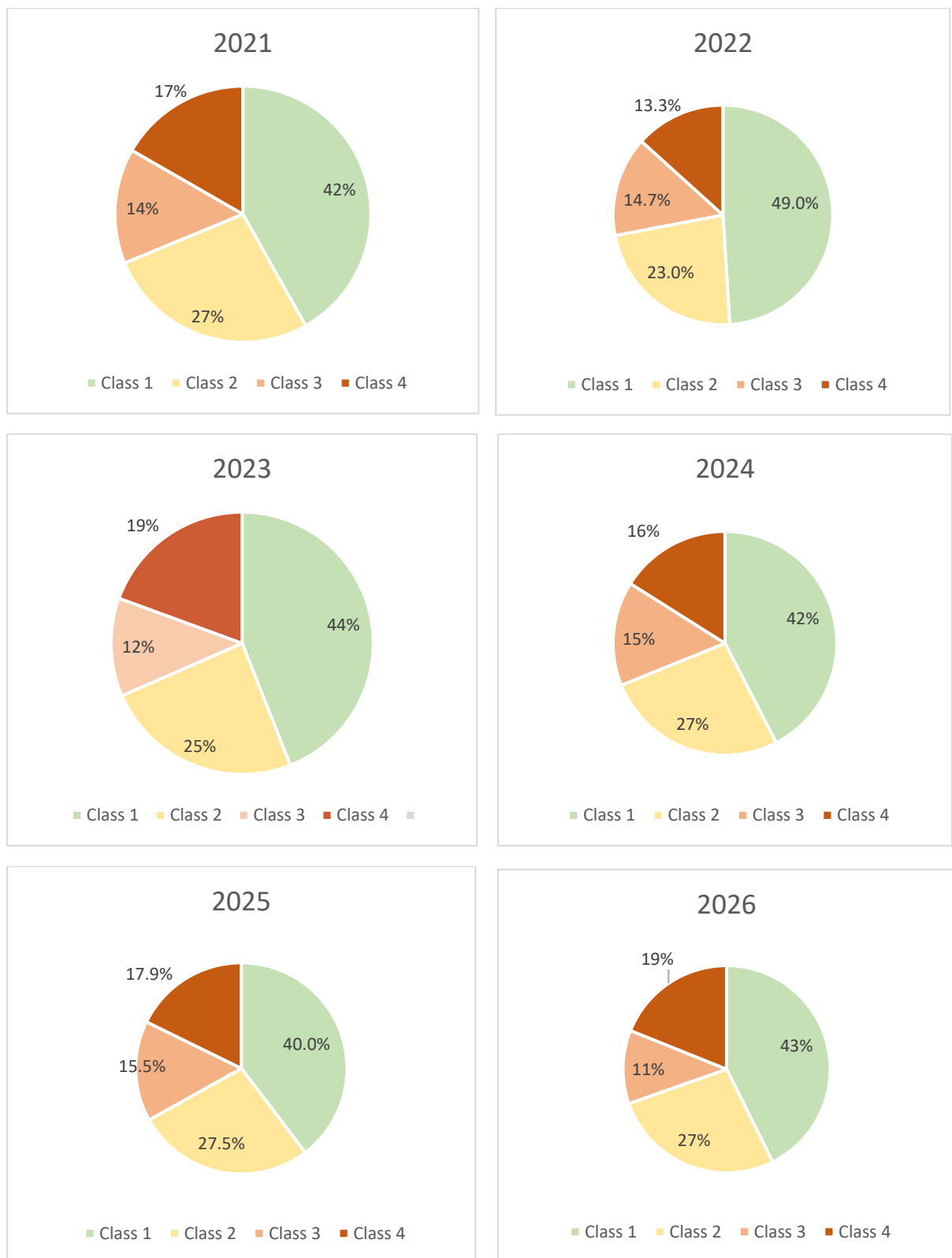


Figure 2 - Percentage of trees within each category from 2021-26

2.3 Trees Removed

Since 2022, ash trees have been felled as part of safety works, removing trees in poor condition which posed a potential hazard. Tree works to remove ash started in 2022 and an estimate of the number removed is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: total trees surveyed each year, and the cumulative total of trees removed in previous years

	2023		2024		2025		2026	
	Total Surveyed	Previously removed	Total Surveyed	Previously removed	Total Surveyed	Previously removed	Total Surveyed	Previously removed
Class 1	632	5	2700	31	1430	41	1718	41
Class 2	351	150	1684	480	947	500	1085	501
Class 3	174	131	959	356	554	516	462	543
Class 4	279	127	1021	242	640	450	762	483
Total	1436	413	6364	1109	3571	1507	4027	1568

In 2026, out of 4085 points surveyed, approximately a further 1568 points may have been part of the survey but have been removed at some point in the previous 4 years (Figure 3). This could have potentially affected the percentage of trees within each canopy class which were shown in Figure 2 above. The removal of declining trees is likely to influence the overall distribution of canopy classes. Without these removals, the proportion of trees within Classes 3 and 4 would be expected to be higher.

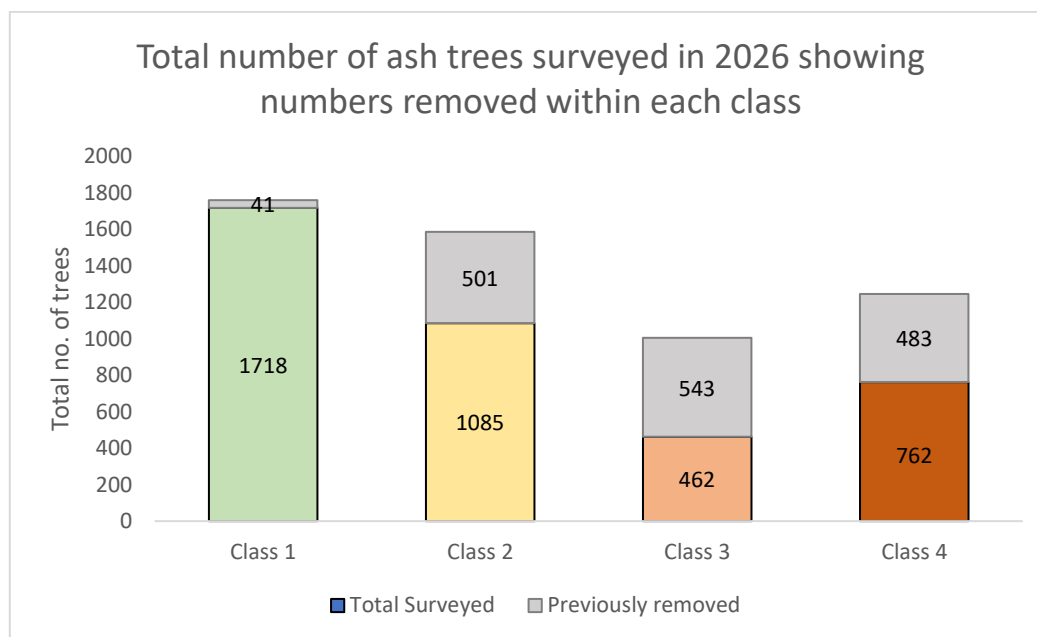


Figure 3: Total trees surveyed in 2026, showing numbers of trees removed in previous years

2.4. Trees located near Roads

As part of the ash surveys, road classes are recorded alongside tree condition. This can highlight ash trees in poor condition which are located alongside main roads (Table 3). Due to tree works in previous years, many of the trees in poor condition along main A roads have been removed.

Table 3 – Number of ash trees within different canopy class next to A, B, and C class roads

Canopy Class	A road	B road	C road
Class 1	222	473	562
Class 2	95	368	349
Class 3	34	155	159
Class 4	51	243	241
Total	402	1239	1311

Treeplotter has been used to identify ‘target zones’, where the likelihood of the public being close to the tree has been approximated. This may be in vehicles on roads, in a residential building or as pedestrians. A ‘high target zone’ is one with a high likelihood of public being in the area near to the tree. Table 4 shows the numbers of trees of each canopy class within each target zone. There are approximately 500 trees in poor condition near high target zones.

Table 4 – Number of ash trees within different canopy class next to different Target Zones

Canopy Class	High	Medium	Low
Class 1	1344	239	30
Class 2	864	174	11
Class 3	331	101	12
Class 4	536	197	15

2.5. Change in condition, 2021-26

Of the total trees surveyed in 2026, the majority did not show a change in condition from 2023. 65% showed no change, 26% declined and 9% improved (Figure 4).

This is a change from previous reports. Last year’s report which covered 2022-25 found a smaller percentage of trees had declined, and a smaller percentage had improved. Of trees surveyed in 2025, 81% showed no change between 2022 and 2025, 13% declined and 6% improved. However, this is a 3-year period not 5 years. Direct comparison between the 2021-26 results and the three-year monitoring periods should be interpreted with caution, as trees monitored over a longer period have a greater opportunity to improve or decline.

Table 5 compares the percentage change over different 3-year periods including 2021-24, 2022-25 and 2023-26. This suggests that the percentage of trees declining appears to be decreasing over time.

Table 5. Percentage change recorded over different 3-year periods and from 2021-26

	2021-24	2022-25	2023-2026	2021-26
Improve	7%	6%	3%	9%
Decline	22%	13%	5%	26%
No change	71%	81%	92%	65%

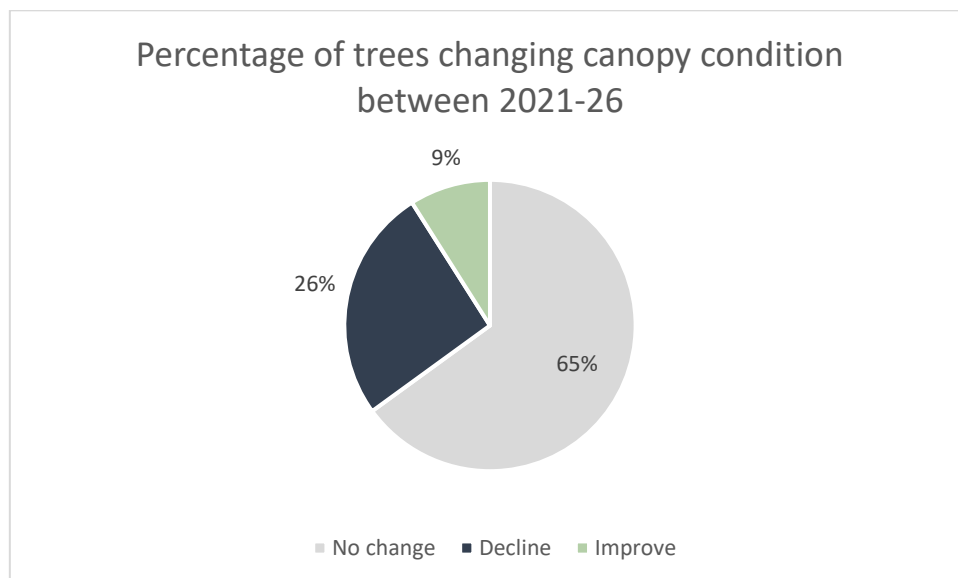


Figure 4 - Percentage change in condition of ash trees, 2021-26

2.6. Changes within each canopy class

The change within each class was examined from 2021-2026 based on the crown scores of the trees in 2021. For example, within trees originally ranked as Class 1 in 2021, the total number of trees that declined from 2021-26 was calculated (Figure 5). For trees originally classified as canopy condition 1 or 2, most showed no change in condition. While for those classified as Class 3, a larger number of these declined in condition.

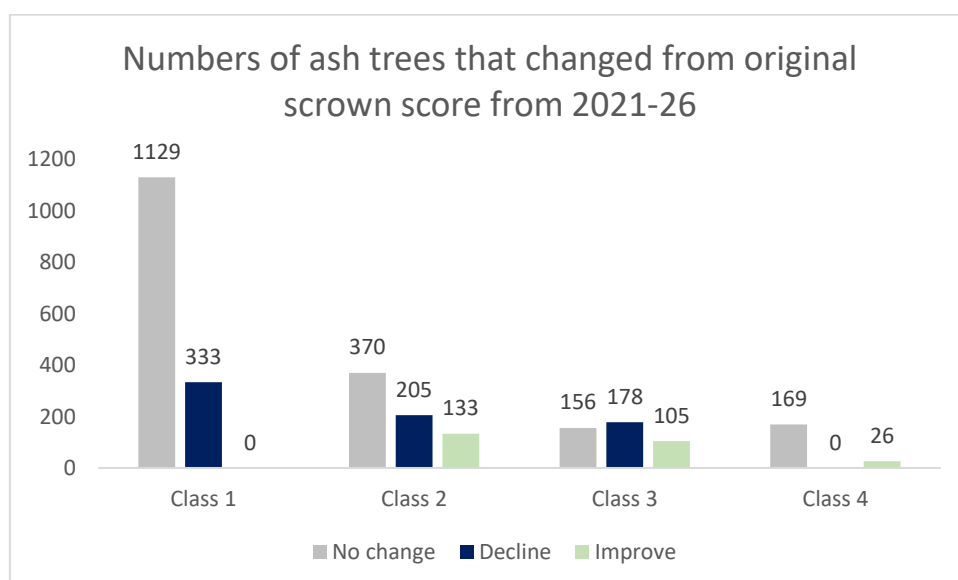


Figure 5 – Total numbers of ash trees which changed from original crown score in 2021

The percentage change in tree condition within each class was calculated (Figure 6). Between 2021 and 2026, 22% of trees initially classified as Class 1 declined, compared with 28% of Class 2 trees and 40% of Class 3 trees. This indicates that trees already in poor condition due to ash dieback were more likely to experience further decline. These findings are consistent with the 2022–25 report, which also found that a higher proportion of Class 3 trees deteriorated further.

Some trees have improved over time, 19% of Class 2 trees, 24% of Class 3 trees improved and 13% of Class 4 trees improved in condition.

This is higher compared to data from 2022-25 when 9% of Class 2 trees improved and 11% of Class 3 trees improved. And in 2023-26, only 7% of Class 2 trees improved and 5% of Class 3 trees improved. Again, these previous reports covered only a three-year period and the 2026 report covers five years. Possibly over longer periods of time, more trees will show some signs of improvement.

The data does suggest that some ash trees are recovering from the effects of dieback disease and this is supported by findings of other studies which have also shown that infected ash trees may improve over time⁴ and that ash trees may evolve some resistance⁵. There may be several reasons for an improvement being recorded. The results may reflect a combination of genuine recovery, annual variation in canopy, weather influences or observer differences.

It's also possible that some changes in the numbers of trees within each canopy class are due to trees being removed, as discussed in earlier sections and shown in Figure 3. Nevertheless, the proportion of trees showing improvement is consistent with wider studies suggesting that a proportion of ash trees may show some tolerance to ash dieback.

⁴ <https://treecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Tree-Council-Ash-dieback-tree-owners-guide-FINAL.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvg45zrex7jo>

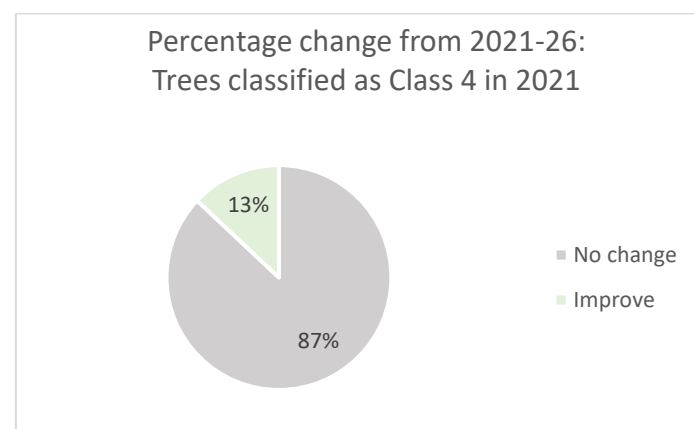
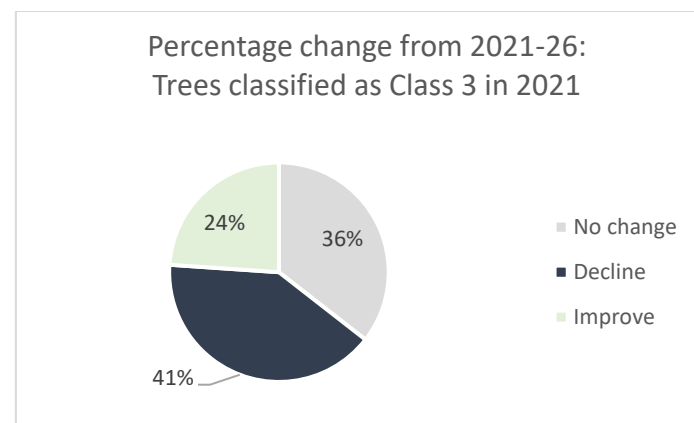
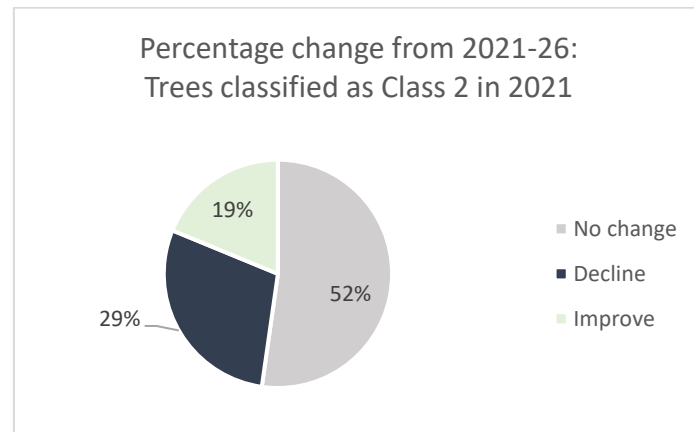
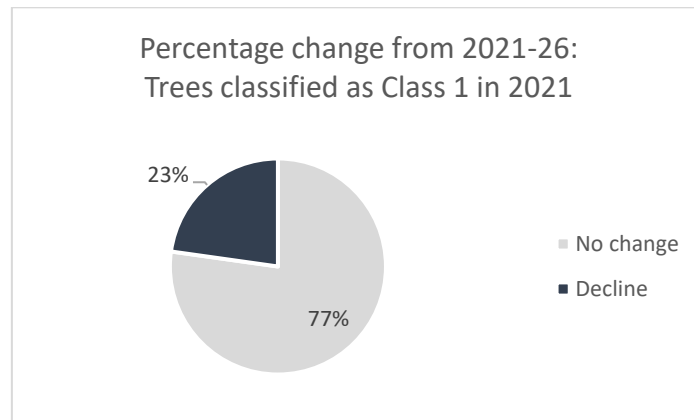


Figure 6 – Percentage change in condition from 2021-26 within trees classified as Class 1- 4 in 2021

2.7. Tree size and condition class

Observations from West Lothian and elsewhere suggest younger ash trees are more severely affected by ash dieback than older trees⁶. To investigate this, the canopy score of the trees in 2026 was compared against the diameter at breast height (DBH).

The total number of trees classified at Class 4 was greater in trees with DBH under 20cm (Figure 7). However, the number of Class 1 ash trees was also higher in this DBH range, due to a larger number of trees of this size being surveyed.

Looking only at ash trees within Class 3 and Class 4, there was a negative relationship between DBH and crown score (Figure 8). As DBH increased, the numbers of Class 3 and 4 trees decreased.

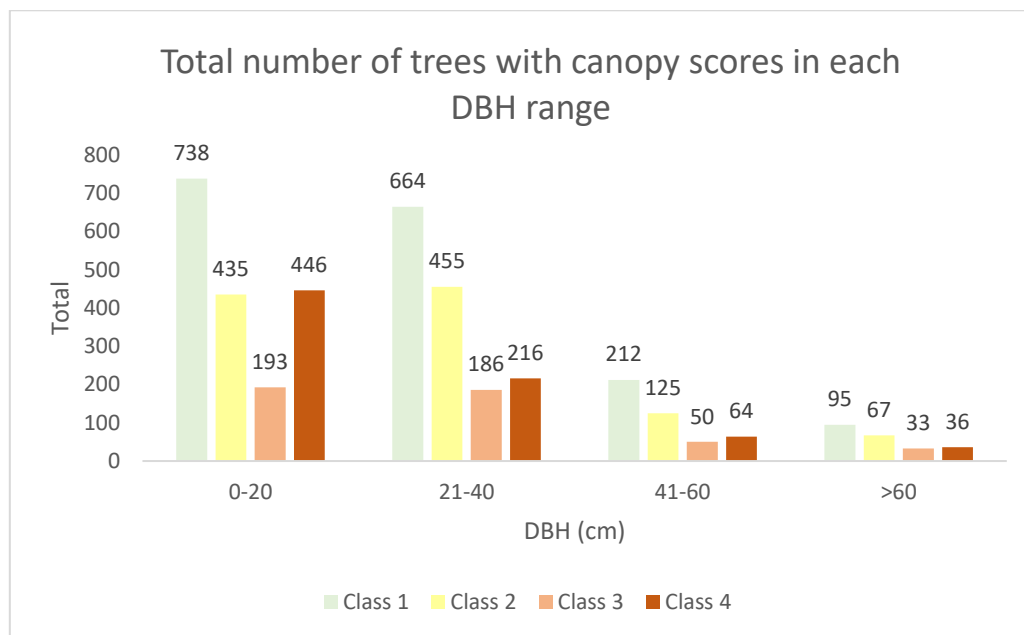


Figure 7 – Total numbers of trees within each DBH range (cm) that were categorised into canopy scores in 2026

⁶ <https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1365-2745.14191>

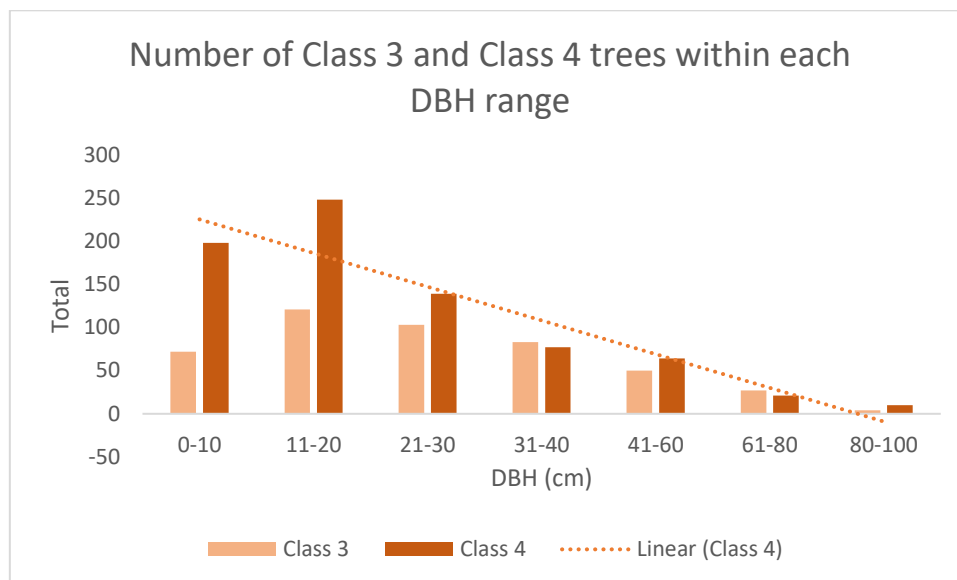


Figure 8 – Total numbers of Class 3 and Class 4 trees within each DBH range

As there were a higher number of trees surveyed with DBH of 0-20cm, the percentage of trees of different size within each condition class was also investigated (Figure 9 and 10).

43% of Class 1 trees had DBH of 0-20cm while 59% of Class 4 trees had DBH in range of 0-20 cm, suggesting that smaller and younger ash trees were more likely to have canopy score of Class 4 and be in poor condition. This does suggest that smaller trees are more vulnerable to ash dieback disease.

This is similar to findings from 2025, which showed that for class 1 trees, 53% of trees surveyed had DBH in the range of 0-20cm. In Class 4 trees, this increased to 64% of trees having a DBH of 0-20cm.

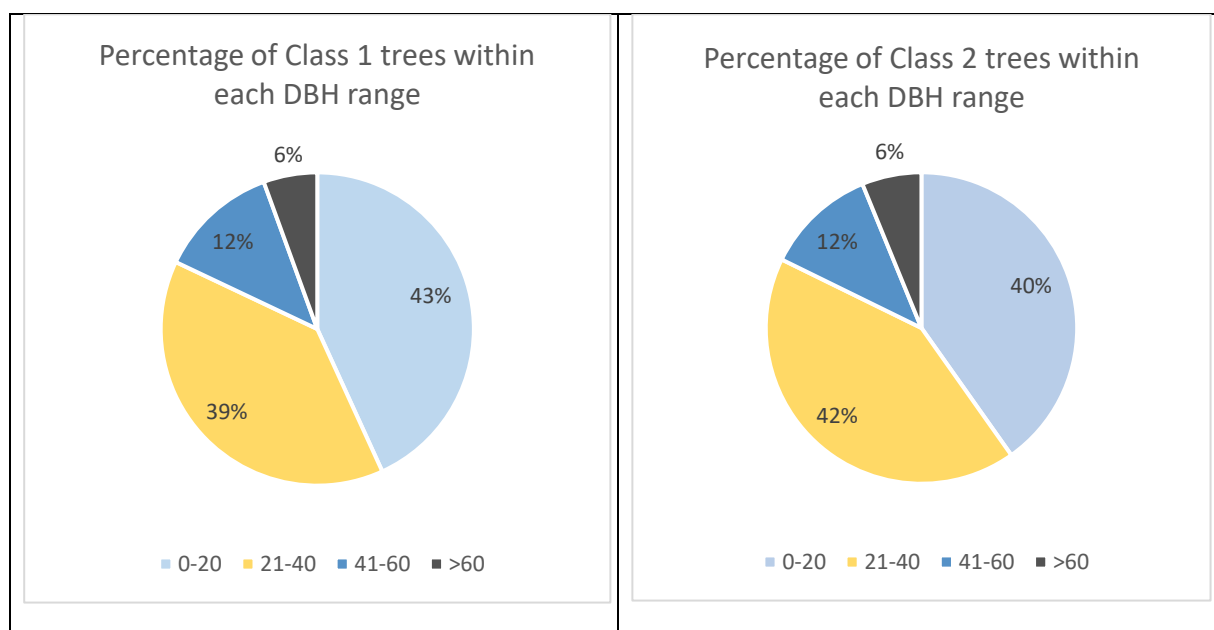


Figure 9 - Percentage of trees classified as Class 1 and Class 2 within each DBH range in 2026

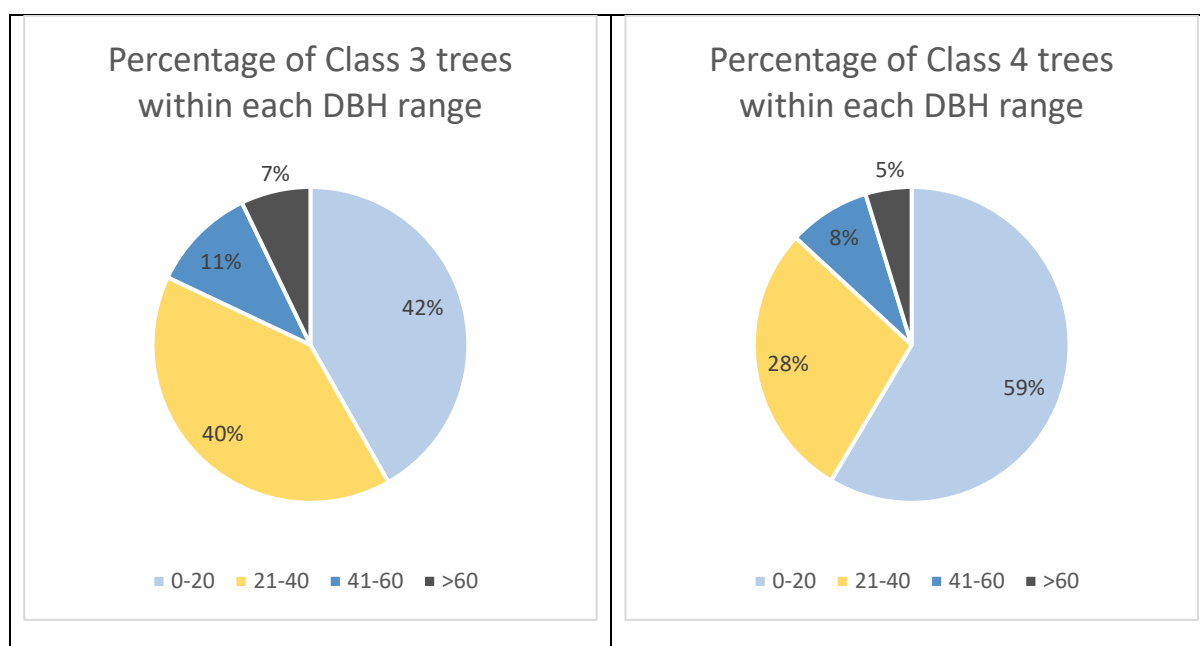


Figure 10 - Percentage of trees classified as Class 3 and Class 4 within each DBH range in 2025

2.8. Tree condition and location

Differences in condition within different wards in West Lothian were investigated (Figure 11). The highest number of Class 1 trees were in Ward 5 (East Livingston and East Calder) and the highest number of Class 4 trees were in Ward 1 (Linlithgow).

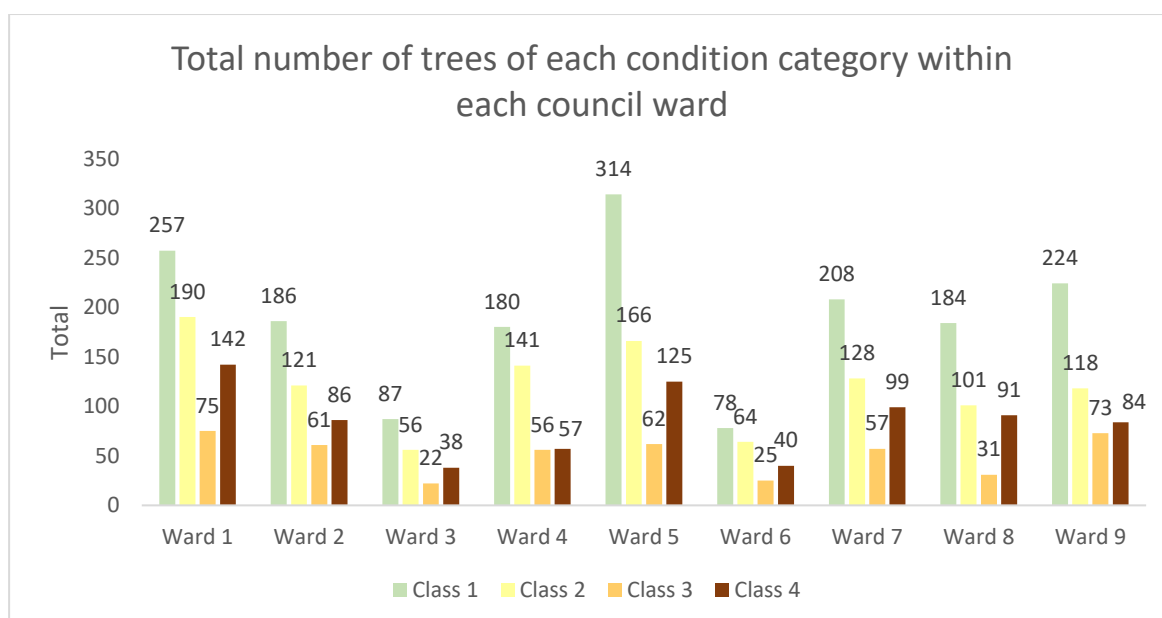


Figure 31 - Number of trees classified into canopy classes within each council ward 2026

The percentage trees classified into canopy score 1-4 are shown in Table 6. Ward 5 had the highest percentage of trees classified as Class 1. Ward 8 had the highest percentage of trees classified as Class 4.

There did not appear to be any strong relationship between location and condition of trees, for example no difference between northern and southern wards or between eastern and western wards.

Table 6 – Percentage of trees within each ward classified as Class 1-4. Highest values for each Class are highlighted

Canopy Score	Ward								
	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8	Ward 9
Class 1	38.3	40.5	42.4	41.4	46.3	36.4	41.0	44.9	44.3
Class 2	28.3	26.4	27.3	32.4	24.5	29.9	25.2	24.6	23.3
Class 3	11.2	13.3	10.7	12.9	9.14	11.7	11.2	7.56	14.4
Class 4	21.2	18.7	18.5	13.1	18.4	18.7	19.5	22.2	16.6

Summary

The progression of Ash Dieback Disease is being monitored in West Lothian using repeat visits to the trees across the county. The data collected from 2021-26 was examined for potential changes in condition. Over the five year monitoring period, approximately 26% of the trees surveyed had declined from 2022-25, but the majority (65%) had not changed.

The number of ash trees classified as Class 4 increased slightly from 17% in 2021 to 19% in 2026. This is similar to findings from last year, which also showed an increase in trees at Class 4.

Trees that were already in poor condition in 2021, such as those in Class 2 or 3, seemed more likely to decline than a tree that was class 1 in 2021. 29% of Class 2 trees declined and 41% of Class 3 trees declined from 2021 to 2026. This is higher than in 2025 when 16% which were Class 3 declined, although this was only over a 3-year period, not the 5-year period covered by this year's report.

However, there was also an increase in the percentage of trees improving, 9% from 2021-26 compared to 6% in 2025. Also, a greater percentage of class 2 and class 3 trees improved over time. For example, 19% of class 2 trees improved from 2021-2026, compared to 9% in 2022-25.

The percentage of trees classified in each class does stay at around the same level over 5 years. Percentage of trees classified as Class 1 remains around 42-43%, Class 2 around 23-27% and Class 3 around 11-15%.

Changes in the rates of improvement or decline in trees may be due to the longer period covered by this year's report. Changes may also be affected by the removal of declining trees through ash tree works. The removal programme has successfully removed a number of declining and dangerous trees where these posed a risk to the public and work continues to identify and remove trees where required. The removal programme is likely to have reduced the number of high-risk trees in poor condition.

The change in the number of trees declining may also be due to discrepancies in surveying or changes in weather conditions. It's also possible that ash trees are becoming more able to resist or recover from ash dieback. The autumn and winter weather of 2025 was relatively dry, which may have reduced the spread of fungal spores among trees.

A larger percentage of trees with DBH of 0-20cm were categorised as Class 4, compared to trees with DBH of greater than 40cm. This suggests smaller and younger trees are more vulnerable to the disease.

The results show that ash dieback continues to cause significant problems to ash trees in West Lothian. While some trees have recovered and not all ash trees across West Lothian are likely to be lost to the disease, the data suggests that approximately 25% of trees with the disease are likely to continue to decline in the near future. Trees already in poor condition are more likely to continue to decline. There is still a need to monitor the spread and progression of the disease particularly when trees in poor condition are located in areas that could be a risk to the public.

*Caroline Freeman
Tree and Woodland Officer – Ash Dieback
West Lothian Council
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