

London Borough of Bexley

News Release

For Immediate Release

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Prompt action taken at Lesnes to eradicate plant disease

A fungus like disease capable of causing damage to a wide range of plants and trees has been discovered at Lesnes Abbey Woods.

As part of its work to maintain and protect the woodlands at Lesnes Abbey, London Borough of Bexley works closely with the Forestry Commission. Following a recent site visit, symptoms of the disease were identified on one rhododendron. Samples were taken and test results received late last week have shown that it is the fungus like disease known as *Phytophthora ramorum*. This is a naturally occurring plant disease which originates in Asia. It is not harmful to people or animals.

Immediate measures are being taken to remove the plant disease, which includes clearing the infected rhododendron and all of the ground level vegetation and leaf fall within a two metre radius. The most effective way to do this is to burn the plants. Council officers are liaising with the London Fire Brigade to ensure that this process, which is scheduled to take place on Thursday 4 May, is managed in a safe way. No trees will be affected. Public access may need to be restricted in parts of the site.

Samples have been taken from other plants within the wood and park to determine if there are any further cases of the disease and the results are due in 2 to 3 weeks. The Council will work on a management plan with the Plant Health and Safety Inspectorate (PHSI) should more infected plants be found.

- *Phytophthora ramorum* is a fungus-like organism capable of causing serious damage to a wide range of ornamental and native plants, as well as some commercially grown trees. In Western USA, it has caused the death of more than a million native oak trees and is commonly known as 'Sudden Oak Death'. In Europe, *Phytophthora ramorum* has been confirmed on a range of plants, principally varieties of Rhododendron, Viburnum, Pieris and Camellia but also some trees. It has also been found on a variety of different sites including public parks and historic gardens.

