

Plantation Works

Sunderland City Council are responsible for the management of approximately 185 hectares of plantation across the city. Over several years plantation management has been limited meaning they have become dense and unmaintained leading to the overall health and diversity of the plantation being negatively affected. The location of many of the city's plantations mean they grow relatively close to property boundaries and in some cases encroach gardens and fence lines. As a result, the Council receive high volumes of requests and complaints related to plantations. The Council are aware that in order to manage the potential adverse impact upon the health and lifespan of the plantations that a programme of works is required in some locations.

The locations in which work is planned have been prioritised by considering condition, the risk posed whilst taking into account member and resident feedback.

The work will comprise of thinning operations, which refers to the practice of selectively removing some trees from a woodland or plantation to promote the growth and health of the remaining trees.

Thinning can bring several advantages, including:

- Thinning can reduce competition among trees for resources such as light, water, and nutrients, allowing the remaining trees to grow more naturally, healthier and more wind resistant.
- Removing diseased, damaged, or suppressed trees can help reduce the risk of, pest and disease outbreaks, storm damage failure and improve the overall health of the plantation.
- Thinning can create gaps in the plantation canopy, allowing more light to reach the plantation floor and promoting the growth of understory plants. This can increase habitat diversity and support a wider range of wildlife species.
- Thinning can promote the growth of high-quality specimens by allowing the remaining trees to develop a stronger trunk and a more desirable crown structure.
- Thinning can help reduce the risk of plantation fires by reducing the fuel load and creating a more open plantation structure that is less susceptible to ignition and spread.
- Plantation thinning allows selected healthy trees to grow, which enables them to store more carbon.

It is important to remember that the work is comparable to the initial stages of a housing development, the planned thinning of a plantation can look messy directly after works due to the presence of machinery needed for effective tree removal. In the weeks and months following the thinning operation, natural processes and understory growth begin to restore damage to the plantation floor and it becomes less apparent that management had occurred.

If plantations are left alone and not managed in this way, the trees will eventually grow too close together and understory plants and seedlings will not be able to grow. Naturally occurring forests, often hardwood/deciduous forests, can sustain themselves overtime due to the species ability to regenerate within that environment. Man-made plantations are not established in the same way and need to be managed so they can stay healthy and structurally sound for many years.