

Guide to Pruning Activities

Pruning is often part and parcel of good tree management. Operations are described below. Some operations are harmful and will only be used in exceptional circumstances, others are ineffective and usually avoided.

The most amount of live growth that can be removed is about 30% however sustainable management usually limits this figure to about 20%.

Felling – This involves cutting the tree down to ground level and commonly removing the stump.

Crown Cleaning- this process involves removing dead, damaged or significantly diseased branches from the tree. This may also remove contacting or crossing branches to prevent further damage.

Deadwooding – Deadwood is beneficial for wildlife and is retained where possible. However, in public areas falling deadwood can pose a risk. Where dead wood presents a significant hazard, dead wood will be removed from trees.

Crown Reduction – Crown reductions reduce the size of the tree size by cutting the length of branches. It is a significant operation that can disrupt natural tree growth. We carry out crown reductions only where there is an overriding need to do so. Much like when creating a hedge, crown reductions can have an effect of making the crown more dense. This is can be an issue where the objective is to manage light or visibility.

Crown Thinning – Crown thinning is selective removal of tree branches within the crown, usually to let light through. Crown thinning is often ineffective in managing tree growth. Crown thinning may be successful where a tree has grown abnormally, but this practice will not work where a healthy tree is thinned, as the tree will respond and return to its original state within a growing season. Cyclical thinning can be used to manage pollarded trees (see below).

Crown Lifting – Crown lifting is the removal of lower branches of the tree. This enables access below the tree crown, it removes branches that may be an obstruction, and allows more light to reach ground level. Crown lifting mimics natural processes in the tree as it grows so long as not too many branches are removed. It is therefore considered as an effective way of sustainably managing trees.

Structural Pruning – Structural pruning is an important part of tree management. This is preventative tree pruning and enable trees to form a good, strong branch structure. The Forestry Service is moving away from reactive pruning practices such as crown reductions and thinning to proactively manage trees. However the pace of tree growth, means this is a long term strategy of 30 years or more. Structural pruning will enable younger trees to be more sustainable later in their life.

Pollarding/Repollarding – Pollarding is traditional process that was once used to grow feed and wood fuel above the height of cattle. Pollards are established at a young age and grow adapted to the practice. This process can be undertaken for aesthetic reasons or where space is constrained. This should not be confused with topping.

Topping - Topping is the stripping of a mature tree crown back to large woody branches. Topping can be very damaging to trees not adapted from a young age and/or species that do not respond with healthy regrowth. This process is avoided.