



Sussex Square North Garden – Tree Maintenance Information Sheet + FAQ

What's happening

Over the coming weeks, planned tree maintenance will take place in the **North Garden of Sussex Square**. This includes:

- **Selective pruning and thinning** of limbs and branches (mainly on **Sycamores** and **Holm Oaks**) to allow more light, reduce excessive density, and improve health.
- **Removal (felling) of a small number of weak or compromised trees** that are impeding the growth of their neighbours or pose longer-term structural risks.
- Establishing a **regular, proactive maintenance programme** across the Kemptown Enclosures — moving away from the reactive approach of the past.

The aim is to ensure the trees are **healthy, safe, and resilient**, while keeping the garden beautiful and ecologically vibrant.

Why some trees need to be removed

All trees have been professionally assessed. The few that will be felled are either **structurally weak**, in decline, or **negatively affecting surrounding trees** by blocking light or competing for space and resources.

Removing a small number of poor-condition trees allows their healthier neighbours to flourish. This strengthens the canopy overall and reduces the risk of major failures in future. In short, this is **about long-term preservation** — fewer trees now mean stronger, longer-lived trees later.

The science behind this work

Recent research confirms that **regular, moderate pruning** helps urban trees remain healthier and more effective at providing environmental benefits such as carbon storage, pollution capture, and cooling.

- **Ordinary pruning** (moderate, frequent maintenance) leads to healthier trees that continue providing ecosystem services for longer.
- **Infrequent heavy cuts** cause short-term losses in benefits like air-pollutant capture (up to 25%) and increase stress, but trees recover better when managed proactively.

- Trees maintained regularly are **less likely to fail**, reducing both risk and cost over time.
- In urban settings, consistent pruning **prolongs a tree's lifespan and improves resilience** to stress, drought, and pests.

By following this science-led approach, the Sussex Square works will improve the health and longevity of the trees while maintaining their environmental value.

Holm oaks, sycamores and biodiversity

- **Holm oak (*Quercus ilex*)** is a valuable evergreen tree, well-adapted to the seaside environment. It supports a good number of generalist insects, birds and fungi — but fewer than our native English oak species.
- **Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)**, while attractive and well-established here, is non-native and supports a **relatively limited range of specialist wildlife** compared to native species. It mainly benefits generalist invertebrates rather than rare or specialist species.
- Because many of the trees being pruned or removed are **sycamores**, the **impact on local biodiversity is modest**. This work is designed to favour the stronger holm oaks and improve the overall ecological balance of the garden.

In other words, the tree work will **enhance biodiversity in the long term** by maintaining a healthier, more resilient canopy dominated by species that can thrive here safely and sustainably.

Squirrel Damage and Feeding

Many residents enjoy seeing squirrels in the gardens, and they certainly add to the character of Sussex Square. However, it's important to understand that **grey squirrels can cause significant and costly long-term damage to trees**, particularly in managed green spaces such as the Kemptown Enclosures.

How squirrels harm trees

Grey squirrels strip bark from trunks and branches, often in spring and early summer when sap is rising. This can lead to:

- **Structural weakness and dieback**, especially in young or stressed trees.
- **Entry points for pests and fungal infection.**
- **Increased risk of branch failure**, particularly in **sycamores**, which are naturally more **brittle** than many other species. Once bark is removed, moisture and decay can enter, increasing the likelihood that limbs will snap in wind or heavy rain.
- **Costly remedial work** and, in some cases, tree loss.

Across the UK, grey squirrel bark-stripping damage is estimated to cost **tens of millions of pounds annually** in lost timber value, reduced carbon capture, and tree replacement

The problem with artificial feeding

Although it can seem kind to feed squirrels, wildlife experts emphasise that **artificial feeding often does more harm than good**:

- The **Mammal Society** advises that wild mammals should find their own food — relying too heavily on human feeding reduces their natural foraging skills and resilience.
- The **Royal Parks** also discourage feeding, explaining that “the parks themselves are great sources of natural food, and it’s much healthier for the wildlife to eat what they are accustomed to foraging for.”
- Food provided by people (such as bread, nuts or snacks) can lead to **nutritional imbalance**, making animals less healthy and more dependent.
- Concentrating many squirrels around a single food source increases **disease transmission and aggressive competition**.

Feeding also attracts other pests

Leaving food for squirrels can unintentionally draw in **rats and gulls**, as well as mice and pigeons.

Guidance notes that bird seed, nuts, or leftovers can spill easily, and that “rats, mice and grey squirrels are opportunistic feeders... excess food may also attract scavengers such as pigeons, crows and seagulls.

These animals can spread disease, damage planting, and create mess and noise — all of which increase maintenance costs and disturb the peace of the gardens.

What residents can do

To protect both the trees and wildlife:

- **Please avoid feeding squirrels** or leaving food where they can access it.
- **Keep seating and paths clear** of leftover food, seed, or bread.
- **Support natural foraging** rather than supplementing with human food.

Why this matters

Healthy foraging behaviour keeps squirrels fitter and more adaptable, while fewer artificial food sources mean less tree damage, lower pest numbers, and reduced long-term maintenance costs. It’s a simple step that protects the trees — particularly the vulnerable **sycamores** — and maintains a cleaner, safer, and more balanced North Garden for everyone to enjoy.

Remember – this is a Conservation Area

Sussex Square and the Kemptown Enclosures are part of a **designated Conservation Area**, meaning all tree work is carefully controlled.

- **No trees can be pruned or removed without formal consent** from the **Brighton & Hove City Council Tree Officer**.
- Every stage of this work has been **professionally surveyed, risk-assessed and approved** to ensure it meets both legal and ecological standards.
- The works comply fully with **wildlife protection laws**, including the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**, and checks for nesting birds or roosting bats are undertaken before any felling or pruning begins.

This ensures that everything being done has been **thoroughly reviewed, justified, and authorised** — balancing environmental care with safety and conservation requirements.

FAQ

Q – Why are some trees being felled? Doesn't that harm the garden?

A – Only trees that are weak, dying, or negatively affecting their neighbours are being removed. This allows healthier trees to thrive and remain safer and stronger for decades. The overall canopy health will actually improve.

Q – Will pruning reduce the green feel of the garden?

A – In the short term, yes — it will look more open. But this will quickly rebalance as light reaches the understorey, new growth flourishes, and the remaining trees grow more vigorously. The result will be a brighter, greener, and healthier garden, while beginning to open views.

Q – Doesn't wildlife need all those branches and dense cover?

A – Overcrowded trees are more vulnerable to disease and storm damage, which can destroy habitat suddenly. Regular pruning ensures that habitat is maintained safely and sustainably. The trees will continue to support wildlife — just in a healthier, more stable way.

Q – Is this work properly authorised?

A – Yes. Because this is a **Conservation Area**, all works have been approved by the **local Tree Officer** and meet all relevant legislation. Nothing is done without consent and professional supervision.

Q – Will this cost residents more?

A – No. In fact, regular, preventative work is much **more cost-effective** than emergency removals or replacements after storm or disease damage. This is an investment in the estate's long-term sustainability.

Final note

Thank you for your understanding and care for the North Garden. Every decision has been made with the long-term health, safety, and beauty of the trees in mind. This project represents the start of a **sustainable tree-care cycle** — one that protects what we have now while ensuring the garden continues to thrive for generations.

If you have any questions or concerns, or would like to discuss a particular tree, please contact **management@jonathanrolls.com**