

# ***Nip it in the Bud***

*Non-native invasive plant strategy for the River Avon  
A seminar for local authorities & public bodies*

*Thursday 29 November 2007  
Dinton Village Hall, Salisbury*

## **Seminar Proceedings**



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## **Programme**

<b>09.00</b>	<b>Tea &amp; coffee</b>	
09:30	Introduction	Chair: Gerry Hamersley – Area Manager, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire West of England, Natural England
09:45	Presentation	<b><i>A non-native invasive plant strategy for the River Avon; why do we need a strategy?</i></b> Martin de Retuerto – Wessex Chalk Streams Project, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
10:15	Presentation	<b><i>The Invasive Non-Native Species Framework for Great Britain; How will it affect us?</i></b> Huw Thomas - Head of Protected & Non-native Species Team, Defra
10.50	Questions	
<b>11:00</b>	<b>Tea &amp; coffee</b>	
11.15	Presentation	<b><i>Lessons from a city council; linking policy &amp; practice</i></b> Sean Hathaway – Environment Officer, Swansea City Council
11:50	Presentation	<b><i>The landowner's approach to controlling invasives on large estates</i></b> Simon Ford – Wessex Conservation Advisor, National Trust
12:25	Questions	
<b>12:30</b>	<b>Lunch</b>	
13:15	Presentation	<b><i>'The reason why' – a County Council approach</i></b> James MacFarlane – Vegetation Advisor, Cornwall County Council
13:50	Questions	
<b>14:00</b>	<b>Tea &amp; coffee</b>	
14:15	Discussion	Integrating the planning system, constraints & opportunities, Establishing a stakeholder forum
15:30	Summary	Summarise & propose actions
<b>16:00</b>	<b>Close</b>	

## Introduction

The Living River Project is an exciting £1m project focussing on the River Avon and its catchment in Wiltshire, Hampshire and Dorset. Its goal is to improve the river and wetland environment through both practical work and increasing local understanding of the river system, showing how its natural heritage is linked to the rich cultural heritage of the area. It encompasses the whole catchment from the headwaters in the Wiltshire Downs right down to the sea at Christchurch; however the hub of the project is Salisbury which is the major cultural centre and whose history is interwoven with the river system.

The Project has eight contributing partners: Natural England, Environment Agency, Hampshire Wildlife Trust, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Wessex Water, Salisbury Festival, Salisbury District Council and Hampshire County Council. These partners are contributing 30% of the project resources, with 70% provided by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Living River has three programmes:

- Biodiversity restoration – this includes restoration of wetland habitats and two projects on invasive non-native plants: development of a catchment wide stakeholder strategy for tackling invasive plants, and a demonstration project where eradication programmes will be carried out
- Access and Interpretation – improvement of existing physical access to the river and wetlands, including work with local community groups throughout the river system to engage them with the river; creation and enhancement of interpretation that will help people understand and appreciate the river system; access activities such as open days, guided walks etc, and arts projects, especially through Salisbury Festival
- Education and Training – provision of formal and informal education resources to help people learn about the river, its natural heritage and the issues facing it today, and provide information on how they can reduce their impacts on the river; training in activities ranging from practical work such as habitat restoration, outdoor art and plant identification and monitoring.

## Chairman's opening address

*Gerry Hamersley – Area Manager for Gloucestershire, Wiltshire & West of England, Natural England*

The purpose of the seminar is to bring together all public bodies, statutory authorities, NGOs and groups who have an influence over the management of the River Avon System in Wiltshire, Hampshire and Dorset. The seminar will be a platform for introducing the Living River Project's Invasive Plant Strategy for the River Avon, which will take measures to halt the spread of some of the most aggressive non-native plants damaging the river system and where possible help to eliminate all presence of these species.

These invasive plants pose a significant threat to the integrity of an important river system with both SSSI & SAC designations, but it is not just biodiversity that is under threat. Socio-economic interests are intrinsically linked and the purpose of this seminar is to emphasise the links and provide the momentum for an effective partnership that can work across all three counties to address this problem. Expert speakers will provide stark evidence for the severity of this problem and reinforce the importance of a catchment approach for action.

**Presentation 1 - A non-native invasive plant strategy for the River Avon  
Why do we need a strategy?**

*Martin de Retuerto – Wessex Chalk Streams Project, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust*

An introduction to the behavioural attitudes surrounding the presence of non-native plants among stakeholders and the misconceptions applied. Background to the development of the Living River Project (LRP) and the non-native invasive plant strategy. Stated that after habitat destruction, alien species pose the greatest threat to biodiversity loss. However, this has far reaching effects on socio-economic factors, such as through increased flooding, diffuse pollution, physical damage to buildings and structures, health and safety and financial loss to development sites (examples given). Three of the most aggressive bankside species are being targeted; Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) and Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*). An outline of the LRP's objectives for the strategy with an emphasis on the formation of a stakeholder forum, which it is intended will drive the implementation of a long-term action plan and provide much needed coordination. The afternoon discussion will allow delegates to offer views and expressions for this action. Finally with the onset of climate change, a stark warning was provided for ignorance and a lack of attention to this problem.

**Presentation 2 - The Invasive non-native Species Framework for Great Britain:  
How will it affect us?**

*Huw Thomas – Head of Protected & Non-native Species Team, Defra*

Emphasis on the severity of alien introductions to both biodiversity and the economy, with an estimation of £2-£6bn being the costed impact in the UK. An outline of the various international & legislative drivers requiring the control and management of alien species. Background to the Review of non-native species policy in the UK and recommendations. Labour manifesto to take coordinated action to tackle the threat to biodiversity from alien species – Review of progress to date, including the establishment of a GB Programme Board & Secretariat, stakeholder forum and launch of NERC Act 2006. Clearer guidance on why a GB strategy is required highlighting a particular need for a coherent and coordinated approach with a shift on focus to better prevention measures and effective rapid intervention. Draft strategy has been under consultation in 2007 with joint government response in Jan 2008. For local/regional initiatives this will provide national direction for setting priorities and an informed risk assessment resource. Final message that prevention is better than cure.

**Question:** *Are any of these plant banned from sale?*

**Response from Huw Thomas:** Not yet, although as a result of the consultation process Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and giant hogweed will soon be. Through the NERC Act (section 50) the secretary of state has the power to ban the sale of any alien species known to cause damage.

**Response from Martin de Retuerto:** Japanese knotweed is controlled waste and under the Wildlife & Countryside Act. It is illegal to cause it to spread while any contaminated soil must be disposed of at a licensed landfill site. The legislation [NERC] also allows the SoS to issue codes of practice, which if not followed could be used in court to demonstrate that a defendant did not take appropriate action to prevent damage caused. It should be noted though, that this is 'fledgling' legislation and probably yet to be tested.

**Question:** *Much of the River Avon runs through MOD property where there is very limited access. In addition, some of the MOD stretches are not very popular with the fishing members. Who is surveying for invasive plants there?*

**Response from Martin de Retuerto:** Approx 80% of the river system is managed by fisheries and again most MOD property is leased by fisheries. The project is working with individual clubs and the two main umbrella associations; Wiltshire Fisheries Association (Wilts) & Wessex Salmon & Rivers Trust (Hants/Dorset), to ensure that there is sufficient awareness and 'eyes on the ground'. Respective clubs would probably be receptive to parishes working with them

**Response from Sarah Yarrow (LRP Manager):** Perhaps local parish conservation groups could work with clubs.

**Question:** *There is a big issue on availability of resources. Does the strategy address this or will we have to wait for a national-scale problem before there is national intervention?*

**Response from Huw Thomas:** This is very much under consultation at present, although funding has already be put into research into control of specific species. For example, CEH is just completed work to look at the impacts and control of escaped water primrose in the UK. Likewise the legislation is being tightened while further consultation with delivery organisations (e.g. NE, EA) is needed.

**Response from Martin de Retuerto:** This issue is partly why a stakeholder forum is the best way forward. Consolidating all relevant stakeholder groups will help to pool resources and ensure that expenditure is cost-effective and strategic. A forum will also put members on the spotlight to recognise ownership of the problem. This has been demonstrated most effectively with the Cornwall Knotweed Forum.

**Question:** *Who should accept ownership or responsibility for the control of these plants and at what level? Is it the riparian owner, tenant farmer or a statutory body for example? It appears that there is a lot of confusion surrounding this.*

**Response from Martin de Retuerto:** Without full legislative backing this is a difficult issue to resolve. Generally speaking it's the owner' responsibility or the group with a vested interest in the site. However, there needs to be recognition that the problem will affect others in the vicinity or catchment, so it's a shared problem. In the case of Japanese knotweed it's a little more straight forward.

**Response from James McFarlane (Cornwall County Council):** It's a collective problem, but in the first instance if you have an invasive plant on your property that's causing damage or has the potential to do so the owner is responsible for eradication. With regards to occupiers of property under lease this should be written in so that people cannot plead ignorance.

**Response from Huw Thomas:** At present if its not causing damage to anyone else's property there is no legal requirement to eradicate.

**Question:** *Has there been any liaison with other countries for examples of best practice?*

**Response from Huw Thomas:** There is a lot of communication between those involved with research, but at policy level its through the European Framework, regulations on international trade and movements of species etc. We have had some contact with New Zealand over species control.

### **Presentation 3 - Lessons from a City Council; linking policy & practice** *Sean Hathaway – Environment Officer, Swansea City Council*

Background to the establishment of Japanese knotweed within the council's boundary. Has spread aggressively over the past 100years. Survey in 1998 revealed coverage of 100ha all within urban and fringe areas. All these areas owned by SCC with little opportunity to share the problem. Description of plant ecology with many examples of its presence within the Swansea area and emphasis on its uncompromising rate of spread and contamination of urban zones.

Examples of disruption to local biodiversity, amenity areas, development sites, highways, riparian corridors, historic sites etc. Examples of costs for specific decontamination and treatment schemes. Outline of legislative and regulatory mechanisms that have been used to control the spread, including planning conditions. Summary of treatment approaches and lessons learned. Background to development of Swansea Action Plan and key objectives and application by the City's Planning Department. Further emphasis on monetary devaluation of development sites due to contamination of knotweed. Final message to Avon catchment is to utilise the opportunity of partnership working and do not ignore, it will only get worse.

**Presentation 4 - The Landowner's approach to controlling invasives on large estates**  
*Simon Ford - Wessex Conservation Advisor, National Trust*

An illustrative account of the National Trust's attempt to control non-native invasive plants nationally across their large estates. Difficulties can arise as some problem plants are also of high amenity value to some people, such as *Rhododendron ponticum*. It's affect to areas such as Snowdonia National Park demonstrate the overwhelming problem for biodiversity and landscape. Other signature locations for the NT are also under threat, such as Brownsea island and the New Forest. Aquatic invasives are a priority for control with parrot's feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) and Australian swamp stonecrop (*Crassula helmsii*) causing severe infestations and damage to important wetland sites, as well as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam. Again, commonly known as a garden shrub, cotoneaster spp, is causing serious management problems on many coastal sites. Climate change is starting to exacerbate these problems with milder winters. With so many species to manage over large areas the NT has become well practiced with the experimentation and application of control techniques, such as utilising large numbers of volunteers for scrub clearing and burning, cattle and goat grazing, stem injection of knotweed etc. The NT have a proactive approach favouring action rather than too much attention to strategies.

**Question:** *How is SCC monitoring the effectiveness of it's knotweed policy?*

**Response from Sean Hathaway:** In an *ad hoc* way, but the planning department attach conditions to planning applications. Its then up to the enforcement team to ensure compliance.

**Question:** *As soil disposal is strictly regulated have you had problems with people disposing appropriately?*

**Response from Sean Hathaway:** Yes there has been a few problems, some out of ignorance others deliberately. Some farmers have been dumping on farms, developers using unlicensed operators etc.

**Question:** *Have you used feral goats to control knotweed?*

**Response from Sean Hathaway:** It hasn't been tried in Swansea but I'd be keen to try. We've experimented with pigs and it seemed to work well.

**Question:** *How has the NT funied control work, was it through Countryside Stewardship for example?*

**Response from Simon Ford:** Yes for some place. SSSI and BAP species interests has generated other funds. Much of the work is undertaken by wardens and groups of volunteers, but this needs organising and frequent activities arranged.

**Question:** *Have you utilised corporate team building days?*

**Response from Simon Ford:** Yes. Motorola have sent teams. They have also donated new tools to cover the activities.

**Question:** *How do you overcome public outcry when controlling Rhododendron, which many people like/*

**Response from Simon Ford:** Some people don't like this so we find the most effective way is by stem injection, which allows the plant up to six months to die and is less obvious. It can be a time consuming process as every stem needs to be treated, but it is also good for sites of archaeological interest

**Question:** *How have you managed to persuade funders?*

**Response from Sean Hathaway:** We've just asked and to date found it relatively easy.

**Response from Simon Ford:** It can be difficult if the problem is not easily recognisable, which is something you may experience here on the Avon

**Response from Martin de Retuerto:** It appears that much of the funding is often obtained from already restricted 'biodiversity' budgets, which to some is not seen as the the most desirable use of such limited funds. Exceptions occur when for example there is a flood risk, whereby the EA will probably intervene. It is necessary to demonstrate the link to other sectors to widen the scope of funding sources.

## **Presentation 5 - 'The reason why' – a County Council's approach** *James MacFarlane – Vegetation Advisor, Cornwall County Council*

Cornwall is case-study for an early warning system for plant invasions, with a long history of plants being trialled for their ability to grow in the British Isles. Japanese knotweed has been a primary concern to many organisations with its hostile invasion of road sides, brownfield sites and wider countryside. Surveys have shown a significant spread of the plant in the county and investigations have revealed the robust and forceful nature of this plant transcending into significant de-contamination costs. These lessons have been reinforced by incidents of poor practices by highways and developers for example. Control is also targeting giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam, although Cornwall boasts a wealth of other invaders introduced through the horticultural trade and affecting similar areas. Emphasis that rapid intervention saves time and money. The Cornwall Knotweed Forum is a partnership of organisations, including engineering, development, ecological, transport etc with a common interest that meets regularly to share information. A strategy has been adopted setting priorities for treatment and starting with sites where there is greatest danger of spread. The forum demonstrates the financial implications of ignorance and encourages participation, which in turn persuades others to follow. The forum works comprehensively to map infestations, develop best practices and raise awareness through varying publicity outlets. Final message that while we are sitting the plants are spreading. Don't waste your opportunity.

**Question:** *What is Cornwall's annual budget for this work?*

**Response from James MacFarlane:** It has been £60-£70,000, but falling

**Question:** *How are you monitoring the effectiveness of invasive plant control and are there any plans to have policies in the local plan relating to invasive plants*

**Response from James MacFarlane:** Initial site survey of Japanese Knotweed is usually by GPS. Monitoring of sites is carried out by treatment gangs on their twice yearly site visits. This gives some indication of continuity of diminution of the plant and spot checks are carried out in addition for verification. Sites are monitored for five years after shoots are seen above ground.

In the case of giant hogweed on the Tamar, the contractor is required to do a report with records on a GIS database as part of the work and this is compared with results from the previous year. Spot checks are also carried out.

Himalayan balsam assessment work, which is more limited while we have been dealing with the above, is carried out on return site visit basis. The main concern at present is in the higher reaches of catchments and in areas where GH and JK have been treated.

We are endeavouring to gain greater input into local plans and put a question on planning application forms as to whether JK is present on site. This is used in some but not all planning areas.

## **Responses to questions in feedback sessions**

### **1. *Outline constraints or opportunities associated with invasive plant control***

#### **CONSTRAINTS**

- Lack of central, regional & local funding source
- Lack of awareness (general public, local authorities, particularly planning & enforcement)
- Lack of interest & resisting acceptance or ownership of the problem
- Lack of communication (cross-county catchment, departments, statutory bodies & NGOs)
- Lack of access to river system – reliance on specific user groups (e.g. anglers)
- Fear of disproportionate financial and labour commitment
- Difficulty of control or eradication
- Need for leadership & continuity/direction of the forum
- Legislation not strong enough
- Availability of disposal sites
- Data not up to date

#### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- Reacting now while the problem is manageable and less costly
- Can target less infected areas
- Comprehensive awareness campaign (targeted at specific groups e.g. garden centres, local communities, river users etc)
- Promoting partnerships locally & regionally – help to pool resources
- Sharing examples of good practice
- Investigate suitable disposal sites
- Agri-environment schemes to fund control
- Improved data-collection & mapping
- Linking to SSSI/SAC & BAP funding mechanisms
- Improved utilisation of Water Framework Directive
- Local groups taking action & ownership
- Influencing neighbouring catchments

### **2. *Integrating the planning system***

- Planners not aware of the problem
- Financial implications must be reinforced
- Requires up to date and qualitative data from the Biological Records Centres – need for mapping and monitoring of sites
- Local Development Frameworks require effective policies – indicators of sustainability
- Requires greater consideration in Environmental Assessments
- Enforcement of long-term invasive plant control on mineral restoration sites
- Greater inclusion in Avon Planning Forum

### **3. Is the establishment of a forum the correct approach for the Avon catchment?**

An overwhelming 'yes' was given with the following points to consider:

- Would help group to share experiences & ensure a joined-up approach (Knowledge & resource 'bank')
- Provide a central point of contact for invasive plant issues
- Provide strategic direction to control activities
- Requires commitment from member organisations
- Demonstrate shared ownership of the problem

### **4. How should a forum be structured?**

Representation should include the following organisations

- |  |                        |                       |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|
| - Local authorities (county, district) | - Environment Agency   | - Natural England     |
| - Water companies                      | - MOD                  | - Wildlife Trusts     |
| - Fisheries                            | - Network Rail         | - Highways            |
| - NFU                                  | - Landowners (estates) | - Aggregate companies |

The group should be outward-looking and open to membership, however, consistency of attendance is vital. Furthermore, it should be expected that representation is not solely from the ecologically trained. Attendance from planners, engineers and contractors is equally important.

The forum should act as a steering group tasked with the implementation of actions outlined within the long-term action plan that will be produced during the life of the Living River project. Within this the group should act across three working areas; awareness raising, technical (e.g. control, research) & monitoring and mapping. Each of these areas could have a lead partner (e.g. monitoring led by BRC's).

Initially the Forum should be coordinated by the Living River Project for its duration, after which a statutory body would be most appropriate to chair the forum. Funding should be obtained via the member groups to employ a project officer in similar guise to the Vegetation Advisor at Cornwall County Council or the Environment Officer at Swansea City Council to work across the river catchment and coordinate the delivery of the action plan. This person would be catchment based and not confined to county boundaries.