



Subject:	Management & Control of Japanese Knotweed
Date:	8 th November 2016
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department
Contact Officer:	Siobhan Toland, Assistant Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department.

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of report or summary of main Issues
1.1	Members will be aware that the Council receives environmental inquiries and complaints regarding the presence of Japanese knotweed on residential and commercial sites and regarding the spread of Japanese knotweed onto properties from vacant lands. Inquiries can also arise as part of the Planning process whenever sites are being redeveloped or when construction is occurring.
1.2	Concerns regarding the spread of Japanese knotweed across the UK have been recently highlighted by the national media, both on television and in print. At a local level, the issue of Japanese knotweed has been considered by the Northern Ireland Assembly and its Environment Committee. A few prominent cases involving residential properties have been identified within the Council area.
1.3	In order to identify opportunities for the more effective control of Japanese knotweed, council officers from the City and Neighbourhood Services Department and Legal Services have held a preliminary meeting with representatives of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). This report serves to update Members on the outcome of that meeting and regarding the actions that are proposed to be taken jointly by the Council and NIEA to heighten awareness of Japanese knotweed within Belfast, thereby leading to the timely and more effective control of this non-native invasive species.

1.4	Members will be aware that an Assembly Motion has recently been tabled calling on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to bring forward proposals for a regional programme to eradicate Japanese knotweed.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of this report and to agree that Council officers continue to engage with the NIEA regarding the development of a Japanese knotweed publicity article for inclusion in City Matters, to be augmented by supporting information on the Council's website.
3.0	Main issues
3.1	<p><u>Context.</u></p> <p>Japanese knotweed (<i>Fallopia japonica</i>) is a highly invasive non-native species that was introduced into the UK in the mid-nineteenth century but has since spread to virtually all parts of the UK. It is spread solely via the movement of soil material infected with fragments of the rhizome (root) or plant material and although Japanese knotweed does flower, only the female plants are known to occur in Northern Ireland. Hybrids of the plant do occasionally occur but these generally do not survive.</p>
3.2	<p>Japanese knotweed is prescribed within the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 as a non-native invasive plant species. As such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause Japanese knotweed to grow in the wild. The enforcing authority is the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). Although Japanese knotweed can cause structural damage to property, thereby potentially leading to reductions in land values and difficulties in obtaining mortgages, it is not injurious to human health.</p>
3.3	<p>Invasive species are considered to be a threat to our native biodiversity as they crowd out native species and as such, they can cause damage to forestry, agriculture and infrastructure sectors.</p>
3.4	<p>Japanese knotweed is typically dealt with either by deep excavation and deep burial or via the sustained application of a Glyphosate based herbicide. Japanese knotweed is however difficult to successfully eradicate and so herbicide treatments need to be continued until no regrowth is observed which can typically take between 4 and 5 years.</p>

Legislative controls.

3.5 Where Japanese knotweed is located on private land, NIEA has indicated that any decision to control the plant lies with the landowner. Whilst it is not an offence to have an established Japanese knotweed stand growing on a property, an offence would be committed if it was knowingly removed from the site thereby leading to its further spread. Where Japanese knotweed has spread from one property to another, NIEA has advised that this is a civil matter between both landowners.

3.6 In GB, similar legislative controls to those available in Northern Ireland exist to prevent the spread of Japanese knotweed via the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. In addition, Section 14(4A) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, as inserted by section 23 of the Infrastructure Act 2015, enables species control agreements and orders to be made by environmental authorities to ensure that landowners take action on invasive non-native species, or permit others to enter the land and carry out those operations, to prevent their establishment and spread.

3.7 The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has advised however that these provisions should be used primarily to support national eradication programmes, typically used to remove newly arrived invasive non-native species or those of relatively restricted distribution, adding that it would not be an appropriate use of these powers or an effective use of resources to seek to apply these orders to invasive non-native species that have become widespread such as Japanese knotweed.

Officer meeting with NIEA and proposed actions.

3.8 During the recent officer meeting with NIEA, it was highlighted that there is likely to be a significant benefit to landowners in the prompt identification and treatment of Japanese knotweed, thereby preventing the plant from becoming established. Accordingly, it is proposed that the Council will join with the NIEA in order to develop a Japanese knotweed information article for inclusion in the spring 2017 edition of City Matters, prior to the 2017 growing season commencing. This article will be augmented by additional technical information, available via the Council's website. In addition, it is proposed that staff from the City and Neighbourhood Services and Property and Projects Departments will review procedures for dealing with Japanese knotweed on Council owned lands. Finally, it is proposed that Council officers will continue to liaise with NIEA regarding further opportunities for the more effective control of Japanese knotweed.

3.9	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications.</u></p> <p>There will be a requirement for officers to periodically liaise with NIEA regarding development of the Japanese knotweed information article and supporting website information. Staff costs and the cost of production of the information article for City Matters are included within existing revenue estimates.</p>
3.10	<p><u>Equality & Good Relations Implications.</u></p> <p>There are no relevant equality considerations associated with the proposed Japanese knotweed information article and supporting website inclusions.</p>
4.0	Appendices – documents attached
4.1	None.