

That in view of its obligations under

- **Articles 49, 50 and 74 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations,**
- **Article 56 of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000,**
- **Article 8 of the Convention on Biological Diversity**
- **Article 4 of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats**
- **Target 8 of the National Biodiversity Plan 2011 – 2016**

and particularly with regard to EU Regulation 1143/2014 on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species which entered into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015 and which lays down rules for the prevention and minimisation of the adverse impact of the spread of invasive alien species and requires a risk assessment within 18 months and a comprehensive control programme within 3 years,

- (i) **Cork County Council would dedicate either new or existing staff resources to addressing the issue of Japanese knotweed and other invasive species**
- (ii) **Cork County Council would devote some of the financial allocation to the Cork County Biodiversity Action Plan to:**
  - a. **Improved training of on-the-ground staff, contractors and subcontractors in controlling the spread of Japanese knotweed**
  - b. **Raising general public awareness of Japanese knotweed.**

If I told you that a female alien had come down from space, was self-propagating and gradually invading the earth, what would you say? That as it grew and multiplied, it would gradually kill off our grasses, ferns, buttercups, daisies, nettles. It would kill off the butterflies, ladybirds and those familiar insects which depend on those plants. It would knock walls, damage paving, cause erosion of riverbanks and flood defence structures, it would destroy archaeological sites and it would attack homes. Would you stand idly by and watch it happen? Would you say “there’s nothing we can do”? Would you say “we don’t have adequate resources to control it. We’ll just have to let this alien take over”?

Because that is what is happening. And as Mother Nature is being choked and smothered, we are being less than chivalrous.

Japanese knotweed was brought to Europe in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by a German botanist who found it growing on the sides of volcanoes in Japan. It was lauded and celebrated as a new ornamental plant and in 1850, the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew received its first shipment of knotweed. Four years later, the plant was sold commercially in nurseries.

In its native Japanese volcanic landscape, the climate, natural predators and regular deposits of ash kept knotweed plants small. The plant survived because of the energy stores in its deep root system. But in Western Europe, without these impediments, it grows unabated.

At its most prolific it can grow up to 20cm EVERY DAY. That is 3 – 4 metres in just 10 weeks – the equivalent of two grown adults. Underground, its roots can spread 7 metres horizontally and can go down up to 3 metres.

All the Japanese knotweed all over the UK and Ireland have grown from that one single female specimen shipped to Kew in 1850. So because the plants are unfertilized by a male, they cannot produce flowers and hence, cannot produce seed. For the vast majority of plants, this would mean extinction. But not Japanese knotweed. A new plant can grow from miniscule fragments of ANY part of the plant.

So in the case of Japanese knotweed, the absolute worst thing you can do is to flail, chip or trim it on a roadside. Every tiny needle-sized fragment of the plant that flies out from under the chipper creates another new plant. Every wheel of every tractor or van that passes over the flailed material spreads it further down the road. Every cut stem left lying on the roadside verge will form another plant.

Knotweed costs the UK economy Stg£166 million per year for treatment and in home devaluations. One London-based couple saw the bamboo-like stems growing through the floor of their home. They were told it would be cheaper to knock down and rebuild their £300,000 home rather than try and treat their knotweed problem. Mortgages have been refused on properties in the UK with a single 3cm stand of Japanese knotweed in their garden. If a bank's valuer finds evidence of it or if there is a history of it in the area, a specialist survey will be required. At least three banking institutions in the UK will not lend, whilst others will consider with the advice of a surveyor but require guarantees or an indemnity to be in place. Estimates now show at least one infestation of Japanese knotweed in every 10 sq kms in the UK.

And Ireland is rapidly following suit.

Section 49 of the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations says that any person who plants, spreads or allows Japanese knotweed to spread is guilty of an offence. Yet last October I watched Cork County Council contractors flailing knotweed on the roadside verge of the R610 at Rochestown. And every day now, I watch the brand new knotweed plants springing forth from where they were spread. In this instance, Cork County Council was clearly guilty of an offence under the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations.

But the European Parliament and Council have passed a new regulation which came into force on the first day of 2015. This regulation requires each Member State to carry out a risk assessment on all alien invasive species within 18 months and a comprehensive control programme within 3 years. That is a control programme for ALL invasive species. Not just Japanese knotweed. Bearing in mind the current rate of its spread, the tackling of Japanese knotweed would be a very good place to start teeing up for compliance with this regulation.

One of the advantages of always being behind the curve is that we rarely have to reinvent the wheel. There are many examples of interagency management of knotweed in the UK, of illustrative advice leaflets, of community forums. Our own NRA lays out the clearest and briefest of guidelines for the management of Japanese knotweed on roadside verges:

- Step 1: Undertake a detailed assessment
- Step 2: Implement the appropriate control measures
- Step 3: Undertake post control monitoring.

Right now we can't even do Step 1 because we don't know where the Japanese knotweed is. And we can't know where it is because most people don't recognise it.

So I am asking that Cork County Council would allocate either new or existing staff resources to the Japanese knotweed issue. This does not have to be a full time position but we need to begin the mapping of stands of Japanese knotweed in County Cork. This work does not have to be done from scratch; we simply have to liaise with other mapping projects which are currently underway. For example, the Cork Branch of the Irish Wildlife Trust has been funded by Cork City Council to run a mapping project of knotweed and other invasives. This is ongoing at present.

And I am asking that Cork County Council would use some of the unspent financial allocation to the County's Biodiversity Action Plan to raising awareness of Japanese knotweed. Training ground staff and contractors to recognise the plant. Developing methods of its control on roadside verges. Starting a campaign of awareness. Defining how ground staff and contractors should transport it. Defining where they should transport it to for destruction.

I'm not asking for a widespread 4-year programme of glyphosate injection into every stand of Japanese knotweed in County Cork. I'm asking for the most simple and common sense approach to getting a handle on our problem. Because right now we are being invaded and we are standing idly by rather than defending our homeland.