

## **Draft - Japanese Knotweed – Outline Strategy for Croston.**

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### **Abstract**

This note is intended to provide a basis for discussion of the potential problems and possible solutions resulting from the growth of Japanese Knotweed in Croston. It covers the following topics:- Legality, Community Action, Structural Damage, Contacts with Local Authorities & the EA, Funding, Tasks and Timescales, Possible future development. Comments are invited and the support of Croston PC is requested.

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## **1. Background.**

This note is intended to provide a basis for discussion of the potential problems and possible solutions arising from the presence of Japanese Knotweed growing in Croston.

Japanese Knotweed is an alien species imported into the UK in the 1800s and on sale as a garden plant until just before the beginning of the current millennium. It escaped from intentional planting areas and spread very vigorously in the wild along watercourses, railway embankments and other areas. It spreads by root propagation with rhizomes which can penetrate concrete, masonry and tarmac to send up new shoots. Even small fragments of the roots and above ground stems can produce new plants if they fall into places which will support regrowth.

## **2. Legality**

It is not illegal for landowners to grow Japanese Knotweed but it is illegal to allow it to spread onto neighbouring properties. A recent Appeal Court Ruling established that the owners of properties can claim damages from the neighbours who allow it to cross their boundaries. The case awarded damages of £15,000, so there is an incentive to prevent the spread.

## **3. Treatment**

The web abounds with advertisements for contractors to treat Knotweed but a recent study at Swansea University (D. Jones et al “Optimising physiochemical control of invasive

Japanese knotweed – 5 Feb.2018) provides a field based assessment of physical and or chemical treatments over a three year period.

The conclusion notes that though no treatment provided complete eradication within three year years, glyphosphate using foliar spray and stem injection was found the most effective control treatment. It also advised against unnecessary physical methods (cut & fill, summer cutting and excavation).

#### **4. Community Action**

A useful precedent for community action has been reported (Community Involvement in knotweed control – Lee, North Devon) and could provide a good basis for community action in our area.

“The project originated with a public meeting identifying the spread of knotweed as a significant problem. A steering committee was established and the Environment Agency was consulted. As knotweed treatment by professional contractors can be very costly the committee decided that they would organise a treatment programme themselves. A training programme was established to promote skills within the local community, which resulted in six people gaining the necessary qualifications to undertake chemical treatment work. Gaining the trust of local land owners was also vital as it allowed for widespread take up of the programme. Free knotweed treatment was offered but many made a donation to augment funding from North Devon District Council and North Devon AONB. These sources paid for training, equipment and the chemical needed to undertake the work.”

Proposals to follow this model are outlined later under the headings of Tasks, Timescales and programme.

## **5. Structural Damage**

A very recent report provides at least an initial attempt to quantify the real risks as opposed to the more extreme scenarios in current circulation. (M Fennell et al – “Japanese knotweed : An analysis of capacity to cause structural damage (compared to other plants) and typical rhizome extension” – 6 July 2018).

A review in the Daily Telegraph (Sam Barker - 7/7/18) concluded that the current reluctance of lenders to provide mortgages for properties where knotweed is growing nearby is over cautious both in relation to the distance from visible plants and from the severity of potential damage. Currently those lenders willing to provide loans require the sellers to pay for specialist treatment, costing typically £2000 to £5000 for a three bed semi. A solicitor specializing in knotweed litigation commented that knotweed could reduce property sale values by 20% and that, as in the case of mad cow disease, public perception could ignore academic studies.

Fennel found no evidence that knotweed roots “can grow through concrete” but noted that there was potential for the roots to exploit existing cracks or weaknesses.

This might be of particular concern with historic properties where the foundations predate modern concrete and were constructed of rocks bonded with clay of lime mortar.

## **6. Local Authorities**

Lancashire County Council Countryside Service Manager, Mr Tim Blythe, kindly agreed to discuss the problems of knotweed in Croston. He referred me to a map of known locations (may 2009) and a flyer produced by Croston PC in conjunction with LCC, the EA and FRY.

He noted that LCC could have responsibilities for knotweed growing on LCC property and that this could be relevant to highway verges but that the responsibilities of adjacent land owners would need to be clarified.

Chorley Borough Council, Team Leader for Grounds Maintenance, has been nominated as the contact for knotweed control. He advised that training was required for herbicide application. Typically, a three day course including an assessment might cost £1800 for a group of six people (ie £600 per person). The resulting qualification lasts for life but CBC follow best practice with one day refresher courses every 5 years. He noted that CBC might be willing to allow volunteer trainees to participate in a CBC course subject to availability and an agreement on cost sharing. He has offered the name of a potential trainer who should be able to provide more specific advice. He also said that suitable knapsack spray equipment could be bought for about £60.

## **7. Environment Agency**

An attempt was made to seek advice from the EA at Lutra House. Apparently they do not have a responsibility to register the presence of knotweed but do require applications for permission to apply herbicides “in or near water”. Various EA web posts failed to define “near water”.

When the threat of potential knotweed damage to flood retaining walls in Croston was raised, the response was that this could be notified to the “flood hotline”. This seems about as appropriate as going to the local A&E to seek treatment for tennis elbow.

Further attempts to seek a useful contact for the EA are ongoing.

## **8. Funding**

Initially, funding should not be a significant issue but some assistance with provision of premises for public meetings and preparation of posters/flyers may be requested.

An initial indicative cost for training two people for pesticide qualifications – say £ 1250.

Purchase of knapsack sprayer and stem injection equipment plus chemicals and protective clothing – say £750.

A total initial target of £ 2000 should not be unachievable with support from a combination of direct public contributions, Croston Together Charity, CPC, LCC and CBC.

## **9. Tasks**

The first priority is to update the map of knotweed locations in Croston. This needs to be done before the dieback makes it too difficult to identify the plants.

Ideally, there should be an indication of the size of the outbreak:-

- Number of canes/crowns for small patches
- Area in square metres for larger patches
- Nearness to water courses
- Land owners(s)

There may be an App which will facilitate this – IT advice welcome!

The second priority is the recruitment of a steering group. This should include skills such as:-

- Secretarial, records, and communications
- financial management
- IT skills
- coordination, planning, programming, action table management
- horticultural and herbicide knowledge
- PR, liaison with other groups.

Then there is the need to recruit volunteers to obtain the cooperation of landowners hosting knotweed and to carry out the herbicide applications.

### **10. Time scales/programme**

Realistically, this project will extend over several years. Even with efficient treatment, knotweed elimination takes at least three or four years unless drastic excavation and soil sterilization/disposal is adopted. Such procedures are far beyond the capability and resources here.

The establishment of the steering group and settling roles could take a couple of months, especially if the project is extended to include neighbouring parishes and other areas.

- Agreement of training needs and candidates could take another month.
- Agreement of equipment needs, again a month but in parallel with training.
- Preparation of cost estimates and proposals to potential fund providers. This could be targeted for December, so as to be in goodtime for statutory budget allocations in 2019.
- Training and equipment procurement prior to knotweed growth season, say April onwards.
- Completion of first year herbicide programme by September/October 2019.

### **11. Possible future developments**

As well as dealing with knotweed already growing in Croston, it would be prudent to identify potential sources of new growth by surveying the upstream watercourses flowing into Croston (Yarrow, Lostock, Syd Brook, Spent Brook Etc).

Cooperation with neighbouring parishes in both surveying and weed control could help to reduce the transport of knotweed into Croston.

An awareness programme could be useful to encourage identification of knotweed locations. This could include approaches to:-

- Schools & colleges
- Walking & cycling groups
- Youth organisations, scouts, guides & Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

## **12. Conclusions and Recommendations**

This note identifies the potential problems of Japanese knotweed in Croston and provides a first outline for a strategy to control the growth in the village.

It outlines the basis to set up a community group to tackle the problem in cooperation with LCC, CBC and consult with the EA.

Croston Parish Councilors are asked to consider these proposals, to provide comments and to support the strategy to control knotweed.

## **13. Acknowledgements**

Grateful thanks are due to those individuals and organisations who have provided the information and advice which has made the preparation of this note possible. Thank you.

Peter Fenemore.