

Title of Report Invasive Alien Species Strategy of Council Owned Greenspaces Update	Officer Presenting: Director of Environment and Regeneration Author: Biodiversity Officer
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

1.1 To provide clarification on queries raised by Members at the July (ER22/2020) and September (ER147/20) 2020 Environment and Regeneration Committee meetings, in relation to invasive species in the Strabane area and collaborative working with stakeholders to address invasive species.

2 Background

2.1 The Derry and Strabane Green Infrastructure Action Plan (ER12/19), has a priority action to, '*minimise the impacts of invasive alien species.*' Action 6.18 was to, "*Develop a Council invasive alien species strategy*", to manage invasive alien species on Council owned land.

2.2 Members will recall approving the Non-native Invasive Alien Species (IAS) Strategy of Council Owned Greenspaces 2020-2025, which was presented at Septembers 2020 Environment and Regeneration Committee (ER147/20).

3 Key Issues

3.1 Members raised queries at July's 2020 (ER22/2020) Environment and Regeneration Committee meeting, in relation to the presence of Giant Hogweed within the District.

3.2 Members raised additional queries at the September meeting in relation to:

- Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed in The Strabane and Derg areas.
- Measures that were being taken by Council to address the 12,000 m2 area of IAS along the Strabane Riverside Walkway.
- Request that '*Council work collaboratively with partners to tackle invasive species and expressed concern that there was no evidence outlining a plan of collaborative working with other stakeholders other than DAERA.*'

3.3 The Non-native IAS Strategy: Council Owned Greenspaces 2020-2025 (Appendix 1; ER147/20), outlines that Council are only responsible for controlling IAS on its own land. It is the responsibility of the landowner to control IAS on their own land.

3.4 Council do not have any legal powers to enforce landowners to control IAS, we can only signpost to best practice guidelines. The Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (NI) 2019 applies to key IAS in the District to include Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, which places a legal obligation on landowners to control these species on their land.

3.5 The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) have the enforcement powers to ensure that landowners comply with the control of these IAS on their own land. DAERA are the advisory and enforcement agency tasked with IAS across Northern Ireland.

3.4 Members will recall that:

- Historically, the Strabane Riverside Walkway had several infestations of IAS, for example, Japanese knotweed, Giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam. Council controlled these species annually. However, the August 2017 flood event significantly increased the extent of IAS at the site. Large numbers of seeds and roots were washed downstream and became established on site following the August 2017 flood event.
- Council commissioned an updated IAS survey to manage these IAS along the Strabane Riverside Walk in 2019. Council approved a maintenance budget of £5,000 per annum over a ten-year period for the long-term maintenance of the Strabane Riverside Walkway in 2019 (ER249/19). These IAS are exempt from the products containing Glyphosate motion (C72/19).
- Council's Ground Maintenance staff have received the appropriate training and were issued with the appropriate PPE, proactively surveyed and controlled the Strabane Riverside Walkway with Glyphosate on a regular basis between April and September 2020. This control programme has significantly reduced the number of new plants and the size of the area infected. This site remains closed to the public.

- However, as outlined in the IAS strategy (Appendix 1), it will take years to eradicate these species from this site. Approximately 8% of Giant Hogweed seeds survive in the soil for more than one year and 5% survive for two years after release from the parent plant. Although, most Giant Hogweed seeds will become unviable after two years, some seeds can remain viable for over a decade. Therefore, it is too early to estimate how long it will take to eradicate the IAS at this site. The site will be re-surveyed and controlled from April 2021 by Council's trained Ground Maintenance staff.

3.5 The IAS Strategy (Appendix 1) presented at September 2020 (ER147/2020) Environment and Regeneration Committee meeting, outlines that Council provide sign posting and advice to around 100 queries a year to public and private landowners, which includes a range of stakeholders.

3.6 Council have been proactively managing its own IAS and working with stakeholders for over a decade to address IAS, since the development of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan for the District in 2008.

3.7 Subsequently, we have merged these biodiversity partnership stakeholders into the Green Infrastructure Plan Stakeholders in 2017 (attached), which form part of the Community Plan Partnership. Below is a summary of the activities that Council have completed with our stakeholders in relation to IAS:

- Raised awareness, understanding and action on IAS at events, press releases, social media, signage at our sites, information on our webpage, signs at our green waste skips at recycling centres.
- Organised an international conference in partnership with Queen's University Belfast in 2012 for public sector stakeholders to increase understanding and effective control measures for IAS. We hosted a follow up conference in 2014.
- Commissioned undergraduate dissertation research into a range of IAS with Queen's University Belfast students to help with research, conduct surveys and monitoring of IAS on Council and stakeholder sites.
- Provide identification and best practice guidance signposting to ~100 residents, businesses and stakeholders in relation to IAS each year.
- Incorporated the use of potential planning conditions for any new developments with IAS in the Derry and Strabane Local Development Plan 2032.
- Associate partner of the CIRB EU Interreg Project with a range of stakeholders to map and control IAS along the River Faughan catchment.

- Established the NW Red Squirrel Group in 2010, to conserve the red squirrel population and control the invasive grey squirrel. This constituted group received five years of support from Council and are now self-sufficient and independently manage the grey squirrel population in the District.
- Project partner with RAPID and Woodland Trust, to deliver the Faughan Valley Landscape Project (2015-2015), to work with public and private landowners in the Faughan Valley area, to manage IAS.
- Work with Creggan Country Park to manage IAS at their site and Council's adjacent Creggan Burn Park, to minimise the spread and co-ordinate control programmes.
- Work with DFI Road Service in relation to adjoining land parcels affected with IAS, for example, at Prehen Greenway, to co-ordinate control and minimise the spread of IAS. Also, provide best practice guidance on Japanese knotweed along the Letterkenny Road and to adjacent social housing partners. In addition, provided best practice guidance for Giant Hogweed control, fencing and signage on their adjoining land to the Waterside Greenway and their road verges.

- Secured funding to map and control sections of the River Foyle, in partnership with Loughs Agency.
- Worked with Translink to inform them that they had Giant Hogweed along the railway network, provided best practice guidance on control and coordinated control to prevent spread to Council's adjacent land at the Waterside Greenway.
- Provide notifications to NI Water and Rivers Agency when IAS are identified on their land and sign post them to best practice control.
- Worked with the NI Housing Executive to survey, create a management plan and control programme for a site that was affecting NI Housing Executive residents, to raise awareness, understanding and develop a best practice IAS management showcase example of how to manage Japanese Knotweed for residents and stakeholders.
- Working with Woodland Trust at their Southway site in relation to the adjoining Council owned City Cemetery, to manage Japanese knotweed. Council surveyed, developed management plans, sprayed the IAS and conducted deep excavation and burial of extensive IAS on site, to facilitate development and minimise spread within and adjacent to their site.
- Working with the Ulster Wildlife Trust (UWT) as a Green Infrastructure partner, to promote awareness of IAS on bogs, to restore peatland to provide essential ecosystem services. This involves UWT removing invasive trees and scrubs to prevent any further damage to this priority habitat.
- Consulting with Forest Service on their surveying, management plans and control programme for IAS on their forest estate within the District.

3.8 The IAS Strategy (Appendix 1) was developed to outline Council's approach in managing IAS on its own land and how it will work with a range of stakeholders. The strategy aims to, "*minimise the risk posed by IAS; reduce and control the spread of existing IAS within the Council's owned greenspaces*". The following sections demonstrate how Council are collaborating with stakeholders in relation to IAS:

- Section Four Prevention, Early Detection, Surveillance and Rapid Response: 'To achieve this, we will continue to work with DAERA's Plant Health and Non Native Invasive Species Officer, Northern Ireland Local Authority Biodiversity Officers, Green Infrastructure Stakeholders (Appendix 2) and Council's Environmental Health Service.'

- Section Five Monitoring, Recording and Reporting: 'If the IAS is not on Council owned land, but on a known public sector owned greenspace, we will inform the public sector landowner and signpost them to best practice. This information will be submitted to CEDAR (<https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>) to assist with Northern Ireland's requirement under the EU Regulation to monitor EU Species of Concern. Council's Local Development Plan 2032 has a Guiding Development Principle, to request that the landowner manage IAS as part of a condition of planning permission.'
- Section Seven Communication, Awareness Raising and Capacity Building: Over the last decade Council have proactively raised awareness and understanding of IAS by organising conferences in 2012 and 2014 for public sector organisations, sign posting to best practise management guidelines upon request to residents and stakeholders. Council will:
 - Build upon the previous campaigns and work with the Green Infrastructure Stakeholders (Appendix 2), to raise awareness and understanding of the risks that IAS pose to biodiversity, economy, society and the actions that minimise these risks.
 - Continue to build upon its strong research on surveillance, detection, monitoring, control and eradication strategies.
- Section Eight Action Plan
 - *Work with Council's Environmental Health, Green Infrastructure Stakeholders, and DAERA's IAS Officer and Plant Health to identify high risk emerging IAS that could enter NI and pose a risk within the District.*
 - *Continue to raise awareness, understanding of the impacts of IAS and capacity building for the public, private landowners and Green Infrastructure Stakeholders with stakeholder meetings, presentations at events, identification guides, signposting to websites and best practice publications and co-ordinate volunteer pilot control events.*
 - a. *Provide support to enable Green Infrastructure stakeholders (Appendix 2) to take action to address IAS on their own land.*
 - b. *Co-ordinate with other public bodies to target IAS at a catchment scale / adjacent public greenspace, to prevent IAS becoming established on Council owned land.*

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement, Rural Needs and other Implications

4.1 Surveying and controlling IAS on Council owned land is expensive and resource intense. If we commence control of IAS that are not in Council ownership, there will be a need for further resources to manage these IAS, which could pose liability issues and set a precedent to control on land that is not in Council ownership.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

Background Papers

C72/19, ER12/19, ER249/19, ER22/20 and ER147/20

Appendix 1 – Non-native Invasive Alien Species Strategy: Council Owned Greenspaces 2020-2025

Appendix 2 – Derry and Strabane Green Infrastructure Plan 2019-2032 Stakeholders