House of Commons

Science and Technology Committee

Japanese knotweed and the built environment: Government Response to the Committee's Seventeenth Report

Thirteenth Special Report of Session 2017–19

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 4 September 2019

HC 2600
Published on 6 September 2019
by authority of the House of Commons

Science and Technology Committee

The Science and Technology Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Office for Science and associated public bodies.

Current membership

Norman Lamb MP (*Liberal Democrat, North Norfolk*) (Chair)

Vicky Ford MP (*Conservative, Chelmsford*)

Bill Grant MP (*Conservative, Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock*)

Mr Sam Gyimah MP (*Conservative, East Surrey)*

Darren Jones MP (*Labour, Bristol North West*)

Liz Kendall MP (*Labour, Leicester West*)

Stephen Metcalfe MP (*Conservative, South Basildon and East Thurrock*)

Carol Monaghan MP (*Scottish National Party, Glasgow North West*)

Damien Moore MP (*Conservative, Southport*)

Graham Stringer MP (*Labour, Blackley and Broughton*)

Martin Whitfield MP (*Labour, East Lothian*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO. No. 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/science and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the inquiry publications page of the Committee's website.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are: Danielle Nash (Clerk), Zoë Grünewald (Second Clerk), Dr Harry Beeson (Committee Specialist), Dr Chris Brown (Committee Specialist),Sonia Draper (Senior Committee Assistant), Julie Storey (Committee Assistant), and Joe Williams (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Science and Technology Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general inquiries is: 020 7219 2793; the Committee's e-mail address is: scitechcom@parliament.uk.

You can follow the Committee on Twitter using @CommonsSTC.

Thirteenth Special Report

On 16 May 2019 the Committee published its Seventeenth Report of Session 2017–19, *Japanese knotweed and the built environment* [HC 1702]. On 17 July 2019 we received the Government's Response to the Report, which is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Preface

The Government thanks the Committee for its report on the effects of Japanese knotweed on the built environment.

We are aware of the problems caused by invasive non-native plants such as Japanese knotweed. Japanese knotweed is listed on Schedule 9 and subject to section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981,[1] which makes it an offence to allow the plant to escape or cause it to grow in the wild.

Whilst landowners are under no statutory obligation to remove Japanese knotweed from their property, where they are acting unreasonably and allowing it to cause a nuisance to the local community, local authorities and the police can now issue a Community Protection Notice against them to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

Defra continues to fund a biological control programme through the release of a psyllid insect to tackle Japanese knotweed. If successful, the psyllid will reduce the invasive capacity of Japanese knotweed as well as the effort and cost of managing it. Research is also underway to evaluate a leaf-spot fungus for use as a mycoherbicide, whereby a single-mating type isolate might be used to treat Japanese knotweed whilst preventing the fungus from reproduction, persistence and spread in the field.

The EU LIFE funded RAPID LIFE project ("Reducing and Preventing Invasive Alien Species Dispersal") is a three year co-funded project (2017–2020), with total funding over €1.1m. RAPID LIFE bridges the gap between the Great Britain Invasive Non-native Species Strategy[2] and the work done by Local Action Groups. The RAPID LIFE project is supporting efforts to establish and spread the biocontrol agents for Japanese knotweed in its five regions across England. It is also carrying out two catchment-scale demonstration projects on Japanese knotweed control (in the Bristol Avon and Wensum) using best practice chemical and mechanical methodologies.

Natural England and the Environment Agency undertake action nationally to remove Japanese knotweed where it is affecting protected sites, water quality or adds to the risk of flooding.

We have a comprehensive Great Britain Invasive Non-native Species Strategy designed to tackle invasive non-native species and a 25 Year Environment Plan[3] commitment to biosecurity.

1 https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/section/14
2 http://www.nonnativespecies.org/index.cfm?pageid=156
3 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan

The Government welcomes the findings in the Committee's report. We agree with the Committee that Japanese knotweed may have been disproportionately singled out above other invasive plants and trees, which cause similar damage but are not subject to the same controls. We must act to tackle this species with a measured, evidenced-based approach.

The Committee made a number of recommendations, which we will now consider.

We welcome the Environment Agency's offer to approach Defra and others with a view to ensuring that research is commissioned to fill knowledge gaps. To support this, the Environment Agency should convene a meeting with the major national Japanese knotweed remediation firms to explore how a national dataset could be assembled from this information and how companies could contribute to this on an ongoing basis to inform academic research which seeks to better understand Japanese knotweed. This would provide a useful resource for further research and an evidence base to inform guidance in this area. (Paragraph 29)

The Environment Agency accepts the recommendation to convene a meeting with the major national Japanese knotweed remediation firms to explore how a national dataset could be assembled from this information and how companies could contribute to this on an ongoing basis. We have agreed with the Property Care Association (PCA) and the Invasive Non-Native Specialists Association (INNSA) to begin this process in early autumn 2019.

Defra should consider adding the physical effects of Japanese knotweed to its "areas of research interest" document. (Paragraph 29)

Defra's Areas of Research Interest are continually kept under review and will be updated in due course. We will consider including the impact of invasive species on a range of environments.

Defra commission a study of international approaches to Japanese knotweed in the context of property sales to further inform discussion of this issue, and report by the end of the year. (Paragraph 45)

Defra will commission a study on international approaches to Japanese knotweed in the context of property sales and report by the end of the year. We will be happy to send a copy of the study to the Committee once completed.

In consultation with the Civil Mediation Council, the Government produce additional guidance on dealing with such disputes, recommending that mediation via an accredited mediator be normally used, subject to the agreement of the parties involved, as the initial route to resolution of the dispute if it offers value for money, while explaining that this would not prevent an aggrieved party from having recourse to litigation if efforts to achieve a mediated settlement do not succeed. (Paragraph 93)

There is already a route to resolution for home buyers whose sale is affected by Japanese knotweed through the relevant ombudsma—the Property Ombudsman and Property Redress Scheme. Therefore, the *Government* does not see a specific need to produce additional guidance.