

Clinton Devon Estates

Environmental Policy Document No: 1 Control of Himalayan Balsam

Commitment: Clinton Devon Estates recognises its legal obligation to control Himalayan Balsam. We are committed to taking all reasonable measures to control the spread of this species on our land through our own endeavours and working in partnership with other stakeholders.

Background: Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) originates from Asia. It was introduced to the UK in 1839 as an ornamental plant, but has since escaped from gardens. It aggressively colonises river banks, hedgerows and woodlands across the UK, out-competing native species and resulting in a serious threat to native biodiversity. The plant is found on farmland, particularly along hedgerows, and in woodland owned by Clinton Devon Estates (CDE), particularly on areas adjacent to the River Otter. Although associated with rivers, woodlands are vulnerable to invasion due to the species' ability to spread in habitats where there is low light and ground vegetation.

Legislation and Estate obligations: Himalayan balsam is listed under *Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*. As such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise allow this species to grow in the wild.



Means of Control: Himalayan balsam is very difficult to eradicate. It can be controlled chemically, through strimming or by hand-pulling, with each of these methods proving effective only if they are carried out in a sustained manner. The choice of technique depends on local ground conditions and legal/environmental constraints. The plant has a persistent seedbank, can re-sprout vegetatively and can readily be transferred by human activity, or downstream by water flow. Its control requires a long-term vision and sustained action.

Constraints: CDE faces a number of constraints in controlling Himalayan balsam on its land. These include the aggressive nature of the species and the constant contamination of land, particularly farmland within the Otter Valley floodplain, with seed/stems carried downstream from higher up the catchment. This problem is accentuated through flooding events that regularly impact the whole floodplain, which comprises much of CDE's farming area. In addition, farming activities are currently organic, and as such, chemical control of Himalayan Balsam of farmland would be illegal. The Otter Valley area also has a number of popular rights of way running through and adjoining CDE land, with members of the public unwittingly assisting the spread of this invasive species. Vehicles can also spread the species, with fords being a source of concern.

Opportunities: Clinton Devon Estates is part of the multi-agency and community *River Otter Himalayan Balsam Project*, which includes the Environment Agency, the Westcountry Rivers Trust, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, the Devon and Cornwall Probation Trust and the Otter Valley Association. This partnership began in 2012 and provides a powerful and effective focus for controlling this plant. It accepts that control of Himalayan Balsam is only possible through the long-term endeavours of multiple stakeholders, including landowners.

CDE 's Strategy: The CDE strategy follows broad recommendations made by *DEFRA's Invasive Non-Native Species Framework* (2008). This outlines Key Actions to strengthen a) prevention, b) detection, c) surveillance and monitoring, d) response to, and e) control, and eradication of this species. The local approach is that adopted by the *River Otter Himalayan Balsam Project* which advocates starting at the source of each of the tributaries of this river and working down to the confluence where they enter the Otter. Once these tributaries have been cleared, control on the main river and on farmland within the Otter valley will be considerably more effective and sustainable.

Priorities: We are working towards the following CDE priorities, listed in order of importance: 1) the protection of the Pebblebed Heaths, which have a European conservation designation and are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Protection Area (SPA) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC); 2) the control and eventual eradication of Himalayan Balsam on the tributaries of the River Otter running through CDE owned land; 3) the control and eventual eradication from woodland areas; and 4) the control on farmland within the lower Otter catchment once all tributaries are cleared.

CDE Actions:

- Limit further spread by ensuring all CDE staff are made aware of the seriousness of Himalayan balsam and provide suitable training so staff activities do not cause cross-contamination of land.
- Map any new populations that are found and react rapidly to eradicate them
- Map and work towards eradicating Himalayan balsam on the Pebblebed Heaths, and on woodlands managed by CDE using chemical control, strimming or pulling where environmentally appropriate;
- Map and work to eradicate existing discrete populations of Himalayan balsam on CDE land outside of the Otter catchment;
- Continue to work as a partner of the *River Otter Himalayan Balsam Project* to control and eventually eradicate Himalayan Balsam from the four Otter tributaries running through CDE land;
- Monitor the success of all control programmes;
- Continue to manage CDE farmland appropriately to minimise spread of Himalayan balsam within the Otter catchment;
- Dedicate core staff time, particularly of Conservation and Forestry staff, to the control of this species, recording annual effort dedicated to this task and with the production of an annual report for the public domain;
- Formally notify all tenant farmers of their obligation to control invasive species under their tenancy agreement and strongly encourage them to do so; and