

## Notes from Meeting 20 Feb 24 Zoom Erme and Yealm Rivers Association

For ITC/Parks Officers & interested ITC Cllrs

This was a meeting for landowners of the Rivers Yealm & Erme - the main topic was discussing Himalayan Balsam (HB). Below is a combination of background info provided and notes from the meeting.

Himalayan balsam is a very attractive plant, but has become problematic in the British Isles since it was imported to be planted in gardens, and subsequently escaped.

Reasons why HB is harmful to our native species:

The plant is attracted to damp areas like riverbanks, where it grows in clusters that can reach 10 feet (3 m.) in height.

Since it is so tall, it will often shade out shorter native plants.

Himalayan balsam is an annual, however, and it dies back in the winter, leaving bare spaces that would normally be inhabited by native grasses. This leaves the riverbanks vulnerable to serious erosion.

It is also a vigorous producer of nectar, which draws pollinators away from native plants, putting their pollination and reproduction in jeopardy.

Seeds spread predominantly down stream, and I believe HB has been sighted at Harford, in which case it is likely to appear on ITC land at some point in the future . It has definitely been confirmed to be at Ivybridge Sewage works.

It is landowners responsibility to control it / stop it from spreading.

Work is being undertaken on the Yealm & Erme to:

1. map where the HB currently is
2. Find out who all the landowners are to get permission to go on their land/provide access.
3. Start a 5 year plan to eradicate HB from the 2 catchment areas, including all tributaries of the rivers.

Compared to other invasive species like Japanese Knotweed where eradication is complex, HB can be removed fairly easily. The best option is to pull up shoots of HB before it can set seed.

If there are large areas of HB mixed with bramble, this can be brush cut at ground level. As it dies back each year, if prevented from setting seed, this will stop it growing - however to remove completely it will require 3 pulls/cuts a year starting April/May (for 5 years). I think this is due to life of seeds already spread but not 100% sure

The plants can be left in situ after being cut/pulled, as long as they haven't flowered/gone to seed they will just rot down. HB shoots are already coming up in Feb in some places!

The Yealm group has secured funding for this year, but is trying to get funding for the next 4 years of the program on the Yealm. Liability insurance required so Landowners are not liable for the volunteers that undertake the work on their land.

Volunteers may need waders and have to navigate barbed wire fences to access all the stands of HB, so Yealm Group working with Park life to complete this work & are seeking funding.

Mark Walker from WATER has been engaging with SWW about the need to manage the HB on their sites and had a positive meeting with their ecology lead, who will hopefully be developing a SWW policy. (The Erme Joint Parishes group also raised this with SWW via the SHDC scrutiny committee and awaiting for a response from SWW)

Other topics briefly discussed were Yealm plans to increase native fish numbers - 2 avenues - as well as improving water quality, also looking to develop a site for a hatchery.

Yealm received advice from EA re fallen trees in river to leave as is - slows flow of water and EA looking for water to take a more natural route as best practice. Yealm river is walled in many parts due to water historically being used for leats/mills - I thought this was interesting as there are many parallels with the Erme.

Next Erme and Yealm Rivers Association mtg will be in Sept 2024 with hopefully a larger number of landowners attending.