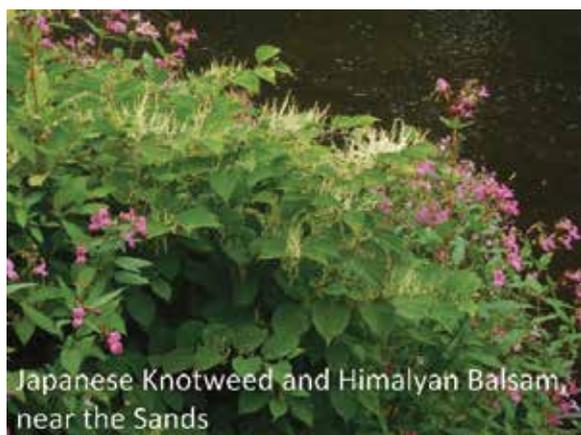


Durham's River and Riverbanks: Restoration Plans and Call for Volunteers

2022 is the 80th anniversary of the founding of the **City of Durham Trust** and a particular focus for this year is the City's riverbanks, working with the Wear Rivers Trust and other local bodies.

The River Wear and its wooded banks are among Durham's iconic features, but they are in a declining condition. Initiatives have now begun to reverse this. **Could you help?**

While the woodland here is carefully managed by Durham Cathedral, the immediate banks along the water present a scene of picturesque but environmentally damaging neglect. A major worry is the spread of three invasive, non-native plants, **Japanese Knotweed**, **Indian or Himalayan Balsam**, and **Giant Hogweed**, pictured here. They may be interesting to look at, especially in flower, but these plants are increasingly smothering other native vegetation. They then leave the banks vulnerable to damaging erosion during the winter die-back. The need to deal with them has become urgent.



The expert **Wear Rivers Trust** and other community groups are looking for volunteers, either individuals or local groups, to help remove alien plants, starting this spring and summer. **To record your interest in helping the “Invasive Non-Native Species” project contact in the first instance admin@wear-rivers-trust.org.uk** .

Volunteers with WRT and other groups are mainly involved in hand-pulling the balsam. There is space for more specialist volunteers to tackle the other species, with the possibility of pesticide training being offered to those interested in helping fight the knotweed. People can also help by sending in reports of the location of the three problem species, or by participating in local surveys. For more details on these plants, see <https://bit.ly/3HkvgSZ> .

The banks to be cleared extend from the Maiden Castle area downstream to the Barkers Haugh Sewage Treatment Works (knotweed at the Sands and the hogweed opposite Kepier should be included). The interventions will be optimally timed according to the individual life-cycles of the three species.

The wider ambition of the Wear Rivers Trust is in time to clear the whole catchment area of the River Wear. In the local area balsam already dominates areas of Hopper's Wood, Pelaw Wood and the area around the former DLI museum. The Wear Rivers Trust advises: “The scale of the effort on the ground is entirely down to the level and consistency of funding we are able to source.” Progress with Durham riverbanks will encourage more support from local residents and businesses, who will benefit from safer and more accessible riverbanks.

Reference to the use of pesticides may cause anxiety, but the knotweed is so intractable that no practicable alternatives yet exist. Pesticide may also sometimes be used on the giant hogweed if a large stand makes hand removal impracticable (be wary, the sap can cause burns). Careful “spot spraying” is used, to avoid affecting other species, and permission is overseen by the Environment Agency. The project will need to be staggered over several years and need repeats in the future.

The Durham City Riverscape Community

The WRT is working closely with the recently formed “Durham City Riverscape Community” set up in coordination with Durham City Parish Council. This is a group involving the many local users and enjoyers of the river, whether commercial or for sport or leisure. It is overseen by City of Durham Trust member **Martin Hiles**, a logistics expert with skill in river management.



A working group has formed and a first task is to remove litter from the river and its banks, and to make plans to clear debris from the weirs. Groups of litter-pickers are now being organized, with monthly attacks planned.

Interested in helping? It is easy to join the Facebook group (“Durham City Riverscape Community”): <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1361735904297775>

The Durham City Riverbanks Regeneration Study

A third initiative is being coordinated by the Cathedral along with the Environment Agency, the County Council and the University, with a fund of £34K (core grant of £25k from the Environment Agency and £9K from the three other lead partners). There is currently no call for volunteers.

This project is now studying means of enhancing the natural environment of the watercourse and woodlands, including possible measures to mitigate extreme weather events and to improve accessibility and amenity for visitors. The Cathedral property department is the project lead. A report with recommendations is expected from April. The area being covered extends from Shincliffe Bridge to Framwellgate Bridge.

More Information and Useful Links

Local historian Martin Roberts has given an illustrated lecture for the City of Durham Trust on the long history of Durham’s riverbanks. “**The Riverbanks of Durham Peninsular**” is on Youtube: <https://bit.ly/3s3EgHO> .

The Wear Rivers Trust works to conserve, protect, rehabilitate and improve the landscape and watercourses of the Wear and its catchment area. It relies on volunteers to help with its work: <https://wear-rivers-trust.org.uk/> .

The City of Durham Trust is a civic society and registered charity which works to celebrate, protect and enhance the heritage and landscape of the City. New members are always welcome: <https://durhamcity.org/> .

For the national picture see the “State of Our Rivers” report from the **Rivers Trust**: <https://bit.ly/3HxF0tq> and also the item in Arocha, “The UK’s Rivers: In Deep Water”: <https://bit.ly/35c1rah> .