



Environmental boost from County Durham invasive species projects

Water quality in County Durham is set to benefit from work aimed at tackling invasive species on the banks of local watercourses.

Wear Rivers Trust has received funds totalling £32,000 from Northumbrian Water, which will support experts and volunteers working to remove species such as Giant Hogweed, Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed, all of which are harmful to people and habitats.

The support from Northumbrian Water has come through the company's Branch Out funding, as well as its bluespaces scheme, which aims to support improvements to areas around water that are freely accessible to our customers.

A £7,000 grant will support the catchment-wide Wear Invasive Non-Native Species (WINNS) project and £25,000 will go towards the 'Old Durham Beck Renewed' project to support the management and treatment of Giant Hogweed.

'Old Durham Beck Renewed' started in March and Northumbrian Water funding will help it to run until 2025. While the WINNS project covers a wider area, it will also contribute towards work at Old Durham Beck.

Work to treat Giant Hogweed is already underway. This will be followed by activities to tackle Himalayan Balsam and Japanese Knotweed later in the year. In total, 7.8km of bluespaces will be improved, as the removal of these species will result in benefits such as reduced erosion and sedimentation into the water. Additionally, the area will become safer for visitors; Giant Hogweed can cause burns if its sap comes into contact with skin so people should avoid touching it and keep pets away.

Both projects will not only improve habitats and safe accessibility along watercourses, including the River Wear, but will also contribute to water quality improvements.

Old Durham Beck Renewed complements the water quality benefits to 9km of watercourses from £11 million of ongoing investment by Northumbrian Water in upgrades to its network assets at Pitlington and Sherburn.

Wear Rivers Trust Project Officer Rebekah Bainbridge said: "Giant Hogweed spreads very quickly, dominating habitats. Each plant head can contain up to 50,000 seeds that enter rivers and streams. When water levels rise and fall, these seeds are transferred to the banks, taking hold in new areas.

"By tackling these species, we improve habitats, allowing other flora and fauna to thrive, enabling a recovery in the environment around the becks, streams and rivers, with a positive effect on the water quality, too.

“The work this funding from Northumbrian Water enables us to do, combined with the company’s own investment in its assets, is really important to our shared goals of improved water quality and environmental access in the area, and we are grateful for the support.”

Stuart Pudney, Conservation and Land Manager at Northumbrian Water said: “The water quality in, and environment around our region’s rivers, streams, becks and burns are really important to us. So we are glad to be supporting Wear Rivers Trust with its vital work to provide a boost to River Wear and its catchment.

“Branch Out is a well-established way of supporting such projects and it is great to be enhancing that through our bluespaces programme. This delivers upon our commitment to go above and beyond our regulatory requirements to improve the environment and work in partnership to improve 500km of bluespace by 2030.

“Species like Giant Hogweed carry a dual threat, as a health risk to people and animals and also because of the effect that it has on water quality. It’s great to see Wear Rivers Trust tackling it with these projects.”