

Concern over move to release weed predator

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A RADCLIFFE businessman feels the Government decision to release an insect to halt the spread of Japanese Knotweed is "premature".

Mike Clough, managing director of Japanese Knotweed Solutions, based in Melton Street, says assurances are required as to how the insect — or aphid — can be effectively managed. His comments come after Wildlife Minister Huw Irranca-Davies gave the go-ahead for the release of an insect, called a psyllid, to stop the spread of the devastating plant which costs the UK economy more than £150 million a year to control and clear.

Using an insect to act as a natural form of pest control will be the first time that a solution like this has been used to help control the spread of a non-native invasive plant in Europe.

Commenting on the move, Mr Clough said: "The consultation seems to have slipped below the radar.

"The decision to release is premature as real concerns remain about the ability to control the spread of the aphid should it not react as scientists expect.

"Just like Japanese knotweed, the aphid is an alien species and has no known predators in the UK.

"The public needs reassurance that there are stringent controls in place to ensure we do not have a bigger problem on our hands if the aphid in turn acts differently than expected."

He says that although the aphid does not actually kill the Japanese Knotweed, it is proven to be an effective agent in slowing of the plant's growth and spread.

Mr Clough concluded: "If assurances can be given as to how the aphid can be effectively managed, consumers and the weed eradication industry would no doubt welcome it."

"It would be an additional tool to tackling the growing problem of Japanese Knotweed."

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