

The Observer

SCIENCE Japanese bugs may be answer to knotweed

19th July 2009

By Robin McKie

Scientists are considering plans to release hundreds of tiny insects imported from Japan in a bid to fight

A rapidly growing weed that is blighting Britain.

They want to use **Aphalara itadori**, which is a psyllid - a small jumping insect that eats a specific plant - to attack Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), which was introduced as an ornamental plant in the 19th century and now costs more than pounds 1bn every year to clear from buildings, roads and railway lines.

On Thursday, the government will reveal that it is considering an application for a licence to release the insects. If successful, the plan would lead to a reduction in the use of chemicals and weedkillers to clear Japanese knotweed and also cut the costs of removing it from sites. A final decision on whether to release the insects will depend on the public's response to the plan.