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Knot for the fainthearted

Environmental scientist and founding Director at Environet UK, Nic Seal provides an update on Japanese knotweed and outlines how to ensure its removal.

Japanese knotweed is an invasive plant species that was introduced into the UK around 1850. It can now be found all over the UK, on brownfield sites, highways, railways, canals, rivers, gardens, parks, and even graveyards. It is notoriously difficult to kill and causes damage to property, growing through asphalt, blocking underground drains, coming up through floors and damaging walls. Mortgages are often refused on properties affected by knotweed, causing adverse effects on property values.

In February 2017 judgment was passed against Network Rail for allowing Japanese knotweed to grow on their land, thereby causing actionable nuisance to adjoining property owners. Network Rail was ordered to pay not only for the treatment, but more interestingly for diminution – the reduction in property value resulting from the knotweed. Hailed as a landmark case, it has very significant ramifications for owners of property containing Japanese knotweed, and makes it even more imperative to tackle it correctly, especially in a development context.

Physical removal

Whilst it's easy to make knotweed look dead with herbicide, it's very difficult to kill the underground rhizome system in its

entirety, and even more difficult to verify with confidence that eradication has been achieved. If you are serious about eradicating the plant within a given timescale, physical removal is the only answer. Whilst it might be more expensive than herbicide treatment, the reason all major developers use it is that it's carried out in days not years, has a better success rate, cuts delays and therefore overall cost.

If building within an area where Japanese knotweed has been previously treated with herbicide, extreme caution is required. The mere action of disturbing ground during groundworks or

landscaping can reinvigorate rhizome made dormant by herbicide treatment, resulting in considerable spread across a

KNOTWEED IDENTIFICATION

When spring is in the air, new red knotweed shoots appear, rapidly growing from a plant that resembles asparagus, into a dense thicket of knotweed 3m or more tall by June. Environet offers a knotweed identification service – just email your photo to expert@environetuk.com and the company will confirm one way or the other. It's a free service – although a small donation to help one of the chosen charities on the Environet Just Giving page would be appreciated.



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much larger area, causing delays and significant additional costs.

Development in Derby

Environet UK is the preferred knotweed specialist for a rapidly expanding food superstore chain. Having secured planning permission, tackling the six areas of knotweed amounting to over 100 sq m of affected land was next on the agenda. The company assessed the site in December 2016, estimating there to be some 200m³ of infested soil.

The 'dig & dump' option whereby all infested soils are excavated and consigned to landfill was rejected due to cost and for environmental reasons. The alternative, Xtract was chosen as it represented far better value for money, was better environmentally (zero waste and zero herbicide), and comes with insurance backed guarantees underwritten by a syndicate at 'A' rated Lloyd's. Work on site started in January 2017 and was complete in only three days, allowing the rest of the development work to

commence without delay.

Xtract was developed by Environet UK to separate knotweed rhizome from soil. It now has patents in the UK, USA and Canada and is recognised as an eco-innovative alternative to 'dig & dump'. Clients can also benefit from it being an on-site remediation method, as it's eligible for Land Remediation Tax Relief.

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