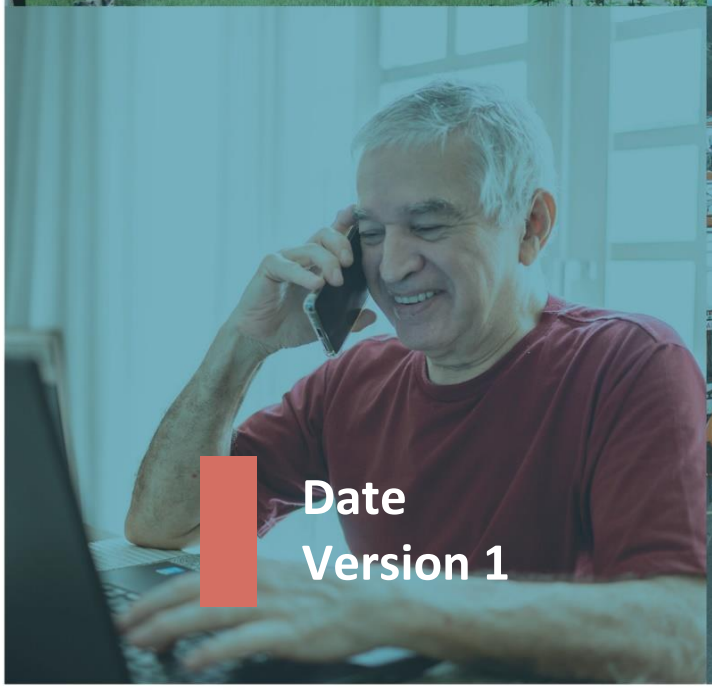
Milton Keynes City Council

Biosecurity Policy.

January 2026



Date
Version 1

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Introduction

Since the early 2000s there has been an increase in the number of non-native invasive plant and animal species, pests, and diseases in the UK. Climate change and other factors are making it easier for some invasive non-native species (INNS) to become established and spread. INNS are a major cause for biodiversity loss and species extinction, affecting the health of habitats and causing significant changes to ecosystems and landscapes. Some INNS bring risks to property (Japanese Knotweed) and others pose risks to human health (Giant Hogweed). There is a need to address these risks within the management of open spaces and the environment.

The word 'biosecurity' refers to a set of precautions that aim to prevent the introduction and spread of harmful organisms. These include non-native pests, such as insects, and disease-causing organisms called pathogens, such as some viruses, bacteria, and fungi. These pests and pathogens threaten the health of our plants and trees, and some may directly threaten the health of humans and animals. Many INNS lack native predators or herbivors that might reduce spread or at least vigour, they may also ofer little to the wider ecology, thus reduce overall diversity.

Good biosecurity practice involves early detection, ongoing surveillance, and contingency planning to eradicate or at least contain problems as they arise. Milton Keynes City Council declared a Climate Emergency in July 2019[1], recognising that the global climate is in a state of breakdown. We need to urgently prepare for the local impacts of a changing climate, reduce our carbon emissions and protect and restore nature.

We also know that climate change, along with other factors, is having a significant impact on the health of nature and ecosystems, and that this is a critical part of the wide

[1] https://mkcc-climatestudy.commonplace.is/

environmental crisis. For this reason, the council has taken an approach that tackles the nature crisis together with the climate emergency and recognises that we face a Climate and Nature Emergency.

Changing the way we manage our assets and work with our partners and communities to prevent and control invasive non-native species will play a key role to help us to tackle this emergency together.

In recognition of the issue the Government have set out a Biosecurity Strategy (2023 – 2028) [2] founded on a commitment to co-ordinate our approach towards plant biosecurity and in recognition of our collective responsibility to respond to these challenges and protect our plants and trees.

Purpose

This policy outlines Milton Keynes City Council's plans to improve plant biosecurity through reducing the spread of invasive non-native plant species, injurious weeds, and plant diseases across open spaces owned or managed by Milton Keynes City Council.

Legislation & duties

This Plant Biosecurity Policy aligns with:

• Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 - invasive non-native plants

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is the primary piece of legislation in England and Wales for protecting wildlife. All birds and a variety of other plant and animal species are protected under this act. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is it illegal to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild any plant listed in Schedule 9 as these may cause ecological, environmental, or socio-economic harm[3].

• Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, 2006:

Section 40 – 'all public bodies must have regard for the purpose of conserving biodiversity in the discharge of their normal functions.'

Regarding biosecurity, NERC requires the council to control invasive species to ensure they are not detrimental to biodiversity.

[2]https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plant-biosecurity-strategy-for-great-britain-2023-to-2028/plant-biosecurity-strategy-for-great-britain-2023-to-2028#joint-ministerial-foreword
[3] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/schedule/9/part/II

Invasive non-native plants

There are 36 species of invasive non-native plants which are of special concern because of their invasiveness and their ability to establish in several nations across Europe, including the UK. They cause severe problems for native UK plants and the environment[4].

The most common invasive non-native plants in the UK include:

1. Japanese knotweed
2. Giant hogweed
3. Himalayan balsam
4. Rhododendron ponticum
5. New Zealand pygmyweed

Defra's Invasive non-native (alien) plant species: rules in England and Wales, 2020 states, 'you must not do any of the following with invasive non-native plants:

- Import
- Keep
- Breed
- Transport
- Sell
- Grow, cultivate, or permit to reproduce.

These rules also apply to specimens of listed invasive non-native species, including:

- Any live part of the species, such as seeds or cuttings that might grow or
- Hybrids, varieties or breeds of such a species that might survive and reproduce.

If a listed plant is already growing on your land, then in the view of Defra, those plants are not considered to be intentionally kept or cultivated. But you should:

- Treat or dispose of them where possible
- Not intentionally allow them to grow or spread outside your land.
- There are exemptions which can be found in Defra's Invasive non-native (alien) plant species: rules in England and Wales, 2020'.
- Weeds Act 1959 - Injurious weeds

Under the Weeds Act 1959 enforcement action may be taken on the occupier of land on which injurious weeds are growing, requiring the occupier to take action to prevent the spread of injurious weeds. These five injurious weeds can be identified using Defra's 'Identification of Injurious Weeds' leaflet[5].

[4] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/invasive-non-native-alien-plant-species-rules-in-england-and-wales#list-of-invasive-plant-species

[5]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/69265/pb4192-injurious-weeds.pdf

The Weeds Act was amended by the Ragwort Control Act of 2004. Ragwort is an important, nectar rich, native plant which has high biodiversity value. A strategic approach can be applied to assessing and controlling of the spread of ragwort, concentrating efforsts where it poses a threat to the health and welfare of grazing animals and the production of feed or forage.

Ponds are often species rich; the European Protected Species Great Crested Newts being particularly abundant across the city, and home to many species of invertebrates which in turn are food for birds and bats. The spread of invasive pond plants; often introduced into garden ponds, can desomate wildlife. New Zealand pygmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*), is an extremely invasive species which is not easy to control. Fragments of this species can easily be spread on clothing or equipment or by animals. It forms dense mats on water bodies that shade out other aquatic vegetation can impede drainage, and cause oxygen depletion. It is extremally difficult to eradicate so biosecurity is vital[6].

Tree Disease

The impact of tree disease has had a catastrophic impact on Elms, once the ubiquitous tree of the British Countryside. Dutch Elm disease, was accidentally imported into the UK from Canada in the late 1960s, caused by the fungus *Ophiostoma novo-ulmi* which is spread by elm bark beetles millions of trees were lost. Now through an understanding of plant breeding and biosecurity the disease can be slowed and one day reversed.

As can be seen in the graph below the frequency of outbreaks has increased significantly since 2002. Not only are pest and diseases an issue for the host plant they can also be toxic to humans.

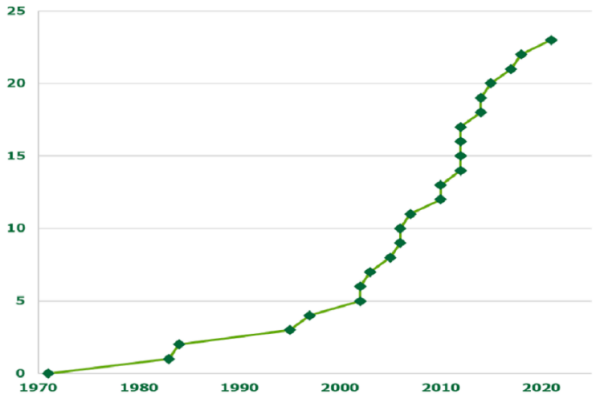

Figure 1: *Graph showing a cumulative increase in the number of new pest and disease outbreaks (y axis) affecting trees since 1971 (x axis). (Source: Forestry Commission)*

Ash dieback and the fungal pathogen that causes it was first detected in the UK In 2012. This pathogen, which is often fatal to our native ash trees, arrived here naturally as wind-blown spores as well as through the importation of infected ash trees. It is aready having a significant impact in Milton keynes, The Parks Trust are taking a proactive approach at Linford Wood, an ancient woodland where 65% of the upper canopy is Ash. The Trust have

[6] https://nnnsi.org/assets/NNNSI/NZP-management.pdf

started removing some of the trees before the disease fully takes hold and start to dangerously fail.[7]

Tree diseases can also directly impact Human health. For example, the spoors of sooty Bark disease can cause symptoms similar to allergic asthma, influenza, or pneumonia. Exposure to the public is less likely to be an issue, but tree surgeons and others directly working with the trees are at a higher risk.

The caterpillar of the Oak Processionary moth, which emerges in April every year, develops thousands of irritating hairs, which can cause skin rashes, sore throats, breathing difficulties and eye problems if people or their pets encounter them. The council is taking proactive action to manage the risks and reduce the introduction and spread of other tree biosecurity risks including Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner as set out in the Councils Tree Operational Tree Management Plan[8]

Policy

As set out in national legislation the council is responsible to stop invasive non-native plants, injurious weeds and plant diseases spreading on land owned and or managed by Milton Keynes City Council or spreading to third party land.

Invasive non-native plants must be prevented from spreading and causing a nuisance or damage to other land or property. If efforts to prevent spreading are not carried out, the landowner may be responsible for any damage the plants cause and may be prosecuted.

Around 10 new invasive non-native species of plants and animals come into and establish each year in the UK. Around 12 percent of these cause serious impacts and are classed as invasive, costing millions each year to control. Plants that have serious impact include giant hogweed (human health risks) and Japanese knotweed (infrastructure risks) both of which impact biodiversity by impacting native plants. A proactive approach to biosecurity is essential to control and stop the spread of non-native invasive species and diseases.

The council currently work with its landscape contractor, Glendale to remove Japanese knotweed (Fallopia japonica) when it is identified. It is A legal requirement to eradicat and also to ensure controlled disposal.

Work is underway to raise awareness of these species and control requirements by staff and the public and it is a key area of work and action to implement this policy.

[7] https://www.theparkstrust.com/our-work/landscape-management/landscaping-challenges/ash-trees-in-milton-keynes-are-at-risk-from-devastating-ash-dieback-disease/
[8] https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-08/Operational%20tree%20policy.pdf

Related biosecurity issues

There are also biosecurity issues from specific animals, pathogens, and other organisms that are outside of the scope of this policy. The council responds to other aspects of biosecurity which are covered through pest control and environmental health.

Biosecurity Vision

- To improve plant biosecurity through preventing the spread of non-native plants and injurious weeds.
- To build awareness of the risks from pests and diseases, increase knowledge of how to reduce those risks and introduce a system of management to reduce risks.

Objectives

The council will take action to deliver 3 priority objectives to prevent, control and monitor the spread of non-native plants and injurious weeds:

- **Understand and detect -** The council will have best practice at the core of its operations, acting upon existing threats and keep informed of new threats. The council will enable training of staff and public on invasive non-native species, injurious weeds, and plant diseases.
- **Prevent -** The council will identify and monitor the spread of non-native invasive plants, injurious weeds and plant diseases on land owned or managed by the council.
- **Respond -** The council will act to prevent the spread and reduce introduction of invasive nonnative plants and injurious weeds on council owned or managed land.

Policy actions

The council has prepared an operational action plan to implement this Plant Biosecurity Policy which sets out the action and proactive approach required to enact this policy. The council will embed these actions in its work to improve plant biosecurity.

The council's action plan implements the three objectives, to understand and detect, prevent, and respond. These objectives and actions align with two leading national government biosecurity campaigns which provide information and guidance for improving biosecurity in water and on land:

- Check Clean Dry - water based biosecurity[9]
- Be Plantwise - land based plant biosecurity[10]
- Share and disseminate information to stakeholders and the wider community

[9] https://marinescience.blog.gov.uk/2019/05/13/how-check-clean-dry-can-help-protect-our-freshwater-environments-and-animals/

[10] https://www.nonnativespecies.org/what-can-i-do/be-plant-wise

Understand & detect:

The council will have best practice at the core of its operations, acting upon existing threats and keep informed of new threats. Training of staff and contractors on invasive non-native species, injurious weeds and plant diseases.

- Council staff trained on invasive species.
- Landscape Contrator share policy and procedures and ensure trainng of staff
- Promote and share communication campaigns based on the government's 'be plant wise' information
- Actively communicate issues with other land managers such as the Parks Trust and Parish and Town Councils – share knowledge, training, and communication

Prevent:

The council will identify and monitor the spread of non-native invasive plants, injurious weeds and plant diseases on land owned or managed by the council.

- All plant purchasing will be documented and reviewed
- Follow the British standard 'BS8545:2014 Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape recommendations'
- Report invasive species on BMERC (Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre)

Respond

The council will act to prevent the spread and reduce introduction of invasive non-native plants and injurious weeds on council owned or managed land.

- INNS assessed and controlled
- UK grown plants and seeds will be prioritised
- The council will not introduce any plants on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act

Monitoring and reporting

It is important to highlight that with increased understanding, detection, and awareness of INNS that reporting is anticipated to increase, and that increased reporting will not necessarily reflect an increase or decrease in INNS. Information on both the number of reports and action taken will therefore be captured.

As explained in the councils Pesticide Policy, control of INNS currently often requires controlled use of pesticides, so information regarding pesticide use for control of INNS will be captured and included in the reporting on progress for the councils Pesticide and Plant Biosecurity policies. The council continues to trial and monitor alternatives to pesticide use to control invasive nonnative species and injurious weeds, and to apply latest best practice and compliance to requirements.


Milton Keynes
City Council