

Meeting	Parks & Open Spaces Committee
Date	4 th August 2026
Report Title	WWT Mouldon Hill
Agenda Reference	16a
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Background

A report was submitted by Haydon Wick Parish Council to Swindon Borough Council regarding a significant infestation of Himalayan balsam along the River Ray at Mouldon Hill Country Park.

The issue was initially raised following observations by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and subsequently reported by Haydon Wick Parish Council to Swindon Borough Council, with photographs provided showing the extent of the infestation.

The concern highlighted the importance of addressing the plants before seed dispersal to prevent further spread along the watercourse.

Response from Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

Swindon Borough Council confirmed that the infestation had already been identified by one of its wardens and referred the matter to Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (WWT), recognising that the Council does not currently have the resources to undertake large-scale Himalayan balsam control.

WWT was asked whether its volunteer-led balsam management programme could assist with management at Mouldon Hill.

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust advised that Himalayan balsam control is already being undertaken at several locations within the River Ray catchment:

- Volunteers have worked for several years at the Rivermead Flood Storage Area, upstream of Mouldon Hill, where significant progress has been made towards eradicating Himalayan balsam along the Westleazes Stream.
- Additional volunteer groups regularly manage Himalayan balsam at Swindon Lagoons and Rivermead Community Nature Reserve. However, these efforts are continually affected by seeds being transported downstream from upstream infestations.
- WWT's Freshwater Team also coordinates volunteer balsam control sessions along the Hreod Burna Brook (Australis).

Assessment

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust advised that effectively controlling Himalayan balsam at Mouldon Hill would require a coordinated catchment-wide approach rather than isolated treatment at a single site. Due to the continual downstream movement of seed, long-term success would depend upon managing infestations across the River Ray and its tributaries, working from upstream to downstream.

This would require collaboration between multiple organisations, including:

- Swindon Borough Council
- Wiltshire Wildlife Trust
- Parish councils
- The Canal & River Trust
- Corporate volunteer groups
- Other local partners and volunteer organisations

WWT also noted that, given the current stage of the growing season, the plants are already flowering and are likely to set seed shortly. As a result, opportunities for effective large-scale control during the current year are limited.

Proposed Actions

Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has proposed developing a coordinated management plan for the following growing season.

In the meantime, WWT intends to:

- Schedule volunteer Himalayan balsam pulling sessions at Mouldon Hill, focusing on the worst affected areas where it is safe to do so.
- Restrict work to locations where access is safe, recognising that sections of the River Ray have steep banks.
- Confirm land ownership before undertaking any works, as parts of the affected area are not owned by Swindon Borough Council and may require landowner permission.

Conclusion

The responses from Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust demonstrate that the issue has been acknowledged and forms part of a wider catchment management challenge. While limited volunteer action may be possible at Mouldon Hill during the current season, both organisations recognise that meaningful long-term control will require a coordinated, catchment-wide programme commencing from upstream locations to reduce continued seed dispersal into the River Ray.