

REPLY TO ARTICLE IN THE AUTUMN 2010 EDITION OF THE TRUG “*Has my passion for gardening made me a criminal?*”

Sir

I am writing in defence of the action of Sedlescombe Parish Council to eliminate plants of Giant Hogweed from the banks of the Rivers Line and Brede in this parish.

It is rare that news of the work of the Parish Council reaches the pages of The Trug and it was with some surprise and concern that I read the article about Giant Hogweed in the autumn 2010 edition.

There is no doubt that Giant Hogweed is a truly magnificent plant, up to 5 metres tall, with large flat heads of white flowers. Its ornamental beauty was the reason for it to be planted in Britain at the end of the 19th century being brought from Asia and the Caucasus. It was first planted on private land but soon began to colonise wild areas, riverbanks in particular, where it spread at a prodigious rate. The reason for the spread is the large number of viable seeds that can be set, up to 50,000 per head each year, and the ease the seeds can be transported by the water of our rivers. The seeds are thought to remain viable for up to 7 years, and possibly up to 15. The plant has spread widely, not only in this country but throughout the world.



In 2003, the Parish Council was alerted to the large stand of Giant Hogweed growing beside the River Line close to the area known locally as The Brooks. Checking down river, it soon became apparent that the seeds of these plants had taken up residence along the banks of the Line and Brede, including beside the children’s playground, the sportsfield and public footpaths and plants were growing vigorously.

You might say, “so what”? Once established, the Giant Hogweed is a brute shading out all other plants and grasses in the summer and leaving banks bare of vegetation in the winter removing all environmental value from that area. From a human perspective, it is important to know that the sap, present throughout the plant’s length, can cause some nasty health problems. The size and

form of Giant Hogweed stems may encourage children to make use of them as telescopes or “pea-shooters” but, if sap comes into contact with the skin, it can cause phytophotodermatitis, reddening, burning and blistering on exposure to sunlight. Hospitalisation may be necessary. The burning effects in the sun can recur for years and it is said to be able to cause temporary or even permanent blindness.

Control of the plant is not the responsibility of anyone but it is illegal, as the article in the autumn Trug states, under Section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, to cause it to grow in the wild.

Faced with the problem of the Giant Hogweed growing and expanding in close proximity to areas with public access, it was decided by Sedlescombe Parish Council that the plants should not be allowed to continue to grow. Methods of control were considered carefully eventually resulting in a decision to appoint a professional contractor from Languard Ltd. with an Environment Agency Licence to chemically control the plants. This has cost Sedlescombe Council Tax payers thousands of pounds over several years and, although the problem is now under control, the company continues to monitor the situation and chemically treat any plants that do appear.

I would urge your anonymous contributor to very carefully remove the Giant Hogweed specimen that he or she is so carefully nurturing on private land before it is able to flower and, maybe, inadvertently escape into the wild. Other readers are respectfully requested to spread the word about Giant Hogweed’s problems and to make a concerted effort not to spread the plant.

Sincerely

Pauline Raymond

Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer, Sedlescombe Parish Council

22 October 2010