BOLTON'S BIG BALSAM BASH 2026



Invasive Non-Native species cost the UK £1.9 billion per year and contribute to 60% of global biodiversity loss. Himalayan Balsam (HB) is a major threat to local wildlife: it outcompetes native plants, increases the long-term flood risk as well as destabilising riverbanks and accelerating riverbank erosion.

Each plant produces around 800 seeds (4-16 seeds per pod meaning 150-200 pods per plant). These pods explode, firing seeds up to 7 metres away. Once it arrives in an area, it can take over within two seasons! This is why we need to take action and manage the spread of this plant. The plants start to grow in mid-May and they seed around the end of July/beginning of August, which only leaves window of approximately 8 – 10 weeks to pull them up ***before*** they seed.

Further information can be found on the Big Balsam Bash website:
https://bigbalsambash.co.uk/index.html

Big Balsam Bash of 2026



Every year we fail to act Himalayan Balsam spreads dramatically. For many years now voluntary groups and individuals in Bolton have devoted many hours and great efforts tackling HB along river banks, in parks and country parks. In recent years these efforts have been more systematic, documenting and measuring the impact to provide empirical evidence to support future efforts.

In 2026 the campaign went much further, with Bolton Green Umbrella and other groups working with Bolton Council, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, and liaising with Bury Council and Bury voluntary groups.

In addition a number of private companies contributed when their staff used volunteer days to join events. This was a huge boost to the achievements for 2026 and a good prospect for collaboration in future years.

Voluntary groups: Bolton Green Umbrella, Bolton Conservation Volunteers, Friends of Captains Clough, Bradshaw Brook Fly Fishing Club, Friends of Harwood and Longsight Park, and many more

Organisations: Bolton Council, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Go North West, Rotala (Diamond Bus Company), AXA Insurance, Be One Homes, GoodGym, Duke of Edinburgh scheme

Strategy:

Calendar of events
We compiled a list of target areas and created a calendar of ***midweek*** events on the Bolton Green Umbrella (BGU) website, and also on the Big Balsam Bash website. The idea of midweek events was to accommodate businesses and companies whose employees are given volunteer days in order to meet their social value obligations. This was ***in addition*** to the normal weekend activities undertaken by many other groups.

Promotion of the events:
We distributed flyers and posters both physically and via emails
We also promoted the campaign and calendar on social media and via targeted emails
Bolton Council promoted it on their internal noticeboards

Methods:
A wide range of methods were used and tested, depending on the experience of volunteers taking part and the terrain.

Hand Pulling
Weed slasher
Strimming
Tractor Mowing
Bush cutter
Scythes
Sickles
Power scythe
Spraying

Summary of HB treatment events in 2026

Below is a table showing a summary of events undertaken. There was support from one representative each from Bolton council and Lancashire Wildlife Trust. Apart from them all the work was carried out by volunteers.

BALSAM BASH 2026 SUMMARY

Area	Number of events	No. Volunteers	Volunteer Hours	Contractor Hours	Corp Volunteer	Corporate Hours	Company
Bradshaw	2	10	25		9	27	Rotala
Captains Clough	2	12	20		5	25	Go North West/Bolton Council
Dean Clough	1	2	6				
Doffcocker	2	5	20				
Dunscar Woods	1	10	50				
Firwood Fold	1	10	50				
Leverhulme	3	7	25		9	38	Go North West
Moses Gate	2	10	50		20	60	AXA
Smithills	10	50	500				
Walker Fold	1	10	50				
Watersmeeting Road	2				9	14	Be One Homes/GoodGym
Harwood and Harwood Vale SBI	18	50	116		2	6	Duke of Edinburgh
Various special treatment areas (JF)	15		98	48			
	60	**176**	**1010**		**54**	**170**	

The total number of hours is 1180, which equates to :

31 weeks for a full-time worker

£15,000 at minimum wage

Valuable experience and knowledge base

An extremely valuable knowledge base has been built up over the last few years which may be the most comprehensive in the country since the North West and Greater Manchester are hot-spots for HB. In addition considerable empirical evidence has been collated which can be used for future reference.

Other benefits:

- knowledge of catchment areas and extent of HB
- experience of using different techniques to suit the terrain
- knowledge of the timing of HB growth and flowering
- knowledge of regrowth patterns and retreatment
- observations of what happens when invasive species is removed e.g. when Japanese Knotweed is removed the HB immediately starts to invade. Future programmes need to look at planting native species immediately after removal of JKW or HB to inhibit resurgence
- mapping and monitoring of areas treated

Future programmes

Every year we have built on the experience and knowledge gained. Considerations for 2027 include:

- start the planning for the programme earlier in the year, ideally January 2027
- maximise corporate involvement. As well as the companies who took part in 2026 we have established links with United Utilities who wish to collaborate in 2027
- provide training on INNS and control methods. Lancashire Wildlife Trust's INNS and Rust project are delivering an AQA accredited course on Invasive species and effective control methods in November 2026 and further courses are planned
- Some mapping of specific areas has been done in 2026 but not all areas. In 2027 a mapping tool will be selected. INNS Mapper is being considered. LWT are planning to recruit a volunteer to input the submitted data to INNS Mapper on a quarterly basis.
- improve collection and collation of data by means of a spreadsheet that will save everyone time and provide a central place to record INNS efforts
- select a specific area as a template, Captains Clough was the favoured location

Summary

A huge amount has been achieved already but INNS and HB are so widespread now that it needs commitment at government level and a serious long-term strategy to tackle this environmental problem.

BOLTON GREEN UMBRELLA

Bolton Council

The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire Manchester & North Merseyside