

10-year Upper Vale of Health Management Plan

Meg Game

Autumn 2009



Upper Vale of Health Management Plan

City of London

Autumn 2009

1.0. Site description

1.1 Location

The site lies north, west and south of the Vale of Health, centred on grid reference 526,350 186,430, Hampstead Heath compartment numbers 193, 197, 199, 201- 204, 206- 209, 211 - 215, 240, 247, 248, and measures 12.4 hectares in area.

In this document, the **Upper Vale of Health** refers to land defined on Map 1, while the **Vale of Health** refers to the hamlet itself.

1.2 Geology, Soils, Hydrology.

The Upper Vale of Health is a crescent-shaped area of land which lies at the upper end of the Hampstead Stream. Much of it is steeply sloping. Bagshot Sands underlie the upper slopes: sand and gravel are evident along eroded footpaths. The more impermeable and damper Claygate Beds underlie the lower, flatter ground around the Vale of Health itself and the small valley near the Pound.

1.3 Ecology

The types of habitat to be found in the Upper Vale of Health are secondary (recent) woodland, scrub, neutral and acidic grassland, gorse, bramble, rosebay willowherb, rough vegetation, bare ground and small patches of heather. Map 1 indicates the location and extent of the major habitats. Details of brambles which skirt most of the other habitats are not shown.

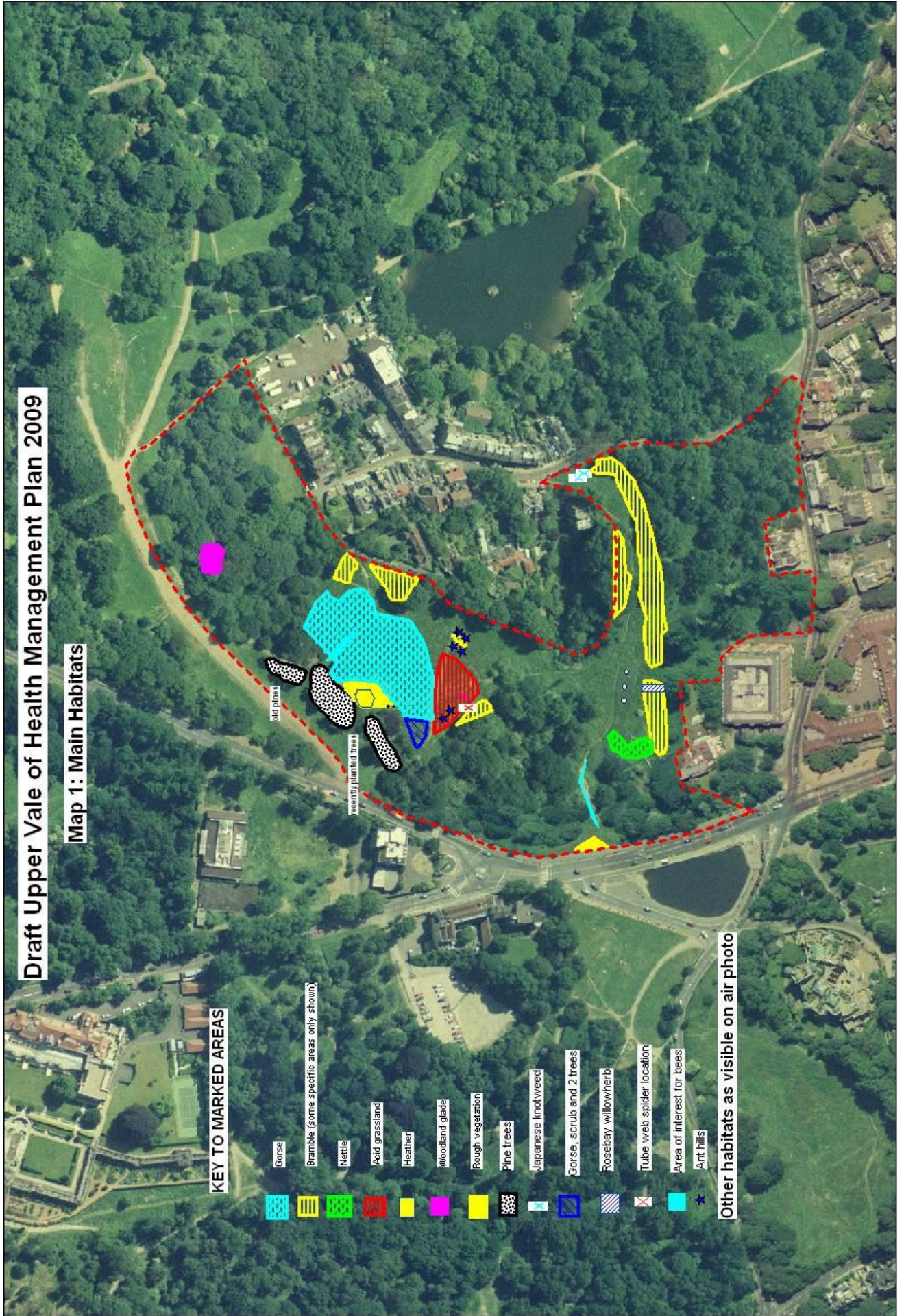
The largely self-sown woodland is mainly a mix of oak (pedunculate and Turkey) and sycamore, with bramble beneath. Several large lime trees indicate earlier plantings. The neutral grassland is mostly dominated by coarse species, especially Yorkshire fog, but also contains the fine leaved species common bent-grass. A central section contains bramble and hogweed. The southern section contains small quantities of lesser stitchwort. Large ant-hills are present below the acid grassland. This latter lies up slope on the dry infertile Bagshot Sand. It is dominated by red fescue, a short-growing grass; notable is the occurrence of small amounts of wavy hair-grass and heather.

A large patch of gorse grows in the Upper Vale of Health. It is of mixed age structure due to previous management and fire damage. Heather used to occur wild at the Vale of Health; it has been re-established above the gorse patch and in three small areas below The White House.

The remaining vegetated areas are covered by bramble, scrub, rosebay willowherb (on the slope below The White House) and rough herbaceous vegetation consisting of, for example, cow parsley and ox-eye daisy. These habitats contain a diversity of other plants, including rose-bay willow-herb, nettle, and saplings and small trees.

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Map 1: Main Habitats



KEY TO MARKED AREAS

- Gorse
- Bramble (some specific areas only shown)
- Nettle
- Acid grassland
- Heather
- Woodland glade
- Rough vegetation
- Pine trees
- Japanese knotweed
- Gorse, scrub and 2 trees
- Rosebay willowherb
- Tube web spider location
- Area of interest for bees
- Art hills

Other habitats as visible on air photo

Two small patches of Japanese knotweed grow by the approach road to the Vale of Health and Himalayan balsam is common, especially on the damper soils. A large extent of bramble containing several immature trees and saplings extends down the steep slope below The White House.

The Upper Vale of Health is particularly noted for the record of a rare purse-web spider, *Atypus affinis*, which was found in about 2005 on a small cliffy edge of the acidic grassland, where it can form a tube-shaped web in the sandy soil in order to catch prey. More recently it has also been seen within the gorse patch.

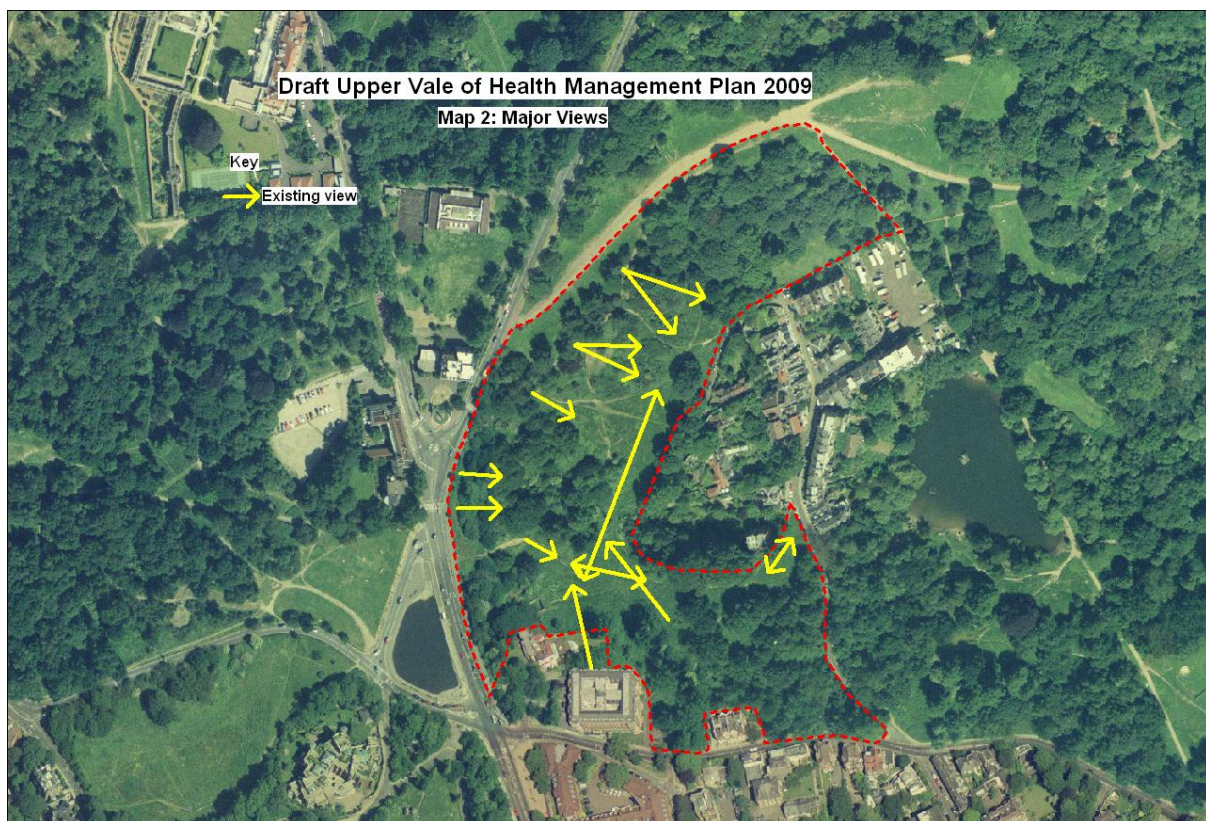
The eroded path going east from the bus stop opposite Whitestone pond down the slope past the pound is a centre of ground nesting bee activity and also some of their uncommon brood parasites. The semi-bare, sandy soil maintained by erosion on a limited scale creates the right conditions for these and other ground-nesting invertebrates.

Birds benefit from the habitat variety and density in the Upper Vale of Health. They feed, roost and nest in the gorse, and the dry grassland is a favourite with green woodpeckers.

Hedgehogs have been reported here in recent years.

1.4 Public and educational uses

The compartment provides a portal to the Heath and a route for residents to and from Heath Street, Whitestone Lane and East Heath Road



The highest elevations of the site by the pines provide extensive views (see Map 2) towards Canary Wharf seen over the tops of the trees in the Upper Vale of Health. There are two 'peephole' views of eastern London from the road opposite Whitestone Pond; the southern one is partly obscured by street furniture. There is an attractive view over the Upper Vale from the path by The White House.

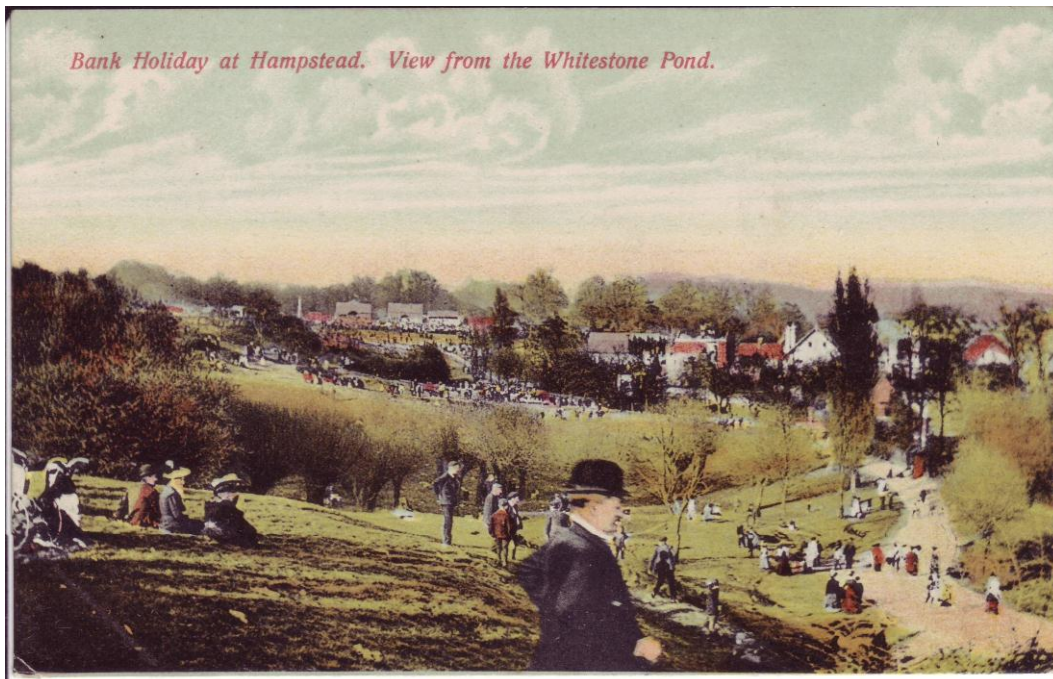
In contrast to these, the site lower down presents a pleasantly intimate aspect. Two main internal views extend east-west and north-south through rough grassland flanked by bramble and trees, but there are numerous short-distance views.

There are no formal educational uses of the site.

1.5 History

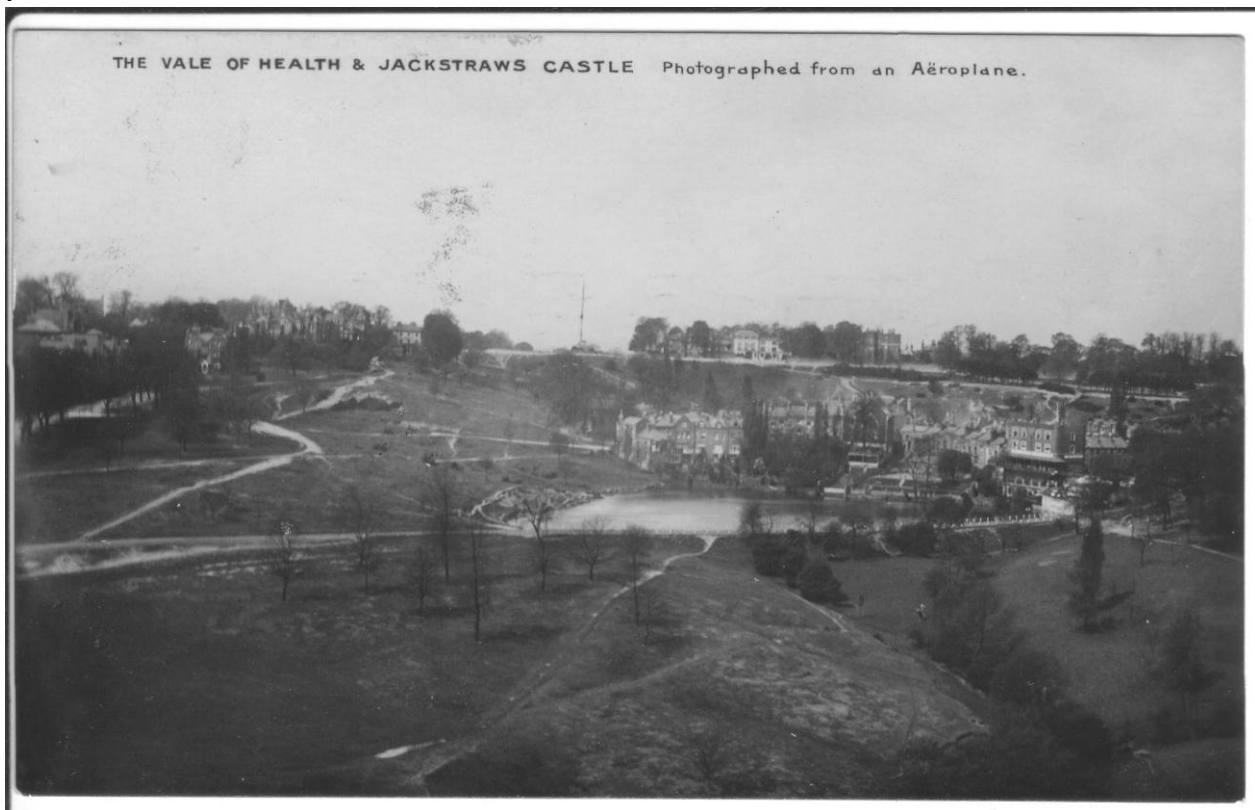
In the early 18th century the area of the Vale of Health was a malarial swamp; this was drained to make a reservoir in 1777, and soon afterwards a small hamlet of cottages was built up nearby.

By 1872 the general area was used for the fairs which were being held on the Heath, bringing an estimated 100,000 Londoners on a Bank Holiday. A large hotel with accommodation for 2,000 people was built in the hamlet, and the number of houses grew rapidly, from 17 in 1861 to 41 in 1881.



Bank Holiday fair on Hampstead Heath, September 1919

A photograph of the Vale of Health in 1907 shows the Upper Vale of Health at that time largely consisting of grassland. This is also depicted on a postcard of unknown date (below).



Recent management is as follows. Much of the coarse grassland on the lower slopes has been cut annually, the arisings being removed. An area of grass opposite The Gables has been cut more frequently. The dry, acidic grassland remains short and has not been cut for several years.

A small clearing was created in the woodland in about 2005/6, and whips of shrubs planted; these are not growing well, and show signs of having been eaten by muntjac deer, or possibly cut with clippers. Whips were also planted along the top of the woodland, by the Fairground; some of these are growing better. Three trees were recently felled to reduce shading to the gorse and improve woodland edge habitat, and two holly trees have been felled near grassland by The Gables. An oak tree was also felled to enhance the open habitat for the tube-web spider. A hawthorn bush of the south-west corner of the Vale of Health was felled in 2008.

Bramble has been periodically cut from the edges of the footpaths. A sizeable area immediately to the south of the Vale of Health has been cut annually for several years with the intention of reinstating grassland here. The bramble on the slopes below The White House has been cut back substantially over several years to reinstate grassland at the lower edge and provide access to control Himalayan balsam. In recent years bramble and nettle have been removed to provide access to the Pound. Volunteers have carefully removed some of the bramble around the location of the tube-web spider, to maintain relatively open habitat.

Gorse has been coppiced on a 12 year rotation, one section every 2 years, to provide variety of height and structure. A section was recently burned through

vandalism. The edge of the woodland has recently been cut back to release an area of gorse, which is now re-growing, and provide woodland edge habitat.

Heather has been planted in four areas. This is weeded annually.

The patches of Japanese knotweed have been pulled and re-growth treated with herbicide; they are now very small. Himalayan balsam has been pulled out repeatedly, but is still present in some quantity.

1.6 Natural and human-induced trends

Despite being formerly very open, the Upper Vale of Health is now composed of an intimate mix of trees, scrub and grassland. This is due to the former management practices, presumably regular mowing and before that grazing, having ceased. Without human intervention, scrub, especially bramble, would in a few years increase to cover the remaining open areas, which would eventually become woodland.

The area is subject to quite heavy public pressure. On the upper slopes, on dry sandy soils, many of the unmade paths are eroded.

1.7 External influences

The Vale of Health Society maintains a strong interest in management of the area.

2.0 Evaluation

2.1 Natural landscape

The Upper Vale of Health possesses a good diversity of habitats, three of them uncommon on the Heath: a relatively large extent of gorse, an area of acid grassland, and an area of heather. The acid grassland and gorse support a rare purse-web spider. Acid grassland and heathland are London Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats.

The central section of the compartment is on a steep, east-facing slope, and provides a range of warm, sheltered conditions of value to invertebrates; for example bare areas of sand adjacent to footpaths here support species of invertebrates which require warm, dry open habitat, such as solitary bees. Lesser stitchwort, which grows in some of the neutral grassland, is somewhat uncommon on the Heath and is also a very attractive plant.

The dense, inaccessible areas of the Upper Vale of Health are likely to be of value to birds. Examples are the large gorse patch and the extensive bramble on the steep slope. These are supplemented by the variety of trees and shrubby areas throughout the compartment. The yellow meadow-ant hills in the acid grassland are of interest in themselves and are a favourite feeding site for green woodpeckers.

Increasing the area of acid grassland could improve the biodiversity of the area as a whole. This could be achieved by reducing an area of scrub at the top of the gorse, which has already been initiated, and cutting back the gorse slightly at the bottom of

the slope. The latter would provide warm habitat for invertebrates of dry grassland. These proposals are included in this plan.

2.2 Public and educational uses

The Upper Vale of Heath is enjoyed both by residents of the Vale of Heath and by visitors to the Heath. The compartment provides a portal to the Heath and a route for residents to and from Heath Street, Whitestone Lane and East Heath Road

Very attractive and extensive views to east London and beyond can be enjoyed from the pine tree copse area (see Map 2). Small windows onto similar views are obtainable from the road north of Whitestone Pond. The most extensive internal view extends north-south at the lower edge, but there are many closer and more intimate views within the site. The purplish-pink of rosebay willow herb extending up the slope towards The White House is striking when in flower in summer.

The trees and shrubs provide vital screening for the residents of the Vale of Heath from the road, the path to the Upper Fairground, and the fairground site itself. They also provide the converse, hiding the buildings of the Vale and maintaining the natural aspect of this part of the Heath.

There is limited value of the site for schools use as it lies relatively far from schools.

2.3 History and built environment

The Pound is where animals were kept, and is of considerable historical significance. It is a Listed building.

2.4 Overall vision

To maintain and improve:

- the variety and quality of habitats for biodiversity
- the intimate landscape created by the vegetation and topography
- the fine views towards the east and south-east
- an attractive portal to the Heath from sections of East Heath Road, Heath Street and Spaniards Road
- safe access
- screening for the Vale of Heath from roads and busy paths.

2.5 Relevance to achieving the 2007-2017 Hampstead Heath Management Plan

The area has particular relevance to the following Essential Actions in Part I of the draft Hampstead Heath Management Plan:

- H2: To interpret and make available to as wide a public as possible the history of the Heath, and to do this in a way that will complement its other distinctive characteristics
- H6: To maintain existing views and consider the restoration of lost views where appropriate
- NL4: To manage the Heath's woodlands to enhance their nature conservation value and improve their distinctiveness
- NL7 To manage the Heath's heathland and dry acid grassland to enhance their nature conservation value
- NL8 To manage the Heath to protect and enhance populations of plants and animals protected by law, identified as being Priority Species in national and local Biodiversity Action Plans, or identified in subsequent management planning as being worthy of protection (in relation to tube-web spider, *Atypus affinis*, and acid grassland and heathland)
- NL14 To control certain invasive and inappropriate species.

The area has particular relevance to the following Aspirational Goals:

NL15 To retain, restore and extend areas of heathland and dry acid grassland as functioning, sustainable habitats

3.0 Prescription and work programme

See maps 3 and 4

Key

x Months in which tasks scheduled. These are a guideline, and may change subject to other work priorities and, especially to weather and growing conditions. It may not always be necessary to undertake the task the set number of times, or *vice versa* it may be necessary to undertake it more often.

- Months in which tasks can be undertaken.

6.1 Regular management tasks

Objective	Prescription and map reference (bold) where relevant – see Maps 3 and 4	Frequency p.a.	Month(s)												Who by	Priority: Low, Med. or High		
			January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December				
1. Maintain neutral grassland	1 Mow majority of fertile grassland (including along paths) annually in late summer, say August, removing arisings	1								-	-						Cons. Team	High
	Mow area near Approach Road annually in late May	1					-	x									Cons Team	High
	All neutral grassland. Carefully remove any invading shrub and tree seedlings annually	1	-	-								-	-	-	-		Cons Team	High
	3 Manage area of grassland in front of The Gables by cutting 3 times p.a., leaving a softer edge of uncut grass by the brambly	3					x		x			x						Cons

	39. Leave narrow unmown strip along woodland by Upper Fairground unmown, to allow it to thicken up.																		Cons Team	Med
5. Retain dead and dying wood subject to safety considerations	Leave aerial dead and dying wood on the tree subject to safety considerations. Leave fallen or cut wood in partial shade if possible. Use for dead-hedging where wanted.	As required																	Cons Team	
6. Replace pines as they are lost and maintain recently planted pines	8. Replant pine trees if any die.	As required	-	-															Cons Team	High
	9. Maintain area of recently planted pine trees by cutting out bramble annually.	1	-	-															Cons Team	High
	9. Remove false acacia suckers annually here and nearby.	1	-	-															Cons Team	High
7. Maintain vast majority of gorse, with a variety of age structures, but stop from encroaching further into grassland	10. Coppice gorse on a 12 year rotation, cutting 1/6th every even-numbered year; see map 4 for zones and timing. When gorse zones are coppiced, remove trees and saplings but retain a few suitable song posts, e.g. hawthorn or elder. Cut bramble and remove. Use brash as dead-hedging material in adjacent woodland.	Every other year	-	-																
	11 Cut brambly edge to gorse annually in autumn/winter to prevent gorse spreading further into grassland. Monitor and, if spreading, cut again in spring or summer.	1-2	-	-																
8. Maintain areas of heather	12. Weed heather annually	1																	Cons Team	High

Pond																			
12. Maintain habitats for tube-web spider and ground nesting bees	17. Annually 'skirt' bramble (cut back to last year's growth) carefully by hand on 'cliff edges' where tube-web spider has been found. Remove tree and shrub seedlings and saplings by hand.	1	-	-														Cons Team	High
	17. Cut back any trees or overhanging branches if they grow further significantly increasing shade from current levels.	1 or fewer	-	-														Cons Team	High
13. Minimise Himalayan balsam and eradicate Japanese knotweed	18. Pull up Himalayan balsam annually until very much reduced; it is probably unrealistic to expect to eradicate it. This will mean cutting back some bramble and rosebay willowherb for several years in order to gain access to balsam plants.	Throughout its growing season								x	x	x	x					Cons Team	High
	19. Annually pull Japanese knotweed then spray regrowth with herbicide in late summer.	1										x	x					Cons Team	High
14 Maintain and where necessary improve made footpaths	Maintain paths sympathetically by mowing the edges and repairing with agreed aggregates, leaving some eroded areas bare for burrowing invertebrates. Include steep path from the Pound to Heath Street. Keep trees and shrubs in particular cut back sufficiently frequently from the path between East Heath Road and the Vale, i.e. the path on the south side side of the Approach Road (technically outside this compartment); the upper part of the Holford Road path (the steep tarmaced path from the Vale which reaches East Heath Road opposite Holford Road), and from the	As required	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cons Team	High
																			High

	25. Maintain existing narrow view further north by coppicing a willow tree close to the road. Review in later years.	As required	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cons Team	Med.
	26. Keep bramble cleared from view beside Whitestone Lane near Whitestone House so that view over the Upper Vale can be enjoyed.			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cons Team	High

6.2 One-off or time-limited tasks

Objective	Prescription and map reference	Frequency p.a.	Month(s)												Who by	Priority: low, medium or high	
			January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December			
17. Restore grassland areas	27. An area within the coarse grassland contains hogweed and bramble and will require cutting 3-4 times p.a. until these are eradicated. Similarly, an area of very rough grassland and hogweed near the gorse patch will also require mowing at the same frequency until grassland condition improves and the hogweed is eradicated. An area of ant hills at the bottom of the acid grassland slope is being invaded by bramble and this needs eradicating, avoiding damage to the anthills.	3					X		X		X					Cons. Team	High
	28. Cut back annual extension of bramble at the foot of the slope below Whitestone House until area becomes grassy. The bramble area is to pass above the bench to Eileen	3	-	-						X		X		-	-	Cons Team	High
																Cons	High

	Cordingly.																	Team	
	29. Reduce bramble clump by steps opposite Vale Lodge.	3	-	-														Cons Team	High
	30 Cut bramble 3-4 times/year south of Vale of Health fence, & in area with anthills near acidic grassland, until bramble is eradicated.	3	-	-														High	High
18. Increase extent of acidic grassland	31. Cut and maintain two small scallops into the gorse at the lower edge by cutting back bramble and gorse. Remove one previously-pruned whitebeam tree near the bench in memory of Grandma Pat Phillips at the top of the acid grassland, then cut or strim 3 times p.a. until a grassy sward is created. Review whether to coppice second whitebeam tree nearby.	3								x	x	x						Cons Team	Medium
19. Increase area of heather	Consider planting new areas of heather																	Cons Team, Ecol.	Low
20. Improve access	32. Thicken up vegetation above path from Vale of Health to top of East Heath Road, to make a more enclosed path, by planting shrubs. It will be necessary to open up the canopy overhead to achieve this. Improve short path at top of acidic grassland, which is at present narrow and eroded.		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cons Team; Ecol.	Med.
	36. Improve path to Whitestone Pond, leaving areas bare as this is important habitat for ground-nesting invertebrates.		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cons Team	Med.
	37. Improve path along top side of gorse		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cons Team	High

	<p>patch</p> <p>38. Move the bench by the pine trees to Norah and Brian Lawrence by a few metres so that the best view can be gained from it.</p>		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cons Team	High
The Pound	<p>23 Lay new surface in interior of Pound to prevent weed growth (gravel /sand with membrane).</p>		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Cons Team/ Others	Low.

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Map 3: Management

KEY TO MARKED AREAS

-  Gorse
-  Bramble (some specific areas only shown)
-  Nettle
-  Acid grassland
-  Heather
-  Woodland glade
-  Rough vegetation
-  Pine trees
-  Japanese knotweed
-  Gorse, scrub and 2 trees
-  Rosebay willowherb
-  Tube web spider location
-  Area of interest for bees
-  Ant hills

Other habitats as visible on air photo

leave unmown strip by wood to allow edge to thicken

thicken glade by further tree and shrub planting

maintain Coneosters at 6 ft.

mow grassland approx 3x p.a. maintaining longer grass by brambly edge and by railings

reduce bramble

prevent gorse and bramble incursion into grassland. Cut back gorse to create new acid grassland & warm sites for invertebrates - see Map 4

control hogweed and reduce bramble

cut coarse grassland in late summer (e.g. Aug)

scrape path to Greenmor as required then keep topped up with woodchip.

eradicate bramble carefully, avoiding damage to ant hills

monitor short grassland & cut if becoming coarser

cut coarse grassland in late summer (e.g. Aug.)

remove debris & mow 3x p.a. until nettles etc. controlled

mow strip alongside path for access as required

mow 3 times/year until brambles & saplings eradicated

mow once p.a. late May

keep trees & shrubs back from paths

mow once p.a. late summer

no special management needed to bulk of wood except control of sycamore seedlings/saplings

install bench

keep vegetation away from path

maintain current extent of bramble

maintain rosebay willowherb by cutting bramble

thicken vegn. above path

improve path, leaving some bare areas

cut annually after cow parsley etc. has flowered

keep view open (see text for details)

maintain existing narrow view by coppicing willow near road; review

scallop bramble edges

remove debris & mow 3x p.a. until nettles etc. controlled

cut coarse grassland in late summer (e.g. Aug)

scrape path to Greenmor as required then keep topped up with woodchip.

eradicate bramble carefully, avoiding damage to ant hills

monitor short grassland & cut if becoming coarser

cut coarse grassland in late summer (e.g. Aug.)

prevent gorse and bramble incursion into grassland. Cut back gorse to create new acid grassland & warm sites for invertebrates - see Map 4

control hogweed and reduce bramble

out coarse grassland in late summer (e.g. Aug)

reduce bramble

keep small path open

move bench

move Ish Prasad's tree

weed heather

coppice gorse

remove bramble from young pines

create acid grassland glade by cleaning bramble, gorse & a small whitebeam; review coppicing 2nd whitebeam nearby

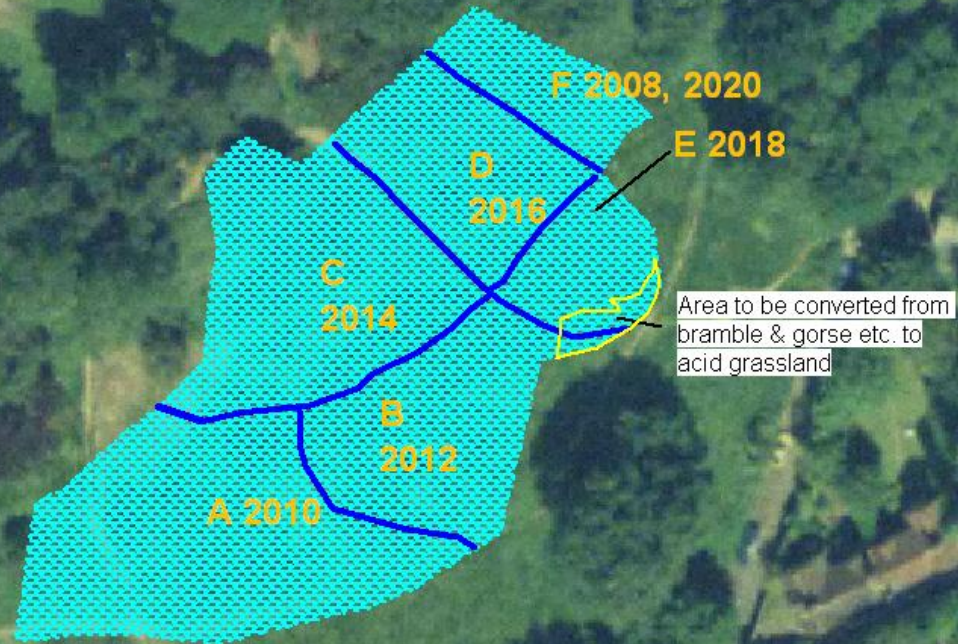
improve path surface

prevent any further spread of bramble by hand, to protect tube web spider

maintain access & views to Pound. Remove vegn. & improve surface of interior. Remove graffiti. Plant broom fringe along front

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Map 4: Gorse management showing approximate zone boundaries and dates for coppicing



4.0 Review

To be left blank, to be filled in as time goes by.

Author	Date	Task	Observation, event or alteration to task

Reference

Alan Farmer, *Hampstead Heath*, Historical Publications, 1984