

Appendix 1

Preacher's Hill Management Work Plan

May 2014



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April 2014

1.0. Site description

1.1 Location

Preacher's Hill lies at the south-west corner of the Heath, between East Heath Road, Willow Road and Christchurch Hill, as shown on map 1. It is centred on grid reference 526,945 185,931 and covers 2.5 hectares.

1.2 Geology, Soils and Hydrology

Preacher's Hill lies on the lower slopes of the ridge on which Hampstead and Highgate are situated, and slopes up to the north, in some places quite steeply. The lower half lies on London Clay, the upper half on the Claygate Beds, composed of clay and sand deposits. The layers of permeable sand and impermeable clay are doubtless responsible for the wetness of ground above the children's playground and further along Willow Road.

1.3 Ecology

Woodland, scrub, hedge, grassland and specimen trees form a complex mix of habitats on Preacher's Hill, with woodland predominating on the upper slopes, and grassland lower down. Map 2 indicates the distribution of the habitats on the Hill.

Closely spaced trees make up the centre of the woodland. Ash tends to dominate, with sycamore (both mature trees and saplings/seedlings), Turkey oak, red oak, silver birch and wych elm also present. Holly and yew form a sub-canopy and ivy clothes many of the trunks and covers the ground beneath, which is too shaded by the canopy to allow many other woodland plants to survive. This creates a rather dark atmosphere, but may be exciting for children's play, for example hide and seek. Away from the centre the trees tend to be less crowded, and include plane trees (often fine specimens), English oak, a group of well-grown Italian alders, and Lombardy poplar. A patch of few-flowered garlic grows in the woodland near the northern boundary.

A hedge grows along the boundary with East Heath Road. This was laid and gapped up in early 2014. A small hedge also divides the Hill from the Children's Playground to the south.

Some of the grassland, especially in the centre of Preacher's Hill, is dominated by common bent and red fescue, with patches of sheep's sorrel, indicating dry, infertile and probably somewhat acidic soils. Ant hills are present. Elsewhere, particularly on the lower and damper slopes, the grassland consists of coarser and more competitive grasses such as cock's-foot. Large numbers of garden daffodils have been planted in grassy areas by local people. The area of acid grassland is reducing due to invading brambles and shade from expanding tree canopies.

A broad band of former grassland along the lower edge by Willow Road and Christchurch Hill is now covered in species such as cow parsley, creeping thistle, bramble, comfrey and patches of the invasive grass California brome. Bramble has also invaded other areas of former grassland, extending out from under trees and woodland and the edges of the site. Dense bramble now covers much of the former grassland alongside the hedge by East Heath Road.

Common birds of such habitats, such as wren, blackbird, robin and perhaps great spotted woodpecker and blackcap are likely to breed in the scrub and woodland. A local resident and keen bird watcher reports that the north-east corner is good for blackcaps. The Hill is south-facing and warm, and the grassland is likely to support a range of invertebrates.

1.4 Public and educational uses

Preacher's Hill is much enjoyed by local people for general recreation, picnics, children's play etc. It is separated from the main Heath by a busy road, and is therefore less likely to be used by people from outside the immediate neighbourhood. A network of paths leads through the area. There are pleasant internal and external views, although the outlook over Christchurch Hill could possibly be improved to make it less of a townscape.

1.5 History

Preacher's Hill is so-called after George Whitefield preached there in 1739. He was one of the founders of Methodism and of the evangelical movement, and preached in the open, not being able to use an Anglican church. When he preached near Hampstead, 'the audience was of the politer sort, and I preached very near the horse course, which gave me occasion to speak home to the souls concerning our spiritual race. Most were attentive, but some mocked. Thus the Word of God is either a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death.'

The Ordnance Survey maps of about 1866 shows the area open apart from trees round the edges, plus a line of trees where the centre of the woodland is. An air photo of 1929 shows it as open grassland apart from a few large trees.

In 1951 part of Preacher's Hill was enclosed 'for the use of women and children', and despite protests the enclosure – the Children's Playground - was made permanent in 1955.

A hedge was planted alongside East Heath Road in roughly 2000, and another on the boundary with the Children's Playground. A second area of acid grassland on the slope facing Willow Road was created through clearing scrub and elm. Recent management has concentrated on keeping the paths accessible and laying part of the East Heath Road hedge. Bramble has been allowed to invade grassland in places. Daffodils, very few of them native, have been planted extensively by local people despite by-laws prohibiting public planting on Hampstead Heath.

1.6 Natural and human-induced trends

If grassland is not managed, e.g. by mowing, it will 'revert' to rougher vegetation and scrub. This has occurred in places at Preacher's Hill, with lack of sufficiently regular management allowing bramble, thistle and other invasive species to grow and dominate significant areas.

California brome, an invasive grass from America, has become established in several populations near the edge by Willow Road. Japanese knotweed grows on the boundary path leading to Christchurch Hill, which belongs to London Borough of Camden.

The disease Ash Decline, *Chalara fraxinea*, may affect trees at Preacher's Hill within a few years and cause significant dieback, altering the landscape and the make-up of the woodland. In the longer term, climate change may affect the habitats on the Hill.

2.0. Evaluation

2.1 Natural landscape

Preacher's Hill contains acidic grassland, which is a flagship habitat for Hampstead Heath. The mix of woodland, scrub and grassland provides useful habitat for birds, butterflies and other invertebrates. Brambly edges to the trees and woodland are important in this respect. The tree canopy in the main, central area of woodland is too heavy to allow many woodland plants to survive beneath, apart from ivy, though this may change with ash dieback, in which case the understorey of yew and holly could be reduced.

2.2 Public and educational uses

Preacher's Hill is particularly important to local people for enjoying the open air and natural landscape, and is regularly used. The use is varied, from walking the dog, a quiet stroll, picking blackberries, to children exploring and playing in a naturalistic setting very different from a more formal park. It is not used for formal educational purposes. It provides attractive views from adjacent houses.

2.4 Overall vision

Management of Preacher's Hill should seek to preserve and enhance the flora and fauna, but emphasis must also be placed on providing an attractive and safe place for people to enjoy the natural world and scenery, yet without managing it in a park-like way.

The vision (not in priority order) is to:

- Maintain and increase the areas of grassland
- Retain and manage the woodland and trees, using the opportunity, should ash dieback severely affect it, to make the centre of woodland more varied in structure and species
- Manage the hedgerows to create and maintain thick habitat and good visual barriers, and plant one new hedge on north-eastern boundary
- Maintain and enhance public access, enjoyment and safety.

3.0. Prescription and work programme

See Maps 3 and 4

6.1 Regular management tasks

Objective	Prescription	Frequency p.a.	Months to undertake	Years to undertake	Who by	Priority
Maintain & increase area of grassland	Prevent spread of bramble by cutting annual growth, yet retaining fringes of this important habitat, cutting in autumn or before the daffodils are coming up to avoid damage to them.	1, or more if required	September-February	All	Cons	High
	Prevent spread of and try to eradicate patch of Himalayan bramble by Willow Road by regular cutting	5	May-September	All	Ranger	High
	Cut areas of fine-leaved grassland areas annually late in summer, leaving about 10% uncut as refuges (different areas each year)	1	September	All	Cons	High
	Cut grassland/cow parsley/green alkanet along boundaries with Willow Road and Christchurch Hill, once this is in satisfactory condition, annually in July, leaving patch of Russian comfrey	1	July	All	Cons	High
	Prevent California brome spreading by cutting frequently to prevent seeding.	6 or as required	May-October	All	Cons/Ranger	High

Retain and manage the woodland and trees	Remove sycamore saplings generally	1	Any	All or every other year	Cons	Medium
	Reduce ivy on trees, especially the Italian alders, to reduce threat to their safety and long-term health	1	Any	As necessary	Cons	High
Manage and plant hedgerows	Lay East Heath Road hedge, gapping up as required. This was layed early in 2014 but will need re-laying at some time, not before 2021.	1	October-February	2021 or later, cyclically, as appropriate	Cons	High
	Gap up and lay hedge on boundary of Children's Playground and near East Heath Road; extend hedge westwards as possible. Hedge is shaded so likely to regrow slowly.	1	October-February	Winter 2014/15 then every 10 years or as required	Cons	High
Maintain and enhance public enjoyment and safety	Maintain paths, cutting grass, strimming back bramble and carrying out any other necessary work	As required	All	All	Ranger	High
	Maintain access to apple tree on Willow Road, removing small trees and scrub	1	August-September	All	Cons	Medium
	Review need to reduce amount of holly and yew in understory as these grow more dense, especially if ash decline affects the canopy	1	September-February (ivy), any (holly)	2018	Cons	High
	Eradicate Japanese knotweed on path along north-west boundary	As required	Summer	Until eradicated	Cons	High

3.2 Short-term tasks

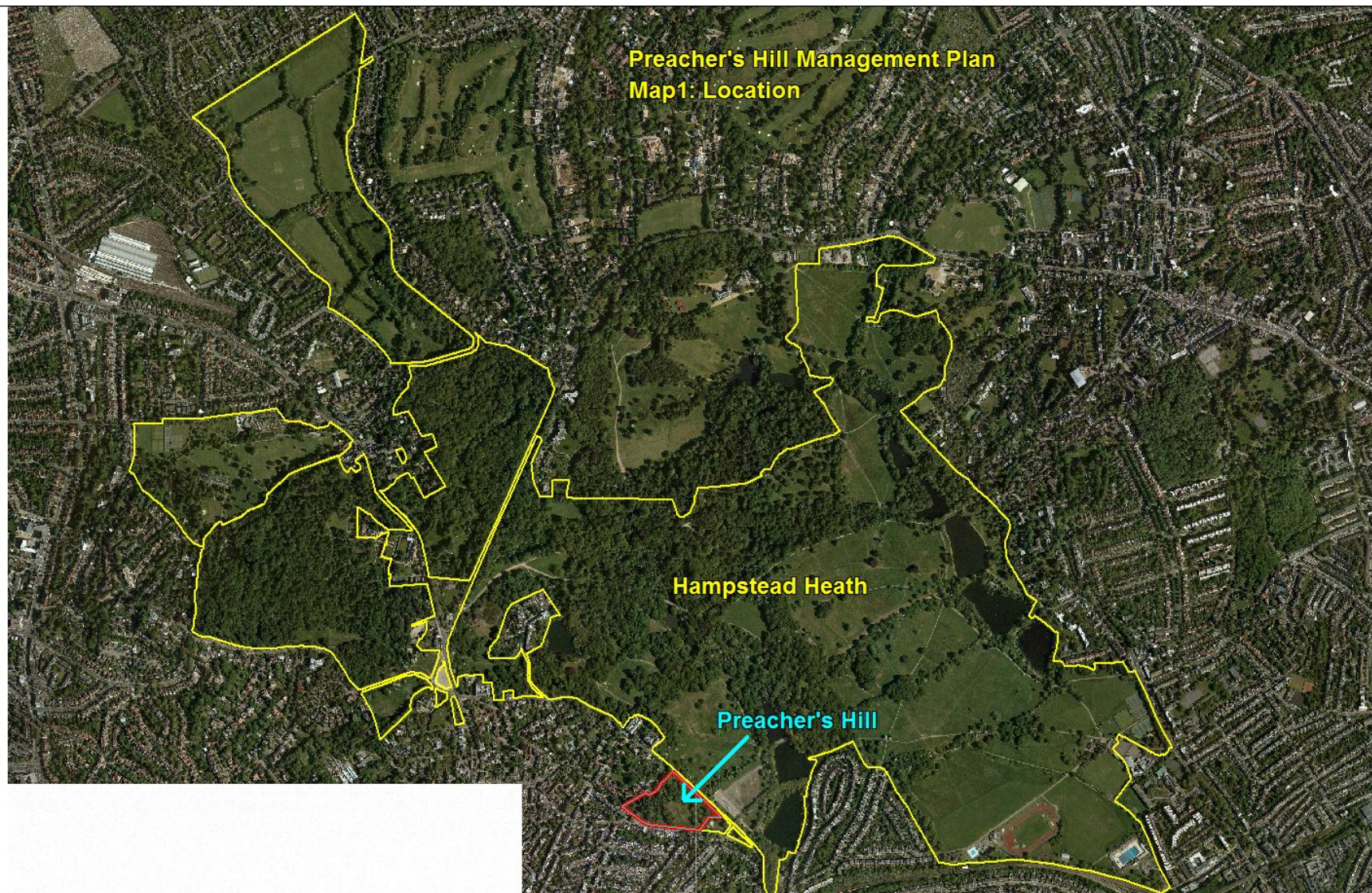
Objective	Prescription	Months to undertake	Years to undertake	Who by	Priority
Maintain & increase area of grassland	Regularly cut areas of rough grassland and incipient scrub alongside Willow Road and Christchurch Hill (see Map 3) early June to September, to eliminate scrub and reduce invasive plants	Monthly early June to September	2 years, for review	Cons	High
	Remove Tree of Heaven sapling, western corner of site.	Any	2014	Cons	High
	Cut back elm scrub and bramble on western side of smaller acid grassland glade to extend acidic grassland	August-February	Until grassland crested	Cons	Medium
	Remove dead cherry tree and raise crown of large Turkey oak tree, near Christchurch Road edge, to restore grassland	August-February	2014	Cons	Medium
	Remove 2 Turkey oak trees and cherry sapling near western corner to restore acidic grassland	August-February	2014	Cons	Medium
Retain and manage the woodland and trees	Remove dead elm in south-east corner, coppice elm regrowth round it, and plant black poplar tree	August-February	2014	Cons	High
	Remove dead white willow & plant native black poplar, near Willow Road	November-March	2014/5	Cons	High
	Replant with a range of suitable trees and shrubs if woodland severely affected with Ash Dieback	November-March	As required	Cons/Ecol	High
	Remove sycamores & sapling ashes, leaving plane & oak, near East Heath Road	September-February	2014	Cons	Medium
	Remove 4 small Turkey oaks leaving one larger one, near East Heath Road	September-February	2014	Cons	Medium
	In the long term, as plane trees decline and die, replant with native black poplar	November-February	As required	Cons	Medium

Manage and plant hedgerows	Plant new hedge along eastern half of north-eastern boundary, reducing overhanging shade as appropriate	November-March	2015	Cons	Medium
Maintain and enhance public access, enjoyment and safety	Reduce extent of bramble as indicated on Map 3 by repeated cutting, about 4 times p.a., until undesired growth is eradicated, avoiding daffodils	First cut outside bird nesting season, then in growing season	3 years but for review	Cons	High
	Cut back holly canopy near north-west corner to improve view	September-February	2014	Cons	Medium
	Plant total of 4 white willows and 4 native crab apples along boundaries with Willow Road and Christchurch Hill to enhance view and feeling of seclusion	November-March	2014/5	Cons	Medium

4.0 Review

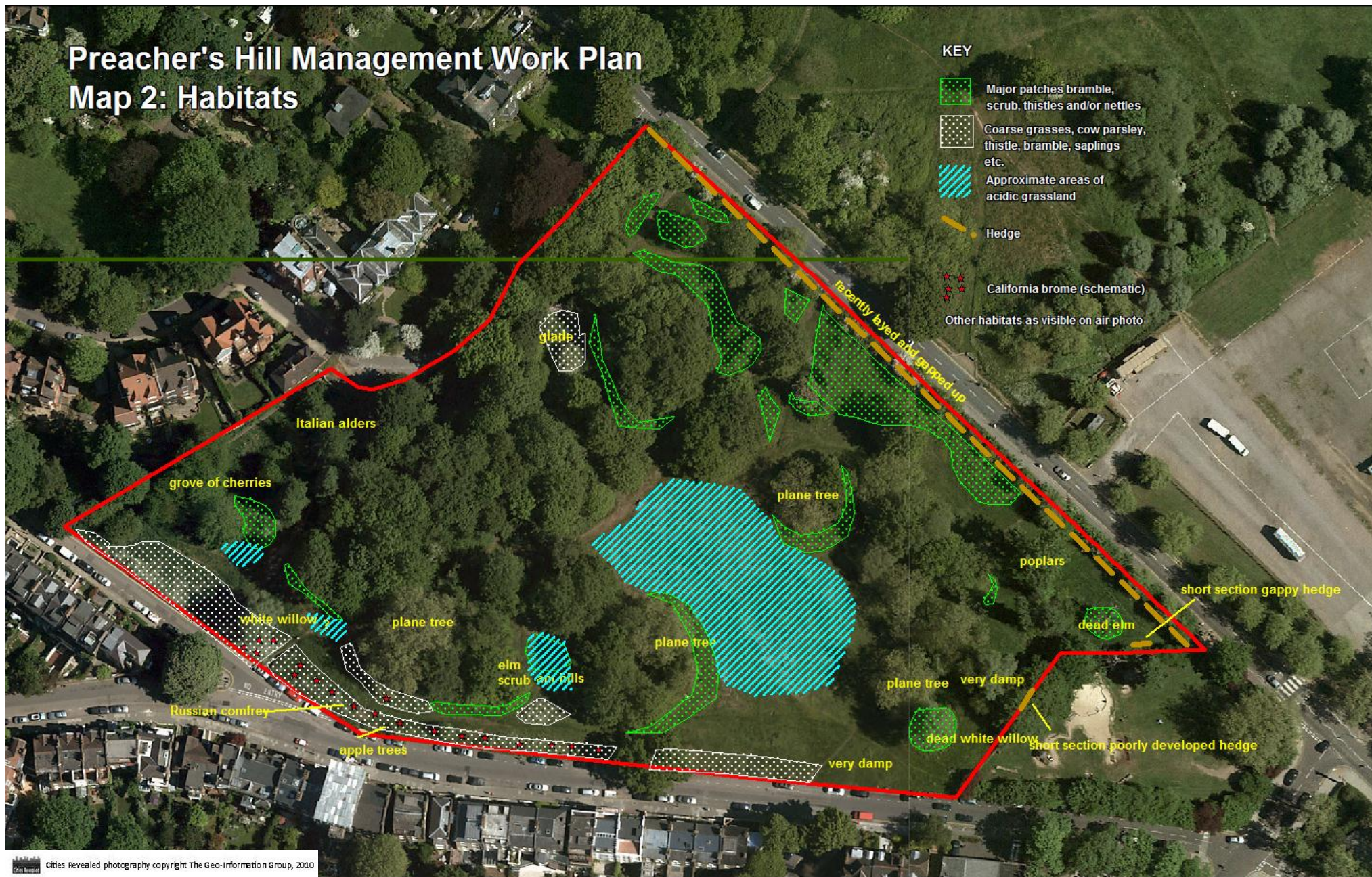
To be left blank, to be filled in as time goes by

Author	Date	Task	Observation, event or alteration to task



Preacher's Hill Management Work Plan


Map 2: Habitats




Preacher's Hill Management Plan


Map 3: Short-term management of bramble and grassland

KEY

 Bramble etc. to be eradicated by frequent cutting or strimming

 Bramble to be retained (main areas, excluding in woodland)

 Monthly grass cutting early June to September

 Cut sufficiently frequently to stop California brome flowering

retain patch Russian comfrey

leave patch of bramble round newly-planted tree

Preacher's Hill Management Plan
Map 4: Summary of management

Notes

- See Map 3 for short-term management
- Some of grassland shown as annual cut not yet in good condition;
- Paths to be cut through grass as necessary: not shown on map

Key

Areas shown are approximate

- Cut annually in July
- Cut fine-leaved (acid) grassland annually in September; leave refuges
- Cut sufficiently frequently to stop California brome flowering
- Bramble to be retained but cut round to prevent expansion

Management Actions:

- control Japanese knotweed
- remove laurel
- remove cherry sapling to reduce tree spread into grassland
- remove large Turkey oak tree and sapling T. oak behind it
- remove Tree of Heaven sapling
- plant 2 white willows
- remove dead cherry & young Turkey oak, raise crown of large Turkey oak
- avoid cutting Russian comfrey if not invaded with California brome
- plant 4 native crab apples along this edge
- control Himalayan bramble
- maintain access to apple tree
- clear scrub and elm suckers to extend acid grassland
- cut back holly to reveal view
- re-lay hedge when necessary
- plant new hedge
- remove sycamore & sapling ashes, leave plane and oak
- remove 4 Turkey oaks leaving one larger Turkey oak
- re-lay hedge when necessary
- lay hedge
- clear dead elm, coppice suckers etc., plant black poplar
- remove dead willow, plant black poplar, leave some bramble around to protect young tree
- reduce ivy on trees, especially alders; clear sycamore saplings; review if ashes decline substantially

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