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30 August 2018

Ref: FOI 2018/10218

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email of 01 August 2018 requesting the following information:

a) All correspondence between the DIO and the Royal Borough of Greenwich regarding travellers and fly-tipping in June and July 2018. b) The current management plan, including any fire management plan, for Woolwich Common. c) Details of any licences to occupy land on Woolwich Common - such as for parking vehicles or caravans - in June and July 2018.

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and can respond as follows:

a) All correspondence between the DIO and the Royal Borough of Greenwich regarding travellers and fly-tipping in June and July 2018.

A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and I can confirm that no information in scope of 'part a' of your request is held.

b) The current management plan, including any fire management plan, for Woolwich Common.

A search for the information has now been completed within the MOD and I can confirm that all of the information in scope of 'part b' of your request is held.

The information you have requested can be found attached at Annex A but some of the information falls entirely within the scope of the absolute exemption provided for at section 40 FOIA (Personal Data) and has been redacted.

Section 40(2) FOIA has been applied to some of the information in order to protect personal information as governed by the Data Protection Act 2018. Section 40 is an absolute exemption and there is therefore no requirement to consider the public interest in making a decision to withhold the information.

c) Details of any licences to occupy land on Woolwich Common - such as for parking vehicles or caravans - in June and July 2018.

A search for the information has now been completed within the MOD and I can confirm that no information in scope of 'part c' of your request is held.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.gov.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made in writing within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely

DIO Secretariat

**WOOLWICH COMMON
MANAGEMENT BRIEF**


**London Ecology Unit
June 1998**

DETACHMENT COMMANDER
EAST
3 JUL 1998
G4 (ES) A/C
HQ LONDON DISTRICT

WOOLWICHCOMMON

Management Brief

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Terms of Reference

This management brief has been prepared for the property managers of Woolwich Common which is owned by the Ministry of Defence. The common is accessible to the public and is one of a number of sites across the borough which have been identified by the London Ecology Unit as Sites of Importance for nature conservation. This brief has been prepared with the permission of Greenwich Council who are a contributory member of the London Ecology Committee.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of the management brief are as follows:

- a) to describe the semi-natural habitats present on Woolwich Common;
- b) to assess the current nature conservation interest of the site;
- c) to prescribe habitat management recommendations to maintain and enhance the nature conservation value of Woolwich Common.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 General

2.1.1 Woolwich Common is a large area of semi-natural open space in the centre of the London Borough of Greenwich. The common is owned by the Ministry of Defence but most of the site is freely accessible to the public and managed, in part, for informal public recreation, nature conservation and general amenity.

2.1.2 The Common lies within a corridor of open space which runs from Avery Hill park in the south-east corner of the borough almost to the banks of the Thames, via Oxleas Wood, Eltham Common, Woolwich Common and Maryon Wilson Park. A recreational footpath, the Green Chain Walk, traces the entire length of this open space corridor.

2.1.3 Woolwich Common lies over an outcrop of the sand and gravels of the Blackheath beds. The original surface still occurs across the northern half of the Common; however, the land to the south has been extensively land-raised in the past, apparently with blitz rubble topped with soil. The boundary between the two areas is marked by an embankment running east-west across the common.

2.1.4 Surrounding the Common are existing and former military establishments, including Woolwich Barracks to the north and the Old Royal Military Academy to the east. Two major roads lie adjacent to the common - Shooters Hill Road to the south, and Academy Road to the east.

2.1.5 Woolwich Common has been identified by the London Ecology Unit as a Site of Borough Importance for nature conservation. It is shown thus on the Proposals Map of the Greenwich Unitary Development Plan (1994). It is also designated as Metropolitan Open Land, and Green Chain. The site is described in the publication *Nature Conservation in Greenwich: Ecology Handbook 10* (LEU 1989)

2.2 Biological

2.2.1 As a former common it is likely that much of the site was extensively grazed until the area was acquired by the military at the beginning of the 19th century. Grazing, combined with the nutrient poor soils of the sand and gravels would have prevented the establishment of trees and shrubs, thus creating a large open area of heath and grassland. Subsequent management and use, including military training, mowing, and use of the northern part of the common for fairs has also prevented trees and shrubs becoming established across much of the site, thus maintaining the open grassland habitat. The majority of the trees and shrubs on the southern half of the Common are a result of successive planting schemes during the last 20-30 years.

2.2.2 Vegetation - for descriptive purposes the common falls into two areas: the northern half, where the original land surface still occurs, and the southern half, which has been subject to land-raising. The two halves being separated by the embankment.

Immediately to the north of the slope is an extensive area of acid grassland, consisting of: common bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, early hair-grass *Aira praecox*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, squirrel-tail fescue *Vulpia bromoides* and annual meadow grass *Poa annua*, with sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, cat's ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, and buck's-horn plantain *Plantago coronopus*. In areas where

the grass sward is sparse and spurry *Spergularia rubra* occurs. The acid grassland grades into areas of coarser grassland in more nutrient rich areas, particularly along the western boundary which has probably been subject to more frequent mowing in the past. These coarse grassland areas support grasses such as perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, couch *Elymus repens*, and cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, along with a range of common herbs, including: white clover *Trifolium repens*, common mallow *Malva sylvestris*, mugwort *Artemisia vulgaris* and hoary pepperwort *Cardaria draba*. The interface between the acid and coarse grassland supports stands of downy oat grass *Helictotrichon pubescens*.

An additional triangular area of grassland to the north of Circular Way supports some species of acid grassland but, as a result of frequent mowing in the past, the area is mainly composed of coarse grasses and common herbs.

The land-raised southern part of the common consists of extensive areas of rough grassland, with patches of trees and shrubs which are mostly the result of successive planting schemes over recent years.

The grassland areas are dominated by coarse grasses such as false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, couch and cocksfoot. A variety of other grasses are present including: meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, timothy *Phleum pratense*, sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, and crested dogs-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*. Within the grassy sward a variety of common grassland and ruderal herb species occur, such as: mugwort, black horehound *Ballota nigra*, creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense*, hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium*, broad-leaved everlasting pea *Lathyrus latifolius*, black knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratense*, common vetch, *Vicia sativa*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus pratense*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea*. Some patches within the scrub/grassland are particularly diverse and contain additional species such as yellow vetchling *Lathyrus aphaca*, grass vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia*, hairy tare *Vicia hirsuta* and smooth tare *Vicia tetrasperma*. The grassland also contains several small patches of Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica*.

Of the blocks of planted scrub one is composed mainly of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* whilst two others contain mostly a species of Cockspur-thorn *Crataegus* sp. A wide variety of other tree and shrub species are also present, many in mixed plantings; these include: cherry *Prunus avium*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, field maple *Acer campestre*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, alder *Alnus glutinosa* and poplars *Populus* sp. Tree plantations are confined largely to the edges of the site, particularly along the western and southern boundaries, whereas scrub plantings occur as discrete patches throughout, but mostly towards the southern end of the land-raised part of the Common. A dense band of scrub runs adjacent to Academy Road, presumably planted to screen this busy highway, but also to reinforce an old hedgerow which contains English oak *Quercus robur*, elder *Sambucus nigra* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*.

The ground flora beneath the wooded areas is generally species poor, consisting mainly of false oat-grass, couch, cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, ground elder *Aegopodium podagraria*, couch, and hoary pepperwort. Several large patches of bramble *Rubus fruticosus* are scattered through the grassland area towards the southern boundary of the site.

In the south-east corner of the common is a redundant covered reservoir. A fringe of common reed-*Phragmites australis* betrays its presence.

- 2.2.3 **Fauna** - Apart from bird and butterfly records there have been few surveys or observations of the fauna of Woolwich Common. The habitat variety ensures that the site supports a wide range of bird species and it is likely that the diversity in the avifauna is mirrored by a diverse invertebrate fauna.

Woolwich Common is perhaps best known for its birdlife. The extensive areas of grassland and the wooded blocks and scrub patches provide a range of habitats attractive to a variety of relatively common birds.

Birds which regularly breed on the Common include common species such as blackbird, mistle thrush, robin, wren, dunnock, blue tit, great tit, woodpigeon, goldfinch, greenfinch, starling and magpie - all of which occur in a wide range of areas of open space throughout London. Breeding species occurring on the Common which are more reliant on semi-natural open space and, therefore, of more limited distribution in London, include: whitethroat, willow warbler, blackcap, skylark, linnet, meadow pipit, long-tailed tit and jay. Other birds regularly encountered include: kestrel, sparrowhawk, great spotted woodpecker, and in winter, redwing and fieldfare.

Many large area of semi-natural open space with varied habitats attracts a wide range of bird species during migration periods (the birds stopping to feed and rest before continuing their journeys). Woolwich Common is no exception species such as wheatear, whinchat, spotted flycatcher, chiffchaff, lesser whitethroat and garden warbler are recorded most years. Uncommon winter visitors such as stonechat may also occasionally appear.

An invertebrate survey of the site has not been undertaken. However, casual observations of butterflies suggest that the Common supports a typical range of grassland species including: meadow brown, common blue, small skipper, large skipper and small copper. Additionally, green veined white, large white, small white, small tortoiseshell, red admiral and speckled wood also occur.

There is no current survey information regarding mammals, reptiles or amphibia on the common. However, fox and grey squirrel were noted, and field vole, common shrew and wood mouse are likely to occur.

- 2.2.7 Further surveys, particularly of the invertebrate fauna, are strongly recommended.

2.3 **Current Management**

- 2.3.1 In recent years much of Woolwich Common has been subject to a minimalist land management regime. Current management is limited to cutting a 1 m strip on both sides of all pathways, adjacent to public roads and around the site boundaries. The height of the grass in these strips should not exceed 75mm. No other grass-cutting, tree works, tree planting, etc. is carried out unless specifically requested.

Other management includes maintenance of anti-vehicle ditches, posts and bollards to prevent unauthorised vehicle access onto the Common

2.3.2 The area of acid grassland between Circular Way and the slope defining the land-raised part of the common is used as a site for fairs and circuses 3-4 times per year.

3.0 EVALUATION AND PRIORITIES FOR MANAGEMENT

3.1 Woolwich Common constitutes one of the largest areas of semi-natural grassland/scrub habitat in the borough. It lies within a major green corridor and is adjacent to a number of other sites of nature conservation interest. Current management policy is aimed at maintaining the Common as an informal recreation area and a site for nature conservation.

3.1.2 Nature conservation features of particular value are:

- the area of acid grassland at the northern end of the Common
- the small but significant population of breeding skylarks and meadow pipits
- the populations of grassland butterflies
- the patches of flower-rich grassland
- the existing habitat variety.

3.1.3 The site has the potential to be utilised as an education resource by local schools and colleges, and to provide a focus for community involvement in the care and protection of their local environment.

3.2 Management Objectives

3.2.1 Bearing in mind the features of particular nature conservation interest described above the main management objectives for this site are:

- to protect the area of acid grassland at the northern end of the common
- to maintain the populations of breeding skylarks and meadow pipits
- to maintain the patches of flower-rich grassland
- to introduce a cutting regime for the scrub and grassland areas to maintain the current habitat matrix
- to diversify the habitat structure of the planted woodland/scrub blocks by thinning and underplanting
- to promote active involvement by local community groups in the nature conservation management of the site

4.0 MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTION

4.1 The management prescriptions detailed below relate to compartments depicted on the map in Appendix 1. The compartments are not necessarily defined by distinct changes in habitat type; for ease of location physical features (roads, slopes, and paths) are used to delineate compartment boundaries.

4.1.1 Compartment 1 - Grassland triangle

This area of former amenity grassland still retains species indicative of acid grassland, although throughout most of the compartment coarse grasses and common herbs predominate. Restoration to acid grassland is not likely to be viable without stripping of much of the existing grass sward. Therefore, future management should aim to establish this area as a medium length rough grassland which provides some nature conservation interest whilst fulfilling, primarily, a recreational function. Additional tree and shrub planting at the edges could provide screening to the busy roads and junction.

Management recommendation

- Cut central area of the compartment annually in September. Cuttings should be removed if possible
- Plant additional trees and shrubs (silver birch, hawthorn, gorse and broom) at corners.

4.1.2 Compartment 2 - Acid grassland

This compartment contains the best area of acid grassland. It is also the part of the site which is used to stage fairs and circuses 3 or 4 times during the year. It is likely that the trampling and soil disturbance caused by staging of the fairs and circuses is an important factor in the maintenance of the acid grassland. Most acid grassland species are tolerant of a degree of trampling and will rapidly colonise disturbed areas of the sand and gravel substrate. However, trampling and disturbance can be inimical to the invertebrate populations of acid grassland, and excessive trampling and compaction will result in undue wear on the grassland vegetation.

At the boundaries of the compartment the acid grassland is replaced by coarse grasses and herbs. Further encroachment of coarse grasses should be prevented.

Management recommendation

- Continue to allow the staging of fairs and circuses at the current level of 3-4 events per year. The number of staged events should not exceed this level.
- Cut the areas of coarse grassland once per year in September. Remove the cuttings if possible.

4.1.3 Compartment 3 - Central rough grassland

This large expanse of rough grassland provides the core breeding habitat for skylarks and meadow pipits. The grassland has not been cut in recent years but is subject to occasional burning as a result of dropped cigarettes or deliberate vandalism. Ironically, it is these indiscriminate acts which probably maintain the grassland in a condition which is favoured by the skylarks and meadow pipits. Without removal of the grass

thatch by occasional cutting or burning the grassland is likely to become to rank, thus reducing it's value as nesting habitat for skylarks and meadow pipits.

There has also been recent attempts to establish trees within the main expanse of grassland in this compartment. Establishment of trees and shrubs within the territories of skylarks and meadow pipits will reduce the quality of this habitat for these species in the long-term and should not be sanctioned.

Several clumps of Japanese knotweed occur in this compartment

Management recommendation

- Cut one third of the grassland every 2 years, in August. Cuttings should be removed if possible
- Remove recently planted trees from the core grassland area
- Prevent spread of suckers from planted cherry trees in south-west corner
- Eradicate Japanese knotweed

4.1.4 Compartment 4 - Scrub/grassland

This compartment is a mixture of rough grassland, planted blocks of scrub and bramble patches. The habitat matrix provides a variety of niches for birds and invertebrates. Future management should aim to retain the intimate mix of habitats with a particular emphasis, within most of the compartment, on preventing further encroachment of scrub and bramble into the grassland areas. The habitat structure within the planted scrub blocks could be diversified by thinning and coppicing.

Management recommendations

- Thin the planted blocks of scrub by cutting and removing c.20%-30% of the scrub within each block. This could be done randomly throughout or by selecting discrete areas where all the scrub is cut to create small glades. Thinning will allow the development of a dense undergrowth within the scrub blocks, thus creating additional nest-sites for birds and sheltered habitats for invertebrates.
- Coppice 2m deep strips along selected parts of the southern and eastern edges of planted scrub blocks on a 5-7 year rotation. Coppicing will assist in the creation of a densely vegetated "edge" adjacent to the planted blocks. These sunlit, sheltered edges are high value habitats for invertebrates.
- Prevent further encroachment of bramble into the grassland areas by cutting back (by up to 1m) the leading edges of 20 % of bramble patches on an annual basis.
- Prevent further encroachment of scrub into grassland areas by selective removal of isolated trees and bushes.

4.1.5 Compartment 5 - Wooded and scrub fringes

The boundaries of the southern part of the common have been planted with trees and shrubs over the years to provide a screen to the adjacent roads and surrounding built development. These are now beginning to develop into areas of woodland and dense scrub. Management in this compartment should aim to promote scrub and woodland development.

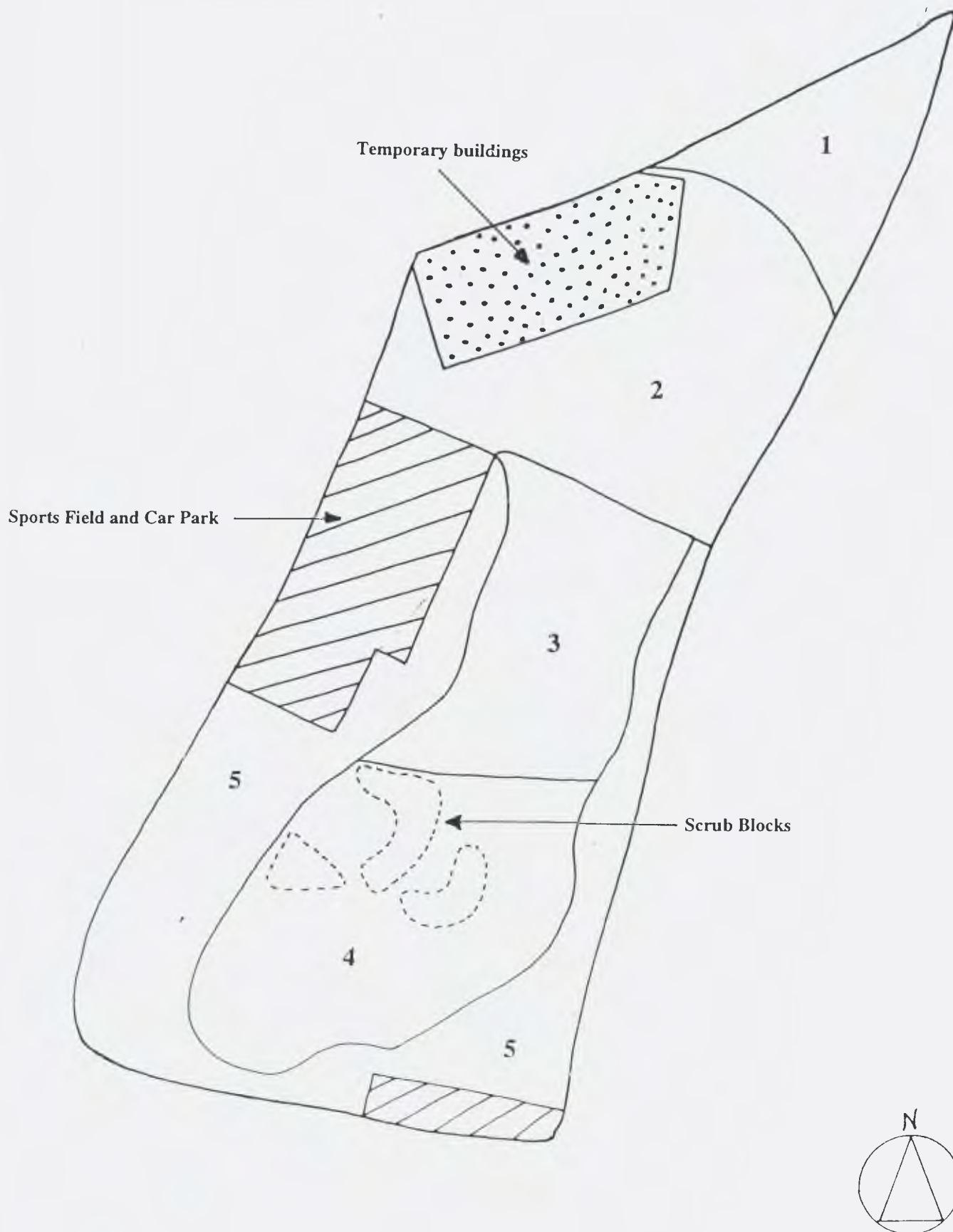
Management recommendations

- Non-intervention through out most of this compartment, allowing natural regeneration to further the development towards woodland and mature scrub.

4.2 Site Development

- 4.2.1 Woolwich Common is well used by the local community as an informal recreational resource. Although many may be aware that the Common is semi-wild in character it is likely that few appreciate it's true nature conservation value. This could be addressed by the provision of sign-boards detailing the history and ecology of Woolwich Common at main access points, particularly on the route of the Green Chain Walk.
- 4.2.2 Community involvement in the care and management of areas of nature conservation interest is often the best way of ensuring effective conservation management. Much of the suggested management work on Woolwich Common could, with proper supervision, be undertaken by local conservation volunteers. The establishment of a "Friends of Woolwich Common" or similar group could help to establish a local volunteer work-force. Additionally, existing nature conservation organisations (see Appendix 1 for contacts) active in the borough could be approached to determine their interest in participating in the nature conservation management of the Common.

MAP 1 WOOLWICH COMMON
COMPARTMENT BOUNDARIES



MAP 2 WOOLWICH COMMON MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

