

## **Draft Scrub Management Plan**

### **1. Introduction**

This management plan covers the steep chalk ridge of Long Hill (RLR parcel number ST80325560). The site is designated as a County Wildlife Site (ST83.049) for its importance as an area of remnant chalk grassland and is included in the HLS Agreement for Castle Hill and Long Hill under option HK7 with the objective of restoring it as species rich grassland. Scrub is naturally associated with chalk grassland but on this site the level of trees and scrub has been increasing for some years. The scrub and woodland has become dominant over some parts of the hill, whilst the area of open chalk grassland has gradually been decreasing.

Capital works options have therefore been included in the HLS agreement to enable phased scrub and tree clearance to be carried out in selected areas. This Scrub Management Plan provides detailed guidance on locations and priorities for scrub control.

### **2. General description**

*Location of tree and scrub areas are marked on Map 1.*

Area 1: There is a large patch of chalk grassland located near the western boundary. At present the sward consists of many chalk grassland species such as ladies bedstraw, rock rose, knapweed, salad burnet, scabious, birds foot trefoil, common spotted orchid and cowslip. Chives and dwarf sedge have been recorded in the past (CWS data) but they were not recorded in 2010. There is also a small patch of grassland to the far east which includes a scheduled barrow, it has a small amount of scrub on top.

Area 2, 3 & 4: The site has been under-grazed in recent years, allowing mainly blackthorn scrub, bramble and young ash/sycamore saplings to establish, there are patches where the scrub is dense enough to create bare earth below. Area 4 contains much young sycamore and ash as well as low scrubby woodland. The densest areas of scrub are located around the edges of the woodland. In general the most species rich areas are beneath the younger, lower scrub, although the sward beneath this is generally tall, tussocky and becoming rank. There have been recent attempts to clear and grub out some of the trees and scrub from the denser areas. This operation has created occasional disturbed patches of ground which are being colonised by ruderals such as nettle, hogweed, dandelion and thistle. In Area 4 there is an area of memorial planting, there are also two barrows side by side near the southern boundary. The eastern barrow of the two, has a mature sycamore tree growing on top and some scrub. Some anthills are present in the north-eastern section of the parcel.

Area 5 & 6: Established closed canopy ash/sycamore secondary woodland with an understorey of thorn and bramble scrub. In Area 5 there are some small patches of woodland which support woodland ground flora species including bluebell and primrose. Adjacent to the southern boundary of Area 6 is a mature avenue of beech trees (these lie outside the parcel boundary). A barrow is located in Area 5 at the top of the hill and is currently covered in scrub.

#### Existing wildlife

A range of common garden birds use the site such as blackbird and robin, they will be protected by ensuring scrub clearance is undertaken outside the bird breeding season. Two bat roosts have been identified on site in Area 4, the trees will be retained with a buffer around them. Several badger setts are also known on the site, these will be buffered as necessary.

#### Public access and amenity

The site is well used by local people especially dog walkers as well as visitors. Mere School, Cubs, Scouts and Brownies all use the hill for activities and learning. Castle Hill and Long Hill are the most distinctive

feature in the immediate area of Mere, from the steep chalk ridge there are spectacular views across the surrounding countryside. So the site is also popular with walkers.

### **3. Rationale**

*See also – Map 3 & 4*

The coverage and density of scrub/tree cover on the hill has been increasing over recent years at the expense of the grassland. This continuing encroachment threatens the species-rich chalk grassland habitat resulting in the loss of wildflowers. It also has a negative impact on available habitat for scarce invertebrates, in particular the adonis blue and dingy skipper which are specialist chalk grassland species. Whilst the dingy skipper does require some scrub for shelter, the current extent and density, which in places covers the slope from top to bottom, is threatening the very chalk species that provide food for the butterflies' larvae. The natural succession of grassland to closed canopy woodland needs to be reversed, in order to conserve and improve the quality of the rarer habitat.

A small amount of scrub is also present on some of the archaeological features (round barrows) and this should be removed to avoid any damage to these features from roots or burrowing animals.

However, the presence of some scrub and more mature trees is valuable for birds, bats and invertebrates and as already mentioned, low scrub forms part of the habitat requirements for the dingy skipper. It is therefore important to retain a certain amount of scattered and denser scrub within the chalk grassland matrix along with pockets of more mature trees.

### **4. Objectives**

- To restore and prevent any further degradation of CWS species rich chalk grassland reversing the succession to closed canopy woodland and the associated loss of species.
- To restore and maintain suitable habitat for other scarce/uncommon invertebrate species, including the adonis blue and dingy skipper
- To prevent damage to archaeological features and improve their visibility in the landscape
- To return the escarpment to a more open landscape of predominantly grassland with scattered scrub and pockets of woodland and trees
- To create conditions whereby regrowth may be controlled through grazing, with further cutting or possibly herbicide treatment where necessary
- To retain diverse areas of scrub and woodland cover on the hill for amenity, nesting birds and bats etc

This will be achieved by:

- Removing or splitting up large blocks of dense, closed canopy scrub
- Reducing the % coverage in areas of even-aged, scattered scrub
- Creating a mosaic of scattered, uneven-aged scrub and larger blocks with sheltered inlets and bays
- Removing tree saplings and seedlings from the open grassland areas notably ash and sycamore
- Thinning areas of secondary woodland and removing the underlying scrub, creating open canopy, grazed 'wood pasture' and retaining small patches of established closed canopy woodland
- Reintroducing grazing by erecting a stock-proof fence (to be funded through capital works)
- Managing stocking densities such that scrub coverage is kept at optimum levels, without damaging the sward by poaching

## 5. Priority areas

A stock-proof fence needs to be erected around the perimeter of the hill as soon as possible, to allow grazing. The western part of Long Hill 5560 (south facing slope) should be given the highest priority, as it holds predominantly low scrub but still supports an existing area of species-rich chalk grassland from where species can spread. In addition, the removal of scrub from archaeological features should be given a priority to protect the earthworks from being damaged by tree/scrub roots. Work across the whole site should be phased over five years, reflecting the amount of work required, the density of much of the scrub/tree cover, the ground conditions and the sensitivity of the site for public access.

## 6. Methodology

A full description of the appropriate scrub control methodology, advice on location of burn sites, timing of work and control of regrowth on this site are given in the relevant capital works prescriptions (SC, SA and SS) in the HLS Agreement document (Part 5). Specifically it is important to carefully consider the location and number of burn sites. Burn sites should be located away from existing areas of species rich grassland and main public access routes. The number of burn sites each year should be kept to a minimum.

To protect anthills, earthworks and established species rich areas, uprooting trees and scrub should be avoided. The practice of grubbing out the woody scrub will create bare patches and this disturbed ground is likely to be colonised by ruderal / problem species rather than chalk grassland species. Removing the scrub by cutting, using chainsaws and hand tools and leaving stumps close to ground level is preferable. Cut stumps should be treated with a contact herbicide to prevent regrowth. The area of memorial planting and the bat roosts trees will be buffered by leaving an undisturbed strip of vegetation around them. Mark badger setts prior to work commencing, operations within 20m should be carried out with a high degree of sensitivity.

Removal of arisings is essential. Smaller brush (up to a diameter of 7cm) should either be taken to a specified burn site or the material should be chipped and left on site in heaps to be used for footpath maintenance. Larger logs / timber should be either removed from site (if marketable) or stacked on site to provide dead wood habitat, away from species rich areas. Due to the steepness of the slope and limited access the use of heavy machinery will not be feasible. The adjacent landowners permission should be sought after harvest, for extracting any large timber if required.

Since there is open public access on the site, work areas will need to be cordoned off and clearly signed, timing will be critical. Scrub and tree clearance should take place between 1st October and 28th February (outside the bird nesting season). As the site is so well used, it is recommended explanatory signs should be posted prior to work commencing. Contractors will need to be fully briefed on the objectives of the scrub management programme.

## 7. Target Condition & Indicators of Success

*See also - Map 2*

- Eradicate young ash/sycamore seedlings and saplings from the open grassland areas
- Reduce scrub cover to 5 - 10% across the site, leaving occasional mature bushes and mature or semi-mature trees

- Break up patches of dense scrub areas with bare ground beneath, to create a diversity of scrub age and height structure with irregular scalloped edges
- The areas of woodland with the rich ground flora will be retained as non-intervention. The remaining 50% of the woodland will be heavily thinned to create areas of open canopy grazed 'wood pasture'
- Once the scrub removal has been achieved to the desired level this should be maintained through grazing pressure
- The underlying chalk grassland should meet the condition required by HK6 indicators of success (ref HLS agreement Part 3)
- There should be no disturbance by tracking and machinery over any archaeological earthworks and anthills

## 8. Archaeological features

Consent from English Heritage must be obtained before any scrub clearance work proceeds on any scheduled monuments. As well as the four bowl barrows, the scheduled area of Castle Hill extends slightly into Long Hill along the eastern boundary.

## 9. Annual work programme

*Numbered areas referred to are shown on Map 1*

YEAR 1 (2011/12)		
Location	Description	Work
Areas 2, 3 & 4	Fencing	A stock-proof fence needs to be erected as a priority around the perimeter of the site, this will involve clearing up to a 10m strip along the fence line
Area 1	Grassland with scattered scrub; objective to ensure no further loss of species-rich grassland	Remove all low and scattered scrub, avoiding any ground disturbance to the archaeological features (the scheduled area of Castle Hill extends into the eastern part of this parcel, there is also a round barrow)  Treat all cut stumps to prevent regrowth
Area 1	Open grassland	Re-introduce grazing if a suitable grazier can be found (temporary fencing may be required)
YEAR 2 (2012/13)		

Location	Description	Work
Area 3	Predominantly dense, impenetrable scrub	<p>Reduce scrub cover to 5-10%</p> <p>For dense blocks with no remaining grass cover beneath, scallop and shape edges, removing any bramble, to create a varied edge. Large blocks should be split up by creating rides through them, running at different angles to the slope</p> <p>Treat all cut stumps to prevent regrowth</p> <p>Remove any ash/syamore seedlings and saplings</p> <p>Badger setts need to be buffered</p>
Area 4  Area 4 continued...	Scattered scrub grading to denser scrub, along the edge of the secondary woodland	<p>Reduce scrub cover to 5-10%</p> <p>For dense blocks with no remaining grass cover beneath, scallop and shape edges, removing any bramble, to create a varied edge. Large blocks should be split up by creating rides through them, running at different angles to the slope</p> <p>Treat all cut stumps to prevent regrowth</p> <p>Remove ash/sycamore seedlings and saplings</p> <p>Reintroduce grazing to newly opened areas (temporary fencing may be required)</p> <p>The patch of memorial planting in Area 4 and known bat roosts, need to be retained and buffered. The anthills located in this area also need to be protected. In addition, avoid ground disturbance to the archaeological features (the scheduled area of Castle Hill extends into the eastern part of this parcel, there are also two valley barrows)</p>

YEAR 3 (2013/14)

Location	Description	Work
Area 2	Scattered scrub grading to denser scrub, along the edge of the secondary woodland	<p>Reduce scrub cover to 5-10%</p> <p>For dense blocks with no remaining grass cover beneath, scallop and shape edges, removing any bramble, to create a varied edge. Large blocks should be split up by creating rides through them, running at different angles to the slope</p> <p>Treat all cut stumps to prevent regrowth</p>

Area 2 continued...		<p>Remove ash/sycamore seedlings and saplings</p> <p>Reintroduce grazing to newly opened areas (temporary fencing may be required)</p> <p>The patch of memorial planting in Area 4 and known bat roosts, need to be retained and buffered. The anthills located in this area also need to be protected</p>
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YEAR 4 (2014/15)

<b>Location</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Work</b>
Area 5	Secondary ash/sycamore woodland	<p>Woodland with rich woodland ground flora along northern boundary to be retained as non-intervention- see Map 2</p> <p>Remaining 60% of woodland needs to be heavily thinned, focus on felling young ash and sycamore trees, the edges should be scalloped.</p> <p>Thorn and bramble scrub beneath trees to be removed</p> <p>Treat all cut stumps to prevent regrowth</p> <p>Avoid any ground disturbance to the barrow located at the apex of the hill</p>

YEAR 5 (2015/16)

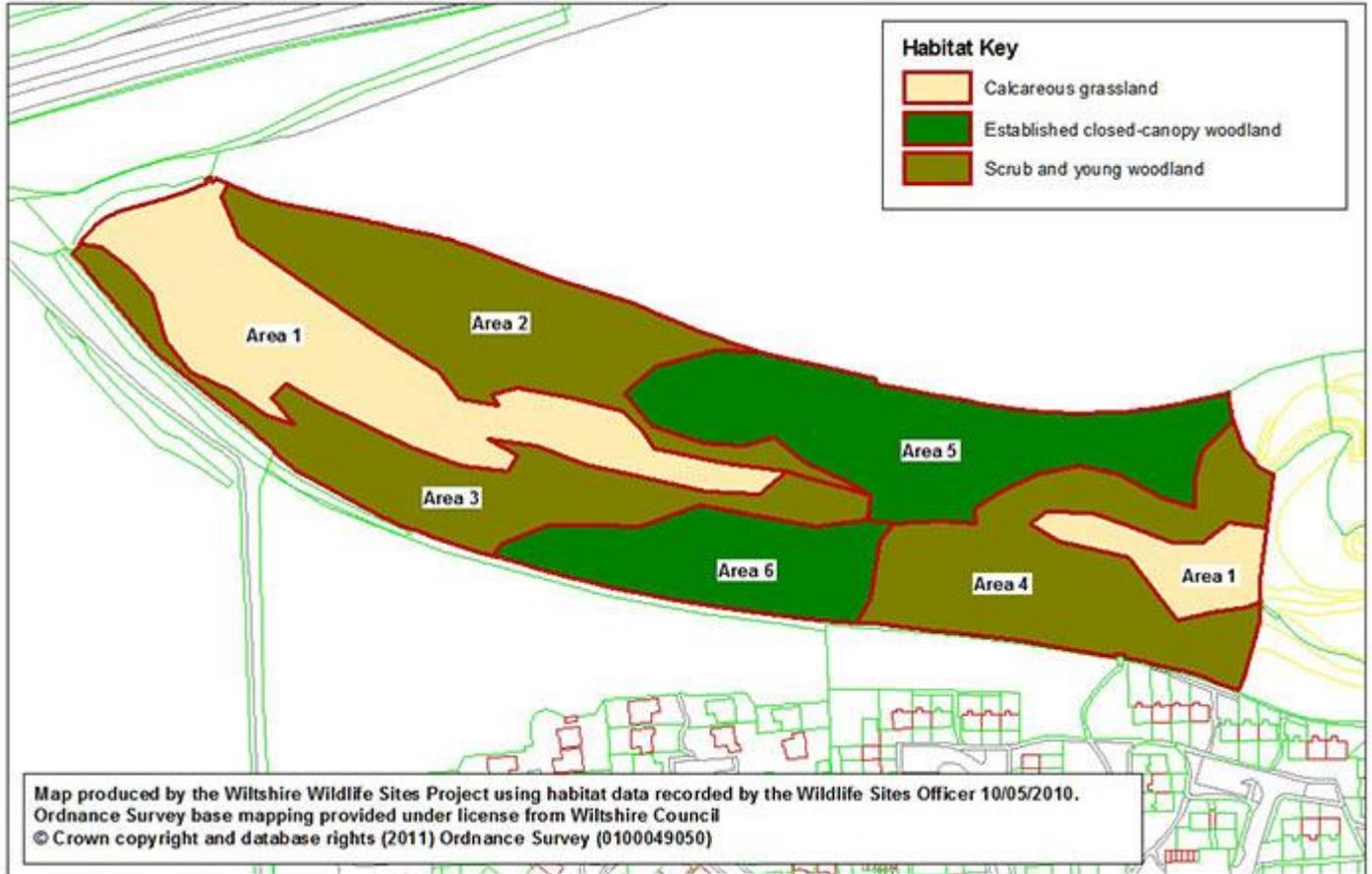
<b>Location</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Work</b>
Area 6	Secondary ash/sycamore woodland	<p>Woodland along southern boundary to be retained for amenity- see Map 2</p> <p>Remaining 60% of woodland needs to be heavily thinned, to create wood pasture. Focus on felling young ash and sycamore trees, edges should be scalloped</p> <p>Treat all cut stumps to prevent regrowth</p> <p>Badger setts need to be buffered</p> <p><i>Work may need to continue into Year 6</i></p>

YEAR 6 (2016/17)

Location	Description	Work
All areas	Any follow up work as necessary	<i>Requirements to be identified and agreed with Natural England in Year 5</i>

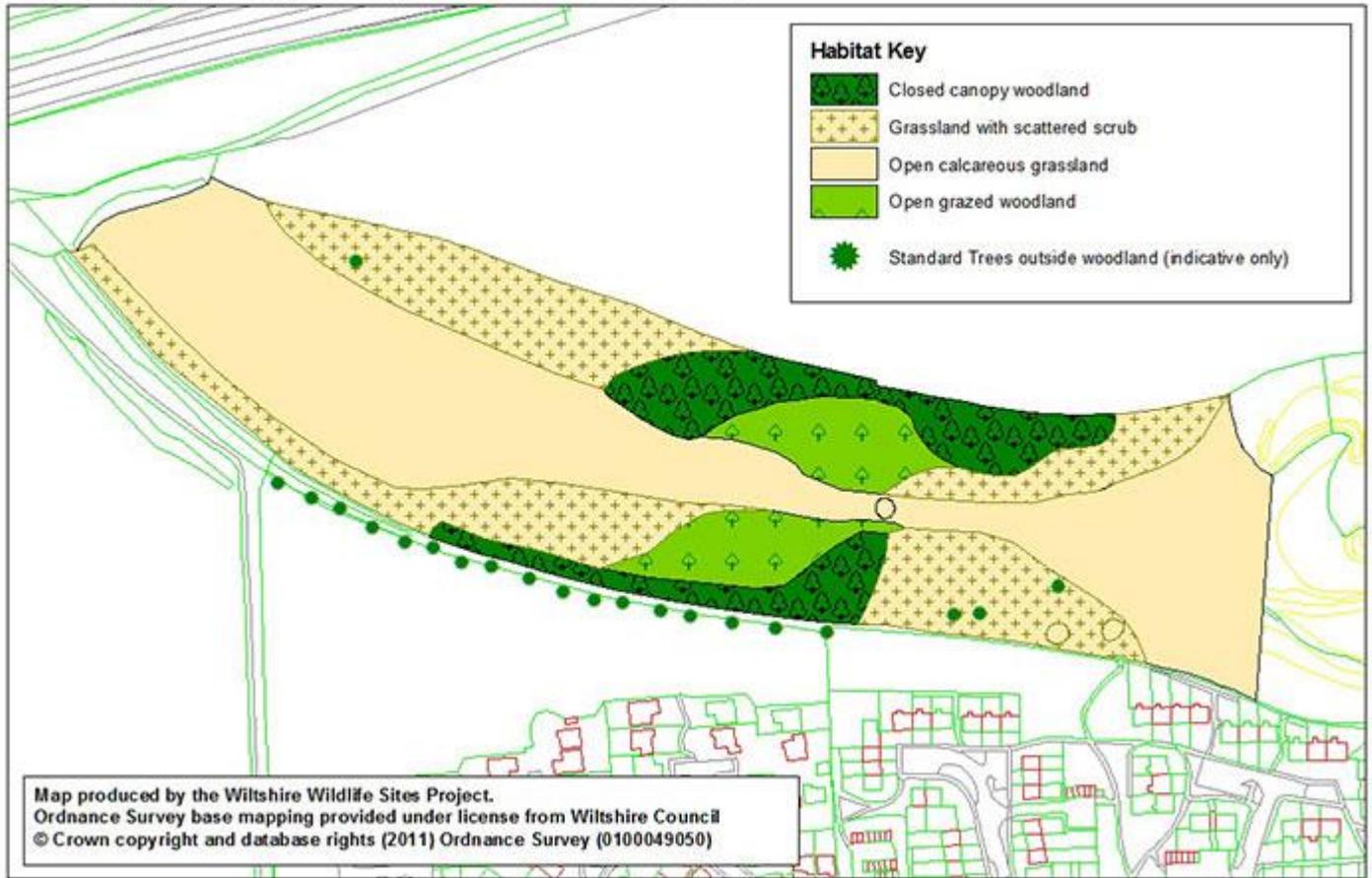
**LONG HILL, MERE**

**Map 1: Current habitats and work areas (Draft)**



**LONG HILL, MERE**

**Map 2: Target level of grassland, scrub and woodland (Draft)**



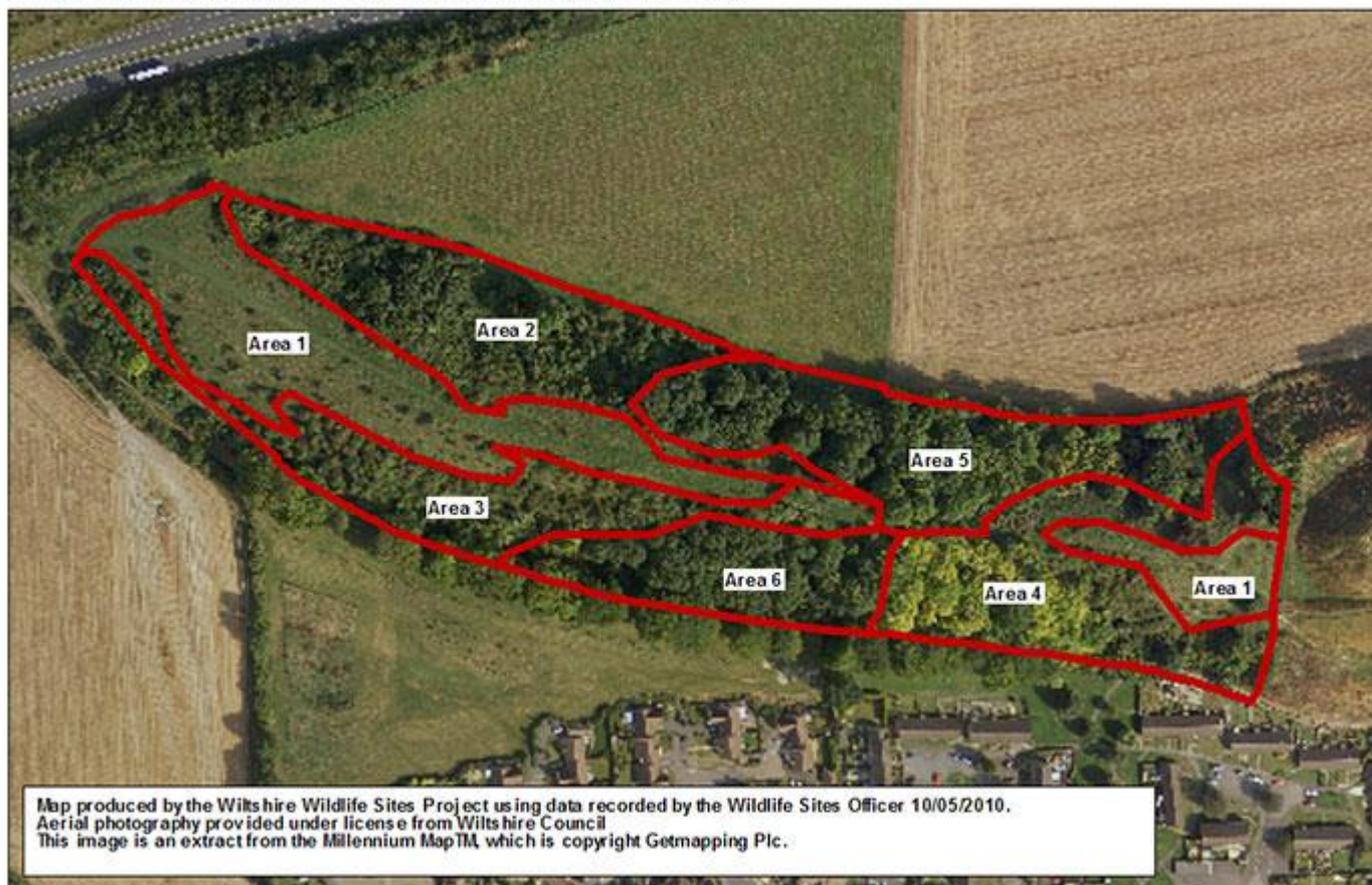
**LONG HILL, MERE**

**Map 1b: Work areas over 2002 aerial photography (Draft)**



**LONG HILL, MERE**

**Map 1a: Work areas over 2005 aerial photography (Draft)**



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