

GRAZING in the AONB

Grazing and its re-introduction to heathlands in Staffordshire are currently key issues within and around the AONB. With the loss of traditional practices such as bracken gathering, grazing and cutting firewood for fuel, the special qualities and diversity of open heathland character are under threat.

On part of Hednesford Hills, managed by Cannock Chase Council, 6 Dexter cows now graze, combining continued public access with the re-introduction of cattle. This more traditional management approach is being monitored thanks to funding from the Countryside Agency. For further details, please contact Cannock Chase Council's Countryside Service on 01543 450018.



Dexters Delight

A while ago, Lichfield District Council commissioned a grazing feasibility study for Gentleshaw Common and Chasewater heaths. Now extensive consultations are underway, for example, a 'Heathland Harvest' event was held at Gentleshaw on 11th September highlighting the past uses of heaths and heathland products. For further details, please contact Lichfield District Council's Biodiversity Officer on 01543 308186.

Staffordshire County Council has recently commissioned a study examining the feasibility, benefits and likely impacts of re-introducing grazing to Cannock Chase Country Park heathland after an absence of around 100 years. Summaries of this grazing feasibility study have been circulated to members of the AONB Landscape and Managing Visitors Topic Groups as well as Parish and Town Councils within the AONB. The County Council is currently carefully considering the study and its options. If a decision is made to continue investigating grazing re-introduction, then full and extensive local consultation will be undertaken. For further details, please contact Staffordshire County Council's Principal Ecologist on 01785 277254.

Should you or someone you know require it, this Newsletter can also be produced, on request, in large print and other formats or languages other than English. Please telephone 01889 882613 or fax 01889 883912.

DEFRA's Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund

Grant Scheme

Staffordshire County Council is seeking to use grant funding to compensate local communities for the impact of current or past aggregates extraction and to support sustainable environmental improvements. Expressions of interest are now being requested for possible 2006/07 projects that demonstrate clear links and support, involvement and benefit from the communities they are seeking to assist. Funding of up to 85% of project costs will be considered and match funding will be required. The Cannock Chase AONB Partnership has been identified as a key partner in delivering this scheme in relation to co-ordinating the implementation of the statutory Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan.

If you think you may have any potential projects, please contact the AONB Unit to register an interest.

OUT NOW

For a free copy of the Cannock Chase AONB Annual Review 2004 - 2005, please contact the AONB Unit or visit the AONB website.



Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is supported by: The Countryside Agency, Staffordshire County Council, Cannock Chase Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire Council, Stafford Borough Council, AONB Parish and Town Councils, British Horse Society, Cemex UK Operations Ltd, Country Land and Business Association, Department of Food and Rural Affairs, English Nature, Forestry Commission, Friends of Cannock Chase, Hanson Aggregates, National Farmers Union, Ramblers Association, Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Trail Cyclists Association, Walton Chasers, West Midland Bird Club.



CANNOCK CHASE AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

NEW AONB Officer

Following the departure of Judith Moore in May to work with the Friends of the Lake District in Kendal, we would like to welcome Ruth Hýtch to the AONB Unit as the new AONB Officer. Ruth joins us from the National Forest having worked with them for the last 6 years as Forest Development Officer.

Ruth, who lives locally, knows the Chase well and is a frequent visitor. Some of you may know Ruth from her previous job working on the Cannock Gateway Project Partnership.

Ruth said of her new appointment "I am very excited to be given the chance to get involved in the AONB Partnership. It is close to home and will give me the chance to make a difference with all of the partners. I'm looking forward to meeting all of those who have been working so hard with Judith and the team, as well as greeting newcomers to the fold. Let's get going!"

If you would like to contact Ruth, she can be reached at the Cannock Chase AONB Unit, on 01889 882613 or email ruth.hytech@staffordshire.gov.uk



Ruth, in the driving seat!

Saving Cannock Chase Country Park Continues

Staffordshire County Council is continuing with the restoration and management of heathland within the Country Park initiated through the former Saving Cannock Chase Heritage Lottery funded project. Bracken control is likely to be an ongoing management issue, although the last six years has seen a dramatic reduction in this invasive plant over many parts of the Country Park. This summer, a combination of aerial spraying and spot treatment has taken place over some 160 hectares. Planning for further management works this winter is now underway and will

include some tree and scrub removal and selective thinning work. For further details, please contact Sue Sheppard, Biodiversity Officer, on 01785 277256.

The AONB Advisory Partnership would like to pass on their congratulations to Sue Sheppard on being awarded an English Nature Site of Special Scientific Interest Award recognising her work in helping to conserve the internationally important heathland habitats and species on the Cannock Chase Country Park. Well done Sue!

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Winner Michelle puts up posters with Colin the Ranger

Anti-arson Campaign

In July, Cannock Chase High School played host to a theatre production and art competition for 12 to 13 year olds supported by Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, Staffordshire County Council Ranger Service and the Cannock Chase AONB Unit. The project aimed to make pupils more aware of the dangers and costs of arson and gave them a unique opportunity to contribute to looking after their local countryside.

After watching the theatre production, pupils were asked to design posters to make other young people aware of the dangers of arson. The eye-catching winning poster by Michelle Jackson was printed and put up across Cannock Chase during the summer months.

The school's Community Education Officer, Andrea Rider, said "the experience aimed to heighten young people's awareness of the dangers of arson on Cannock Chase and also encouraged participation in the local community."

People who see anything suspicious on the Chase are asked to call Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.

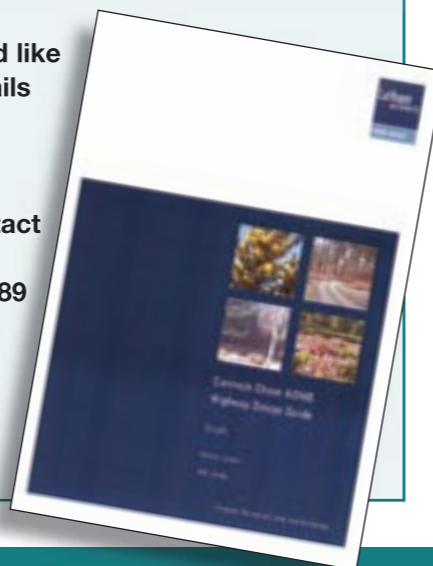
Consultants' Update

Earlier this year, a couple of consultancies were arranged to further investigate the issues of highways design and information provision within Cannock Chase AONB. Funded by the Countryside Agency, two draft strategies have now been developed for further comments.

The Highways Design Guide illustrates current practice within the AONB, suggests improvements and offers examples of how similar issues have been tackled elsewhere. It is to be considered by an AONB sub-group in conjunction with Staffordshire County Council's Highways Authority. It is hoped that, subject to future funding, the next steps will be a signs audit and the production of guidance on the future management and maintenance of roads and the roadside environment within Cannock Chase AONB.

The draft Interpretive Strategy identifies some key themes to convey messages about the AONB, such as history, nature conservation and landscape, along with how, when and where to interpret them. This report is now being considered by the AONB Managing Visitors Topic Group and will be used to help guide future co-ordination and development of visitor management and information within Cannock Chase AONB.

If you would like further details on either of the above strategies, please contact the AONB Unit on 01889 882613.



Protected Landscape Forum

Cannock Chase is at the regional hub of protected landscapes, being surrounded by no less than four other areas: Malvern Hills, Shropshire Hills and Wye Valley AONBs as well as the Peak District National Park. Once a quarter, representatives from each area meet with the Countryside Agency, Rural Development Service, Government Office and English Nature in Birmingham. This Protected Landscape Forum is a valuable opportunity to keep in touch with developments and with each other, as well as hearing from guest speakers on relevant subjects. Recent topics have included the new agri-environment grant schemes, the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund and implementing the Regional Forestry Framework Action Plan.

In May, the Forum visited Shropshire Hills AONB for a very informative day including planning issues relating to AONBs, how to manage heather regeneration within an agricultural system and approaches to conserving land which sits outside the AONB boundary designation but which influences its character.

If you have any questions about the Protected Landscape Forum, please contact Kelda White on 0121 213 4911, or email kelda.white@countryside.gov.uk



Forum visits Shropshire Hills AONB

Countryside Update

English Nature, the Rural Development Service and the Countryside Agency Landscape, Access and Recreation Division are merging in response to the Government's Rural Strategy. In October 2006, the three organisations will be united as Natural England with responsibility for:

- ❖ enhancing biodiversity, our landscapes and nature conservation in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas;
- ❖ promoting access, recreation and public well-being;
- ❖ contributing to the way natural resources are managed so they can be enjoyed now and by future generations.

Nick Young, Chairman of the West Midlands Protected Landscape Forum said "The formation of Natural England marks an exciting change for the future of rural areas. Not only will Natural England use landscape character and quality as a key focus, but it will also have direct links with land managers enabling it to deliver tangible environmental outcomes in a way in which three separate organisations could not achieve. Designated areas such as Cannock Chase AONB will benefit from more integrated input and support to ensure a commitment to a sustainable landscape."

If you have any questions about the formation of Natural England, please contact Nick Young on 0121 233 9399, or email nick.young@countryside.gov.uk

Seeking Project Funding?

The AONB Unit has a £5,000 "Delegated Fund" from the Countryside Agency to be spent on projects relating to implementation of the Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan before March 2006. If you represent an interested group that is perhaps doing some habitat creation work, improving access, increasing education and awareness or helping to support sustainable transport use for example, and can provide 50% match funding, then please contact the AONB Unit for further details.