

**CANNOCK CHASE AONB**  
**STATE OF THE AONB PROJECT**

**Report to the Cannock Chase AONB Unit**

**by**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background to the project**

The advice prepared by the Countryside Agency on the preparation of AONB management plans stresses the importance of developing a monitoring programme. In response to that advice the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership has made a clear commitment to this process.

The management plan for the AONB has a very clear statement in Policy 42 for “*establishing a monitoring and review programme for the AONB management plan*”. The aim of this project has been to develop that part of the monitoring and review process relating to the reporting on the State of the AONB.

### **1.2 The Consultant’s brief**

The Consultant was asked to develop a strategy and action plan for the monitoring of the “State of the AONB”, as part of the overall management plan for the AONB, which will eventually lead to the preparation of a “State of the AONB” [SAONB] report.

In developing the Strategy, the Consultant was asked to:

- address the monitoring of outcomes of management activity i.e. the condition of the AONB and not the outputs of the AONB management service; and
- take account of the work that has been undertaken by the Countryside Council for Wales, Countryside Agency and a number of AONBs [notably by the South West Protected Landscapes Forum] in relation to the monitoring of the State of AONBs.

### **1.3 Method of working**

In preparing the Strategy, the Consultant has had a number of key points in mind:

- the avoidance of the unnecessary collection of information and research by focussing on the qualities that make the AONB special;
- the importance of distinguishing between basic facts about the AONB and the need to establish its condition and how it is changing;
- the need to provide clear signposting to the sources of information and to identify where responsibility lies for undertaking particular elements of monitoring; and
- the need to involve in this project AONB stakeholders that are likely to be involved in ongoing monitoring.

The final point above was addressed through holding two meetings attended by members of the AONB Partnership:

- the first to discuss the nature of the SAONB process and, in particular, to identify the “special qualities” of the AONB and thus provide a basis for the development of the Strategy; and

- the second to receive and discuss the study conclusions and the proposed strategy and action plan.

In addition a number of meetings were held with officers of the AONB Partnership, covering in particular planning, landscape, heathland management and biodiversity.

#### **1.4 Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the enthusiastic assistance of all those who have approached during the course of this project, in particular Judith Moore and her colleagues in the AONB Unit and the members of the AONB Officers group with whom I had two very productive meetings.

#### **1.5 Disclaimer**

The conclusions and recommendations set out in the report are mine alone. Although I believe them to be well founded, the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership is not bound to accept them, wholly or in part.

## 2. BACKGROUND TO “STATE OF THE AONB “ REPORTING

This section of the report explains briefly the concept of “State of the AONB” [SAONB] reporting, its place in the management plan process, the scope of an SAONB report and the benefits that can be derived from it. It draws on work undertaken by CCW – *AONB management plans: guidance for local authorities, 2002 & the final report of the State of the AONB reporting project by Edward Holdaway with R Elwyn Owen, May 2003.*

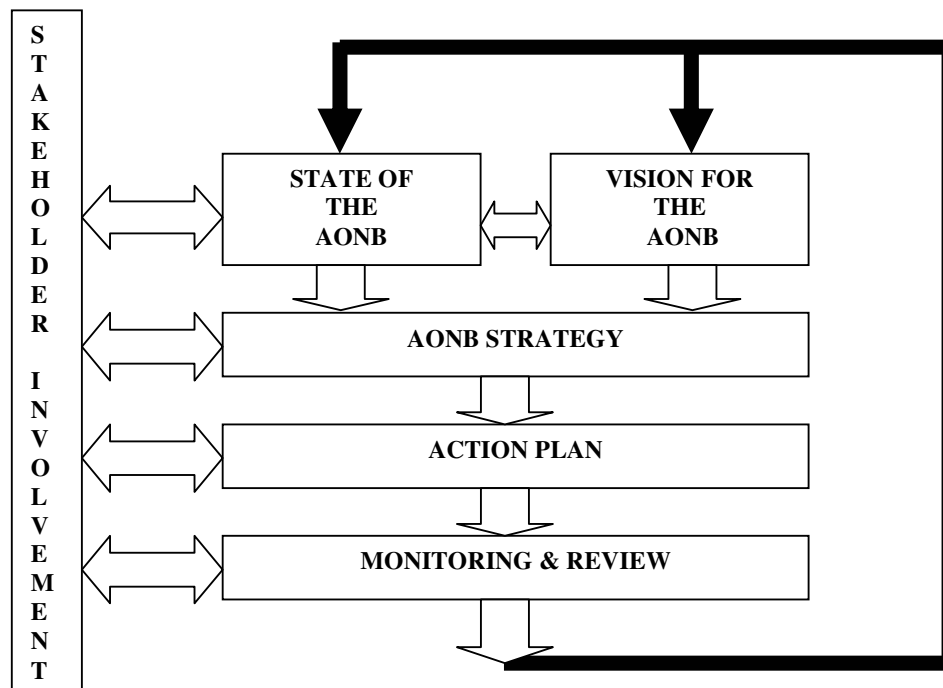
### 2.1 The concept and its place in the management plan process

The essence of the AONB management plan process is summed up in this quote from the guidance published by CCW, which advocates a resource-based approach that starts with:

*“... a thorough understanding and consensus amongst all those concerned about what the **special qualities** of the AONB are [the resource] and then explore the interaction between that resource and human activity. This will form the basis for deciding the management action required to maintain or enhance the resource. Underpinning the whole approach is the need to measure and monitor change both quantitatively and qualitatively.”*

The preparation of an SAONB report, together with the development of a Vision for the AONB, underpinned by the thorough understanding of the AONB, are seen as the starting point of the whole management plan process, as shown in Diagram 4 from the guidance, reproduced below.

**Diagram 4** AONB MANAGEMENT PLAN PROCESS



The CCW guidance emphasises the importance of the SAONB report in developing an understanding of the resources of the AONB, i.e. the special qualities, the activities/pressures that affect them and of changes that are taking place; and in providing the basis for assessing the condition of the AONB. In essence it shows the position reached in managing the “special qualities” of the AONB and how this relates to the desired position identified in the management plan.

It is also important to stress that throughout the management plan process reaching an understanding about the policy outcome is crucial. When developing objectives and policies it is essential to express them in a way that can subsequently be monitored and reported upon. Thus, for example, an objective, which simply says ‘to conserve and enhance the heathland habitats of the AONB’ or ‘to maintain and enhance the woodlands of the AONB’ needs to be qualified, in order to provide a clear link to the dynamics of the area and the changes expected. Such a qualification would need to contain statements relating, say, to the maintenance or extension of their present area or the improvement of their condition from their present state to a desired state in the future. Numerical expression such as doubling the area of heathland or woodland is one way in which clarity can be achieved. It can also be achieved by qualitative means, for example, by saying that all woodlands should be managed in accordance with AONB objectives for woodland management; or that all historic parks and gardens should be managed according to an agreed and implemented plan.

## 2.2 The scope of the SAONB report

The scope of the SAONB report envisaged in the CCW guidance provides an important steer in terms of the information that will be needed. It suggests that the SAONB report should address the following:

[a] **State of the resource** - its nature character, quality, extent and condition, in particular identifying the “special qualities” that are crucial to the long-term well-being of the AONB. The resources considered should include the

- **Natural, visual & sensory** – reflecting the particular purpose of AONB designation i.e. the conservation of the natural beauty of the area;
- **Cultural** – reflecting the importance of the archaeological and historical elements of the landscapes of AONBs;
- **Environmental** – in recognition of the likes of air and water quality to the overall quality of an AONB and thus to people’s enjoyment of it and to the overall quality of life of local residents;
- **Recreation** – in recognition of the importance of the network of public rights of way and open access land as a resource that enables the public to enjoy the special qualities of the AONB.

A full list is reproduced in Appendix 1.

**[b] Activities/pressures** - these represent the social and economic facets of the AONB and its communities, which are significant sources of pressure for change. The kinds of pressures and activities affecting AONBs might include:

- **Visitors** – recreation and tourism;
- **Land management** – agriculture and forestry;
- **Economic activity and development** – employment, housing and the built environment, mineral working, telecommunications, energy generation and transmission, transport and traffic, fishing and waste disposal;
- **Community and Social** – local services and transport, local housing and community facilities;
- **Climate change**
- **Pollution** – air, water and light pollution.

A full list is reproduced in Appendix 1.

**[c] Response** - reporting progress against objectives and the impact of management initiatives, answering the basic question ‘are the special qualities being maintained in the desired condition set out in the Vision and Strategy?’.

**[d]** The basis for **Monitoring**.

### **2.3 The benefits of SAONB reporting**

Good intelligence about an AONB, its resources and the activities / pressures affecting it is essential in order to look after it properly. In addition to being a vital part of the management plan process, SAONB reports are also very important in:

- raising awareness of issues in the AONB [both locally and nationally];
- drawing in stakeholders, through their involvement in the monitoring process;
- influencing those who have direct responsibility for looking after and improving the special qualities;
- reporting to funding agencies;
- making bids for funds [e.g. where the “State of the AONB” is below par]; and
- contributing to wider “state of the environment” reporting and on progress towards sustainable development.

The range of issues that need to be addressed in the SAONB report makes it essential that all stakeholders sign up to the principles and aims of SAONB reporting and contribute to its preparation.

### **3. LESSONS FROM ELSEWHERE**

The requirement in the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 [CRoW Act] for AONBs to prepare management plans has led to a significant amount of discussion about how they should be monitored and in particular on how the “State of the AONB” should be reported on. This section of the report identifies what lessons can be learned from the guidance prepared by the Countryside Agency [*Developing indicators for AONBs: interim guidance note, November 2003*] and the Countryside Council for Wales [*op cit*], the work undertaken by Baker Associates on behalf of the South West Protected Landscapes Forum [*Indicators for use in AONB management plan monitoring, Baker Associates, November 2003*] the approaches of individual AONBs in preparing their plans and from the experience of National Parks in this field.

#### **3.1 Scope of SAONB indicators**

The guidance provided for AONBs by CCW has already been referred to in Section 2 of this report. Guidance on the scope of indicators put out by the Countryside Agency is reproduced in Appendix 2, and that produced by the South West Protected Landscapes Forum in Appendix 3. Whilst they provide very helpful checklists on the scope of indicators, they rely to a considerable degree on local interpretation according to the “special qualities” of each AONB. It is important to note that the SAONB report should relate not only to the “special qualities” but also to local communities and the local economy and the way they interact with them.

In this context it is important to re-emphasise the need [section 2.1 above] for policies to be explicit about the desired state of the “special qualities”, thus providing a clear framework for ongoing monitoring. A perusal of the management plans prepared by AONBs thus far reveals that this has not generally been the case.

The CCW guidance on SAONB reporting advocates two sets of indicators - one to contain a simple profile of the AONB setting out basic information about it and the other to report on the “State of the AONB” in a way that can be measured and so demonstrate change over time. The former providing a simple basis for comparison with other AONBs and the latter focussing very much on the “State of the Special Qualities”

#### **3.2 Wide range of organisations**

National guidance for England emphasises that a large number of organisations will need to be involved in the SAONB process, not only the AONBs individually and collectively through the National Association for AONBs [NAAONBs] but also the Countryside Agency in taking the lead in the development of techniques or supporting AONBs with training programmes and advice.

The work undertaken by AONBs thus far emphasises the important role for partner organisations, especially those identified as public bodies under Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000, in monitoring the condition of AONBs. Most notable are English Nature in relation to SSSIs, English Heritage for Ancient Monuments and Historic Parks & Gardens, the Forestry Commission for woodland & forestry and the

Environment Agency for water quality. There is also a clear role for voluntary bodies such as CPRE for tranquillity and light pollution; and the local wildlife trusts and local biodiversity partnerships for wildlife resources. Also of vital importance are the various departments of partner local authorities covering a wide range of issues, notably landscape & nature conservation, planning, archaeology, listed buildings & conservation areas, tourism, economic development, air and noise.

### **3.3 Gaps in information and techniques**

It is generally accepted as inevitable that in this first round of plans under the CROW Act 2000 there will be gaps in information and in understanding of the “special qualities” of AONBs and the pressures/activities affecting them. There is also a need to develop new techniques. It is not surprising, therefore that many of the management plans refer to the need to collect information – Cannock Chase is no exception. “State of...” reporting is an evolving process to be developed over time in the light of experience and as new information is assembled and gaps in knowledge are filled and circumstances change. Whilst it is acknowledged that a significant amount of work needs to be done over the next 5 years, it will be important that the effort is continued in subsequent rounds of the management plan process. This is not a one off event.

In terms of specific topics that require attention one of the most prominent is the landscape of AONBs, especially the identification of what is special about the scenic qualities and to develop indicators to demonstrate their changing state. In this context it will be very important to develop the characterisation processes that are now so frequently used, so that a clear basis for articulating the state of the landscape as a whole [not the individual components] is provided. It is clear there are difficulties in developing indicators that truly represent “landscape” as a whole as opposed to the individual elements [biodiversity, archaeology etc], particularly concepts such as tranquillity, remoteness and wilderness. What is equally clear is that there is a task for the Countryside Agency and the NAAONB to promote the development of techniques for assessing the state of the landscape.

Particular attention also needs to be paid to the activities and pressures affecting AONBs – the interaction between visitors, the local economy and the local community on the one hand and the resources or “special qualities” of the AONB on the other. In this context, the need to develop ways of defining the capacity of the “special qualities” of the AONB to withstand the activities and pressures is inherent in the SAONB process. Put another way, there is a need to examine in some depth what sustainable development means for AONBs [and other protected landscapes], particularly in terms of what social and economic activity can be integrated within AONBs without damaging their “special qualities”.

It is also evident that AONBs, individually and collectively, and with the Countryside Agency will need to keep up with the developing understanding of our environment and of sustainable development, together with the associated need to gather relevant information. In this context the potential impact of climate change is a matter that needs to be fully embraced.

### **3.4 Resources**

AONBs are experiencing considerable difficulties in grappling with the many issues affecting them. As indicated above, one of the most consistent messages is that more research will be needed, in part to develop techniques for measuring condition, especially of the landscape, and in part simply to collect data. A common plea is ‘where are the resources going to come from?’. Not surprisingly this concern seems to be leading AONBs to decide on indicators on the basis of what information is currently available, rather than what is really needed. Whilst this may be appropriate in the interim, there is a danger that some of the “special qualities” of AONBs may be neglected and a skewed picture of the condition of an AONB portrayed. This is particularly so where, for example, there is relatively good information about particular aspects of the AONB e.g. biodiversity [SSSIs, BAPs etc], woodlands & forestry, ancient monuments & listed buildings, but relatively poor information about the landscape as a whole and such things as tranquillity & light pollution, as well as the socio-economic drivers for change. There is a strong message here for both the Countryside Agency and the family of AONBs to work to redress this seeming imbalance and to ensure that resources are available for this important work. The slow progress of the National Parks with respect “State of...” reporting demonstrates that, without adequate resources, the development of SAONB reporting will be a long and drawn out process.

Closely associated with the question of resources is the importance of ensuring that AONBs have the capacity to handle the needs of SAONB reporting. In particular they will need access to GIS and the development of strong links into the systems of parent local authorities, as well as sufficient staff time and skills to handle data gathering and processing.

### **3.5 Approaches adopted by AONBs**

It is difficult to detect a consistent pattern of approach to “State of...” monitoring in AONB management plans. This is due partly to the varying nature of AONBs and partly to the absence of national guidance on how to approach monitoring of the State of AONBs. Whilst this was addressed in general terms in the CA management plan guidance, it was only recently that CA produced interim guidelines and the AONBs in the South West of England developed a set of indicators designed for use by each AONB to ensure a consistent approach. That said, a number of approaches can be detected:

- recognition of the need to monitor the “State of the AONB”, with no attempt to prescribe in the plan what is to be done, leaving it as an action point during the currency of the plan;
- a few have gone into great detail, identifying as many as 59 indicators - begging the question whether such detail really helps in focussing on the overall condition of the AONB;
- some have followed the national interim guidance, with modifications to suit local needs; and
- in the south west of England the suite of indicators developed corporately has been followed by most AONBs, in some cases as an interim measure to allow time to develop more locally appropriate indicators .

Whether an entirely consistent approach nationally is practical is a matter for debate amongst the family of protected landscapes. Similarly it is questionable whether a consistent approach is needed, so long as each AONB identifies its “special qualities” and develops an understanding of their condition and the drivers for change in that condition. This would enable a relatively simple national picture to be developed based on the proportion of the special qualities in each AONB being in favourable condition.

### **3.6 The use of proxy indicators**

The use of proxy indicators is widespread – for example woodlands managed under WGS are assumed to be managed in line with AONB objectives; and the management of farmland under the likes of Countryside Stewardship are similarly assumed to be managed in line with AONB objectives. These assumptions have to be treated with some caution, unless there is a very strong relationship between the measure and the special quality, for example where the existence of a particular bird is indicative of the condition of a habitat that is a special quality of the landscape. They are very useful where there is specific agreement that such schemes contain AONB objectives, as is the case in the Wye Valley for woodland management; or where a countryside stewardship scheme is being used to restore an historic park guided by a specially prepared management plan. In Cannock Chase, for example, there is an unwritten assumption that the condition of the SSSI/SAC is fully representative of the condition of the heathland [one of the special qualities of the AONB]. Whilst this is true in the context of heathland as a wildlife habitat, it is not necessarily true in terms of the heathland as a landscape. Thus care will be needed in using the condition of the SSSI/SAC as an indicator on its own – a matter that will be returned to in Section 6.1 [B]. Another example from Cannock Chase relates to the woodlands, which are regarded as a “special quality”. The management of the majority of the woodlands is guided by the Forest Design Plan, which embraces AONB objectives and has clear targets for the composition of woodland species, the restoration of ancient and semi natural woods, reversion to heathland and the retention of views. The very existence of the plan and the fact that it is being implemented can be used as a proxy indicator so long as the link with AONB objectives is maintained – a matter that will be turned to in Section 6.1 [D].

#### 4. THE LOCAL CONTEXT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGY

As a prelude to the outlining of a strategy for an SAONB report for Cannock Chase an assessment has been made of the local context. A number of important points have emerged.

The policies in the management plan, whilst hinting at change [usually enhancement of a feature], are not specific in terms of what the desired state or change should be. Thus, for example, Policy 6 refers to enhancing the value and extent of heathland, but is silent on what this actually means. Similarly Policy 7 refers to the improvement of groundwater levels and quality and Policy 8 refers to the enhancement of peace and tranquillity, but they do not define the aspiration. This lack of definition does not help the monitoring process. This matter is addressed in Section 6.1 of the report, where particular actions are identified in relation to indicators for the “special qualities” of the AONB.

However, the management plan does identify:

- the general need for information collection and monitoring [policy 42 A & B] and the need to share it [ Action 41D];
- particular areas [much of it relating to the core of the AONB] where gaps in knowledge need to be filled and where there are particular initiatives requiring it, notably in relation to:
  - habitats and species [6A];
  - groundwater levels [7A];
  - perceptions of and areas of, peace & tranquillity [8A];
  - history & archaeology [14A & 15A];
  - geology, soils and landform [16A];
  - recreation - especially effects on the AONB [24C, 24D];
  - an understanding of economic / business activity [9C, 27A, 28A & 29A];
  - transport [40C & D].

With that greater knowledge it should be possible to be more specific about what policies are intended to achieve - a point that will be returned to in the Strategy for Monitoring in Section 5 of the report.

It is also important to note that the preparation/review of a significant number of strategies addressing particular interests is put forward in the action plan. Their preparation and implementation gives an important opportunity to ensure that monitoring and reporting are fully integrated in the process, notably in the fields of:

- Nature conservation [4A,C&D];
- Management of peace & tranquillity [8B];
- Woodland management [10A & 10B];
- Visitor management and information / interpretation [18A];
- Signage [21A];
- Recreation - resolution of conflicts [24A] & co-ordinated approach to future proposals [25A];

- Access to heathland blocks [26A];
- Sustainable tourism [30A];
- Planning policies [36A], “a support zone” for the AONB [36B] and horse keeping [36C];
- Traffic and transport [38 & 39] cycling [40D] and car parking [40E].

In terms of the availability of information and assessment of the state of the “special qualities” it is clear that in relation to the core of the AONB - the heathland, forest/woodland and recreation - a significant amount is available as a result of the long history of ownership of the land by the County Council and the Forestry Commission, as well as of the designation of most of the heathland area as an SSSI/SAC. A significant amount is also known about individual species, as a result of work by the West Midlands Bird Club and the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. However, as shown on page 11 above it is already recognised that further information is needed to ensure a full understanding of this core area.

Whilst the core of the AONB is relatively well understood, the fringe of the AONB is not well understood, particularly in terms of the landscape, agriculture, development pressures, and local communities / local economy [insofar as they interact with the AONB]. Some of the gaps will be filled by the landscape character work currently being undertaken by the County Council, particularly in terms of the overall quality of the landscape, important historic components and where the landscape is below par. In addition work undertaken by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust on the habitats of the AONB will provide valuable background information.

## **5. THE STRATEGY**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The development of a strategy for monitoring and reporting on the “State of Cannock Chase AONB” is one of the main outputs of this project. However, before setting out the proposed strategy in detail it is important to set it in the context of the management plan.

First, it is crucial to make the distinction between the monitoring and reporting on the “State of the AONB” on the one hand and on the implementation of the management plan on the other. The former, which is needed quinquennially, focuses on the state/condition of the “special qualities” of the AONB and the pressures/activities affecting it. The latter focuses on the implementation of the action plan by measuring the performance of the AONB partnership and the AONB Unit on an annual basis.

Second, it is important to re-emphasise that SAONB reporting is an integral part of the management plan process – the links between the vision, policies and actions set out in the management plan and the monitoring process will need to be identified. There is need for clarity in defining [numerically or qualitatively] what the desired “outcome” is to be with regard to the “special qualities”, so that when the management plan is reviewed it will be possible to ascertain whether the desired “outcome” has been realised.

Third, it is crucial to avoid gathering information for its own sake. Accordingly considerable emphasis is given in the proposals in this report to the need to define the special qualities of the AONB and the key drivers for change as a means of focussing effort and the need to develop a common understanding and agreement of what they are amongst stakeholders in the AONB.

Fourth, monitoring the “State of the AONB” is a task for all those involved in the AONB, not just the AONB Unit, although it will be instrumental in drawing together the many threads into a comprehensive whole. Involvement in the process will provide a good example of how public bodies can demonstrate their commitment to AONBs as required by Section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000.

## 5.2 The Strategy

The following strategy for monitoring the State of the AONB is proposed. For each objective, key actions are identified.

The **aim** of the strategy should be:

*for the AONB partnership to be in a position to prepare a comprehensive “State of the AONB” report in time for the review of the management plan in 2009 and for subsequent reviews.*

The **objectives** of the strategy should be:

*[a] To increase awareness of, and commitment to the AONB management plan process and the State of the AONB reporting process amongst key stakeholders: to achieve this:*

- partners should identify what they are going to do for the AONB and how they will report on their activity; and
- how they will contribute to the State of the AONB report, through the gathering of data and reporting on their particular aspects of the AONB;
- a monitoring working group, comprising those identified with the task of providing monitoring information, should be formed to drive the strategy forward.

*[b] To ensure policies in the management plan are specific in terms of the future state of the special qualities desired: to achieve this:*

- where policies in the management plan refer to the state of the special qualities, more specific statements of the desired future state should be developed;
- where plans, strategies and programmes are developed in accordance with the management plan, they should, where appropriate, address the need to monitor the State of the AONB.

*[c] To agree the basis for monitoring the State of the AONB- to achieve this:*

The AONB partnership should:

- adopt / develop key indicators based on the proposals in this report [see Section 6.1 below];
- agree the basis for the preparation of a profile of the AONB [as set out in Section 6.3 of the report];
- identify organisations responsible for the collection of the particular data and for reporting on it;

- ensure that it has the capacity [finance and staff time], particularly in the AONB Unit, to draw all the threads together;
- make the fullest use of GIS.

***[d] To keep under review/ identify / commission the research necessary to address the perceived deficiencies in data: to achieve this:***

- the AONB partnership should prepare an annual costed plan for this work;
- the Countryside Agency should recognise such a plan as a key element of the work of the AONB for grant aid purposes;
- the Countryside Agency and the NAAONB should agree an annual programme for the development of generic techniques in monitoring.

***[e] To use the findings of the “State of the AONB” report in raising awareness of the AONB, its special qualities and the drivers for change***

- the AONB Partnership should publish the State of the AONB report as part of the management plan review in 2009 and thereafter quinquennially at the start of the management plan review process. The contents should be conveyed not only to those involved in the AONB partnership as part of the management plan review but also to the widest possible audience, including the local community and visitors, as part of the wider interpretation of the AONB.

***[f] To ensure that reporting on the State of the AONB links to regional and national AONB reporting processes***

- the AONB partnership should engage with other AONBs [via NAAONB] and the Countryside Agency to establish a method for reporting nationally based on the condition of the special qualities of each AONB.

## **6. PROPOSALS FOR STATE OF THE AONB INDICATORS**

One of the main objectives of the Strategy set out in Section 5 of this report is to agree the basis for monitoring of the AONB. This Section addresses the question of what indicators should be used for reporting on the “State of the AONB”. Where possible specific indicators have been suggested. Where that has not been possible actions have been proposed to develop them.

This Section also addresses the key pressures/activities that affect the AONB. In particular, it identifies their interaction with its “special qualities” and what needs to be done to achieve a full understanding of that relationship. This includes the need for undertaking surveys and the development of strategies/policies for all or part of the AONB.

One very strong theme is evident throughout the discussion of the State of the AONB indicators and the pressures/activities affecting the AONB. It relates to the importance of preparing an overall landscape strategy [in its broadest sense] for the AONB, addressing two specific but closely related geographical areas:

1. The core of the AONB - addressing the future of its special qualities, including such issues as:
  - what is to be achieved in the heathland and woodlands;
  - what is to be achieved for nature conservation;
  - the identification, planning and management of the historic landscape and peace & tranquillity, wilderness and open space.

Underpinning the development of such a strategy a clear understanding will be needed not only of the “special qualities” but also the particular pressures and activities affecting them, in this case recreation and traffic.

2. The fringe landscapes - addressing the role of this area in providing the setting for the to the core of the AONB, the future of the farmed landscape, historic parkland, nature conservation and the links with the historic core of the AONB. Such a strategy should be underpinned by a thorough understanding both of the special qualities of the area and of the development pressures and the local economy.

The close links between the two parts of the AONB and its relatively small scale suggest that a single strategic approach would be most appropriate. Once prepared, the basis for a comprehensive SAONB report will be in place.

### **6.1 Special qualities of Cannock Chase**

An initial meeting was held between the Consultant and representatives of the key organisation involved with the AONB. The main outcome was confirmation of the “special qualities” of the AONB and the main pressures/activities affecting them that need to be understood. The list, set out below, has guided the Consultant’s work. As

indicated in the strategy, set out in Section 5 of the report, it will be important for the AONB Partnership to endorse this list.

**The “Special Qualities” of the AONB**

**Peace & tranquillity**

**Wilderness** – not able to see farm land, buildings or moving traffic

Large tract of **open country** accessible to the public

**Views** within, of and from the Chase

**Heathland** – importance for its wildlife & the contribution it makes to the landscape mosaic and feeling of wilderness

**Forest and woodlands** [including veteran oaks and ancient semi natural woodland, beech belts and productive forest]

**Valley wetlands**

**Flora & Fauna** - deer, reptiles, birds [e.g. nightjar], insects, plants

**Geology & Soils**

**Historic landscapes and features** – e.g. ancient monuments, parkland, listed buildings and wartime uses

The fringe **agricultural landscapes**

Each of the “special qualities” has been considered in the following manner:

- Comment on its nature;
- Current measure [s] of condition;
- Proposed indicator[s];
- Action [s] required;
- Agency [s] responsible.

It should be noted that peace & tranquillity, wilderness and the extent of open country have been considered together, because of their close interconnection.

<p><i>Special Quality:</i>  <b>6.1 [A] PEACE &amp; TRANQUILLITY, WILDERNESS AND OPEN COUNTRY</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the nature of the special quality</i></p> <p>Peace and tranquillity, wilderness and open country for people to enjoy are at the heart of the management plan. These qualities are found primarily in the core of the Chase and are closely related to other special qualities - the heathland, the woodlands and forest and the historic landscape. They are also closely related to the area of land owned by the Forestry Commission and Staffordshire County Council. Definition is difficult, though the absence of noise &amp; traffic, the absence of development, especially in views, and the extent of public access to open country begin to convey what is meant by this special quality.</p>
<p><i>Current measure[s] of condition</i></p> <p>The only measure currently available is provided by the results of visitor surveys in which local people and visitors recognise these special qualities of the AONB.</p> <p>The use of the CPRE's methodology for assessing the extent of tranquillity and light pollution is being considered for use by a number of AONBs; however, they may well be inappropriate for this AONB as it is so small in scale. If the methodologies were refined for use at this scale, then useful indicators could be at hand.</p>
<p><i>Proposed indicator[s]</i></p> <p>The use of surveys of visitors to the AONB should continue to be used to ascertain what attracts them to the AONB. In addition, the development of the CPRE methodologies should be considered for their appropriateness for measuring peace and tranquillity. Otherwise it will be necessary to consider indicators of a spatial kind that could show for example the extent of the traffic free area, or the area from which no intrusive development can be seen, or the area where 'furniture' for recreation is absent or minimal, or the area where noise levels are regularly below certain levels, or the extent of public access to open country.</p>
<p><i>Action required</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implementation of Policy 8 and Actions 8A &amp; 8B should include the development of an indicator or indicators to reflect the extent &amp; condition of this special quality.</li> <li>2. As part of Action 1 above, the utility of the CPRE's measures of tranquillity and light pollution should be explored and the possible use of spatial measures of the kind indicated above should be explored as part of the development of national guidelines.</li> <li>3. Regular surveys of visitors should continue to ascertain what attracts them to the AONB.</li> </ol> <p>N.B. The implementation of the Strategies proposed in the management plan [see below] will need to be integrated with policy 8, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• visitor management / interpretation [18A, 19B] and signage [21A];</li> <li>• recreation conflicts [policy 24 &amp; action 24B] and access to heathland blocks [policy 26 &amp; action 26A];</li> <li>• monitoring of recreation activity [24C &amp; 24D] and the co-ordination of future recreation proposals [policy 25 &amp; action 25A];</li> <li>• traffic &amp; transport [38, 39, 40] and cycling [40D].</li> </ul> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>Action 1- AONB partnership, in particular SCC and FC.  Action 2 - Countryside Agency with CPRE, and NAAONB.  Action 3 – AONB partnership led by SCC and FC.</p>

<p><i>Special Quality:</i>  <b>6.1 [B] HEATHLAND</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the nature of the special quality</i></p> <p>The heathland of Cannock Chase is special for two reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. as a nationally and internationally important habitat; and</li> <li>2. as a component of the landscape mosaic at the core of the AONB that underpins the special quality of peace &amp; tranquillity, wilderness and open country.</li> </ol>
<p><i>Current measure[s] of condition</i></p> <p>The main indicator of condition is the status of the SSSI as reported on a regular basis by EN – currently its condition is thought to be recovering, particularly as a result of the “Saving Cannock Chase” project.</p> <p>As indicated in Section 3.6 of this report this indicator only addresses the biodiversity interest of the heathland. It does not address heathland as a component of the landscape mosaic at the core of the AONB, for which no indicator has been developed.</p>
<p><i>Proposed indicator[s]</i></p> <p>The use of the condition of the SSSI should be continued based on the regular reporting by EN.</p> <p>Indicators based on the balance between heathland &amp; woodland in the core of the AONB and the overall extent of heathland in the AONB as a whole should be considered. The development of both indicators depends on the way that the landscape strategy for the AONB treats heathland and targets its extension/restoration. The development of the balance of heathland/woodland indicator will depend to a considerable degree on the outcome of negotiations between SCC and EN relating to the management of the SAC.</p>
<p><i>Action required</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued measurement of the condition of the heathland SSSIs.</li> <li>2. The balance of the heathland mosaic should be established as part of the negotiations between EN and SCC on the management of the SAC.</li> <li>3. The desired extent of heathland both in the core and the fringe of the AONB needs to be agreed, so that progress towards the desired state can be measured e.g. as a result of the conversion of forestry land to heathland as per the Forest Design Plan or restoration of heathland on the fringe of the core – this is implied in Policy 3 &amp; Action 3A and Policy 6 [extension &amp; re-creation of heathland] in the management plan. It also links closely to Policy 26 and Action 26A[management of visitors]</li> </ol> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>Action 1 – EN.  Action 2 - SCC and EN.  Action 3 - SCC, FC, SWT.</p>

<p><i>Special Quality:</i>  <b>6.1 [C] VIEWS</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the nature of the special quality</i>  Very important both within the AONB, looking out of it and looking into it. This is very closely linked to the sense of peace &amp; tranquillity and wilderness where views without development etc are so crucial. There is also a close link with the condition of the fringe landscape [see section 6.1 [I] below] as that is so often the subject of views from the core of the AONB.</p>
<p><i>Current measure[s] of condition</i>  Currently there is no measure relating to views, although in the Forest Design Plan the retention of views is regarded as an important objective.</p>
<p><i>Proposed indicator[s]</i>  The recording of quintessential views of all the landscape character areas in the AONB at five yearly intervals should be undertaken so that any changes in the scenery can be recorded and judgements about changes in quality can be made.</p>
<p><i>Action required</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Many AONBs are proposing to develop some form of programme of fixed-point analysis of views as the basis for recording change in the landscape. National guidance and training in the development of such programmes needs to be developed.</li> <li>2. In the light of national advice and as part of the fulfilment of Policy 2 and Action 2A in the management plan, a monitoring programme should be developed locally using fixed-point photography, in each defined character area of the AONB. An important part of any programme will be the involvement of local communities and visitors alike in the definition of the key views.</li> </ol> <p>N.B. It will be important to undertake this work in the context of the landscape characterisation work being undertaken by SCC and the development of an overall landscape strategy for the AONB.</p> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Action 1 - CA / NAAONB  Action 2 - AONB Unit &amp; SCC</p>

<p><i>Special Quality:</i>  <b>6.1 [D] FOREST AND WOODLANDS</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the nature of the special quality</i></p> <p>Woodland forms a very important part of the character of the AONB, especially the core area, and includes ancient native tree stands at Brocton Coppice. FC woodlands managed under a Forest Design Plan [FDP] dominate the woodland area. The FDP links with the objectives of the AONB management plan.</p> <p>Brocton Coppice is managed by SCC and is part of the Cannock Chase SSSI / cSAC. The veteran trees have a unique landscape value within the AONB, contrasting with the conifer woodlands. The coppice also provides a link with the history of the Chase.</p> <p>Outside the core area little is known about the contribution of woodland to the landscape of the AONB. The work being undertaken by SCC on the character of the landscape of the AONB should reveal where trees and woods are or could be important [see also Section 6.1 [I] relating to the fringe landscapes].</p>
<p><i>Current measure[s] of condition</i></p> <p>The management of the FC woodlands are guided by the FDP, which is to be included in the AONB management plan. The FDP is clear about what is to be achieved in terms of land use and species between now and 2041e.g. proposed increase in native species of woodland and the restoration of Ancient &amp; Semi Natural Woodland – to that extent there is a basis for monitoring. However, this is not set out in the AONB management plan.</p> <p>The condition of Brocton Coppice can be reported on as part of the Cannock Chase SSSI and as part of the detailed management planning that it is subject to.</p>
<p><i>Proposed indicator[s]</i></p> <p>Ideally there should be two indicators in relation to trees and woodlands - the desired extent / balance of species and the fact that that all woods should be managed in accordance with AONB objectives [via the FCP &amp; WGS]. This may not be achievable in the short term, as so little is known about woodlands outside SCC / FC control. If that can be rectified as part of the overall landscape plan for the AONB, then it should be possible to agree the two simple indicators. In the meantime the following are proposed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For FC area – the balance between conifers and native species and the restoration of Ancient &amp; semi natural woodland as per FDP.</li> <li>• For SCC area [Brocton Coppice] rely initially on SSSI monitoring by EN, but a more appropriate one might relate to the perpetuation of the oak cover – this needs to be developed.</li> </ul> <p>For other ownerships – indicators need to be developed according to the results of the work on landscape characterisation being undertaken by SCC and the development of a landscape strategy for the whole AONB. They could include the extension of the woodland cover [part of the Forest of Mercia is in the AONB] and the management of all woods in accordance with AONB objectives [i.e. in accordance with policies 9 &amp; 10].</p>
<p><i>Action required</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Define extent &amp; balance of FC woodland in the management plan as per FDP and provide report on progress for each State of the AONB report; and ensure FDP links with AONB objectives when reviewed.</li> <li>2. Devise indicator for Brocton Coppice based on the landscape importance of the continuity of oak woodland cover.</li> <li>3. Devise indicators in the light of characterisation work and any policies for woodlands contained in an overall strategy for the AONB landscape, especially on the fringe of the AONB [n.b link to Section 6.1 [I] relating to the fringe landscapes].</li> <li>4. If an indicator relating to the management of all woodland in accordance with AONB objectives were adopted, it would be necessary to ensure that FC's WGS scheme operated in harmony with those objectives [link to policies 9 and 10 in the AONB management plan].</li> </ol> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>Action 1 - AONB partnership led by FC.  Action 2 – SCC &amp; EN.  Action 3 – AONB partnership led by SCC.  Action 4 – AONB partnership &amp; FC.</p>

<p><i>Special Quality:</i>  <b>6.1 [E] FLORA AND FAUNA</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the nature of the special quality</i></p> <p>The AONB is undoubtedly important for its flora and fauna, particularly its heathland. The importance of the AONB for other habitats and species is not clearly defined. The LBAP for Staffordshire does not refer explicitly to the AONB, though it can be deduced that lowland heath and lowland wood pasture &amp; parkland are important habitats and that significant species include bog bush cricket, nightjar, hybrid bilberry and the small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly.</p> <p>The need for a comprehensive approach to nature conservation in the AONB is recognised in policies 3 &amp; 4 of the management plan and the need to put in place a system of monitoring is emphasised in Action 6A. Whether this is achieved via a separate strategy for nature conservation in the AONB or a separate or sub LBAP is a matter for debate. Until that is resolved and the basis for monitoring is agreed it will not be possible to report on flora &amp; fauna other than the heathland &amp; woodland of the core of the AONB.</p> <p>The work currently being undertaken by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust on mapping the habitats of the AONB is an important start to the achievement of a comprehensive approach. In addition their work on the bog bush cricket and the hybrid bilberry will be very useful. Similarly the work of the West Midland Bird Club on the breeding birds of Cannock Chase [undertaken on a 5 yearly basis] and their surveys of nightjars for the BTO should provide important baseline material.</p>
<p><i>Current measure[s] of condition</i></p> <p>Apart from the condition of the SSSIs in the AONB there are no readily accessible measures of condition.</p>
<p><i>Proposed indicator[s]</i></p> <p>The condition of selected key indicator habitats &amp; species – this will depend on their identification in the nature conservation strategy or LBAP for the AONB.</p>
<p><i>Action required</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A comprehensive nature conservation strategy for the AONB or a separate LBAP for the AONB needs to be prepared as per Policies 4 &amp; 6 and Actions 4A &amp; 6A, within which the key indicator habitats and species can be defined and a basis for monitoring agreed.</li> </ol> <p>N.B. This work will need to dovetail with that undertaken to develop a landscape strategy for the AONB, especially in the context of landscape regeneration in the fringe landscapes. There is also an important link with the way in which indicators are developed for heathland and woodland – in time it may be possible to rationalise the biodiversity indicators for the AONB.</p> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>Action 1 – AONB partnership led by SCC and Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.</p>

<p><i>Special Quality:</i>  <b>6.1 [F] VALLEY WETLANDS</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the nature of the special quality</i>  The scarcity of water over much of the Chase effectively confines wetland flora and fauna to the stream valley systems and a scatter of natural and artificial pools and damp depressions. These valleys are important features of the heathland complex and are dependent on quality/existence of groundwater.</p>
<p><i>Current measure[s] of condition</i>  The main measure is through the regular assessment of the SSSI by EN. There is concern at present that the sources of the Sherbrook and Oldacre valley streams are moving downhill. Whether the lowering of the water table is a result of water extraction, for which the Pebble Beds are very important, is not clear. The management plan recognises the need for more information on this issue.</p>
<p><i>Proposed indicator[s]</i>    In the interim the condition of the valley wetlands, as part of the SSSI, should be used, together with the presence of key indicator species e.g. sundew.    In the longer term, depending on the results of the survey of groundwater, there may be a need to develop an indicator for the water resource and its relationship to the AONB.</p>
<p><i>Action[s] required</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The need is recognised in the management plan [policy 7 and action 7A] for a comprehensive survey of the groundwater of the AONB to assess the causes of changes and future impacts on the “special qualities” of the AONB.</li> <li>2. In the light of the above survey, articulate the relationship between groundwater and the special qualities of the AONB and define what the maintenance and improvement of groundwater levels means, in order to define the baseline for monitoring.</li> </ol> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>Actions 1 &amp; 2 - AONB partnership led by Environment Agency and Water Companies / EN.</p>

<p><i>Special Quality:</i>  <b>6.1 [G] GEOLOGY AND SOILS</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the nature of the special quality</i></p> <p>The management plan recognises the importance of the geology and soils as an influence on the pattern of vegetation, land use and settlement in the area – most notably underpinning the character of the core area of heathland.</p> <p>The importance has been formally recognised with the designation of an area at Milford Quarry as an SSSI. In addition a further five sites have been recognised as being regionally important geological and geomorphological sites [RIGS].</p>
<p><i>Current measure[s] of condition</i></p> <p>The condition of the SSSI is reported on by EN – currently in unfavourable condition.</p> <p>There is no measure in relation to the soils of the AONB.</p>
<p><i>Proposed indicator[s]</i></p> <p>The condition of the SSSI and the number and condition of RIGs should be used, together with any broad indicator that emerges from work on the soil strategy for England, which may help to provide a framework for tackling this work in AONBs</p>
<p><i>Action required</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continued reporting on condition of the SSSI.</li> <li>2. Policy 17 and Action 17A of the management plan aims to identify sites of importance for geology, soils or landform – in implementing the policy it will be important to develop indicators of their condition, particularly for the RIGS.</li> <li>3. National guidance will be needed to define how this whole area of interest is handled in AONB management plans and what form an appropriate indicator should take.</li> </ol> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>Action 1 – EN.  Action 2 – Staffordshire Wildlife Trust &amp; Staffordshire RIGS group.  Action 3 – Countryside Agency and DEFRA.</p>

<p><i>Special Quality:</i>  <b>6.1 [H] HISTORIC LANDSCAPES AND FEATURES</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the nature of the special quality</i></p> <p>The Chase as a whole is an historic landscape – a remnant of the Royal Hunting Forest, with designed parklands; a former mining area, with a military history in the two World Wars and 20<sup>th</sup> century afforestation. Work is underway on the historic characterisation of the AONB as part of the overall process of characterisation of the landscape of the AONB. This should provide a comprehensive basis upon which planning and management can be based. There is a strong link between the special quality of the Chase as a whole being an historic landscape and the special quality based on people’s perception of the peace &amp; tranquillity, wilderness and open nature of the Chase.</p>
<p><i>Current measure[s] of condition</i></p> <p>Apart from the measurement of the number of listed buildings at risk, it seems that there are no immediately available measures of the condition of those historic features that have been defined – Historic Parks and Gardens and Scheduled Ancient Monuments, nor of the overall historic character of the Chase.</p>
<p><i>Proposed indicator[s]</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. % of listed buildings at risk.</li> <li>2. Condition of Historic Parks and Gardens should be gauged by the existence of an agreed management plan that is being implemented.</li> <li>3. Condition of Scheduled Ancient Monuments should be gauged by the existence of an agreed management plan that is being implemented.</li> <li>4. A new indicator [s] will be needed to reflect the overall historic character of the whole Chase or well-defined parts of it.</li> </ol>
<p><i>Action required</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure a survey of listed buildings ‘at risk’ is available for SAONB report as part of each review of the management plan.</li> <li>2. Agree with English Heritage and landowners the basis for management planning and implementation for Historic Parks &amp; Gardens and Scheduled Ancient Monuments.</li> <li>3. Ensure that the historic characterisation of the AONB identifies key landscape features that should be conserved as part of the historic landscapes of the Chase and provides the basis for measuring and reporting on their condition. N.B. this would be a crucial element in the implementation of Policy 14 and Actions 14A &amp; B in the management plan, relating to the identification, protection and management of historic landscapes, sites and their settings.</li> </ol> <p>N.B. It will be important to link this work in the context of the landscape characterisation work being undertaken by SCC and the development of an overall landscape strategy for the AONB.</p> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>Action 1 – SCC.  Action 2 – SCC / AONB Unit / EH.  Action 3 – SCC / AONB Unit / EH.</p>

<p><i>Special Quality:</i>  <b>6.1[I] THE FRINGE AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the nature of the special quality</i></p> <p>A variety of landscapes – the farmed sandstone hills &amp; heaths, the sandstone estatelands and the Trent valley flood plain, surround the open sandstone hills and heaths, which form the core of the AONB. The importance of these areas lies mainly in the way in which they provide the setting for the core of the AONB rather than in their present landscape quality. In addition, they are of importance for their wildlife.</p> <p>In varying degrees they have suffered and continue to suffer from urbanisation, suburbanisation, loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, agricultural change [e.g. ancillary buildings, fencing, poor pasture], land use change to horsiculture, the loss of semi-natural elements of their character that provided a link with the central core of the AONB – the heathland and woodland. These landscapes are an important part of the special quality perceived in the views within and to and from the AONB.</p> <p>Work is currently underway on a landscape characterisation of the AONB, which will address many aspects of the landscape, including its current qualities and the extent to which they are at or below par.</p>
<p><i>Current measure[s] of condition</i></p> <p>No clear indicator[s] exists, although perceptions suggest that it is not in good condition. It is under great pressure from development, urban fringe activities, changes in agriculture, horsiculture and loss of landscape features.</p>
<p><i>Proposed indicator[s]</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In the short term, the extent and nature of the development pressures on the area should be assessed through the monitoring of planning consents on an annual basis.</li> <li>2. Indicators to be developed as part of wider work</li> </ol>
<p><i>Action required</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The special qualities of this fringe area and the elements that serve to lessen them should be identified as part of an overall landscape plan for the AONB, based upon the landscape character work currently being undertaken by SCC.</li> <li>2. The landscape plan should define the future extent/state of the “special qualities” of the landscape of this area [e.g. the extent of woodland, restoration of hedgerows, restoration of heathland, removal of eyesores] thus providing the basis for ongoing monitoring.</li> </ol> <p>N.B. These actions should provide the operational framework for the operation of a number of policies in the management plan by defining what is to be achieved, notably:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies 4 &amp; 6 relating to nature conservation</li> <li>• Policies 9 &amp; 10 relating to woodlands and trees</li> <li>• Policy 11 ensuring the importance of the farmed landscape is acknowledged.</li> <li>• Policy 12 relating to land management practices that conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB; and</li> <li>• Policy 13 encouraging the targeting and uptake of agri-environment schemes that protect, conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.</li> </ul> <p>N.B. also that a full understanding of the development pressures on the area and the local economy will be very important – link with pressures/activities Sections 6.2 [C] and [D].</p> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>Actions 1 and 2 – AONB Partnership led by SCC</p>

## 6.2 Key activities and pressures

At the preliminary meeting, it was agreed that the following pressures/activities are critical in terms of their impact on the “special qualities”. The list below has guided the Consultant’s work. It should be noted that quarrying, telecommunications and renewable energy have been considered under the broad heading of development. Water abstraction and the quality of groundwater are considered under Valley Wetlands in 6.1 [F] above.

One future pressure that has not been considered in any depth in this report is climate change. This is not because of any doubts about the likelihood of the climate changing, but more because insufficient is known about its implications at present. It can be expected during the five years of the currency of the management plan for the AONB that a great deal more will be known about its likely impacts, particularly upon the flora and fauna of the AONB and the nature of farming practices. National advice will be important both with respect the changes themselves and the way in which they are dealt with in management plans, particularly in terms of monitoring the special qualities of the AONB. AONBs will need to work collectively on this matter and with their local partnerships, particularly in developing strategies for the landscape and nature conservation, both of which are central to future work in Cannock Chase.

### **The pressures / activities that need to be understood**

**Recreation** – activities and infrastructure

**Traffic** – speed, volume and type

**Development** – extent/location, design/suburbanisation, eyesores/derelict land, agricultural change/horsiculture, quarrying, telecommunications, renewable energy

**Local economy** – employment generated by the AONB

Each of the broad headings are considered in the tables below with

- A brief commentary on the activity / pressure and its interaction with the AONB;
- The current state of knowledge of the activity / pressure;
- Action [s] needed;
- Agency [s] responsible.

<p><i>Activity or pressure</i></p> <p><b>6.2 [A] RECREATION</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the activity /pressure &amp; interaction with the special qualities</i></p> <p>Recreation is one of the main activities/pressures on the AONB, with a focus on the heathland and woodlands owned respectively by SCC and FC. People’s enjoyment of these areas is central to the management plan.</p> <p>The main interaction with the special qualities revolves around the sheer number of visitors to the AONB and the traffic generated by them, together with the infrastructure required to cater for them – car parks, signs, information/interpretation boards &amp; centres, refreshments, WCs etc. In addition the quiet enjoyment by the majority of visitors can be disturbed by noisy recreation activity.</p> <p>Visitors have a particular impact on the following special qualities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peace, tranquillity and open country;</li> <li>• Heathland;</li> <li>• Flora &amp; Fauna.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Current knowledge of this activity / pressure</i></p> <p>A very good understanding of the visitors to the AONB is obtained from the Visitor Survey 2000.</p>
<p><i>Action needed</i></p> <p>The integration of recreation activity of varying kinds with the special qualities of the AONB is central to the plan for the AONB.</p> <p>Regular surveys of the kind already undertaken [Cannock Chase Visitor Survey 2000] and that are envisaged in the management plan actions identified below will be very important.</p> <p>A range of actions has already been identified in the management plan to address a number of the key issues relating to recreation activity and its interaction with the special qualities;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>visitor management / interpretation [18A, 19B];</i></li> <li>• <i>signage [21A];</i></li> <li>• <i>recreation conflicts [policy 24 &amp; action 24B];</i></li> <li>• <i>access to heathland blocks [policy 26 &amp; action 26A];</i></li> <li>• <i>monitoring of recreation activity [24C &amp; 24D];</i></li> <li>• <i>the co-ordination of future recreation proposals [policy 25 &amp; action 25A;]</i></li> <li>• <i>cycling strategy [40D] and transport [40C &amp; 40D];</i></li> </ul> <p>An important objective of the above actions should be to assist in the definition of the way in which the special qualities are expressed for the purposes of regular monitoring, most notably peace &amp; tranquillity, wilderness and open country.</p> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>The AONB partnership led by SCC &amp; FC.</p>

<p><i>Activity or pressure</i></p> <p><b>6.2 [B] TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the activity /pressure &amp; interaction with the special qualities</i></p> <p>Traffic and transport are recognised in the management plan as a key issue for the future of the AONB, both in terms of generation by visitors and the local community as part of their daily lives.</p> <p>Presence or absence and the nature/levels of traffic is a crucial factor in the maintenance of the special quality – peace &amp; tranquillity, wilderness and open country.</p> <p>The design/location of the range of ‘furniture’ [signs etc] needed for the management of traffic is similarly a crucial factor in the maintenance of the above special quality.</p>
<p><i>Current knowledge of this activity / pressure</i></p> <p>Whilst there is a good level of information about visitors and how they travel to, and what they do on the Chase, no overall picture of traffic and transport is immediately apparent, though observations about the use of the roads across the Chase by commuters and commercial traffic and the recognition of the need to slow down traffic in order to protect the deer population [an important component of the special quality referred to above] suggest that knowledge of the current situation does exist.</p>
<p><i>Action needed</i></p> <p>The development of the Strategic approach towards traffic and transport put forward in Policies 38, 39 &amp; 40 of the management plan will play an important part in the process of establishing the indicator[s] of peace and tranquillity, through definition of such matters as the acceptable levels and types of traffic, the desired levels of use of public transport by visitors and the design/location of traffic management schemes and signs. Similarly the proposed strategy for car parking via action 40E will need to do the same, by addressing the impact of car parking on this special quality.</p> <p>A crucial part of the above work will be to ascertain the current situation in relation to traffic and transport usage of the roads in the AONB either from existing data or from surveys specially undertaken.</p> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>The AONB partnership and the Highway Authority.</p>

<p><i>Activity or pressure</i></p> <p><b>6.2 [C] DEVELOPMENT</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the activity /pressure &amp; interaction with the special qualities</i></p> <p>The development pressures on the AONB are considerable. In varying degrees the AONB has suffered and continues to suffer from urbanisation, suburbanisation, agricultural change [e.g. ancillary buildings, fencing, poor pasture], land use change to horsiculture.</p> <p>The future impact of telecommunications and renewable energy is seen as a potentially significant intrusion into the landscape, particularly in the wilderness areas.</p>
<p><i>Current knowledge of this activity / pressure</i></p> <p>Currently there is no formal monitoring of planning applications in the AONB as there is for the Green Belt.</p> <p>The nature &amp; extent of quarrying is well documented.</p>
<p><i>Action needed</i></p> <p>As indicated throughout Section 6.1 of this report the development of an overall landscape strategy for the AONB will be crucial. A good understanding of the exact nature of the development pressure and its impact on the special qualities of the AONB will be a very important element. This understanding will be crucial in the fringe area, which is under the greatest pressure for change [see Section 6.1 [I] ].</p> <p>Regular reporting on the number of applications in or adjacent to the AONB [proximity to be determined as part of strategy for the fringe area] and their characteristics will also be needed.</p> <p>In the future it will be important to ensure that restoration of workings fits with the AONB. Regular reporting will be necessary.</p> <p>Monitoring of the existence and impact of telecommunications and renewable energy will be crucial. This will be important background information in looking at the definition of the wilderness area.</p> <p>The actions proposed link closely to the following policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy 37 re quarrying - preventing extensions and securing restoration;</li> <li>• Policy 36 re protection from development;</li> <li>• Action 36C review of horsekeeping.</li> </ul> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>AONB Partnership with the local planning authorities.</p>

<p><i>Activity or pressure</i></p> <p><b>6.4 [D] LOCAL ECONOMY</b></p>
<p><i>Comment on the activity /pressure &amp; interaction with the special qualities</i></p> <p>Unlike many larger AONBs there are no towns in the AONB and only a few communities in the fringe area around the Chase. Thus the way in which the local economy, such as it is, needs to be approached in a different way. The relationship with the AONB is largely confined to the employment of people in the core area, in forestry, in managing the recreation and the fabric of the country park and in the provision of services to visitors. Some of this employment will be on the fringe or outside the AONB. Agriculture is confined to the fringe area. Information at this very small scale and in such specific terms is not easy to come by. Nevertheless it is important to develop an understanding of this relationship.</p>
<p><i>Current knowledge of this activity / pressure</i></p> <p>Limited to very general figures as part of surveys of wider areas. The information provided by the Countryside Agency gives a very limited understanding of the local economy [<i>Statistical Digest of Cannock Chase AONB prepared by Centre for Rural Research for the Countryside Agency, 2003</i>].</p>
<p><i>Action needed</i></p> <p>A clear understanding of the local economy and how it relates to the special qualities of the AONB will be crucial to the development of the landscape strategy for the AONB, especially for the fringe area. In this context it will be important:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to identify the extent of employment and economic activity derived from the management of woodlands, the natural environment and the facilities for visitors to the AONB; and</li> <li>• as part of the work on the fringe area proposed in Section 6.1[I] of the report, to undertake specific surveys of economic activity in and adjacent to the AONB to establish the nature of the relationship [if any] between it and the AONB and to identify the extent of employment and economic activity in quarrying and agriculture.</li> </ul> <p><i>Agency[s] responsible</i></p> <p>AONB partnership with assistance of local authority economic development departments regional and local economic development agencies.</p>

### 6.3 The profile of the AONB

The following profile of the AONB is proposed as a complement to the more detailed reporting proposed above.

<b>CANNOCK CHASE – PROFILE OF AONB</b>
<b>Area</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total area of AONB</li> <li>Local authority[s] - number, area in AONB, % of AONB</li> <li>Parish Councils totally or partly in AONB [number]</li> </ul>
<b>Land cover - area &amp; % of AONB</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>heathland</li> <li>arable cropping</li> <li>pasture</li> <li>broad leaved woodland</li> <li>coniferous woodland</li> <li>disturbed land</li> <li>former mineral sites</li> <li>operational mineral sites</li> <li>urban</li> </ul>
<b>Land ownership - area &amp; % of AONB</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Private</li> <li>National Trust</li> <li>Wildlife Trust</li> <li>Forestry Commission</li> <li>Local authority</li> <li>Other major owners</li> </ul>
<b>Nature Conservation – Designations area &amp; % of AONB</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SSSI [inc geology]</li> <li>NNR</li> <li>International Sites – cSAC,</li> <li>LNRs</li> <li>County sites of interest for conservation</li> </ul>
<b>Land in Agri-environment Schemes - % eligible area of AONB in countryside stewardship</b>
<b>Built Heritage &amp; Environment – designations area &amp; % of AONB or number</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scheduled ancient monuments</li> <li>Listed Buildings Grade I, Grade II*, Grade II &amp; number at Risk</li> <li>Conservation Areas</li> <li>Registered Historic Parks and Gardens</li> </ul>
<b>Recreation and Access - area &amp; % of AONB or length or number</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rights of way [length] - public footpaths, bridleways etc + minor roads</li> <li>RoW promoted for recreation [% of network]</li> <li>Defined access and Common land [area &amp; % of AONB]</li> <li>Other Land open to the public - freely or on payment [area &amp; % of AONB]</li> <li>Car parks</li> <li>Information points</li> </ul>
<b>Visitors</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total visitors [number] - Day visitors [%] &amp; Staying visitors [%]</li> <li>% Visitors coming by car and public transport</li> </ul>
<b>Socio - economic Activity e.g.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Population of AONB &amp; population within 10 miles</li> <li>Number of farm units</li> <li>Number of hotel/ guest houses/ B&amp;Bs/ food outlets/pubs</li> <li>Employment in looking after AONB &amp; visitors to it</li> <li>Planning applications &amp; approvals / refusals</li> <li>Licensed riding stables</li> </ul>

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions to be drawn from the project are:

[a] The need to monitor the “State of the AONB” is fully accepted across the family of AONBs, even if the full ramifications of that acceptance are not yet fully understood. The advice that exists nationally is very much “interim” and will need to be more fully developed, together with new techniques, in the years before management plans are due for renewal – a task for the Countryside Agency.

[b] It is important to view the SAONB report as part of the management plan process so that its objectives, policies and action are linked to the “State of the AONB”. The objectives, policies and action points are the key elements of the monitoring process and should clearly articulate the desired state of the AONB i.e. providing the hooks for the monitoring part of the process. It is not always necessary to have quantitative evidence – qualitative can and should be used where appropriate. The strategy and the proposals for indicators set out in this report aim to help forge this link.

[c] By recognising the importance of monitoring and reporting from the outset and integrating it in the plan process, the tendency to view it as “an extra” that cannot be afforded will be avoided. In the case of Cannock Chase the need for gathering information and for the preparation of strategies/plans for particular topics has already been accepted in the management plan. There is a golden opportunity to link these tasks to the reporting part of the process.

[d] Focussing on the “special qualities” of the AONB and the key pressures/activities will help to contain the scope and scale of the monitoring exercise within practical bounds – even if it means the development of new techniques and the collection of new information.

[e] The proposed indicators set out in this report are not the final blue print. Whilst a structure has been provided, indicators of the “State of the AONB” still need to be honed before the review of the management plan is completed in 2009. The process will not stop then. The art or science of “State of the AONB” Reporting is in its infancy – techniques need to be developed and more information needs to be collected. Furthermore, there will be new matters to consider particularly in terms of activities and pressures – there will be new recreation pressures and new development pressures to understand and manage and climate change will have to be fully understood.

[f] Of all the actions proposed in this report, one stands out as being particularly important, as it requires the drawing together of a large number of strands and will provide the basis for the State of the AONB report:

*the development of a landscape strategy for the AONB, focussing on the historic core of the AONB and its fringe, based on a thorough understanding both of the special qualities of the AONB and the key pressures/activities affecting it.*

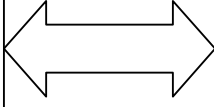
[g] Numerous actions have been identified, with tasks for the AONB partnership as a group as well as for the members of that group as individual organisations. It is important to stress that it is not intended that the AONB Unit should carry out all the tasks. Its role is to instigate action and to draw the many strands together. In some instances organisations that have not been involved closely with the AONB are identified and departments within organisations may need to be leaders of tasks. It will be especially important to draw in those who have not hitherto been part of the AONB management plan process and to broker their involvement e.g. through membership of the proposed monitoring working group.

[h] There is an important range of tasks relating to the development of techniques in relation to landscape monitoring and understanding the relationship between the “special qualities” of AONBs and the local economy that the family of AONBs, through the NAAONBs and the Countryside Agency need to consider.

## APPENDIX 1

### Countryside Council for Wales’s guidance on the scope of the SAONB report

The CCW guidance also lists the resource elements and activities/pressures likely to be found in an AONB that need to be embraced during the preparation of the SAONB report. Table 1 from the guidance is reproduced below.

<b>Table 1: Resource elements and Activities &amp; pressures</b>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Resource Elements</b></p> <p><b>Natural</b> Biodiversity Geological</p> <p><b>Visual and sensory</b> Landscape and seascape</p> <p><b>Cultural</b> Archaeology Historic landscapes Historic parks and gardens Historic buildings Language</p> <p><b>Environmental</b> Air quality Water quality Soil quality</p> <p><b>Recreation</b> Rights of way network Access land</p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Activities &amp; pressures</b></p> <p><b>Visitors</b> Recreation &amp; tourism</p> <p><b>Land management</b> Agriculture &amp; Forestry</p> <p><b>Economic activity &amp; development</b> Telecommunications and other utilities Energy, including renewables Mineral development Housing &amp; the built environment Employment Transport &amp; traffic [inc emissions] Fishing Waste disposal</p> <p><b>Community &amp; social</b> Local services Transport Local housing Community facilities Recreation</p> <p><b>Climate change</b></p> <p><b>Pollution</b> Air &amp; water Light</p>

## APPENDIX 2

### Countryside agency guidance on the scope of the SAONB report

Natural Beauty resource	Themes	Dataset menu
<b>COUNTRYSIDE AND LANDCOVER</b>	<b>Landscape features</b>	Farmland composition: ratios and % change
		Mixed farm ratios
		Traditional arable types
		Average farm sizes
		Extent, condition & change in characteristic boundary features (Stone walls, Hedgerows, Routeways, River banks etc)
	Extent, condition & change in characteristic land cover features	
	Average field size	
Downland, Woodland Orchards, Hopyards etc		
Extent and condition of woodland under positive management		
Woodland grant schemes		
<b>Scenic/ landscape character</b>	Photographic: fixed point monitoring of key views	
<b>Land use &amp; development</b>	% land managed under higher-tier agri-environment schemes	
	No of consents for conversion from rural to other uses (housing, non-agricultural)	
<b>Tranquillity</b>	No of consents resulting in incremental development	
<b>Light pollution</b>	% of AONB disturbed by constant traffic noise (road, air)	
<b>CULTURAL AND VERNACULAR</b>	<b>Archaeology &amp; SAMs</b>	% of AONB affected by light pollution
	<b>Historic landscapes</b>	Number and condition
	<b>Historic parks &amp; gardens</b>	Number on Register/LA register + condition
	<b>Listed buildings</b>	Number on register/LA register + condition
	<b>Vernacular buildings</b>	Number + %at risk, number in positive management
<b>ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>Biodiversity</b>	Number and % conversion of use from rural to other
		% change in BAP habitats
		Extent of key habitats in AONB managed favourably (Ancient semi-natural woodland; Specific woodland types; Unimproved grassland types; River banks; etc)
		No and condition of designations (SSSI, SAC, RIGS, RAMSAR, etc)
	<b>Air quality</b>	Geological features
<b>Water quality</b>	Coastal sites	
<b>Soil quality</b>	Key species in AONB	
<b>SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND QUALITY OF LIFE</b>	<b>Awareness</b>	Local air quality/ national trend
		Rivers A and B
		Pollution incidents
	<b>Enjoyment</b>	% beaches with blue flag status/Bathing Water directive
		Extent of AONB farmland under organic cultivation
		% of residents aware that they are in AONB
		% visitors aware they are in AONB
	<b>Land-based economy</b>	Public concern for countryside/national average
		% of PRoW that are easy to use
		% of ProW that are signposted
	<b>Community</b>	% of AONB open to public for recreation purposes
% AONB area open to public access		
% AONB under sustainable land management/ national %age		
<b>Traffic</b>	Agricultural economy within AONB/ national trends	
	% increase in visitor numbers	
	% increase in visitor-related employment	
	Community vibrancy	
	Geographic availability of services/ national average	
	Access to affordable housing/ nat. average	
	Village shops, POs, halls etc	
	Public transport links (train, bus)	
	Public mobility: ave journey distance per person per year by type	
	% change in annual daily traffic flows	

## APPENDIX 3

### South West Protected Landscapes Forum - scope of indicators

Topic / Headline	Proposed Indicator	Comment
<b>Landscape</b>		
Landscape character	Historic features <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % SAMs in favourable condition</li> <li>• listed and unlisted buildings at risk</li> </ul>	Data available from EH Data partly available from planning authorities and partly will have to be collected locally
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % change in locally distinctive field boundaries</li> </ul>	Importance to be locally determined, and much of the data collected locally
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• changes in key ridges and views</li> </ul>	Sites to be locally determined following baseline survey work, and data collected locally (photographic evidence from fixed point photography)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other locally distinctive features, for example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- extent of woodland type(s)</li> <li>- condition of old routeways</li> <li>- historic gardens</li> <li>- length of undeveloped coastline (development within 300m of mean high water mark)</li> <li>etc</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Key indicators of local distinctiveness need to be locally determined. Some data readily available (eg from Forestry Commission) and some will need to be locally collected (eg unspoilt coastline).
Land management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of land managed under higher tier agri-environment schemes</li> </ul>	Data available from DEFRA
<b>Biodiversity</b>		
Habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % change in BAP habitats</li> </ul>	Base line survey work nearing completion by EN and will be able to be supplied to AONB boundaries
Species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• would require local identification</li> </ul>	Characteristic species will need to be locally determined; data availability depends on species chosen and likely to involve substantial local data collection
<b>Water quality</b>		
Rivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % change in pollution incidents</li> </ul>	Type of incidents to be used in monitoring requires local determination. Data currently available from Environment Agency and is regularly updated
Sea water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of all designated bathing beaches meeting Bathing Water Directive</li> </ul>	Data currently available from Environment Agency and is regularly updated
<b>Access</b>		
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of RoW in good condition</li> </ul>	Data should be available from RoW team
<b>Social</b>		
Affordable housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• number of new homes built annually, in the AONB, which are affordable housing</li> </ul>	Data can be collated from the Local or County Planning Authorities and should include net new affordable dwellings completed per year, including new build and conversions. This may require analysis of housing data by AONB unit.

Access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of AONB population in <math>x</math> km of a convenience food shop</li> </ul>	Data is available from the Countryside Agency as part of their monitoring for the State of the Countryside. The data has been cut to an AONB level but may contain inaccuracies as it is based on ward boundaries.
<b>Economic</b>		
Employment changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % change in key employment sectors</li> </ul>	Categories to be locally selected. Data available from NOMIS data base and DEFRA. Smallest unit of disaggregation is ward, and sometime larger to protect confidentiality. Will require data manipulation.
Farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % change in relevant farming types + geographically specific data if required</li> </ul>	Categories to be locally selected. Data available from DEFRA
Produced by Baker Associates (November 2003)		