



**Cannock Chase AONB Partnership
Annual General Meeting of the Joint Committee
Thursday 16th July 2020 at 10.30 AM
Remotely via Microsoft Teams**

No	Item	Item for	Page
1	Election of Chair and Vice Chair This item to be overseen by John Rowe, Honorary Secretary of the Joint Committee	DECISION	
2	Welcome and introductions		
3	Apologies for absence		
4	Financial report Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee (1) Final revenue outturn 2019/20 (2) Revenue budget 2020/21	DECISION INFORMATION	3
5	AONB Guides Report of the AONB Landscape Planning Officer, with consultant presentations (a) AONB Design Guide (b) Views and Setting Guide (c) Car park improvements - Key Landscape Principles (d) Dark skies	DECISION DECISION DECISION INFORMATION	11
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7	Impacts of COVID-19 on Cannock Chase and AONB delivery Report of the AONB Development Officer	DECISION	17
8	Communications Strategy and Place Brand Report of the AONB Development Officer (a) Communications Strategy (b) Place Brand	INFORMATION DECISION	21
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10	AONB Annual Conference 2020 Report of the AONB Development Officer	DECISION	27
11	Any other business		

12	Date, time and venue of next meeting September – Possible tour on the Chase December – Virtual meeting via Teams		
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Note: the previous meeting scheduled for 19th March 2020 was cancelled.

Local Members Interest
N/A

Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee- 16th July 2020

**Financial Update
Final Outturn 2019/20 and 2020/21 Budget Update**

Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee and the AONB Officer

Recommendations

1. Final Revenue Outturn 2019/20

That the Joint Committee approves the final outturn position for 2019/20 for the Core and Project Costs and the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

2. Revenue Budget 2020/21

That progress on the current net revenue spend for 2020/21 is noted.

Part A

Why is it coming here – what decision(s) are required?

3. The Joint Committee in its role under the Partnership Agreement is responsible for:-

- Approving the final accounts for the year 2019/20 as soon as possible after the year has ended and this report sets out the accounts for consideration.
- This report sets out the new 2020/21 budget which has been formally approved by Defra and its current, initial forecast outturn position.

Reasons for Recommendations:

4. The recommendations represent an effective way to continue to carry forward the implementation of the Management Plan for the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership.

Part B

Background:

5. **Final Outturn 2019/20**

The detailed net revenue outturn for 2019/20 for both the Core and Action Projects Budget is set out in Appendix 1 and is compared to the £190,430 approved budget for the year. The final net revenue spend was £183,472 compared to the budget resulting in an underspend position of £6,958.

This includes an underspend of £4,127 on the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF). The individual community projects, totalling £18,943 including the £2,307 administration fee,

are set out in Appendix 2 and cover a wide range of community-based activities and providers.

However, following discussions with Defra, the final claim for 2019/20 was reduced by £4,651 and Defra paid £143,939 of the expected funding of £148,590. This was based on the previous forecast underspend.

The net underspend therefore in 2019/20 was £2,308 and has been transferred to reserve.

6. Budgets 2020/21

The 2020/21 net revenue budget for the Core and Action Projects budget was previously approved by the Joint Committee at the December 2019 meeting.

The budget 2020/21 is £192,510. This is slightly higher than initially expected by £2,080 as a result of additional Defra funding and this has been added to the budget for AONB projects increasing this amount from £10,000 to £12,080.

As previously reported, the net revenue budget for 2020/21 generally reflects an expected annual inflationary uplift of 2% on salaries and 0% on all non-pay items respectively. The budget includes Core and Programme costs for £167,360 of which £125,520 will be funded by the annual Defra revenue grant and a £25,150 allocation set for the SDF and AONB projects (an increase of £2,080 compared to last year)¹.

A summary of the current amount spent or committed to the end of June 2020 is included in Appendix 3. To date, a nominal £45,838 of the budget has been spent and it is currently forecast that services will be delivered within budget this year.

At present, no funds have been allocated or spend committed against this year's SDF budget allocation (other than the expected £1,307 annual administration fee). Details of the current 2020/21 SDF budget are set out in Appendix 4. As agreed by Joint Committee on 5th December 2019, due to a declining uptake over recent years the total available SDF funding for 2020/21 has been reduced to £13,069 (from £23,069 in 2019/20), with the remaining £10,000 re-allocated to AONB projects.

7. The Cannock Chase AONB Reserve

The Reserve at the end of the financial year 2019/20 stood at £54,819 following the transfer in of previous year's Core and Action Projects and SDF underspend balances and accrued interest for the year of £577.

The balance has reduced significantly in 2019/20 as a result of the completion of additional works totalling circa £0.097m previously proposed by this joint committee and agreed with Defra for the distribution and allocation of retained prior year underspends. A detailed statement of how the Reserve has gradually accumulated since 2007-08 is set out in Appendix 5.

¹ The Defra funding settlement 2020/21 is for a total of £150,670. This includes an allocation of £9,510 from a dedicated Biodiversity Fund and requires that the team sets out how it will use this element of the settlement to carry out activities that will benefit biodiversity.

	19/20 £	
Opening Balance		146,728
- SDF admin fee 2019/20	2,307	
- Underspend 2019/20	2,308	
- Historical underspends; additional agreed works	<u>-97,100</u>	-92,485
Interest		<u>577</u>
Closing Balance		<u>54,819</u>

It has previously been agreed that the priorities for the use of the reserve funds should be as follows:

- Income from sales, donations and consultancy work should be available to supplement the delivery of projects within the Annual Action Plans and to provide matched funding for any major grant applications and,
- The remaining funds should be earmarked to enable the AONB Unit to respond to the implications of any reductions in future funding.

These priorities need to be reviewed annually in conjunction with the annual update of the Risk Register.

8. Equalities Implications

This report has been prepared in accordance with the equal opportunities policies of the County Council.

9. Legal Implications

Actions recommended in this report are in accordance with the provisions of the current Cannock Chase AONB Partnership Agreement.

10. Resource and Value for Money Implications

This report recommends actions to ensure the continued efficient delivery of the Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan. The matched funding requirements to make up the 25% of contributions towards the core activity are set out in the Partnership Agreement. The SDF is a funding “pot” to be administered to partners who can provide the necessary matched funding for their Management Plan project proposals.

11. Risk Implications

If continuity of funding and spend are not continued as recommended to the Joint Committee, then the five authorities involved in the partnership will need to seek other methods of fulfilling their statutory obligations for the AONB under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Report authors:

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Appendix 1 – Cannock Chase AONB; Outturn 2019/20

	2019/2020		
	Budget £	Final Outturn £	Variation £
Core Budget			
Salaries	132,500	108,405	-24,095
Travel and Subsistence	2,200	1,415	-785
Training & First Aid Payments	1,760	2,318	558
Recruitment	400	299	-101
Staff and Associated Costs	136,860	112,437	-24,423
Office Equipment	2,600	2,022	-578
Annual Audit	400	400	0
Volunteer Costs	1,000	0	-1,000
National Association of AONB's Membership	2,700	2,619	-81
Print & Publicity	3,000	815	-2,185
Partnership Running Costs	9,000	9,000	0
Core Budget subtotal	155,560	127,293	-28,267
Core Programmes			
Website	1,000	6,300	5,300
Monitoring Projects	2,000	0	-2,000
Annual Conference	1,800	1,781	-19
Community Involvement and Awareness	0	0	0
Core Activity*	7,000	29,155	22,155
Core Programmes subtotal	11,800	37,237	25,437
Sustainable Development Fund	23,070	18,943	-4,127
Total Budget	190,430	183,472	-6,958

Funded By:			
DEFRA Grant			
Core	125,520	124,997	-523
Sustainable Development Fund	23,070	18,943	-4,127
DEFRA Grant subtotal	148,590	143,939	-4,651
Local Authority Contributions			
Lichfield District Council	2,092	2,092	0
South Staffordshire District Council	2,092	2,092	0
Cannock Chase District Council	8,368	8,368	0
Stafford Borough Council	8,368	8,368	0
Staffordshire County Council	20,920	20,920	0
Local Authority Contributions subtotal	41,840	41,840	0
Funding from(+)/to reserve(-)		-2,308	-2,308
Total Funding	190,430	183,472	-6,958

* Includes additional works agreed with Defra totalling £0.097m relating to the use and distribution of historical underspends and funded from reserves.

Appendix 2 – Sustainable Development Fund 2019/20

	Budget £	Final Outturn £	Variation £
Approved Projects			
Longdon Parish Council - Information Boards	700	700	0
Love Cannock Chase - Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles	1,250	1,250	0
Beaudesert Care Farm CIC - Beaudesert Eco Arts Trails	4,828	4,828	0
Chelmarsh Ringing Group - Bird Boxes	1,497	1,497	0
Brereton and Ravenhill PC - Information board	500	500	0
National Trust - Parkland Planting Programme	7,861	7,861	0
Approved Projects Total	16,636	16,636	0
Admin Fees	2,307	2,307	0
Unallocated	0		0
TOTAL	18,943	18,943	0

Appendix 3 – Cannock Chase AONB; Budget and Forecast Outturn 2020/21

July 2020	Budget	Spent or	Predicted	Variation
	£	Committed to Date	Outturn	£
		£	£	
Core Budget				
Salaries	131,920	32,189	131,658	-262
Training Expenses	1,500	0	1,500	0
Travel and Subsistence	2,200	36	2,200	0
Staff and Associated Costs	135,620	32,225	135,358	-262
Office Equipment	2,600	50	2,600	0
Annual Audit	400	-400	400	0
Volunteer Costs	500	0	500	0
National Liaison	3,000	3,156	3,156	156
Print & Publicity	5,000	0	5,000	0
Partnership Running Costs	9,000	9,000	9,000	0
Core Budget subtotal	156,120	44,031	156,014	-106
Core Programmes				
Annual Conference	2,000	0	2,000	0
Core Activity (including monitoring, community involvement, etc)	9,240	0	9,240	0
Core Programmes subtotal	11,240	0	11,240	0
Sustainable Development Fund	13,070	1,307	13,069	-1
AONB Projects	12,080	500	12,080	0
Total Budget	192,510	45,838	192,403	-107

Funded By:				
DEFRA Grant				
Core	125,520	0	125,520	0
Sustainable Development Fund	13,070	0	13,069	-1
AONB Projects	12,080	0	12,080	0
DEFRA Grant subtotal	150,670	0	150,669	-1
Local Authority Contributions				
Lichfield District Council	2,092	0	2,092	0
South Staffordshire District Council	2,092	0	2,092	0
Cannock Chase District Council	8,368	8,368	8,368	0
Stafford Borough Council	8,368	0	8,368	0
Staffordshire County Council	20,920	20,920	20,920	0
Local Authority Contributions subtotal	41,840	29,288	41,840	0
Funding from(+)/to reserve(-)	0	0	-106	-106
Total Funding	192,510	29,288	192,403	-107

Appendix 4 – Sustainable Development Fund 2020/21

July 2020	Budget	Spent or	Predicted	Variation
	£	Committed to Date	Outturn	£
		£	£	
Approved Projects				0
				0
				0
				0
				0
				0
Approved Projects Total	0	0	0	0
Admin Fees	1,307	1,307	1,307	0
Unallocated	11,762		11,762	0
TOTAL	13,069	1,307	13,069	0

Appendix 5 – Cannock Chase AONB; Reserves

Financial Year	Opening Balance	Income/ Donations	Membership Fees	Visitor Survey Work	Balance of Admin Fees / Underspends	Interest	Closing Balance
	£	£		£	£	£	£
2007/2008	10,214				-1,766		8,448
2008/2009	8,448	572			7,713		16,733
2009/2010	16,733	1,326			5,795		23,854
2010/2011	23,854	896	525	9,564	3,823		38,662
2011/2012	38,662	1,240	1,367	17,845	-221		58,893
2012/2013	58,893	387	1,108		2,685	195	63,270
2013/2014	63,270	1,001	1,675		2,459	249	68,654
2014/2015	68,654	596	1,720		1,273	289	72,532
2015/2016	72,532		569		-1,883	293	71,512
2016/2017	71,512	1,475	553		1,457	132	75,129
2017/2018	75,129	1,471	52		32,512	189	109,353
2018/2019	109,353	169	104		36,417	685	146,728
2019/2020	146,728				-92,485	577	54,819

Item 5

AONB Guides

- (a) AONB Design Guide
- (b) Views and Setting Guide
- (c) Car park - Key Landscape Principles
- (d) Dark skies

Item for: Parts (a), (b) and (c): Decision

Part (d): Information

Author: Julia Banbury, AONB Landscape Planning Officer

Financial implications: None

- Recommendations:**
1. The Committee endorse the AONB Design Guide and Views and Setting Guide and authorise officers to promote and circulate the guides.
 2. The Committee endorse the AONB Car Park Improvements – Key Landscape Principles.
 3. The Committee notes the progress to develop a Dark Skies Project with CPRE Staffordshire.

Parts (a) and (b): AONB Design Guide and Views and Setting Guide

Background

1. Members will recall the report to the March 2020 Joint Committee meeting on the commissioning of two guidance documents to support implementation of the landscape policies of the AONB Management Plan. The Design Guide gives succinct, practical and consistent advice to set clear design expectations for new development within the AONB. The Views and Setting Guide describes representative views to and from the AONB and provides strategic advice where potential development is being considered in the setting of the AONB. The guides are intended for anyone proposing new development as well as for use by those preparing local plans and other community planning guidance that has the potential to affect Cannock Chase AONB.
2. The documents have been directed and developed by a Steering Group and other stakeholders who have brought specialist expertise from partner organisations. Workshops were held with the Steering group for information gathering and to influence the content of the guides, and two draft iterations of the guides were circulated to partners on the Steering Group and planning colleagues to input and comment.
3. Progress on the guides has been slightly delayed by the effect of the Coronavirus however they are now finalised. Consultants FPCR will present the Design Guide, and LUC the Views and Setting Guide at the meeting.

Purpose of the guides

4. Both guides provide information on how the character of the AONB can be conserved and enhanced. Cannock Chase AONB straddles five local planning authorities which

each have their own policies and guidance relating to design and new development. The guides should be read in conjunction with existing planning policy and SPD documents as published by the individual authorities.

5. The guides will help public bodies to meet their statutory duties to have regard to the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect AONB land (Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000).
6. In addition to helping those involved in planning and delivering development make decisions that enhance the character and natural beauty of the area, it is hoped the documents will raise awareness of the unique character of the AONB and what makes that character vulnerable to inappropriate development.
7. Following approval by the Joint Committee, it is intended that the guides will be promoted on the AONB's website, and circulated to local planning authorities, parish councils and neighbourhood planning groups. The guides could also be promoted through sending them to larger local planning and architecture practices that work regularly on planning applications in the area in and around the AONB. Training sessions could be offered to local authority officers and elected members, provided via a medium that is appropriate to the time of delivery.

(a) Design Guide

Structure of the guidance

8. The Design Guide is in two parts: Part 1 includes an overview of Cannock Chase AONB, describing the varied character found across the AONB and the characteristic settlement types; Part 2 contains detailed design guidance. The document is designed so that each of the detailed design guidance chapters can be updated and used separately.
9. Part 1 of the document has 2 chapters. The first chapter explains the purpose of the document, who it is for, the planning context and status of the guide, and includes a User Guide.
10. The second chapter provides baseline information on the character of the AONB, with short descriptions of landscape character and the built character within the landscape. A number of settlement types are identified, and their character described, including a brief colour study of the settlement and the immediate surrounding landscape. This provides the evidence base that supports the detailed guidance
11. Part 2 includes an initial chapter covering the Overarching Principles of Good Design with further chapters referring to different types of development appropriate for the AONB. A section on Domestic development cross-references the settlement types as identified within Part 1 of the document. Other chapters cover Commercial, Employment & Industrial development, Public Realm, Agricultural and Other Rural Development Buildings, Recreation and Leisure Facilities and Stabling and Manèges.

12. The guidance aims to promote high quality, landscape-led design, that reflects the intrinsic landscape character of the AONB and is embedded with a true sense of place, without stifling innovation and creativity.
13. At the Committee meeting FPCR will provide a presentation on some of the key features and advice contained in the guide, after which the Committee is requested to endorse the AONB Design Guide.

(b) Views and Setting Guide

Structure of the guidance

14. The guide is in 5 Chapters. Chapter 1 describes how to use the document, sets the scene by broadly describing the AONB and its setting and describes the methodology for producing the guide.
15. Chapter 2 sets out the planning context and status of the guide; landscape context of the AONB and surroundings, and identifies views identified in previous studies in the area and in conservation area appraisals.
16. Chapter 3 explains the approach to the selection of 20 representative viewpoints, and each of these viewpoints are illustrated and described.
17. Chapter 4 provides a viewpoint specific guide. For each viewpoint location a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) is provided illustrating the viewshed within the 10km study area extent and on 1:25,000 mapping, along an annotated image illustrating management principles for each viewpoint. A user guide is provided to assist interpretation of the ZTVs.
18. The Spatial Guide is contained in Chapter 5. For each Setting Zone around the AONB issues / threats are identified and management guidelines given for views in and views out of the AONB.
19. At the Committee meeting LUC will provide a presentation on some of the key features and advice contained in the guide, after which the Committee is requested to endorse the AONB Views and Setting Guide.

Part (c): Car park Improvements - Key Landscape Principles

Background

20. In May 2020 the SAC Partnership published their Detailed Implementation Plan (DIP) for Car Parking. This recommends rationalisation of car parking on Cannock Chase to reduce impact on the SAC, through redistribution of parking locations with fewer locations to park but overall an increase in parking spaces.
21. Policy LCP7 of the AONB Management Plan and its associated Action A8 seeks to develop shared design protocols for recreation and leisure facilities. With car park alterations potentially taking place in the near future in response to the DIP, AONB officers have produce a guide to set standards for design that would to be sympathetic

to the wildlife and landscape and natural beauty of the AONB. The SAC Partnership and key stakeholders have been consulted and inputted comments and have indicated support for the document.

The guide

22. The guide sets out planning and environmental considerations that should be taken into account when planning and implementing alterations or car park closures, along with key landscape principles, such as layout, detailed design, signage and restoration of car parks and laybys to be closed.
23. The Committee is requested to endorse the Car Park Improvements – Key Landscape Principles.

Part (d): Dark Skies Project

24. Dark skies are a feature of the core of the AONB however this contrasts with light spillage from settlements on the perimeter and in the setting of the AONB. The AONB Management Plan notes that lighting should complement the character of the AONB, and the new AONB Design Guide Dark highlights that skies are key to maintaining the natural beauty of the AONB. External lighting to properties can contribute to light pollution and negatively affect the peace and tranquillity of the rural landscape. Light pollution can also have a negative effect on nocturnal animals such as moths and bats.
25. CPRE nationally created an interactive map of Night Blight (2016). The accompanying Night Blight Report identifies that *'On average, Cannock Chase AONB is the brightest, although 47% falls in the third darkest category and there is no severe light pollution; the majority of the light spills out from the towns of Cannock, Rugeley and Stafford into the AONB. This shows that the AONB is an oasis of darkness for people to enjoy compared to the surrounding towns.'*
26. CPRE also runs an annual citizen science project, Star Count, inviting people to count how many stars people can see in the constellation Orion (the number of stars that can be seen is affected by light from street lighting and buildings). CPRE have confirmed that it is possible to run local Star Counts on the back of the national project. Star Count is usually held in February.
27. Officers have approached CPRE Staffordshire with a view to developing a joint Dark Skies Project. Through this we would initially aim to raise awareness of issues around light pollution in the AONB and the value of dark skies and engage locally to run a Cannock Chase AONB Star Count, inviting local people to take part and upload data. We hope it would be possible for the results to be analysed and reported on at a local level.
28. Working with CPRE and other specialists in the field, an additional aim would be to produce a lighting guide for the AONB, identifying key issues and threats, and providing advice on minimising light spillage and sensitive design that would help maintain dark skies in rural areas.
29. Comments and input from the Committee are welcomed.

Recommendation

6. The Committee is requested to approve the Annual Review for publication and dissemination.

Item 7 **Impacts of COVID-19 on Cannock Chase and AONB delivery**

Item for: Decision

Author: Ian Marshall, AONB Development Officer

Financial implications: No financial implications are anticipated at the moment

Recommendations:

1. The Committee is requested to support the AONB Unit's offer to bring together the major landowners, authorities, emergency services and SAC Partnership in order to discuss the impacts of unprecedented visitor numbers on Cannock Chase and how to respond.
2. The Committee is invited to advise on any further measures required.

Background

1. The first confirmed cases of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK were reported on 31st January 2020, and the first death in the UK attributed to Coronavirus was confirmed on 5th March. During March numbers of daily confirmed cases and daily confirmed deaths continued to rise, resulting in the Government's announcement on 23rd March of a UK-wide partial lockdown coming into effect on 26th March.
2. Numbers of daily confirmed cases and daily confirmed deaths peaked around 15th April, since when they have both followed a steady decline. From 13th May 2020, the Government moved away from the 'Stay at Home' message to 'Stay alert – Control the virus – Save lives', issuing a slight easing of restrictions, and new guidelines on spending time outdoors. Restrictions were further eased from 1st June, with groups of up to 6 people being allowed to meet outdoors.

Impacts of COVID-19 on AONB delivery

3. The AONB Team has been working remotely, full-time, since the third week of March. Generally, we have been able to function perfectly well, staying in touch with partners and stakeholders via email, phone and remote meeting software.
4. Early on during the crisis we reviewed the implications of COVID-19 on our ability to deliver each of the activities and tasks included in our Year 2 work plan allocations for the Business Plan 2019-21. Using a traffic light system this resulted in the following assessment of the situation:
 - 5 tasks - High impact/unlikely to proceed
 - 29 tasks - Moderate impact/adjustments likely to be required
 - 27 tasks - Low or no impacts and can proceed as planned
5. The 5 tasks assessed as being high impact/unlikely to proceed are:
 - Attendance at the annual conference of the National Association for AONBs in July 2020 (conference cancelled).

- Poetry walks and workshops with the Staffordshire Poet Laureate planned for Spring and Autumn (Spring event cancelled: Autumn event to be discussed).
 - Fixed Point Photography training event in April (cancelled).
 - Ecological survey of woodland County Wildlife Sites (postponed until 2021).
 - Nightjar breeding survey (was due to be postponed, but now taking place).
6. Impacts on other planned activities have included:
- The suspension of all volunteer activities (including closing the Great War Hut at Marquis Drive).
 - Delaying the call for applications for our Sustainable Development Fund.
 - Delays to the conclusion of projects due to staff being furloughed in partner organisations or consultancies, or diverted to respond to COVID-19.
 - Changes to the way we have consulted and sought input to our activities, from meeting face to face to virtual engagement
7. Where it proves impossible to carry out some activities, there is flexibility in the management plan to bring forward alternatives into this year's business plan. As most of our budget comprises core costs (salary and partnership running costs for example), it is anticipated that the AONB budget for 2020-21 will still be fully utilised.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Cannock Chase

8. With restrictions relaxing and many attractions and venues still closed, many people have chosen to use Cannock Chase as their escape from Coronavirus. This has coincided with a prolonged period of dry and warm weather and with it an increased fire risk.
9. During May and June the major landowners on the Chase reported unprecedented numbers of visitors, including many new visitors possibly experiencing the Chase or the countryside for the first time. The increase is being felt throughout the week, not just weekends. The consequences are many and varied, including:
- Significant overcrowding at hotspots, such as, Birches Valley, Marquis Drive, and (initially) Chase Road
 - Large social gatherings extending into the evenings, for example, on Milford Green
 - Large gatherings of cars and road racing, for example, around Marquis Drive
 - A rise in the use of disposable BBQs, as well as the excavation of BBQ pits fuelled from wood and brash collected from the Chase
 - Two major fires at Broc Hill and Seven Springs, and a number of smaller fires.
 - Unauthorised car parking on road verges
 - Large volumes of litter left on the ground
 - Increase in wild mountain bike trail building, as well as counteractive saboteur measures
 - Verbal abuse to staff
 - Criminal damage to visitor infrastructure, such as, car park barriers.
10. Whilst more people are experiencing and enjoying the wonderful landscape Cannock Chase offers, the increase in visitor numbers and accompanying rise in irresponsible behaviour is having a number of negative impacts:

- The fabric of the AONB is being damaged and degraded to the detriment of its natural beauty
- The resources of public authorities and the emergency services are being stretched
- The amenity of local residents is being compromised
- Conflicts between user groups are emerging, alongside a disparity in views over future management to balance recreational access with conservation needs

Local response

11. The major landowners have responded to government advice: initially closing car parks and visitor centres, and latterly re-opening them on a phased basis. They have also introduced measures to deal with particular local pressure points, such as, the closure of Chase Road to reduce the fire risk to fragile habitats like Brocton Coppice. In addition, they have increased the presence of staff on the ground, and put out messages on site and in the media to encourage responsible behaviour whilst outdoors. The emergency services have similarly responded.

National response

12. National Parks, AONBs, the coast and countryside have all experienced unprecedented large numbers of visitors since the easing of restrictions, resulting in similar patterns of localised problems arising from over-crowding, illegal parking and camping, anti-social behaviour, litter, localised criminal damage and conflicts with local residents and rural communities. This has created extraordinary pressure on local authorities and emergency services.
13. The National Association for AONBs (NAAONB) is plugged into national groups considering increased public access to the outdoors – led by Natural England and Defra. This is providing a flow of intelligence and insights from the AONB Family and others into national communication and messaging. NAAONB is also feeding into Defra's economic recovery cell, investigating how to support the sustainable tourism and agricultural sectors, as well as green recovery opportunities.

Further required responses

14. As more facilities and entertainment outlets re-open, the pressure on Cannock Chase may begin to ease. However, with the summer holidays approaching and fewer people travelling abroad, higher than average visitor numbers may persist for several months. This will result in further impacts on the fabric of the Chase, visitor infrastructure and local communities, and testing times for the major landowners and emergency services.
15. The pull of Cannock Chase to new users also presents an opportunity to raise awareness and understanding of this national landscape and its special, but fragile, special qualities.
16. The AONB Unit believes it is timely, therefore, to bring together the major landowners, authorities, emergency services and SAC Partnership in order to review what is happening on Cannock Chase, anticipate further impacts and make the most of any opportunities, in the belief that these are Chase-wide issues best tackled in a joined-up way for the benefit of all. Examples of the types of measures that might be considered include collaborative communications campaigns, ways to engage the 'new' visitors including novel ways to reach audiences plus consideration of diversity needs, and

whether some of the visitor management mechanisms in the SAC plans can be brought forward to help tackle the more sudden influx of people.

Recommendations

17. The Committee is requested to support an offer from the AONB Unit to convene the major landowners, authorities, emergency services and SAC Partnership to discuss the impacts of unprecedented visitor numbers on Cannock Chase, the likely issues over the summer months, the opportunities, and how to respond.
18. The Committee is invited to advise on any further measures required.

Item 8 **Communications Strategy and Place Brand**

(a) Communications Strategy

(b) Place Brand

Item for: Part (a): Information

Part (b): Decision

Author: Ian Marshall, AONB Development Officer

Financial implications: The preparation of the Communications Strategy and Place Brand have both been funded from the 19-20 AONB budget allocation, but delayed due to COVID-19. They are due to be completed in the next two months.

Recommendations

1. The Committee notes progress on the development of a Communications Strategy and is invited to make any comments on the draft
2. The Committee endorses the recommended design option for a place brand for Cannock Chase

Part (a): Communications Strategy

1. A communications strategy has been developed to complement the Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan 2019-2024 and help the AONB Partnership achieve its vision and objectives to conserve and enhance the nationally important landscape of Cannock Chase.
2. Preparation of the strategy has been delayed due to COVID-19. However, a draft has now been circulated to partners, and comments are awaited. An amended strategy will be brought back to the Joint Committee for approval.
3. It takes forward the findings and recommendations of a communications review of the AONB carried out in November 2019 and reported to the Joint Committee on 5 December 2019. It is also prepared in the context of the recent review of England's designated landscapes which has called for bold action and a new approach to maintain the beauty and appeal of the nation's finest landscapes. Both reviews have significant implications for Cannock Chase AONB's approach to communications over the next few years.
4. The strategy follows the Government Communication Service's **OASIS** format which lays out our **Objectives, Audience, Strategy, Implementation** and how we will **Score** our success.
5. The way the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership communicates is important because it affects the way people view Cannock Chase, how they behave, and consequently how they support our objectives. In a busy world, it is vital that our strategic messages get through to our users, partners, local businesses, supporters and wider audiences.

6. To help us grow fruitful relationships with all our stakeholders the strategy calls for strong and consistent communications. Closer working between the AONB Partnership and SAC Partnership is essential in this regard.

Part (b): Place Brand

7. The development of a place brand for Cannock Chase was one of the key recommendations of the Communications Review and forms an integral part of the emerging AONB Communications Strategy.
8. Following an engagement and selection process with partners and stakeholders a preferred design for the development of the Cannock Chase place brand is recommended to the Committee for endorsement.
9. Consultants FDA Design have been working with stakeholders and partners to develop an 'umbrella' design styling for visual communications that conveys the message that 'Cannock Chase is a special place'. The design styling consists of a graphic or typographic logo; supporting text, graphic and photographic imagery; typographic principles; and colour palette.
10. Stakeholders and partners, including members of the AONB Visitor Management Task and Finish Group, 6 Visitor Centres Group and SAC Partnership, have been involved in the discussions and decision-making throughout. Six design concepts were originally presented for comment, from which the three favourites were developed further and re-presented in a range of applications.
11. This process has resulted in a clear collective steer for a preferred design option that best fits Cannock Chase called 'the Walker' (design concept appended). This option:
 - Symbolises the experience of taking a walk on Cannock Chase, moving from a wooded landscape to the open heathland
 - Portrays an open landscape with the prospect of freedom, tranquillity and wildlife
 - Links with the positive message of encouraging healthy exercise.
12. The outputs to be prepared will include:
 - Brand guidelines setting out the visual identity, key messages and brand narrative
 - Brand implementation plan setting out ideas and priorities
 - A sense of place toolkit to help businesses "sell" the AONB experience
 - A new style suite of media that animates the Chase.
13. The AONB Unit, working with the AONB Partnership, will begin the process of implementing the place brand from the second half of 2020, applying the identity to websites, social media, leaflets, posters and other publicity, signage and interpretation.
14. Stakeholders and partners will be invited to adopt the place brand, and advice will be given as to how best to integrate the 'umbrella' brand alongside the existing identities of the different organisations.

Item 9**Planning update****(a) Development management and planning policy****(b) High Speed Rail (HS2) Phase 2a****Item for:** Part (a): Information

Part (b): Information

Author: Julia Banbury, AONB Landscape Planning Officer**Financial implications:** None

- Recommendations**
1. The Joint Committee notes progress made on planning matters since the last meeting, as shown below
 2. Members to note the update on High Speed Rail (HS2) Phase 2a

Part (a) Development management and planning policy

1. Since March 2020 the Landscape Planning Officer has reviewed 20 applications, of which 10 required no comment and 4 were for amended applications due to previous objections where objections could be subsequently removed. There has also been consultation on one pre-application discussion and responses made on 2 planning policy consultations.
2. During the Coronavirus lockdown the number of planning consultations was reduced, though numbers of applications are now returning to normal. The table below shows the comments made on planning applications, policy documents and any related planning issues. The information is presented in summary form, but the full responses are available from the AONB Landscape Planning Officer

Category	Summary of response	Outcome/notes
Planning Application		
20/31931/FUL Sister Dora Rest Home Variation of condition 2 and removal of C30 on 17/26941/FUL	Previous objection remains	Awaiting decision
20/31999/HOU Holywood Slade Brook Lane, Brocton Extension	Details of materials need to be secured to ensure these are recessive in the landscape and marry in with the existing colour and tone.	Permitted 29.04.20 with condition for details of materials
20/32011/OUT Land south of Tithebarn Farm, Toldish Lane	Potential detrimental impact of development, particularly the new agricultural buildings, on views from and the setting of the AONB. Development needs to be recessive in the landscape, by reducing perceived scale and bulk and using recessive construction materials.	Awaiting decision

<p>CH/19/201 Rugeley B Power Station, Power Station Road, Rugeley Amendments</p>	<p>Castle Ring is the subject of additional assessment in Chapter 13 Landscape and Visual. Satisfied that from this location effects would not be significant assuming the vegetation cover around Castle Ring is not radically altered. No objection provided that any wider impact on the AONB (as per previous response) is taken into account and appropriate measures required.</p>	<p>Awaiting decision</p>
<p>19/00753/OUTMEI Rugeley B Power Station, Power Station Road, Rugeley Amendments</p>		
<p>20/00469/FUL Land adjacent 6 Malthouses, Malthouse Rd, Gentleshaw 3 bed detached dwelling</p>	<p>Objection. The openness of the Green Belt in and around the AONB is an important element of the landscape and scenic beauty of the designated area. Therefore, unless the local planning authority is fully convinced that the proposal is appropriate the AONB Joint Committee would support the continued application of Green Belt policies to the current application. There is also the potential for approval to create a precedent for infill in and in the setting of the AONB.</p>	<p>Awaiting decision</p>
<p>20/32438/COU Home Farm House, 114 Main Road, Milford: Retrospective change of use to from agricultural to workshop and parking of vehicles</p>	<p>Main Road Milford is a gateway route into the AONB therefore proposals should avoid visual detractors close to the road. Vehicle parking should therefore only be permitted away from the access onto Main Road closely associated with agricultural buildings.</p>	<p>Awaiting Decision</p>
<p>HS2 consultation to SCC on LEMP for Stafford Borough.</p>	<p>Advice provided to SCC on behalf of Trent Sow HS2 Group. HS2 acknowledges that the Trent Sow Parklands is a sensitive area, and integration of HS2 within this special landscape requires careful consideration. The Trent Sow Parklands HS2 Group (The Group), of which SCC is a member, has produced the Trent Sow Parklands and Cannock Chase AONB: Design Principles for HS2, to assist HS2's nominated undertaker in achieving a high standard of design for key design elements and mitigation measures in the area. This document promotes an enhanced level of mitigation and optimal restoration, relevant at all stages of design and therefore relevant to the LEMP, and reference to the document would be appropriate. The Design Principles for HS2 relate to an agreed area of influence (agreed between HS2 and The Group), which includes Shugborough and part of Cannock Chase AONB. It would be appropriate therefore for the LEMP to acknowledge and reference the sensitivities on the AONB,</p>	

	<p>designated on grounds of landscape and natural beauty, and of the Shugborough Riparian Alluvial Lowlands LCA and Shugborough Designed Parklands LCA.</p> <p>Recommend reference Section 5A of the Trent Sow Parklands and Cannock Chase AONB: Design Principles for HS2, which includes guidance on matters such as visual and acoustic screening, advance works including advance planting and restoration.</p> <p>Clauses on trees should be reworded to maximise tree retention, where practical amending designs to secure tree retention.</p>	
Pre- application discussion		
Pre-App REF04357 Former Shooting Butts Outdoor Centre Development	<p>Building location is on higher ground and would be visible in the landscape, emphasising a change in character of the landscape. Basement parking has potential to reduce visual intrusion from car parking, however the site layout plan still refers to 70 parking spaces above ground. Will be essential not to raise levels to accommodate basement parking so that development is not domineering.</p> <p>Outlying glamping pods may be detracting in the landscape.</p> <p>LVIA should form part of any application to fully assess the effects of development, including night-time effects.</p>	
Planning Policy		
Stafford Borough Local Plan 2020-2040; Issues and Options	<p>Seek stronger references to AONB Management Plan and conserving and enhancing Cannock Chase AONB, and it's setting, for its landscape and natural beauty and the services it provides indirectly as a result of its special qualities.</p> <p>Response drew attention to relevant policies in the Management Plan and the emerging AONB Design Guide and Views and Setting Guide, requesting reference to the guides in the Local Plan to give them weight in the planning process</p>	
Stafford Borough Council Draft Biodiversity and Development SPD	<p>Stronger reference to the designated status of Cannock Chase AONB and the AONB Management Plan, which provides a strategic context for the AONB, would be welcomed.</p> <p>Response drew attention to relevant policies in the Management Plan.</p>	

Part (b) High Speed Rail (HS2) Phase 2a

3. Web pages for the [Trent Sow Parklands Group](#) are now hosted on the AONB website, where the Design Principles prepared by the group for HS2 can be downloaded. Due to office closures during the Coronavirus pandemic no hard copies are currently available.
4. HS2 have confirmed that, recognising the serious situation regarding the global pandemic of Coronavirus, the House of Lords Select Committee on the Phase 2a Bill has rightly taken the decision to suspend proceedings until further notice. This is to allow petitioners and everyone else involved to take the necessary precautions advised by the Government during this time. It is not known how long proceedings will be suspended for.
5. Members will recall that the second element of the Group's remit is in supporting delivery of a package of Environmental Enhancements outside the Hybrid Bill Limits. The Project Manager met representatives from National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) to discuss the potential for a funding bid to add value to the proposed enhancements. However, NHLF responded in April to inform that in response to the Coronavirus pandemic NHLF are diverting all new funding into an emergency fund for the time being. This means that they would not be able to take an application for the Trent Sow project forward until normal programmes are resumed.

Item 10 Annual AONB Conference 2020

Item for: Decision

Author: Ian Marshall, AONB Development Officer

Financial implications: A budget provision of £2,000 is allocated for the annual conference in the AONB budget for venue hire, refreshments and other associated costs.

Recommendations:

1. To hold the Annual AONB Conference 2020 virtually.
2. The Committee is invited to suggest a conference theme(s)

Background

1. An AONB Annual Conference is a requirement of the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership Agreement and an expectation of Defra. It is also an integral delivery tool of the emerging AONB Communications Strategy, allowing the AONB Partnership to celebrate its achievements and partners and stakeholders to express their views and opinions on the delivery of the AONB Management Plan and how the natural beauty of Cannock Chase should be conserved and enhanced.
2. The AONB Annual Conference for 2019 took place at Brocton Hall Golf Club on Friday 4th October, and hosted 75 delegates. In addition to an update and discussion about AONB progress, the theme was “Changing views – heathland management on Cannock Chase”, and the conference explored how landowners, local communities, interest groups and user groups on Cannock Chase can come together to ensure that heathlands are part of our future.
3. This years’ Annual Conference is planned to take place at a similar time of year, around October 2020. Preparations should be underway now. A budget provision of £2,000 has been allocated for venue hire, refreshments and other associated costs.
4. COVID-19, however, and limits on large public gatherings and the closure of conference venues are likely to mean that it will not be possible to hold a face to face conference at that time.
5. This situation presents the following options: (i) postpone the conference until Spring 2021 (in the hope that restrictions will be further lifted by that time), (ii) make alternative arrangements to hold the event virtually, or (iii) cancel it altogether for this financial year.

Postponement

6. Postponing the conference until Spring 2021 allows time for the present crisis to subside and further easing of restrictions, such that a face to face conference is permitted to take place. However, there is no guarantee that the current restrictions will have eased, or that the nation will not have experienced new spikes of outbreaks over the intervening months and the (re)-imposition of restrictions. Either scenario would mean the conference could not take place in the financial year 2020-21, and the budget would be reallocated to other activities.

Virtual conference

7. Holding the conference virtually would allow an event to take place in the autumn, and removes the uncertainty around the option of face to face conferencing. It also provides an opportunity for our partners and stakeholders to come together at these difficult times. Virtual conferences are increasingly being organised as alternatives to public gatherings. They allow event organisers, speakers, and participants to interact remotely through an online environment in creative ways and can reach wide audiences. They can be complex to organise, however, and professional assistance would be required to ensure that they run smoothly. The budget provision could be used to hire assistance with event organisation.

Cancellation

8. The third option is to cancel the Annual Conference for 2020. This would undoubtedly be the easiest option in the current circumstances, but may attract criticism and misses the opportunity to keep partners and stakeholders engaged.

Recommendations

9. The Committee is requested to approve that the AONB Annual Conference 2020 takes place virtually, and that the budget provision is utilised to support the necessary arrangements. Committee is also invited to suggest any theme(s) for this year's conference.