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## **1.0 Introduction**

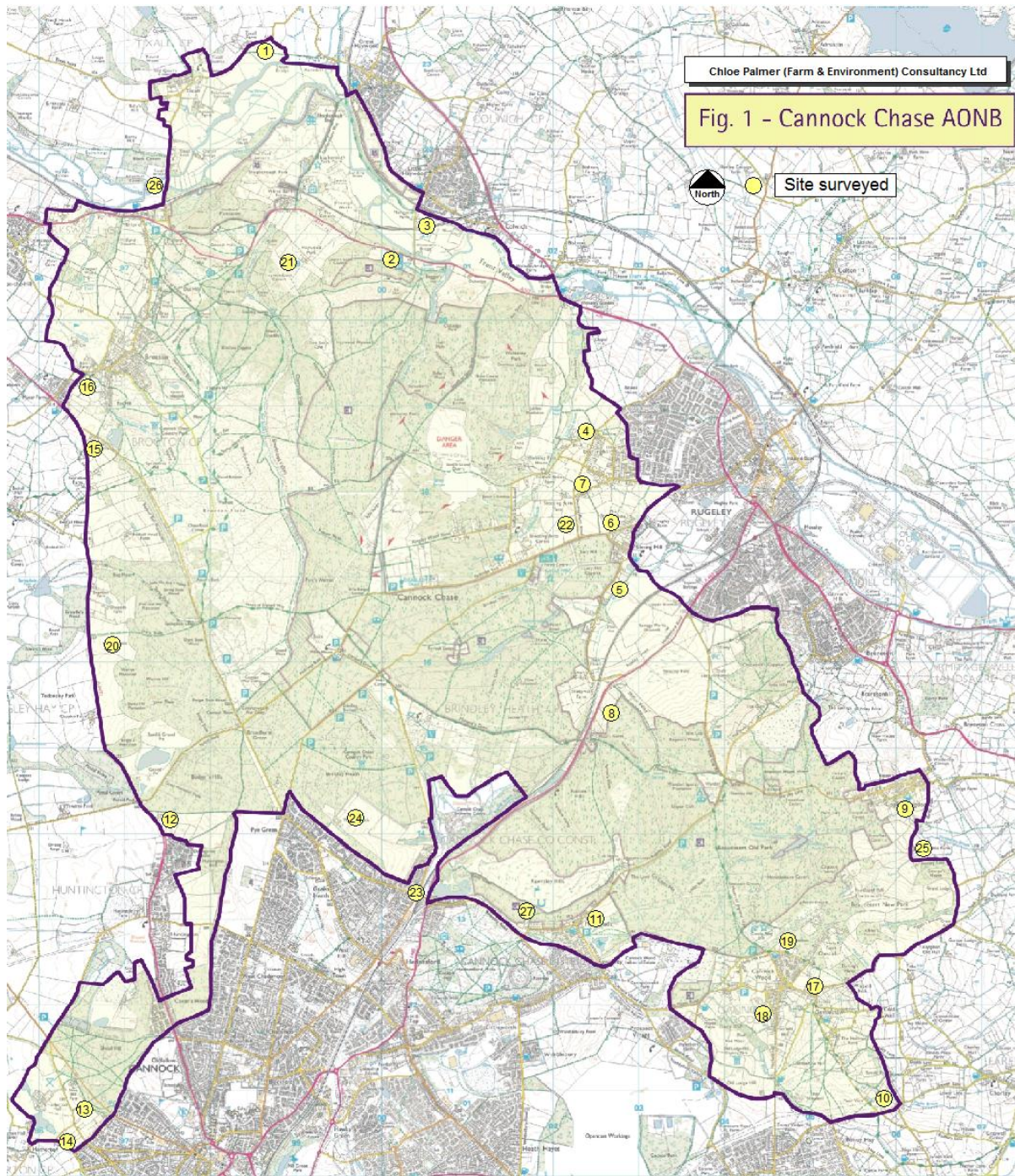
- 1.1 This monitoring survey of horiculture was commissioned by the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in June 2012. The principal objective of the contract was to 'monitor the keeping of horses within Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and compare to the 2008 data'.
- 1.2 A report completed in March 2006 on behalf of the AONB concluded that the use of land for horse grazing was having an increasing impact on the AONB landscape. There is a wide range of grazing usage, ranging from very good to very poor practice. The Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan also identifies one of the pressures on the area as the impact of keeping horses in the landscape. Action LA9 of the Management Plan is to "target information to those involved in equestrian activity in the area to ensure understanding of the AONB's importance is maintained".
- 1.3 The methodology adopted during this survey was developed in order to deliver an objective condition assessment of the sites. It should be noted that where sites were assessed as 'poor' for any of the criteria or indicators, this does not mean that there were any issues relating to animal welfare arising from the management, or that the owners or managers were not complying with any statutory regulations or legislation. The results of the survey will simply be used as a tool by the AONB team to appraise the overall landscape impact of equestrian land use on the AONB area.
- 1.4 The tender brief refers to 2008 data which was obtained during an extensive survey of horiculture completed by Staffordshire FWAG. This monitoring project was the first time a survey of horiculture had been undertaken in the area and therefore necessitated the development of the methodology which will be used, largely unchanged, in the 2012 survey.
- 1.5 In addition to the original 20 sites included in the first survey in 2008, a further seven sites have been added to the survey giving a total of 27 sites. The location of all sites is shown on Figure 1. The total area of land represented by the monitoring sites is 128.03 ha, which is over a third of the land estimated to be occupied by horse paddocks in the AONB.
- 1.6 The survey of the horiculture sites was completed over four days between August 2012 and the beginning of November 2012. It should be noted that the summer and autumn of 2012 were exceptionally wet but it was also a good growing season for grass due to the availability of moisture throughout the summer.
- 1.7 The sites visited represented a range of different establishments from small private yards to large, commercial livery yards with over 20 horses there. Equally, the standard of management and maintenance of the sites varied enormously from those where all aspects of pasture management and care of buildings and infrastructure was first class to those which were at best, very shoddily maintained and appeared as an eyesore in the landscape. A full list of sites included in the survey is shown in Appendix I, Schedule of Survey Sites.
- 1.8 As horiculture is clearly becoming an increasingly significant land use within Cannock Chase AONB, the degree to which the sites are maintained to an acceptable standard is very important. This report shows a slight improvement across all

indicators at sites 1 – 20 that were included in the original survey. Of the new sites included in the 2012 survey, four were assessed as 'good' on all indicators but site 23 was the worst site of all 27 surveyed.

- 1.9 This report sets out to assess the changes in the standard of pasture management and the appearance of associated infrastructure between the 2008 and 2012 surveys and also provides new data relating to the additional seven sites. It contains recommendations regarding how equine land managers could be encouraged to implement improved practice on their land in the future.

## 2.0 Methodology

- 2.1 A total of 27 monitoring sites distributed throughout the Cannock Chase AONB were surveyed. The sites cover a total area of 128.03 hectares. Of these, the original 20 sites cover 70 ha with the additional seven sites covering 58.03 ha.
- 2.2 The location of each monitoring site is shown on the map in Figure 1.



- 2.3 A detailed site record was compiled for each site, all of which are contained in Appendix II. A location map is provided for each site together with a selection of the photographs taken at each site.
- 2.4 Sites were chosen for the ease of access and visibility from public rights of way or roads and comprise a mixture of livery yards and private paddocks together with a trekking centre and competition yard.

## 2.5 Checklist of indicators

Six main indicators have been selected for the assessment of horse paddocks. The site record sheets contained in Appendix II show the type of information that was collected for each site visited.

There are three categories to choose from when assessing the condition of each of the indicators; Poor, Fair or Good. The condition of each indicator is assessed against a set of criteria and depending on the number of criteria that it meets, it will fall into one of the three categories.

POOR                Fails on two or three criteria

FAIR                Fails on one criterion

GOOD               Does not fail on any criteria

### Standard of pasture management

The condition of the grass sward in a horse paddock is very much dependent on the stocking level of horses/ ponies and other livestock. Overstocked pasture may become overgrazed which can lead to problems of poaching and weeds.

Poor pasture management is potentially more damaging if the grassland is classed as unimproved or semi-improved and is likely to have a high floristic value.

Over grazing is determined by the height of the grass sward. It is considered good practice to keep the sward at about 5cm height during the growing season and at about 2cm during the winter.

Overgrazing during the winter months often causes 'poaching' (where land loses vegetation cover becoming very muddy). This can provide ideal conditions for weedy species such as ragwort, docks and thistle to colonise and is also unsightly.

### *Condition Assessment*

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 1. | Cover of weed species (creeping thistle, spear thistle, curled dock, broad-leaved dock, common ragwort, common nettle, bracken) less than 5%. |
| 2. | Cover of bare ground less than 10%.   |
| 3. | Paddock appears overgrazed (average sward height <2cm).   |

### Fencing

There are two main fence types to consider, permanent and temporary. Boundary fences are generally permanent whilst fencing used to sub divide paddocks can be temporary or movable.

Fences need to be a visible physical barrier to the horse to prevent risk of injury. The wrong type of fence can look out of place or visually obtrusive in the landscape.

The fence type(s) should be recorded and categorised as;

- Timber fencing – post and rail with possibly a top electric tape or wire
- Plain wire – Generally strained wire with possibly a top rail and/or electric tape or wire
- Wire netting – Includes sheep, pig or specialist horse netting
- Electric fencing – May be either strands of electric wire or tape, electric mesh or 'poly<sup>TM</sup>' rope.

#### *Condition Assessment*

- |   |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Fence in good state of repair e.g. no missing rails or slack or loose wire/tape.</li><li>2. Type of permanent fencing unobtrusive in local landscape.</li><li>3. Low visual impact of temporary fencing i.e. use of brown/ green electric tape as opposed to white tape.</li></ol> |
|---|

#### Hedgerows

Hedgerows are not only a vital part of the landscape and an important wildlife habitat, but they also provide shelter and protection for livestock. The assessment of hedgerows is based on the condition assessment used in the Environmental Stewardship Farm Environment Plan (Defra 2005).

#### *Condition Assessment*

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Hedgerow measured from the base of the stems to the top of shoots is at least two metres in height.</li><li>2. The average width of the hedge between shoot tips at the widest point is at least 1.5 metres in width.</li><li>3. Gaps in the hedge represent no more than 10% of the hedgerow length excluding access points and gates. Gaps are complete breaks in the woody canopy of the hedgerow.</li></ol> |
|--|

NB. A hedgerow is defined as any boundary line of shrubs or trees over 20m long and less than five metres wide, provided that at any one time the trees and shrubs were more or less continuous.

#### Trees

Both infield and boundary trees are important landscape features within the agricultural landscape of Cannock Chase AONB. Unprotected, trees can be damaged by browsing horses which can lead to the death of even mature trees. If not killed by browsing, the form of young or newly planted trees can be distorted by horses nibbling the growing tips.



Mature infield trees may also be prone to root damage caused by poaching of the ground under the canopy.

#### *Condition Assessment*

1. Mature/ ancient infield or boundary trees have no signs of horse damage including bark stripping, rubbing and soil compaction for the width of the canopy.
2. Newly planted or young saplings fully protected from browsing damage. Fencing is at least 1m from tree.
3. Trees are free of other damaging factors e.g. fencing material nailed to the trunk.

#### Appearance of buildings and other infrastructure

Horse shelters and stables can look very intrusive in the landscape, particularly if they are badly sited or in a poor state of repair.

Other infrastructure may include ménages or exercise areas, treadmills and horse walkers.

#### *Condition Assessment*

1. Stable(s)/ shelter(s) not intrusive in landscape e.g. on the skyline, made of inappropriate materials
2. Stable(s) or shelter(s) in a good state of repair
3. Other infrastructure not intrusive in landscape

#### General tidiness of the paddock and yard

The appropriate siting of the manure heap is important both in terms landscape and environmental protection. Any heaps should be kept well away from a watercourse/ ditch to avoid pollution and possible legal action by the Environment Agency. Environment Agency guidelines for good practice state;

‘Temporary field heaps should be sited where there is no risk of run-off polluting watercourses. They should be at least 10 metres from a watercourse and 50 metres from a well, spring or borehole that supplies water for human consumption or for use in farm dairies’.

It is also poor practice to tip droppings in hedge bottoms and woodland which can smother and kill any floristic interest.

The general tidiness of the paddock is important both from a welfare and landscape point of view e.g. horse jumps should ideally be removed and stored after use to prevent damage to the sward and ensure the paddock does not appear cluttered. In addition, foodstuffs such as bales of hay that are stored under sheeting in a field can also look unsightly.



## Condition Assessment

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Manure is stored in an appropriate location. Not near watercourses, hedge bottoms or woodland edge.</li><li>2. Paddock is free of clutter. e.g. jump poles, disused feed containers</li><li>3. The yard and areas of hard standing are generally in a tidy condition.</li></ol> |
|--|

## 2.6 Consultation Questionnaire

The list below shows those individuals and organisations that were consulted during the project. Their views were considered important either because they represent horse owners and riders in the area, or because they are responsible for or have an interest in the management of significant areas of land within the AONB.

Those listed in blue were contacted at the start of the project. Those in black have now been contacted with a summary of the survey findings in an attempt to obtain some feedback on the findings of the project.

Individuals/organisations included in the consultation were:

- [David Wheatley, Staffordshire Chairman, British Horse Society](#)
- Jane Beharrel, Branch Secretary, South Staffordshire Hunt Pony Club
- [Lesley Simmons, BHS representative on the Cannock Chase AONB Advisory Partnership, organiser of the Cannock Chase pleasure ride](#)
- Mrs Trish Wright, Membership Secretary, Stafford Riding Club, Hixon
- Gaenor Kelly, Environment and Countryside Department, Staffordshire County Council
- [Jason Maclean, Environmental Manager, Forestry Commission](#)
- [Lisa Hyde, Proprieter, Cannock Chase Trekking Centre](#)
- [Fleur Garner, Holford Equestrian](#)
- [Michael Mark, Hollinslade Racing](#)

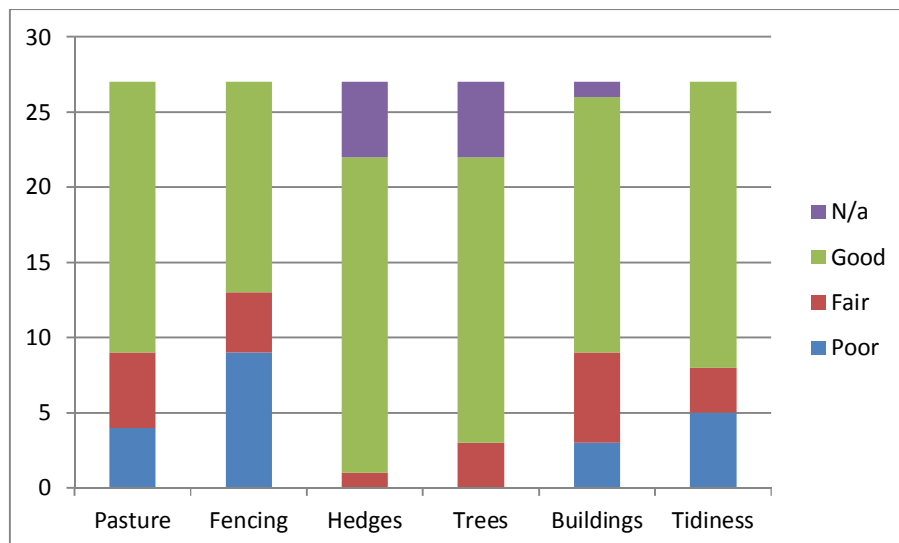
Of those consulted at the start of the project, only Jason Maclean of the Forestry Commission responded. A copy of his consultation response is contained in Appendix II. In summary, he commented that *'we (as land managers) do not really have any major issues with horses. We appreciate that the development of grazing areas, temporary buildings etc is unsightly and of concern to the AONB with their planning and landscape protection role. Our policy on Cannock Forest is that horses are welcome to access FC land and all main tracks for free as long as they are not operating commercially'*.

## 2.7 Questionnaire

Questionnaires were left at all the monitoring sites where a letter box could be identified as associated with the yard (five in all). Questionnaires were also sent to ten other equestrian establishments or associated businesses. Unfortunately the response to the questionnaires was surprisingly poor and only one questionnaire was returned completed. This questionnaire is included Appendix III.

### 3.0 Results

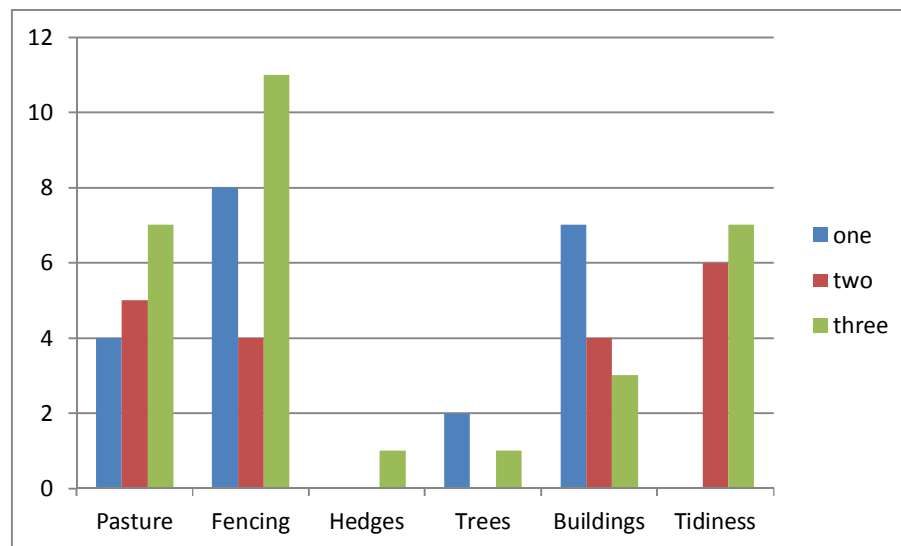
- 3.1 The raw data gathered from the site record sheets is shown in Appendix IV – Summary of Site Data. Exact numbers of paddocks and horses were not possible to estimate in every case because they were not all visible from public rights of way. Similarly, the number of horses stated was based on those that were seen on the day of the survey so may not be entirely accurate and should not be used to calculate stocking rates.
- 3.2 The data was analysed both in terms of the condition of each of the indicators, the criteria that each indicator had failed on and then a comparison with the 2008 data for those sites that were included in both surveys.
- 3.3 The graph below shows the overall condition of each indicator at the 27 monitoring sites in Cannock Chase AONB. It shows that as was the case in 2008, the condition of the majority of the indicators was good. Fencing showed the highest occurrence of 'poor' ratings compared to hedges and trees which were never scored as 'poor' on any of the sites. There was a deterioration in relation to the condition assessment of both fencing and tidiness when comparing the survey data for the 20 sites from 2008 compared to 2012. A more detailed comparison between the 2008 and the 2012 data will be made in section 4.



**Figure 2: The overall condition of each indicator at the 27 monitoring sites**

- 3.4 In order to gain a clearer picture of the issues associated with good and poor paddock maintenance, it is essential to study the criteria on which each site failed. Examining the common failures across the survey sites highlights common problems and issues.
- 3.5 Figure 3 shows the criteria that the six indicators failed on at the 27 monitoring sites with the AONB. Failures are quite evenly spread across the three criteria in each case with only criteria 3, low visual impact of temporary fencing standing out as the most

common reason for failure for this indicator. For other indicators, failures are more evenly spread across the three criteria.



**Figure 3: The criteria that the indicators failed on at each of the monitoring sites**

### 3.6 Review of Indicators and Reasons for Failure

#### Pasture Management

Overall, the standard of pasture management was good with only four sites out of 27 assessed as poor. Three of these sites were found within the seven new sites added in 2012. The worst example of pasture management was seen at site 26. Here, over 50% of the area that was being grazed comprised bare ground. The remainder of the site was heavily over-grazed.



**Figure 4: Land at Tixall Bridge showing extent of overgrazing and bare ground**

There were also some very good examples of pasture management. Encouragingly, those sites identified as containing unimproved or semi-improved grassland were generally managed sympathetically. In most cases, there was no evidence of overgrazing or weed infestation and many were 'poo-picked' regularly. The best examples were site 9, Paddocks off Bardy Lane and site 24, West Cannock Farm, where sward heights had allowed the herbs to flower.

#### 1. Cover of weed species

Severe weed infestations were not common place. A total of four sites of the 27 failed on this criteria and creeping thistle was recorded as the most common weed with one exception. Notably, at site 11, Paddocks east of Hazleslade, ragwort was becoming a serious problem across the entire area.

#### 2. Cover of bare ground

Five sites failed on this criteria. With the exception of site 26, most of the bare ground recorded was found around gateways, or field shelters or occasionally under trees or other areas of shelter where the horses would gather. The exceptionally wet conditions experienced during summer and autumn 2012 meant that it is surprising that bare ground was not recorded as a more widespread issue at the sites.

#### 3. Paddock is not overgrazed

This was the most common reason for failure in relation to standard of pasture management. In a number of cases, although the sward height was below the threshold height of 2 cm, there was no sign of excessive poaching and so most sites would have recovered quickly if stocking rates were reduced.

In many cases where sites were recorded as overgrazed, it appeared likely that this was due to owners attempting to restrict the grazing of ponies and horses that might be susceptible to laminitis as often other grazing units were left ungrazed within the same holding.

#### Fencing

This indicator was the most significant cause of failure amongst all six indicators. There were some excellent examples of unobtrusive and well maintained fencing but there was also fencing that failed on all three criteria. Pictures of bad and good fencing are shown below:



Figure 5a: Example of poor fencing at Paddocks opposite Doveleys Livery (site 14)



Figure 5b: Example of good fencing at the Paddocks next to the Stonehouse (site 6)

#### 1. Fence in good state of repair

Fencing was in a poor state of repair in almost a third of all sites. It was considered to be as such when rails were missing, or if it had been patched up or if wire was sagging.

#### 2. Type of permanent fencing unobtrusive in local landscape

This was less of a problem across all sites. Fencing that was considered obtrusive included examples where materials were inappropriate or where fencing was sited such that it formed an intrusion into the landscape and interfered with open views. Four sites failed on this criteria. There were also some good examples of permanent fencing such as that shown in figure 5b but also where post and rail, and permanent post and electric wire was used. Not only is this type of fencing more pleasing in landscape terms, but it is also far safer for the horses than other types seen.



At West Cannock Farm, deer fencing was used around the boundary of the site and although this could be considered visually intrusive, it was obviously serving a useful purpose, particularly as a number of young trees had been planted.

### 3. Low visual impact of temporary fencing

The main cause of failure on this indicator was the use of white tape in a prominent position. 12 sites failed on this criteria and in nearly every case, it was because of the inappropriate use of white tape. It is acknowledged that electric fencing is an essential piece of equipment in order to control a horse's intake of summer grass but coloured tape and posts or plain wire is also available, albeit at a higher cost, which is significantly less visually intrusive.

### Hedgerows

The majority (22) of the sites surveyed had one or more hedgerows within the boundary. In most cases, hedges formed the boundary to the site but there were also examples of internal hedges. Some of the hedges appeared to be very old and in some cases, remained only as a line of old hawthorns.

There were some excellent examples of well managed hedgerows, one of which is shown overleaf.



Figure 6: Hedgerow at site 9, Bardy Lane

This hedgerow has been allowed to grow tall and it also contains trees such as the crab apple, shown above. A grassy margin has been left at the base of the hedge which will provide shelter for small mammals. This hedge will also support a variety of bird species as it provides plenty of nesting and feeding opportunities. It also provides a useful stock proof boundary.

1. Hedge at least two metres in height
2. The average width of the hedge is 1.5 metres

There were no failures for criteria 1 and 2; wherever hedges were present, they were of the desired height and width suggesting that they were not excessively trimmed

3. Gaps in the hedge are no more than 10% of the hedgerow length.

Only one site (no. 12, Pinetrees Farm) failed on this criterion.

#### Trees

Trees were found on 22 of the 27 monitoring sites. There were some impressive mature trees on a number of the sites and there were also examples of new planting. The most extensive area of new planting was at West Cannock Farm.

1. No signs of horse damage

Damage caused by horses either nibbling the bark or causing excessive soil compaction around the base of the trees was noted at two sites.

2. Newly planted or young saplings fully protected from browsing damage.

As referred to above, new planting had only taken place on one site and here it was fully protected by deer fencing around the boundary and from horse damage by post and wire fencing. Individual trees were also protected from rabbit damage by spiral guards.

3. Trunks are free of other damaging factors.

In one case (site 5, Paddocks off Post Office Lane), damage to the trees was caused by fencing being nailed directly onto an oak tree.

#### Buildings and Infrastructure

Some form of building was found on every site except one. Buildings varied from large stable blocks built in the 'American barn' style or the more traditional lines of stables to single field shelters in the fields and old railway carriages. Some buildings appeared quite new whereas others were in a poor state of repair.

There were some excellent examples of buildings. Site 19, paddocks north of Holly Hill Road contained a very well maintained purpose built stable block complete with tiled roof which was painted black and white and fitted in entirely with the vernacular style of nearby properties.





**Figure 7a: Stable block on the Paddocks north of Holly Hill Road**

Similarly, the wooden stables found in the paddocks next to the Stonehouse were well maintained and had been recently painted.



**Figure 7b: Stables and field shelter in site 6: Paddocks next to the Stonehouse**

1. Stable/shelter not intrusive in landscape

This was the criterion that sites failed on most frequently - seven of the 27 sites failed on it. Typically, field shelters were placed in the middle of fields or near the brow of hills meaning that they were very visible.

2. Stable or shelter in good state of repair

Three sites failed on this criterion; the buildings appeared shabby and where they had been repaired, they had often been patched with materials that were not in keeping with the surroundings or were a distinctly different colour.

3. Other infrastructure not intrusive in landscape.

This criterion refers to ménages, horse walkers or exercise areas. Two sites failed on this criterion, in one case the problem was conspicuous storage sheds and small coral areas and in the other, a number of metal containers were used for storage which appeared unsightly.

## Tidiness

This more general indicator reflected the overall impression created by the yard. Usually, those sites that had scored poorly on the other indicators tended to score poorly on this one, suggesting that they were not well looked after. Five sites were assessed as 'poor' on this indicator, and all of these had scored at least one other 'poor' rating and at least one 'fair' rating.

1. Manure is stored in an appropriate location.

No sites failed on this criterion

2. Paddock is free of clutter.

Six sites failed on this criterion. Clutter typically included jump poles and stands, road cones, used buckets, pallets and old electric fence poles.



**Figure 8: Paddocks south of Sawpit Lane showing untidy field area**

3. The yard and areas of hard standing are generally in a tidy condition.

Seven sites failed on this criterion; the reasons for this were similar to those above but in addition, in some cases, litter such as old feed bags was also scattered across the area.

## **4.0 Comparison with 2008 Monitoring**

- 4.1 Overall, the original twenty sites included in the 2008 survey showed an improvement when surveyed during this monitoring exercise in 2012. Sites were compared by adding up the number of indicators where the site had improved, that is, gone from fair to good, or poor to fair and allotting a score of '1' for each point of improvement in the 'better' column. Note that if a site went from poor to good, this would attract a score of 2. Similarly, where a site had moved from a 'fair' to a 'poor' or 'good' to 'fair', it received a score of '1' in the 'worse' column. When added up, the scores came out as eighteen for the better column and fifteen for the worse column. See Appendix IV, Summaries of site survey data, for more details.
- 4.2 Those sites showing the most dramatic improvements were site 8, Paddocks South of Rugeley Road, site 11, Paddocks east of Hazleslade which both improved by a score of 2 and site 19, Paddocks north of Holly Hill Road which improved by a score of 3.
- 4.3 Those sites demonstrating the most serious deterioration were site 2, Paddocks south of A513, site 5 and Paddocks off Post Office Lane which deteriorated by a score of 3 and worst of all, site 16, Paddocks south of Sawpit lane which deteriorated by a score of 4. This is of concern as the worsening of the sites occurred across most indicators so was not down to a single factor. In each case, the sites were moving from 'good' to 'fair' or 'fair' to 'poor'. These sites were all close to centres of population and so would be noticeable to local residents. It is noted that site 2 has already been brought to the attention of AONB staff as a result of complaints from local people about the appearance of the site.
- 4.4 There was no distinct pattern in relation to which indicators were showing the most improvement or deterioration from the first survey to the second. Generally, the changes were seen across all indicators although there was some evidence that pasture had declined more than the other indicators. This is perhaps not surprising as pasture is a dynamic system rather than an inanimate object. Pasture also changes in quality/appearance faster than hedges and trees.

### **Commentary**

- 4.5 When attempting to interpret these findings, the effect of the subjective judgement of two different surveyors cannot be ignored. Throughout this survey, assessments of each site were carried out using an objective checklist in order to avoid bias wherever possible.
- A lack of detailed information from the previous survey (record sheets, photographs) made it difficult to ground truth comparisons. For this reason, more photographs and detailed record sheets have been provided for each site in this report so that future surveyors have more information against which to assess data so that relative comparisons can be more meaningful.
- 4.6 The summer and autumn of 2012 were noted as the wettest in over 100 years. This inevitably has an effect both on grass growth but also the amount of poaching, weed growth and bare ground noted. Although attempts were made to take this into account, it is always difficult to compare sites between very different years.

- 4.8 In conclusion, of the twenty sites originally surveyed, almost 70% had changed very little (scores of less than 2, better or worse). Therefore the changes seen were not significant.

#### **New Sites**

- 4.9 Seven new sites were included in the survey in 2012. These were distributed across the AONB rather than being centred in any one area of it. Three of these sites were quite large yards that were clearly operating on a commercial basis. In each case, at least seven horses were seen on the day of the survey. One yard, West Cannock Farm, grazed and stabled at least twenty-five horses.
- 4.10 Four of the seven new sites scored as 'good' against all the indicators that applied. Encouragingly, all three of the large yards referred to above fell into this category. In each case, pasture management was of a high standard, fencing, buildings and other infrastructure was all in keeping with the local landscape and was very well maintained.
- 4.11 The pattern of failures against both indicators and criteria within the indicators followed a similar pattern to that for the original sites. The three sites that failed against one or more indicators actually scored poorly across the board. The worst site was site 23, A460 Rugeley Road by Railway Bridge. It is a very small paddock, but adjacent to roads on two sides and very visible to pedestrians walking past. This site was rated as 'poor' on all four indicators which applied to it.
- 4.12 The addition of the seven new sites means that the Horsiculture Monitoring survey now covers 38 % of all land used for equine purposes within the Cannock Chase AONB based on the figure of 336 ha for land used for equestrian purposes which was provided in the 2008 methodology report.

## **5.0 Recommendations**

### **5.1 Suitability of Methodology and Refinements**

Overall the methodology proved to be fit for purpose and allowed the original and new sites to be assessed in order that a comprehensive list of indicators could be monitored. Minor additions were made to the record sheets, in particular to note the number of paddocks and to include comments against each of the indicators. It is hoped that by providing this information in an appendix it will inform future surveys and allow for easier comparisons to be made with previous site data.

In the future, it would be better if the owners/tenants of the grazing sites surveyed could be identified and contacted prior to the start of the survey. A significant amount of time was spent at the beginning of the project trying to identify the relevant individuals with responsibility for the site. However, this yielded little information and so the surveys were undertaken from roads and public rights of way. This meant that sometimes it was not possible to view all areas of the site and therefore estimating the number of paddocks and horses present was not always possible.

The biggest difficulty encountered with the methodology was to get a response to both the questionnaires and the consultation. Out of 25 questionnaires sent out, only one reply was received, even though at least ten of these were hand delivered. In order to obtain this information by a more effective means, it might be possible to attend a local equestrian event, either a pleasure ride or a riding club show and speak to local riders and horse owners directly. The difficulty with this is that many of these people may not own or manage land and instead may simply keep their horses at livery yards.

The initial consultation also only initiated one comprehensive response, although as this was from the Forestry Commission, it was a useful one. It might be more effective to invite local stakeholders that have an interest in the landscape of the AONB to a meeting or workshop to discuss the issues associated with equine land use in order to get a better picture of their concerns and how any particular problems might be tackled. Not only would this generate useful feedback but it would also engage these groups and individuals so that they might be involved in initiatives and projects in the future.

In an attempt to get additional responses from consultees, three (shown in blue in section 2.4) will be contacted with a very brief summary of the project findings. They will be asked for comments on how we might engage their members or the wider equestrian community to address the issues identified following the completion of the monitoring exercise.

### **5.2 Addressing Issues and Impacts**

Section 3.0 sets out the results from this survey. As was the case in the 2008 survey, fencing proved to be the issue on which most sites failed, followed by tidiness and then pasture management. It is likely that the owners/managers of many of the sites identified as failing on these indicators will not even be aware of the landscape

impacts of their activities. Therefore raising awareness of the issue has to be the first priority in relation to taking action.

It was also evident from close inspection of those sites that were most problematical that the horses were probably being kept on a low budget and therefore costly solutions are unlikely to be implemented. Therefore, the focus needs to be on those improvements that can be made at little or no cost. Alternatively, the AONB might consider operating a small capital grant scheme, possibly in partnership with a local agricultural merchants or saddlery. Funding for this grant scheme might be sought from the Heritage Lottery Scheme or Landfill grants as part of a wider project application to address the negative impacts of horsiculture in the area. Items that might be part-funded through this could include:

- Landscape-friendly electric or permanent fencing (green tape or brown rope, dark green plastic or wooden posts)
- Tree planting – to screen unsightly buildings or yard areas
- Hedge planting – to plant up gaps or damaged lengths of hedges
- Small areas of hard standing around field shelters/gateways to prevent poaching/bare ground
- Storage containers so that jumps, cones and other equipment can be stored away safely out of sight
- The cost of employing contractors to tackle weed infestations or to restore areas of bare ground by over-sowing with a suitable grass mix

### **5.3 Promoting good practice**

Raising awareness of the principles and practice of good horse pasture management has been identified as the first stage in addressing the issues identified in this report. The target audience would be the landowners/managers but as a pre-cursor, the workshop referred to in 5.2 for stakeholders would serve to highlight the issues amongst wider user and interest groups.

Promoting good practice can be achieved by a number of means:

- Articles and news items in the local press – visit [www.farmersguardian.com/home/equestrian/equestrian-features/give-your-pasture-a-makeover/46279.article](http://www.farmersguardian.com/home/equestrian/equestrian-features/give-your-pasture-a-makeover/46279.article) for an example of an article prepared by the author of this report for the Farmer's Guardian
- A best practice competition to which all local livery yards and private equestrian landowners and tenants are invited to enter – this would have the added benefit of being a 'good news' story promoting the role of the AONB
- A leaflet – one was produced in 2008 and distributed widely across the AONB; it might be appropriate to update and re-print this
- Providing information on the AONB website that offers advice and guidance to equestrian land managers; useful links to other websites and sources of information could also be highlighted
- Holding horse pasture management events in the AONB that highlight good practice on one of the best sites from the survey – an example of a programme for a well received event held in South Yorkshire that was attended by over 30 equestrian land managers is included in Appendix V

- Deliver targeted one-to-one advisory visits to those owners of sites that have been highlighted as the worst examples within the AONB
- Use social media such as a facebook page or a twitter account to provide topical and seasonal tips on best practice management and to give links to useful information
- Attend a local equestrian event or show and take information boards and leaflets to give out to horse owners and yard managers from the area



## 6.0 Summary and Conclusions

- 6.1 The comparison between the survey of the original monitoring sites undertaken in 2008 and the data from the 2012 survey showed a slight improvement in the condition of the indicators assessed. The only sites that failed on more than one indicator (assessed as poor) were site 2, Paddocks south of A513; site 5, Paddocks of Post Office Lane; site 8, Paddocks south of Rugeley Road and site 14, Paddock north east of Doveley's Livery. Of these four, site 2 creates the most significant adverse visual and landscape impact due to its extent (8.6 ha) and its prominent position next to the A513.
- 6.2 The new sites included three large livery yards and four smaller sites. Of these new sites, the three worst were all smaller yards (maximum of 1.36 ha in area) and the four sites that scored 'good' across all indicators were larger (to a maximum of 31.37 ha). Site 23, Paddock on A460 at corner with Station Road, was the worst of all 27 sites, scoring poor on all eligible indicators. It was a very small site (0.17 ha) however and although in a prominent location which is overlooked on all sides, the setting is largely urban and therefore less sensitive.
- 6.3 Some excellent examples of equestrian land use management were noted and many of these were on the larger yards. Eleven sites were scored as 'good' for every eligible indicator.
- 6.4 There are a number of options that could be implemented to improve the standard of equestrian land use management. These are outlined in section 5.0. Whether or not these are adopted will inevitably come down to available budget. In the absence of sufficient funds within the AONB, consideration might be given to making a grant application to one of the following grant schemes:
- Biffa Award – Recreation theme
  - Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnerships – possibly in partnership with the Forestry Commission and other partners within the AONB – the horse pasture management element could form part of a wider bid

If funds could be secured to provide advice to the equestrian land owners, coupled with a small capital grants scheme, this could deliver some of the improvements that would bring the poorer sites up to a satisfactory standard.

- 6.5 Future improvement or deterioration of the sites surveyed in 2012 will depend on a range of factors including change or otherwise of land ownership, number of horses owned and availability of income to fund maintenance or improvement works. External influencing factors such as climate change which is believed to be responsible for the wetter summers and more extreme climatic occurrences currently experienced by the UK may also have an impact. Effects could include increased poaching and the more frequent occurrence of weed infestations.

Research by the British Horse Society (2010) shows that even in difficult economic periods such as the current recession, horse owners under economic pressures will make very considerable sacrifices in relation to their standard of living before parting with their equine companions. If, as predictions suggest, the recession continues for

several more years, a number of the sites could decline further as a result of lack of investment and maintenance. Indicators such as fencing and buildings will probably be most affected by these circumstances.

- 6.6 In conclusion, the monitoring survey of 2012 was a worthwhile exercise not only to compare the status of the 20 original sites but also the 7 additional sites added to the list. It highlighted a number of issues in relation to the management of these sites. The new sites added a further 58.03 ha to the total area surveyed and so now this survey reflects patterns seen across 38 % of the total land area used for equestrian purposes.
- 6.7 Recent trends suggest that the amount of land used for equestrian purposes will continue to grow. Economic pressures such as the current recession, land price increases or the rise in agricultural commodity prices could slow this rate of expansion in the short to medium term. The recommendations contained in this report provide an opportunity for action to improve standards of horse pasture and infrastructure management that exist across Cannock Chase AONB. If implemented, this could mitigate against the adverse effects of any increase in the area of equestrian land use in the future.

