

---

# Visitor Management Strategy

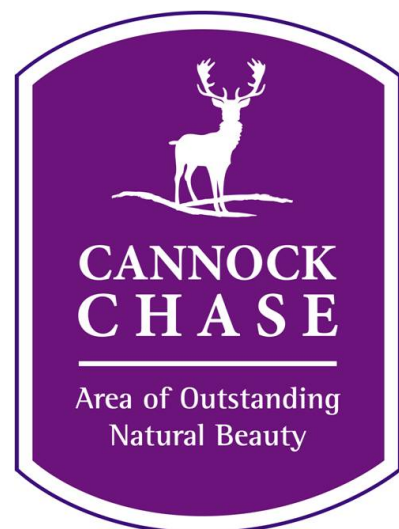
---

## Cannock Chase AONB Partnership

---

Craggatak Consulting  
30 March 2015

---





THE CRAGG, SATTERTHWAITE  
Nr ULVERSTON, CUMBRIA  
LA12 8LW  
01229 860269  
enquiries@craggatak.co.uk  
www.craggatak.co.uk

## Contents

Summary .....	ii
1. SETTING THE SCENE.....	1
Background.....	1
Habitat Regulation Assessment Statement.....	2
Purpose of the strategy.....	3
Using the strategy.....	4
Definitions .....	4
Visitor Facts .....	4
Recreation and tourism trends .....	7
Wider context.....	9
Stakeholder consultation .....	10
Existing local and wider strategies – who is influencing the use of the area?.....	12
The AONB as a destination .....	13
The Visitor.....	14
The Visitor Experience.....	16
2. FOCUS FOR ACTION .....	19
A Vision for Visitor Management on Cannock Chase .....	19
Aiming for quality .....	19
The quality priorities.....	20
3. DELIVERING QUALITY.....	26
A framework for action.....	27
A plan for 2015 .....	31
Appendix 1: Existing local and wider strategies .....	33

## Acknowledgements

This report has been written by Craggatak Consulting with close support from the staff and partners of the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## Summary

The strategy is in three parts:

- Part 1 sets out the information needed to guide decision making to manage leisure activities within the AONB.
- Part 2 proposes the priority areas for action to improve the leisure experience.
- Part 3 presents a programme to deliver those improvements.

## Part 1 – Setting the Scene

Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a very special place covering 68 square kilometres. It is a tranquil haven close to where people live and it is of great interest to the nation. There are legal requirements to conserve and enhance its landscapes, its wildlife and its recreational potential.

‘Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ is a designation to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of a special landscape. AONBs have equal status to National Parks within the planning system. Within the AONB, there are a range of other designations and special sites. These include Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Conservation Areas, listed buildings and nature reserves. A part of the AONB is a European Special Area of Conservation, being one of the best areas in the country for European dry heath. There is a legal requirement to manage the habitats to a high standard. Just less than 20% of the AONB is a country park. ‘Country Park’ is a designation to improve opportunities for the enjoyment of the countryside by the public. The intent is to support informal countryside recreation. The Forestry Commission have set up a Forest Park and there are areas of common land with public access. The combination of statutory and permissive access gives the public some 4,000 hectares to explore and enjoy (58% of the AONB).

Many plans and strategies influence the management of the AONB, in whole or in part. Working in collaboration, partners present a consistent visitor management strategy for the area, linked to other nearby areas. In particular, they aim to bring consistency across the publicly owned areas of land that form the majority of the AONB.

A range of countywide and AONB-specific reports, surveys and workshop outcomes provide the evidence base to support this strategy. These are discussed and referenced in the main report. In summary, the AONB receives over 2 million visitors a year of which between 80 and 90 percent are ‘day visitors’. They are local and are regular users, living close to the AONB. Over three-quarters of them travelled to the site by car. The vast majority of visitors state that Cannock Chase is either excellent or very good as a place to visit. Visitors’ favourite things are the cycle trails and opportunities to cycle, as well as the walks, paths and trails and the beautiful scenery / views.

There are concerns. There is no clear understanding of the purpose of the various designations. Visitor information is confusing and occasionally conflicting. People perceive a lack of appropriate on-site management. Facilities for visitors, such as car parks, cafes, toilets and help-points, are of variable, often low, quality. A creeping expansion of formal activities is reducing the sense of

freedom and wildness, and may harm wildlife. There is no sense of 'ownership' of the AONB by local businesses.

There is only limited predictive trend data on the use of the natural environment. A study on the implementation of the local authority Local Plans suggests they might increase visitor numbers to the AONB by as much as 15%. Visit England has published domestic tourism trends looking forward ten years. It finds that changes in the population and demographic make-up of England over the next decade will have a transformative effect on society and significant implications for the leisure choices people make. As the economy starts to recover, people will maintain many of their recessionary habits as the importance of value for money, thrift and price will take some time to disappear. Increasing access to technology will empower consumers and allow them to make last minute decisions on a wide range of leisure activities. They will seek control and simplicity. Health and sports based trips will grow and people will convert travel opportunities into leisure trips.

A series of trends and changes beyond recreation that will affect visitor management are also discussed. The strategy sets out the response to some of these key changes and trends.

Destination Staffordshire identifies four main visitor segments as target groups for information provision in Staffordshire. Adopting the same segments for the Cannock Chase AONB strategy supports partnership working and builds on existing actions. The four segments are:

- Empty nester / early retired couples
- Families with children aged 3-16
- Pre-family friends and couples
- Non-discretionary (the AONB is not the main reason for travel)

## Part 2 – Focus for Action

### The **Vision** for Visitor Management on Cannock Chase

Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will be a welcoming place that offers a wide range of recreational and economic opportunities that conserve and enhance the area's character and special qualities for future generations.

- ◇ Visitors and businesses will make a positive and sustainable contribution to the area in support of the management of the AONB and the local economy.
- ◇ Taking part in outdoor recreational activities will improve people's quality of life, health and well-being.
- ◇ More people will have better information about where they can go and what they can do in the AONB.
- ◇ People will have the freedom to enjoy the AONB alongside a personal responsibility for doing so in a way that respects its special qualities and the legitimate activities and interests of other people.
- ◇ Collaboration that works in the best interest of the AONB will address the conflicts between recreational users, residents and the natural environment.

The **AIM** is to deliver a sustainable quality visitor experience.

Three themes are set out to impact on the quality of that experience:

- Quality of heritage
- Quality of opportunity

- Quality of people

### **Quality of heritage**

**Objective** - To celebrate, conserve and enhance the landscape character, habitats, wildlife and cultural heritage of the AONB by developing a welcoming, informative culture that supports a balance between the sustainability of the area and visitors' enjoyment and use of it.

#### ***What could help or hinder us?***

Greater use could be made of the AONB historic and landscape characterisation studies. There is a need to assess the capacity of habitats to absorb visitors without inflicting irreversible harm to the integrity of the conservation interest.

Natural England has to ensure the protection and favourable conservation management of the Special Area of Conservation. Though current visitor use of the site is high, it is not putting the site in an 'unfavourable condition'. However, the delivery of new dwellings near the AONB in the coming years, there is a risk of a significant effect on the SAC. Measures are required to address recreation pressure on sensitive habitats. There is a need to monitor the cumulative impacts of formal activities to mitigate impacts on wildlife.

Presenting consistent and accurate information will enhance the visitor experience. Coordinating the messages delivered by partners will reduce confusion and aid site management. People are aware of the area but do not always understand its environmental value or its maintenance needs. One voice for the AONB can create a focus and reduce confusion.

Basic messages need to be consistent across the AONB and easy to find and understand. There is a need for an integrated information and interpretation strategy. It is important to engage actively with on-line user generated resources and social media forums, responding to user comments to reinforce essential messages.

### **Quality of opportunity**

**Objective** - To balance the desires of the people who wish to enjoy the AONB with the need to ensure opportunities for all that conserve landscape character and secure thriving wildlife.

#### ***What could help or hinder us?***

The majority of visitors travel to the AONB by car but there is no clear starting point for a visit. Uncontrolled parking and congestion are significant concerns as this has a negative impact on the visitor experience. A roads management strategy can enhance the setting of the road network to and within the AONB and manage links with other destinations. Implementing an AONB-wide traffic management and car parking strategy can reduce the impact of motor vehicles on the area's special qualities and protect sensitive habitats.

Though the AONB is relatively small, it has a range of owners and managers each operating independently, often without a full consideration of the implications for their neighbour. There is a need to improve the standard and design of all services and facilities used by the public.

There are opportunities to encourage low carbon-cost leisure activities by developing walking and cycling strategies and reducing car journeys within the AONB. Some activities, however, directly affect sensitive parts of the AONB. Lights and noise at night disturb wildlife and degrade tranquillity. Poor siting of events and facilities can inflict erosion on fragile habitats. There are indirect effects too; anything that uses fuel is likely to be carbon costly.

## **Quality of people**

**Objective** - To ensure that all frontline people act as proud ambassadors, understand the needs of the visitors and are knowledgeable about the site and its designations.

### ***What could help or hinder us?***

Custodians need good information, training and support. There are opportunities to design more coherent and effective support for local teams and businesses that respects the need to secure the purposes of designation and enhances the visitor experience. In turn, this can help build a more inclusive society with employment and skills programmes and projects designed to respond to local need.

Funds will always be scarce and it makes sense to pool resources. There is a need to encourage site managers and custodians to work as one team and engage with all who use or benefit from the AONB. Local partnerships that work well can make a significant contribution in improving the effectiveness and responsiveness of service providers.

There is a need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty whilst maintaining it as a living, working environment. By encouraging local businesses to secure green accreditation, such as the Staffordshire Environmental Quality Mark or similar, there could be reinvigorated partnerships with the leisure industry that nurture the AONB and create ways for businesses and individuals to support conservation.

## **Part 3 - Delivery**

### **Actions**

Nineteen actions are set out in the strategy, together with an indication of the risks, responsibilities and resources associated with each action. Many of these actions will require further work to determine exactly who will progress them and how. However, they explain the targets for 2015/16.

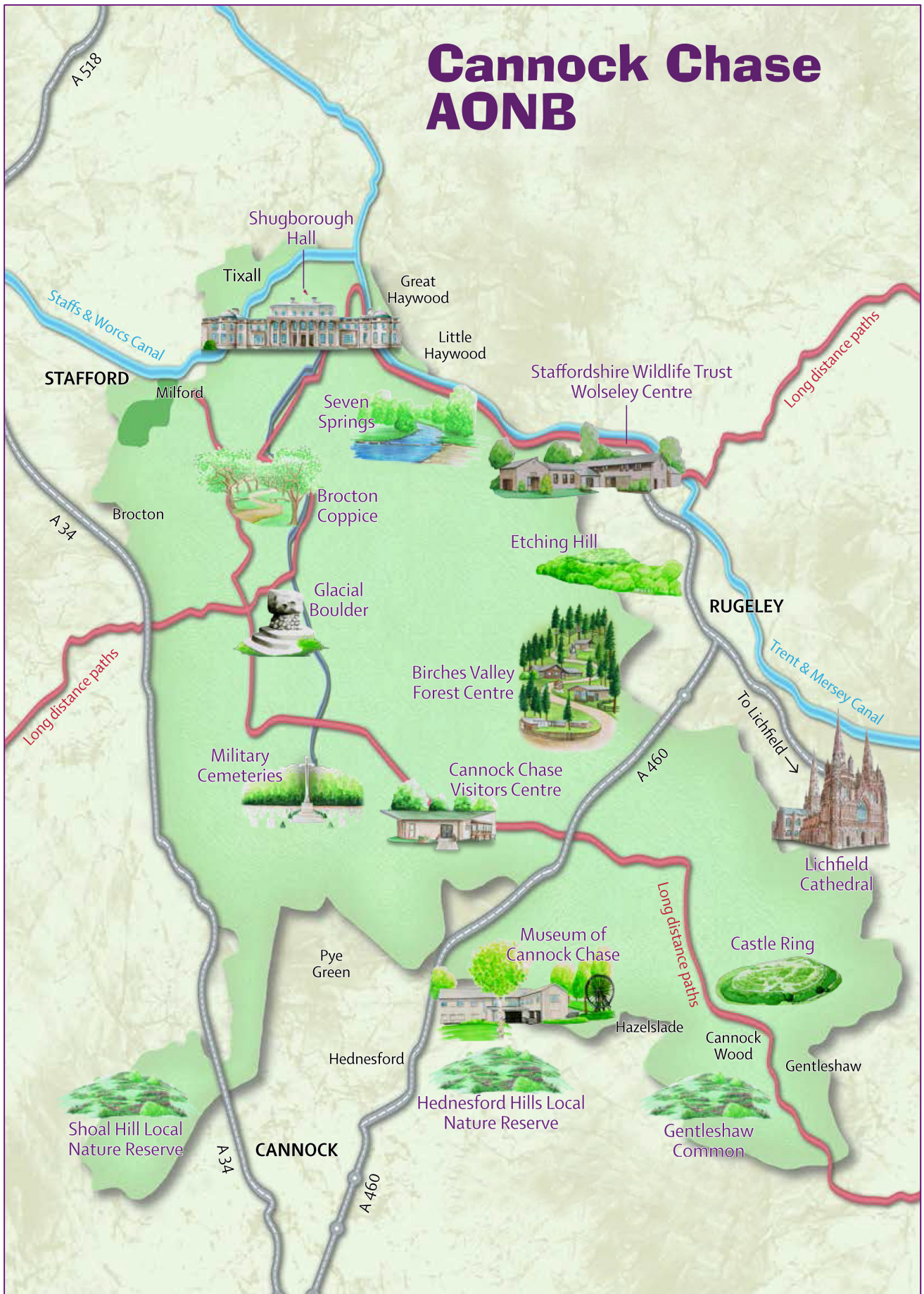
### **Delivery**

This framework for action sets out objectives for all who care for or benefit from the Cannock Chase AONB. To achieve the aim and objectives, all local stakeholders must be willing to support the shared purpose, aims and objectives in the strategy. They also need to agree what action they can each take and what their different responsibilities will be.

### **Performance Measurement**

A system of measuring performance needs to be in place so that the partnership can measure the progress in meeting the objectives. Natural England and the AONB Partnership already collect some data as a part of their State of the Environment reporting. Some new surveys will need to be commissioned or existing surveys enhanced.





## 1. SETTING THE SCENE

### Background

- 1.1. Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a very special place. It is a tranquil haven close to where people live and it is of great interest to the nation. There are legal requirements to conserve and enhance its landscapes, its wildlife and its recreational potential.

### Landscape

- 1.2. 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' is a designation to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of a special landscape<sup>1</sup>. AONBs have equal status to National Parks within the planning system.

- 'In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of economic and social development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.
- Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.'<sup>2</sup>

- 1.3. Designation of the 'Cannock Chase AONB' was in 1958, covering 68 square kilometres. Cannock Chase is the largest surviving area of lowland heathland in the Midlands. It is an area of high sandstone heather and bracken heathland with birch woodland and extensive pine plantations. Dissected by secluded valleys and framed by a gentler landscape of fine parklands and attractive villages, the AONB encloses the last oak remnant of the ancient Cannock Forest. The AONB has extensive areas of forest and woodland along with areas of designed parkland, quarrying and mixed agriculture.

### Wildlife

- 1.4. The European Union Natura 2000 network provides for the protection of sites that are of exceptional importance in respect of rare, endangered or vulnerable natural habitats and species within the European Community. A Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is an area that receives special protection under the European Union's Habitats Directive<sup>3</sup>. Lowland heath is an internationally scarce and threatened wildlife habitat. A SAC covering some 1,237 hectares (18%) of the AONB gives protection to the heaths of Cannock Chase<sup>4</sup>. Natural England is responsible for setting out the conservation objectives for the SAC.
- 1.5. Natural England advises landowners on their responsibilities to maintain designated habitats in favourable condition, which they define, in part, in relation to a balance of habitat extent.

---

<sup>1</sup> Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000: Section 82

<sup>2</sup> Countryside Commission Policy Statement on Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty 1991

<sup>3</sup> Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora

<sup>4</sup> Primary reason for designation is that it is one of the best areas in the UK for European dry heaths; a qualifying feature is the significant presence of North Atlantic wet heaths.



The UK Habitats Regulations<sup>5</sup> (implementing the European Habitats Directive) require an assessment of plans and policies to determine whether there likely to be significant adverse effects on the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation.

### Habitat Regulation Assessment Statement

The Cannock Chase Joint Committee undertook a Habitat Regulations Assessment of the policies and programmes within this Visitor Management Strategy. This found that two actions in the Visitor Management Strategy (the implementation of a roads management strategy and an access strategy) could have an adverse effect on the integrity of the European sites; but:

- The application of those actions would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site when applied in combination with the objective under which they lie.
- No policy areas would have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site in combination with other plans or projects.

This was the subject of a consultation with the statutory agency during March 2015. On the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Natural England confirmed that there are no elements of the plan to take forward for further assessment.

There is no requirement to undertake an Appropriate Assessment under the Habitat Regulations and the Visitor Management Strategy

### Historic Environment

- 1.6. The AONB has a rich historic and cultural environment, including archaeological remains, historic buildings and landscape features. The landscape we see today is the result of thousands of years of human interaction with the natural environment.
- 1.7. The Staffordshire Historic Environment Record (HER) records over 600 cultural heritage assets within the AONB. These range from prehistoric monuments, such as Castle Ring Iron Age Hill Fort, to well-preserved Great War camps and their training grounds, from a 1000-year old hunting landscape, a medieval Bishops Palace (at Beaudesert) and country estates through to late medieval industrial complexes along the Rising Brook. There are many undesigned heritage assets but the AONB does contain a range of designated assets including six scheduled monuments, 68 listed buildings, four locally listed buildings, two registered parks and gardens and five conservation areas. The remains of the Great War camps and training grounds present on Cannock Chase, while not formally designated, are of national importance. Indeed the remains of the Great War Messines Terrain Model are unique in the UK and rare on the Western Front, so may be of international significance.

### Recreation

- 1.8. The public can walk freely on formally mapped Access Land<sup>6</sup>. Natural England has confirmed some 1,600 hectares (23.3%) of the AONB as open heathland and the Forestry Commission had dedicated 1,730 hectares (25.2%) of its AONB estate as open woodland. Consequently, visitors to the area have the right to access approximately 3,330 hectares of land (48.5% of the AONB) across which they can walk without having to stay on paths. In addition, there is other land amounting to around 800 hectares with access, though not as a right (this includes

<sup>5</sup> The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Statutory Instrument No. 490 as amended by the 2012 amendment regulations (Statutory Instrument No. 1927).

<sup>6</sup> Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000: Sections 4, 15 and 16

National Trust and County Council land). The combination of statutory and permissive access gives the public some 4,000 hectares to explore and enjoy (58% of the AONB).

- 1.9. 'Country Park' is a designation to improve opportunities for the enjoyment of the countryside by the public. The intent is to support informal countryside recreation, the main aim of which is relaxation that requires little in the way of special skill or organization, which lacks any competitive element and which requires a countryside location for its full enjoyment<sup>7</sup>. The criteria for recognition as a country park include being<sup>8</sup>:
- a) readily accessible to pedestrians and by car;
  - b) provided with an adequate range of facilities, including as a minimum, parking facilities, lavatories either within or adjacent to the park, and a supervisory service; and
  - c) operated as a single unit.
- 1.10. Staffordshire County Council created one of Britain's largest country parks in 1980. The Council owns and manages 1,335 hectares (19.5%) of the AONB.

### **Common land**

- 1.11. There are ten registered commons covering some 1,533 hectares (22.4%) of the AONB. The local authorities own the majority of the land, though Defra and a few private landowners do own a part. The legal position concerning common land is confused, though recent legislation has sought to remedy this and unlock the legal uncertainties to allow the better use and protection of commons. Work started in 1965, with the Commons Registration Act 1965, on a register of common land that also recorded the ownership and the rights of any commoners. The public did not have the right to use or enjoy common land if they were not a commoner until the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 gave a right of access on registered common land in England. Commons are vulnerable to abuse, encroachment and unauthorised development, partly because no one person has a dominant interest in its protection. The Commons Act 2006 introduces new, clearer measures for protecting common land from unlawful works and encroachment.

### **Purpose of the strategy**

- 1.12. Partners, working in collaboration, present a consistent visitor management strategy for the AONB, linked to other nearby areas. In particular, they aim to bring consistency across the country park, the Forestry Commission holdings and other publicly owned areas of land that form the majority of the AONB. The visitor management strategy draws together individual management measures in a consistent area-wide approach. It addresses the positive and negative impacts of increasing visitor numbers on the principal task of conserving and enhancing the AONB. In turn, this will help secure the delivery of conservation objectives for natural and cultural heritage assets across the AONB, such as the Cannock Chase SAC and Castle Ring Scheduled Ancient Monument as well as the recreational objectives of Gentleshaw and Shoal Hill commons and the country and forest parks.

---

<sup>7</sup> Countryside Act 1968: Sections 6 and 7

<sup>8</sup> Countryside Commission, Policy on Country Parks and Picnic Sites, 1969 (pp. 3 – 4)

## Using the strategy

- 1.13. This strategy is in three parts. Part 1 sets out the information needed to guide decision making to manage leisure activities within the AONB. Part 2 proposes the priority areas for action to improve the leisure experience. Part 3 presents a programme to deliver those improvements.

## Definitions

- 1.14. In order to present a consistent framework for visitor management, there is a need to understand a few of the nationally recognised concepts and definitions of tourism<sup>9</sup>. In this strategy:
- VISITOR MANAGEMENT is the process of influencing, directing and accommodating the flow of visitors to and within a destination.
  - A VISITOR is a traveller taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed in the place visited.
  - A person is a TOURIST if their trip includes an overnight stay; otherwise, that person is a DAY VISITOR.
  - TOURISM is a movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence; pleasure being the usual motivation.

## Visitor Facts

- 1.15. The last general visitor survey carried out for Staffordshire was in 2005. Heart of England Tourism looked at the broad visitor profile, both day and staying<sup>10</sup>.
- 71% of visitors are Day Visitors and 92% travelled to Staffordshire by car/motorcycle
  - 28% originate from within the West Midlands Metropolitan Area
  - 42% travelled to Staffordshire with their family
  - 52% are classified as ABC1 (middle class)<sup>11</sup>
  - 43% are aged 45 years and over
  - 88% are repeat visitors of which 42% have visited Staffordshire more than 10 times in the past 5 years
  - 89% were on an additional holiday/short break and 62% stayed with friends or relatives
  - 31% of visitors were visiting an attraction and 59% had used a TIC in Staffordshire
  - 25% of visitors stated they liked the countryside/rural nature of the area

<sup>9</sup> After: Office for National Statistics (2010), Measuring Tourism Locally - Guidance Note One: Definitions of Tourism; Visit England (2010), Principles for developing Destination Management Plans

<sup>10</sup> Taken from: Destination Staffordshire (2011), Tourism Review, Strategy and Action Plan for Destination Staffordshire 2011-2014 pp 13

<sup>11</sup> Demographic classifications in the UK refer to the social grade definitions that describe, measure and classify people of different social grade and income and earnings levels, for market research, social commentary, lifestyle statistics, and statistical research and analysis.

- 1.16. There are specific surveys for the AONB. The most recent visitor surveying was organised by the AONB management team and undertaken by the team and volunteers from October 2010 to August 2011. Analysis and proofing was undertaken in 2012 by a specialist consultancy, Lepus. There were nearly five thousand interviews on 30 sites across the AONB. The sites cover a wide geographic catchment and include areas inside the SAC and the main visitor centres within the AONB boundary. The analysis of data uses two key datasets: (i) questionnaire data, and (ii) tally data. The first of these relates to the face-to-face interviews with visitors recorded on Cannock Chase. The tally data came from observation. A third, smaller, dataset consisted of car parking information<sup>12</sup>. A brief summary of the findings is shown in Table 1.

<b>Table 1: Cannock Chase AONB Visitor Survey Analysis 2010-11</b>	
Transportation	77% travelled by car, only 1% used public transport
Age demographics	16% are aged over 60 48% are aged 41-60 36% are aged 18-40
Group Demographics	33% "with family" 24% "with my dog" 19% "with friends" 14% "alone" 8% "with family and friends" 1% "with my horse" 1% "with organised party"
Duration of Visit	29% were up to an hour 32% were 1-2 hours 24% were 2-3 hours 15% were over 3 hours
Historic Perspective	76% had visited the AONB for more than 5 years.
Frequency of Visit	52% of visits are on a weekly basis 71% of visits are up to monthly
Temporal Dimension	58% do not visit at any regular time.
Observed activities	34% Walking 26% Dog Walking 24% Cycling 2% Horse Riding 4% Stay in Car/Car Park (10% Other)
Site popularity (>5% of visitors)	15.3% Birches Valley 11.1% Marquis Drive 6.6% Whitehouse Car Park 6.5% Moor's Gorse 5.5% Seven Springs 5.1% Brocton Coppice Car Park

<sup>12</sup> After: Lepus Consulting (October 2012), 2010-11 Cannock Chase AONB Visitor Survey Analysis: Final Report

Reasons for Visit	14% because of attractive scenery 12% because close to home 12% because good for walking 9% for walking with dogs
-------------------	--

- 1.17. Analysis by Lepus suggests that the AONB receives over 2 million visitors a year. The majority of these live locally. When asked, 51% of the questionnaire respondents gave their home post-code. Of these, 88% had travelled from a distance equal to or less than 15km. This can only be a guide figure as some post-codes can cover a wide area.
- 1.18. Using the raw data and some additional analysis, Footprint Ecology completed a study for the Cannock Chase SAC Partnership as a part of the local authority Local Plan mitigation measures required under the Habitat Regulations<sup>13</sup>.
- 1.19. A high proportion of people interviewed travelled by car. Marquis Drive, Birches Valley and Milford Common were the main destinations, particularly for the 'non-local' users, infrequent visitors and mountain bikers. Away from these locations, car parking seems to be widely scattered across lots of small car-parks. Visitors travel from a wide geographic area. Dog walkers and people visiting to run are particularly local, whereas mountain biking appears to have a regional draw. Groups of friends undertake mountain biking and orienteering. Other activities are more family-orientated or undertaken alone. Mountain bikers tend to stay for a greater length of time than other users (2-3 hours). Cycling, mountain biking and 'eating out' are activities that appear to be particularly orientated towards weekends. Dog walkers tend to visit for a short period (less than an hour) and (together with horse riders) were the user group with the highest proportion of interviewees indicating they visit every day.
- 1.20. The Forestry Commission has completed a range of surveys for its forest parks; there was a survey at Birches Valley in Cannock Chase during 2010<sup>14</sup>. Over 80% of visitors had been to the site before. Visitors were more likely than average to come to the site on a weekly or monthly basis. The site had a higher than average percentage of male visitors (75%). Visitors were also slightly younger than average; most were aged under 34 and less than average were aged over 55 years. Similarly, visitors were more likely than average to be classified as 'Young Independents' (that is, aged 16-34 with no children) and visitors were less likely to be 'Families' or 'Empty Nesters'. Only around a third of visitors had children in the group.
- 1.21. Few visitors said they were staying overnight in the area or visiting the site whilst on holiday. Most of those who provided their postcode said they lived in or around West or East Midlands, with few visitors travelling from further afield.
- 1.22. Over two-thirds of visitors had taken part in cycling / mountain biking either on or off tracks and trails, and other popular activities included using the café or restaurant facilities, using the adventure play area, or using the visitor centre and shop.
- 1.23. Nine in ten visitors said Cannock Chase was either excellent or very good as a place to visit and rated the site as either excellent or very good in terms of how safe and welcoming it is. Visitors' favourite things were the cycle trails and opportunities to cycle, as well as the walks, paths and trails and the beautiful scenery / views.

<sup>13</sup> After: Liley, D. (2012), Cannock Chase SAC Visitor Survey. Unpublished report, Footprint Ecology.

<sup>14</sup> BMG Research (2011), Quality of Visitor Experience Survey: Cannock, Bostock Marketing Group Ltd for the Forestry Commission



## Recreation and tourism trends

- 1.24.** Many organisations publish recreational monitoring data to show how people are using the natural environment but there is very little predictive trend data. However, the Footprint Ecology SAC visitor survey<sup>15</sup> did find that the implementation of the local authority Local Plans might increase visitor numbers to the AONB by as much as 15%.
- 1.25.** Visit England has published domestic tourism trends looking forward ten years. It finds that changes in the population and demographic make-up of England over the next decade will have a transformative effect on society and significant implications for the leisure choices people make. As the economy starts to recover, people will maintain many of their recessionary habits as the importance of value for money, thrift and price will take some time to disappear. Increasing access to technology will empower consumers and allow them to make last minute decisions on a wide range of leisure activities. They will seek control and simplicity. Health and sports based trips will grow and people will convert travel opportunities into leisure trips. Table 2 presents a summary of their findings<sup>16</sup>.

<b>Table 2: Domestic leisure tourism trends for the next decade</b>	
<b>Population and Social Change</b>	
Ageing society	As life expectancy increases, there will be increasing numbers of older people in society. A sharp rise in the number of over-80s will see a generation keen to relax but potentially reluctant (or unable) to travel far
Vertical family	Driven by both rising life expectancy and lower fertility rates, the shape of the family is changing in size, shape and composition. It will not be the traditional 'nuclear' family and leisure businesses need to be flexible and responsive, not prescriptive.
Baby boom	Over the past fifteen years, a sustained rise in the birth rate has caused a mini baby boom.
Untraditional families	New types of family are emerging that includes stepfamilies, gay parents and older parents. Grandparents will be 'younger' than ever before; and retiring baby boomers will prioritise their leisure time.
Changing ethnic profile	There will be a rising number of both BME and foreign-born people. There is a poor understanding of their leisure habits but they are an increasingly large part of the market.
Squeezed middle generation	Amid rises in the number of younger and older people, the number aged 35-49 is falling. They will be time-poor and willing to treat themselves.
<b>Economics and Recession-Led Trends</b>	
Economic stagnation	There will be modest GDP growth over next 5 years but the economy will not reach pre-recession size until the end of 2015.
Complicated downturn	The length and depth of the downturn will ensure that the impact of it on consumer behaviour will last long into recovery.
Consumer confidence	Confidence will rise in reaction to positive economic news tempered by peoples' own situations.
Funding climate	The funding climate at both public and private level will remain tight as the economy grows slowly.

<sup>15</sup> After: Liley, D. (2012), Cannock Chase SAC Visitor Survey. Unpublished report, Footprint Ecology.

<sup>16</sup> After Trajectory Global Foresight (2013), Domestic Leisure Tourism Trends for the Next Decade, Visit England

Discretionary thrift	The trend will be to save money and find bargains even when the consumer does not need to.
Value hunters	Consumers will go to extra lengths in search of cheaper products and better value.
Mercurial consumption	With price an increasingly dominant arbiter of choice for many consumers, loyalty to brands will decline.
Self-preservation society	Consumers' ethical concerns are now closer to home as they deal with the downturn's effect on their own lives. The trend for local leisure will remain during the recovery.
<b>Information and Technology Trends</b>	
Internet access and usage	There will be a broader range of information available to consumers and traditional sources will compete with recommendations from peers.
Mobile first	More people use portable devices than a PC. This intensifies the requirement for businesses to customise their offer to different platforms and utilise apps.
Mobile and Tablet Commerce	New booking and payment systems are developing and mobile technology will change what people expect when on trips.
Social Media	Social media facilitates the easy spread of information between friends and peers, 'word of mouth' will become dominant.
Data and Privacy	Concerns about data privacy represent a major area of concern for consumers but convenience will matter more.
Fear of Missing Out	As consumers access the social lives of peers through social media, they will strive to match the shared experiences and do more in their free time.
Digital Downtime	A short-term trend sees people 'logging out' of digital experiences and leaving their smart phones behind for leisure trips.
Last Minute	Technology is allowing consumers to make decisions later and later. Leisure businesses will have to be as flexible as possible.
<b>Consumer Trends</b>	
Play society	During the recession, people put a high value on leisure.
Demand for control	Higher levels of freedom of choice and control will lead to greater satisfaction for consumers.
Demand for simplicity	With greater choice and more access to information than before, consumers will desire simplicity.
Time poverty and work-life balance	Although there will be more leisure time, trying to do more will create the perception of time pressure.
Bespoke	Consumers will seek personal, tailored products and services.
Cultural capital	Conspicuous forms of consumption have fallen out of favour and consumers will distinguish themselves by learning new skills, so acquiring 'cultural capital'.
Decline of deference	New sources of information will reduce deference to traditional sources, expertise or recommendations and lead to a desire for unique experiences.
From green to clean	The focus of consumers' ethical priorities will be broader than a basic concern about the environment. They will want to see specific actions to secure sustainability.
<b>Tourism Trends</b>	
From visiting friends or relatives (VFR) to leisure	Time poor and cash strapped consumers will look to maximise their leisure spend. They will take more short breaks and turn VFR trips into leisure ones.

Active tourism	Active tourism will grow as a reaction to more sedentary lifestyles, people will 'de-stress' through adventure experiences.
Skills tourism	The desire to acquire new skills and cultural kudos will drive skills tourism.
Health tourism	People will focus on wellbeing to relieve pressures at work and home.
Rural tourism	The countryside will benefit from health and active tourism.
Nostalgia tourism	Driven by uncertainty about the future, nostalgia will link to authenticity and meaning.

## Wider context

1.26. There are trends and changes beyond recreation and tourism that will affect how we manage visitors:

- Climate change outcomes are unknown as there is limited data in respect of the AONB. The prediction is for temperatures in the West Midlands to increase and rainfall to fall in summer and increase in winter. Habitats may change or become more susceptible to recreational pressure. People's leisure habits may change.
- Forest trees may succumb to tree diseases and there could be a significant change in the condition and appearance of the public forest estate. The dominant tree is the Corsican Pine but the fungus *Dothistroma* (red band needle blight) now affects it. The response is to heavily thin the stand to allow more air to pass through the trees. This allows some of the more sensitive tree species that require shade and shelter to become established. This increase in the variety of species will increase the resilience of the forest to both disease and climate change. Leisure restrictions may apply in the short term but enjoyment will increase over time.
- *Phytophthora ramorum*, a notifiable plant disease affecting larch and rhododendron, and *Phytophthora pseudosyringae*, a threat to bilberry, is present around Brocton Coppice and around the Katyn Memorial. Bilberry is a characteristic component of the SAC plant communities, and the condition of the heathland would suffer substantially if they were lost. Wild animals, horses, dogs and their owners are all potential carriers of spores. Visitors are asked to keep to the main tracks, not to stray into the vegetation, and to keep dogs on short leads at all times in the main affected areas.
- Development out from existing settlements may lead to some loss of tranquillity or remoteness. Development beyond but close to the AONB boundary may have an impact on the character of the area by introducing noise, light and movement into the recreational experience of the area.
- Traffic flows may increase due to a tendency for people to work at considerable distance from where they live. This may increase commuter traffic through the AONB and diminish the recreational experience of the area.
- Health issues may rise if environmental quality deteriorates due to increased traffic and development in the area. This may increase emissions of oxides of nitrogen and sulphur, as well as carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and ozone.
- Staffordshire Police report that anti-social behaviour in the AONB is growing. Anti-social behaviour is any behaviour that causes or is likely to cause alarm, harassment, or

distress to any person. It includes a range of negative, selfish and unacceptable activity that affects the quality of neighbourhood life.

- 1.27. This strategy sets out the response to some of these key changes and trends. Change is ever-present. There is a need to anticipate and respond to future change. Yet the focus must be on how to deliver a good leisure experience now, balanced with the need to conserve the qualities that make the AONB worth visiting. The need is for a strong and focussed local partnership that knows how to achieve its agreed goals.

## Stakeholder consultation

- 1.28. A wide range of stakeholders completed a questionnaire and attended workshops during March and April 2014. In addition, there were a series of officer meetings. Consistent messages came out of these consultation events<sup>17</sup>. A synopsis of the findings follows.

### Positive feedback

- 1.29. All who responded cherish the AONB. It is an easily accessible, high quality tranquil landscape, with extensive areas freely available for informal countryside recreation. The visitor finds wildness, freedom and spiritual refreshment. Some call for the creation of a dark-sky park. There is a sense of history and place. The site changes with the seasons, offering ever-changing delights to the visitor.
- 1.30. The AONB comes first out of twenty attractions in Staffordshire on Tripadvisor (there are 334 reviews for 'the Chase', of which only four are below average, the vast majority are excellent). It is a family friendly place where a wide range of recreational opportunities, activities and visitor attractions are in close proximity. Outdoor recreation provides opportunities for people to live healthier lifestyles, escape from the pressures of modern life and promote psychological well-being.
- 1.31. It is easily accessible by car with a good road network linking to the Midland region and ample car parking places on site. There are opportunities to rationalise this provision and so aid visitor management. Bespoke highway design and maintenance schemes could increase safety, reduce traffic impact and enhance the sense of place. A review of the Rights of Way network could develop a hierarchy to direct enhancement and promotion. There is a growing use of way-marked trails, particularly by mountain bikers.
- 1.32. There was a call to embrace public transport as a part of the visitor experience. There is an opportunity to add AONB messages into all buses and provide 'Park and Ride' facilities to take people to visitor hubs. Ramblers and cyclists could avoid covering the same ground by using 'Walk and Ride' routes (or break to journey tickets).
- 1.33. Technology is rapidly changing the way people consider their leisure. An imaginative use of the internet and mobile technology can reach a wide audience and deliver sophisticated messages. There is a need to open up and share information points with the full range of stakeholders working under one banner and to the same agenda. This will ensure consistent and clear messages reach the visitor. Some call for a one-stop-shop to collect and collate feedback for issues affecting the area. This will require a 'Chase Ranger Service' working to one plan, albeit with the staff employed by a range of stakeholders.

---

<sup>17</sup> Craggatak Consulting (2014), Cannock Chase AONB On-line Natural Capital Survey and Cannock Chase AONB Natural Capital Consultation Analysis, unpublished. Copies held by AONB Unit.

- 1.34. Family history and local heritage is one of the fastest growing pass-times. There are opportunities to develop heritage talks and walks linked to literature (e.g. Tolkien) and military activities (e.g. WWI centenary). Organised and themed tours and holidays can help manage visits and minimise transport usage.
- 1.35. There are currently over 170 businesses in the AONB and some 5000 businesses within 3km of the AONB boundary. Some businesses need a high quality sustainable environment whilst others can benefit from sharing an interest in the area with their customers. Commercial opportunities and sponsorship linked to support for conservation can build up productive relationships. There is a suggestion for a Cannock Chase business partnership, using the Staffordshire Environmental Quality Mark to enhance the product<sup>18</sup>. There is a need to encourage the creation, promotion and use of local products.
- 1.36. Investing in facilities attracts people and can steer them away from sensitive sites. There is also scope to develop and promote links to neighbouring attractions and sites.

### **Negative feedback**

- 1.37. There are a range of designations on the site:
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
  - Access Land
  - Special Area of Conservation
  - Sites of Special Scientific Interest
  - Scheduled Ancient Monuments
  - Park and Garden of Special Historic Interest
  - Listed Buildings
  - Conservation Areas
  - Commonwealth War Graves
  - Country Park
  - Registered Commons

There is no clear understanding of the purpose of the various designations and the risk that consideration of each designation is in isolation.

- 1.38. Creeping urbanisation within the AONB and its setting will lead to a loss of character and tranquillity. The effect of small incremental changes is harder to monitor than any proposed significant change. Even though they are of international importance, there is no knowledge of the capacity of habitats to absorb pressure or change. Increasing pressure on the sensitive habitats from population growth and climate change will degrade the ecological quality. Disease or natural disaster may limit leisure opportunities. An example is the Phytophthora infection in Brocton Coppice, or a 'foot and mouth' outbreak.
- 1.39. Visitor information is confusing and occasionally conflicting. There is no coordination of messages with at least seven different websites giving out visitor information. Signage is uncoordinated and not designed to enhance the visitor experience, manage visitor pressures or strengthen the sense of place. There is good information about the visitor but little knowledge of user satisfaction. As the exchange of information becomes instant, especially through social media, it will be harder to influence leisure decisions. Fact-finding may become virtual rather than physical. Digital delivery may require a new infrastructure to deliver local media and services. There is a need for welcome hosts/rangers on the ground.

---

<sup>18</sup> Visit [www.eqm.org.uk/staffordshire](http://www.eqm.org.uk/staffordshire)



- 1.40. People perceive a lack of appropriate on-site management resulting in site degradation and potential fire risks. Facilities for visitors, such as car parks, cafes, toilets and help-points, are of variable, often low, quality. Careful siting of facilities can direct people away from ecologically sensitive areas. The police are recording a rising level of antisocial behaviour in parts of the site. The visitor may not feel comfortable or safe due to a perception or experience of crime and anti-social activities. There is a call for more active ranger services and focused education on countryside issues.
- 1.41. A creeping expansion of formal activities will reduce the sense of freedom and wildness, and may harm wildlife. The development of uncontrolled or regular large events can reduce the sense of tranquillity. There is misuse of facilities, such as cyclists on footpaths or the disturbance of wildlife at night.
- 1.42. There is not enough sense of 'ownership' of the AONB by local businesses. The perception that the land belongs to the public may lead to a resistance to fees and charges necessary to maintain and improve infrastructure and services. There is no co-ordinated 'visitor experience' plan for the site. Vehicle access to and on site is largely uncontrolled and car parking policies are uncoordinated. Public transport links between attractions are either undeveloped or poorly advertised.

### Existing local and wider strategies – who is influencing the use of the area?

- 1.43. The land and facilities on Cannock Chase AONB are not the responsibility of one owner or one manager. There are a number of owners, each with their own ambitions, responsibilities and requirements; and these owners employ a range of managers. Nor does Cannock Chase lie in isolation. Many national, regional and local organisations prepare and implement plans that affect the area either directly or indirectly. Consequently, many plans and strategies direct actions in the AONB. The purpose of this strategy is to encourage collaboration between partners and bring consistency to the management of visitors.
- 1.44. In preparing this strategy, there was a review of a wide range of plans. The list is comprehensive but by no means exhaustive; other initiatives will also affect the AONB. The sample selected is representative; it includes the most significant plans. A list of the plans is in Table 3 and there is an introduction to each of these plans in Appendix 1.

Table 3: List of reviewed plans and strategies	
Local strategies	Wider strategies
Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan	Cannock Chase Council Local Plan
Cannock Chase Country Park Higher level Stewardship Agreement	Lichfield District Council Local Plan
Cannock Chase Country Park Management Plan	SAC Mitigation Strategy
Cannock Forest Plan	South Staffordshire Council Local Plan
Castle Ring Management Plan	Stafford Borough Council Local Plan
Gentleshaw Common Higher level Stewardship Agreement	Staffordshire County Council Local Transport Plan
George's Hayes Nature Reserve	Staffordshire County Council District Integrated Transport Strategies
Shoal Hill Common Higher level Stewardship Agreement	Staffordshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan
Shugborough Estate Higher level Stewardship Agreement	Staffordshire County Council Tourism Economic Impact Assessment
	Staffordshire County Council Tourism Strategy

Shugborough Parkland Management Plan Wolseley Bridge Visitor Site	Strategic Plan for the Public Forest Estate in England Visit England Strategic Framework for Tourism Visit England Rural Tourism Action Plan
--	--

### Local strategies

- 1.45. The local strategies all seek to secure a high quality, sustainable environment and some recognise the need for habitat conservation. Many wish to encourage the public to use and enjoy the land; some seek to make an economic return from such use. A number seek to raise local awareness, understanding and involvement in the natural world. What conflicts there are relate to a lack of knowledge or misunderstanding about the special qualities of the area and the pressures caused by the need to secure resources. Sometimes the driver is to contribute to tourism, the local economy and generate employment opportunities rather than to conserve or enhance the environment. There is little discussion about the capacity of the land to absorb activities without damage to the habitats and the special qualities that are the basis for the statutory designations.

### Wider strategies

- 1.46. The wider strategies generally seek to contribute to economic activity, rural employment and green growth. Access is important, as is the desire to protect and enhance the overall biodiversity and heritage value. They also seek to improve the quality of life, health and learning of local populations. The local authorities do identify Cannock Chase as an important asset and recognise the statutory requirements in their plans. They wish to conserve and enhance the Cannock Chase AONB and maintain the integrity of the SAC. Leisure and access is important. The County Council wants a better signed, maintained and accessible rights of way network. It acknowledges the need for better connections and want to encourage greater use of the network.
- 1.47. The priorities for the county are for local people to be able to access more good jobs and feel the benefits of economic growth, be healthier and more independent, and feel safer, happier and more supported in and by their community. These drive policies but the benefits of a high quality environment are also considered. For example, the local transport plan seeks to minimise the impact of transport on the environment and enhance the landscape through the management and maintenance of the highway network. However, the County Council's objective is to increase in income from the leisure tourism economy by 15.5%. Without a consideration of landscape impacts and habitat capacity, then there may be irreversible change.

### The AONB as a destination

- 1.48. Nearly two million people live within 30 kilometres of the AONB. Cannock Chase is an important year round recreation area, both for daytrips and for the growing population on its immediate fringe. Many footpaths and bridleways cross the area, including Forestry Commission trails and the Staffordshire Way. The number of people coming to the AONB has just about doubled in the last 10 years, with over 2 million visitors enjoying the area each year. Most of these people are local and make many visits. There is a wide range of recreational activities on the AONB, some of which can conflict with one another. These include extensive cycling and walking trails for a range of abilities; including the Sabrina, Heart of England and Two Saints ways. There are Go Ape and Segway courses, campsites and adventure play

areas for children. There are cafes, toilets, retails and hire outlets. The countryside services and forest rangers run a series of event and activities throughout the year.

- 1.49. Along with its beautiful landscape, the AONB has important and unusual wildlife, including the Cannock Chase hybrid bilberry (*Vaccinium intermedium rultie*), Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary butterfly. Rare birds include the Nightjar and Woodlark. Cannock Chase and its associated animal and plant communities are part of an historic landscape dating back thousands of years. Wild deer still roam the area and are probably descended from the original herd introduced in Norman times for hunting purposes.
- 1.50. The AONB retains a rich variety of cultural heritage assets, including its varied historic landscape character of open heathland, country estates and villages. The Chase has a number of nationally important heritage sites, which add to its unique sense of place. Many of these sites, such as Castle Ring hill fort, the Commonwealth and German War Grave cemeteries and the original Great War hut at Marquis Drive Visitor Centre attract visitors to the Chase. Due to the relative fragility and uniqueness of individual heritage assets and the broader landscape, there is a need for careful management to ensure their continued survival and enhancement. Visitor management is particularly important as we enter the Great War centennial period.
- 1.51. Five formal visitor centres serve the AONB. The Cannock Chase Visitor Centre is located at Marquis Drive and there is a Forestry Centre at Birches Drive. There is a fascinating industrial history to the area, where there was once mining, charcoal and glass making. Cannock Chase Museum in Hednesford presents the history of Cannock Chase, and its coal mining tradition. The Wolseley Centre is Staffordshire Wildlife Trust's Visitor and Education Centre, set in 26 acres of landscaped gardens. The historic estate of Shugborough is located on the fringes of the AONB. The estate is set in 900 acres of parkland and riverside gardens with an elegant mansion house, working Victorian servants' quarters, Georgian farm and mill and restored walled garden.

## The Visitor

- 1.52. There is a wide range of material describing the visitors to the AONB. Data comes from Staffordshire-wide surveys, the SAC mitigation studies, on-line surveys, on-site questionnaires and workshops. We know that:
- 52% of visitors are ABC1
  - 85% of visitors stay less than 3 hours
  - 64% of visitors are aged over 40
  - 76% of visitors are on repeat visits
  - 77% of visitors travelled to the area by private car and 1% by public transport
  - 22% of visitors walked or rode to the area
  - 45% of the trips are with family
  - 86% of all activities on site involve walking and riding

In summary, between 80 and 90 percent of visitors are 'day visitors'. They are local and are regular users, living close to the AONB. The remaining visitors are more likely to be 'tourists' staying in, or passing through the area<sup>19</sup>.

- 1.53. Destination Staffordshire identifies four main visitor segments as target groups for information provision in Staffordshire<sup>20</sup>. It bases these on the life-stage insights from Visit England's research and local analysis. Adopting the same segments for the Cannock Chase AONB strategy will support partnership working and building on existing actions. The four segments are as follows:

- Empty nester / early retired couples
- Families with children aged 3-16
- Pre-family friends and couples
- Non-discretionary

The non-discretionary segment is likely to be dominated by tourists but the other three segments could be either day visitors or tourists.

- 1.54. The intent is to present a consistent visitor management strategy for the area, linked to other nearby areas. To achieve this, there is a need to understand what motivates the visitor. The characteristics and desires of Staffordshire's visitor types are summarised in the Table 4.

Table 4: Visitor segments	
Empty nesters / early retired	
Characteristics	Fit with destination
45+ (but typically 55+) Post family (or travelling without children) ABC1 – financially stable	Bias towards heritage, arts and cultural attractions Strong appeal towards days out in the 'great outdoors' Likes 'soft' walking, 'pottering' around / sightseeing
Families with children aged 3-16	
Characteristics	Fit with destination
Aged 25-50 Families with school age children C1C2DE	Attractions and activities – younger families looking for fun and ease but also cost conscious. Older families might be looking for 'bonding' / family time and their activities might be more diverse.
Pre-family, friends and couples	
Characteristics	Fit with destination
Typically aged 25-45 Travelling without children (although they may have them)	Adrenalin attractions and fitness (e.g. orienteering, biking, Go-Ape) Also 'pure indulgence' (e.g. memory shopping and Segway) Like to plan in advance online
Non – discretionary	
Characteristics	Fit with destination

<sup>19</sup> After Lepus Consulting (October 2012), 2010-11 Cannock Chase AONB Visitor Survey Analysis: Final Report – 88% of respondents travelled 15km or less but the consultants warn of inaccuracies when using post-code analysis.

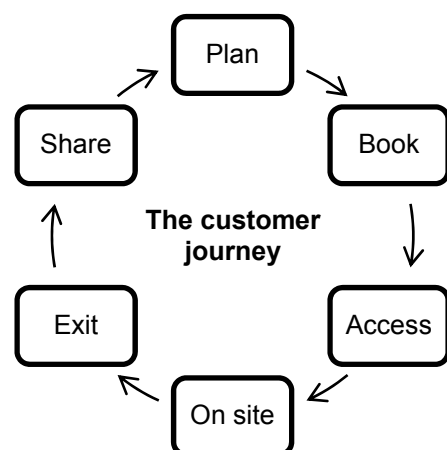
<sup>20</sup> Team Tourism Consulting (2013), Staffordshire Visitor Information Strategy – Action Plan, Destination Staffordshire

Characteristics will vary	<p>These visitors are not necessarily choosing the AONB but coming for a range of 'non-discretionary' reasons (e.g. business trip, wedding, visiting friends or relations, graduation etc.)</p> <p>This group also includes visitors passing through, en-route.</p> <p>Primarily focused on the purpose of their trip but may have some limited 'discretionary' time for other activities</p>
---------------------------	---

- 1.55.** Empty nesters often plan the main elements of the trip at home but they are open to suggestion or repeat visits based on information on site. They use online sources and user-generated content (for example, Tripadvisor) for planning. On site, they prefer to meet information staff and use leaflets, signposting, maps etc. They are not significant users of mobiles or digital sources in the destination but usage is increasing (mainly for 'functional' information).
- 1.56.** Families with children frequently plan the main trip elements in advance (often looking for deals) but they are open to additional information in the destination, particularly around extra activities. Peer group recommendations, including social media, forums such as Mumsnet and user-generated content, influence their planning. On site, they will use both traditional media and mobiles for orientation, maps and information.
- 1.57.** Pre-family group needs will vary. In many cases, they are not open to visiting other attractions and are very focused on purpose of visit (particularly where there is a specific motivation /activity for the visit such as mountain biking or GoApe). They want functional information, such as directions, costs and places to eat. Other groups are more footloose and plan 'on the hoof'. Their information needs will be around potential activities and functional information. For planning a trip, they will use the web and social media. On site they are the most liable to use mobiles, including apps.
- 1.58.** Non-discretionary visitor information needs are most likely to be functional. They want to know where to eat and get directions. There is an opportunity to encourage repeat visits. They plan on-line but on site, they pick up maps and leaflets. They will use visitor centres, displays, signposting and digital sources.

## The Visitor Experience

- 1.59.** For the visitor, the experience is everything. Visitors do not want packaged experiences where they could be anywhere. They want to be treated as individuals, seeing places that celebrate a distinct identity through design, local events, heritage, culture, food and drink. They want a sense of freedom and stimulation. An important concept is the 'customer journey' visitors make. The concept recognises that visitors go through different stages in their planning and visiting – from seeking inspiration to visiting and then recollecting





and sharing their experience in a variety of ways (see diagram)<sup>21</sup>. Understanding this activity is important, as it encourages the making of judgments from the perspective of the visitor.

- 1.60. All visitors make this journey, whether they are regular day visitors or first time tourists. There is a need to put in place an information strategy for each stage linked to each visitor segment. However, the scale and scope of each stage will vary between visitor segments. Regular users may spend little time researching and planning their trip, making it more difficult to influence or modify their behaviours. Word of mouth (the sharing stage) will be a big influence on them. What family and friends say about their last trip to the AONB is important. Though some tourists will act on a whim, many will plan their trip using the internet, tourist information centres and guidebooks. Visitor memories will influence tourists who use internet tools like Facebook and Tripadvisor. The booking stage is quite limited for the AONB experience though it does occur; transport, rooms and equipment are hired, guided events are booked.
- 1.61. By managing this journey, it is possible to increase the visitors' satisfaction and modify their behaviour. Building on the concept, there are six segments in managing the Visitor Experience:
- Managing dreaming and planning
  - Managing any booking processes
  - Managing the journey to the AONB
  - Managing on site experiences
  - Managing the journey home
  - Managing visitor stories

The concept requires managers to understand more about their visitors and engage with them. Delivering a quality experience will create loyal visitors who want to recommend and return to the site. Whilst recreational demands do not lead this strategy, influencing the needs and expectations of visitors will provide a means to deliver visitor management objectives within acceptable environmental limits and encourage compliance with codes of conduct. The diagram below illustrates how to catch the attention and interest of regular day visitors at each stage of the customer journey. It does not attempt to set out a comprehensive plan of action; that would need a considered study.

### Using the Customer Journey to change the habits of regular visitors

The majority of visitors to the AONB are local people who make regular trips; they are likely to be people of habit. They will have a favourite place and activity. It is hard to give such people new information and ideas, as they are not likely to search out information about the site. Their 'planning' was in the past.

#### Dreaming and planning

Use media opportunities and events to publicise essential messages  
Place messages in local newspapers and on local radio and television  
Support creative writers and artists to reflect the agreed vision for the AONB

#### Booking processes

Train all operators to use consistent messages and give agreed advice

<sup>21</sup> After Team Tourism Consulting (2013), Staffordshire Visitor Information Strategy – Action Plan, Destination Staffordshire

Use social media to attract new audiences	
<p><b>Journey to the AONB</b></p> <p>Consistent and thoughtful signposting and gateway design supported by focused traffic management schemes and car parking</p>	<p><b>On-site experience</b></p> <p>Train all site staff to give out consistent and effective information</p> <p>Provide attractive and relevant information and interpretation including through new media such as apps for smartphones and tablets</p> <p>Incorporate essential messages in the decor of cafes, kiosks and toilet blocks</p> <p>Place ticket machines and other functional units within information points</p> <p>On-site staff to engage with visitors</p>
<p><b>Journey home</b></p> <p>Supply consistent leaflets and messages when people return equipment or leave an event</p> <p>Provide opportunities for visitors to offer feedback on their experience</p> <p>Train all site staff to seek and record feedback</p> <p>Design exit signs that reinforce essential messages</p>	<p><b>Visitor stories</b></p> <p>Provide mementoes that reinforce essential messages</p> <p>Actively engage with on-line user generated resources (e.g. Tripadvisor) and respond to user comments to reinforce essential messages</p> <p>Engage in social media forums (e.g. Facebook or Mumsnet) to reinforce essential messages</p>

## 2. FOCUS FOR ACTION

- 2.1. Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a well-used recreational site and has been for many years. However, although the site is relatively compact, its management falls to a number of different bodies in both the public, voluntary and private sectors. There is recognition that visitor management is poorly coordinated and sometimes inadequate to protect the site and enhance the leisure experience. The need is to draw together individual visitor management measures in a consistent area-wide approach. The intent is to present a consistent visitor management strategy for the area, linked to other nearby areas, that conserves and enhances the AONB. In turn, this will help secure the conservation objectives of the SAC and Scheduled Ancient Monument as well as the recreational objectives of the commons and country and forest parks.

### A Vision for Visitor Management on Cannock Chase

- 2.2. Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) will be a welcoming place that offers a wide range of recreational and economic opportunities that conserve and enhance the area's character and special qualities for future generations.
- Visitors and businesses will make a positive and sustainable contribution to the area in support of the management of the AONB and the local economy.
  - Taking part in outdoor recreational activities will improve people's quality of life, health and well-being.
  - More people will have better information about where they can go and what they can do in the AONB.
  - People will have the freedom to enjoy the AONB alongside a personal responsibility for doing so in a way that respects its special qualities and the legitimate activities and interests of other people.
  - Collaboration that works in the best interest of the AONB will address the conflicts between recreational users, residents and the natural environment.

### Aiming for quality

- 2.3. The **AIM** is to deliver a sustainable quality visitor experience. To that end, there are three priorities to impact on the quality of that experience:
- Quality of heritage
  - Quality of opportunity
  - Quality of people

## The quality priorities

### Quality of heritage

#### *Objective*

- To celebrate, conserve and enhance the landscape character, habitats, wildlife and cultural heritage of the AONB by developing a welcoming, informative culture that supports a balance between the sustainability of the area and visitors' enjoyment and use of it.

#### *The current position*

- 2.4. Important both locally and nationally, Cannock Chase is an area of outstanding natural beauty because of its stunning landscape, its history and its wildlife. The AONB is a remote area of high sandstone heather and bracken heathland with birch woodland and extensive pine plantations. There are also areas of designed parkland, sand and gravel quarrying, and mixed agriculture. It is part of an historic landscape dating back thousands of years. It once lay within a great medieval royal hunting forest. Its wild deer are probably descended from the original herd introduced in Norman times. Dissected by secluded valleys, the AONB encloses the last oak remnant of the ancient Cannock Forest.
- 2.5. The heathland, woodland and valley wetland habitats receive protection as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The heaths are the largest surviving area of heathland in the Midlands. Lowland heath is an internationally scarce and threatened wildlife habitat. They are valuable habitats for invertebrates along with the rare nightjar, lizards and adders.
- 2.6. The AONB is an area where the visitor can find tranquillity with a sense of history, place and inspiration that offers freedom and wildness. It is an easily accessible, high quality landscape with extensive areas freely available for informal recreation all year round. There is a wide range of activities and visitor attractions, all in close proximity. It is close to densely populated conurbations with long views and a diverse range of habitats rich in wildlife. It offers spiritual and physical refreshment that supports health, fitness and well-being. Some people like the opportunities it offers to do voluntary work and support nature.
- 2.7. Local people know of the area and pass on knowledge through word-of-mouth. There are many visits by schools, colleagues and universities. Outdoor education centres use the site. The Staffordshire Experience and a host of enterprises promote the site using visitor centres, events, websites, leaflets, newsletters, maps and information boards. There is a wide range of on-site activities. Such communication is of two types:
- One is functional. The visitor receives guidance or instruction. Examples include maps, way markers and codes of conduct.
  - The other is interpretative. This seeks to provoke, rather than instruct, by revealing meanings and relationships. Examples are guided walks, information panels and guidebooks.

2.8. The structure of visiting groups is changing. The different types of visitor have different information needs. Destination Staffordshire identifies four main visitor segments as target groups for information provision in Staffordshire<sup>22</sup>. The four segments are as follows:

- Empty nester / early retired couples
- Families with children aged 3-16
- Pre-family friends and couples
- Non-discretionary

***What could help or hinder us?***

2.9. There is now considerable economic and recreational pressure on this landscape. Many of the natural and cultural assets are fragile. Greater use could be made of the AONB historic and landscape characterisation studies. There is a need to assess the impact of specific leisure activities on the natural and cultural assets of the area. Carefully designed viewpoints and trails can help conserve the sensitive sites whilst adding to the sense of place and time. There is a need to assess the capacity of habitats to absorb visitors without inflicting irreversible harm to the integrity of the conservation interest.

2.10. The Habitats Directive<sup>23</sup> requires Natural England to ensure the protection and favourable conservation management of the SAC. Though current visitor use of the site is high, it is not putting the site in an 'unfavourable condition'. However, the delivery of new dwellings near the AONB in the coming years could increase use of the SAC by 15%. In the absence of a scheme of access management measures, there is a risk of a significant effect on the SAC. The principal impact will be the loss of heather and bilberry to new paths or path expansion, along with the associated erosion of vegetation and soils. Nutrient enrichment from dog waste and horse dung may favour unwanted plants. Measures are required to address actively recreation pressure on sensitive habitats that could degrade ecological quality. There is a need to monitor the cumulative impacts of formal activities to mitigate impacts on wildlife.

2.11. Presenting consistent and accurate information will enhance the visitor experience. Coordinating the messages delivered by partners will reduce confusion and aid site management. Currently, it is not clear where a visitor starts their 'AONB Experience' or what is expected of them once on the site. There is no coordination; visitor messages are confusing and occasionally conflicting. People are aware of the area but do not always understand its environmental value or its maintenance needs. Visitors may be unaware of the impact of their activities on the special qualities of the area. People want simplicity and one voice for the AONB can create a focus and reduce confusion.

2.12. Basic messages need to be consistent across the AONB and easy to find and understand. There is a need for an integrated information and interpretation strategy informed by the customer journey model for each target audience. The style of functional information (such as way marking and directional signs) must be consistent and the design can build on a sense of place. Greater depth must lie behind the basic messages for those that want more and these will be site specific but can follow AONB wide themes and stories. It is important to engage actively with on-line user generated resources and social media forums, responding to user comments to reinforce essential messages.

<sup>22</sup> Team Tourism Consulting (2013), Staffordshire Visitor Information Strategy – Action Plan, Destination Staffordshire

<sup>23</sup> Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora



### ***Risks in meeting our objective***

- Creeping expansion of formal activities will reduce the sense of wildness.
- Resources may be too limited for the actions needed to raise the quality of the experience and enhance the character of the AONB.
- Another crisis such as foot and mouth may divert resources elsewhere.
- Visitors may be unaware of the impact of their actions on the natural and cultural assets.
- Visitor habits may be too in-grained to change.
- It may be difficult to alter established activities or relocate them to less sensitive sites.
- Different operational requirements and cultures among providers may need balancing to enable collaborative working to enhance both landscape and recreation.
- Local businesses may not see the value of a quality standard that demonstrates sustainable behaviour and commitment to the environment.
- There may be an inability or unwillingness to move towards more e-focussed information.
- Bad experiences or negative messages about high prices, poor quality and upsetting incidents may deliver a poor reputation via word of mouth and on social media.

### **Quality of opportunity**

#### ***Objective***

- To balance the desires of the people who wish to enjoy the AONB with the need to deliver a sustainable high-quality visitor experience to all whilst conserving and enhancing its natural and cultural heritage.

#### ***The current position***

- 2.13. The AONB is an important recreation area, both as a traditional Midlands daytrip and for the growing population on its immediate fringe. Some 1.9 million people live within 30 kilometres of the AONB and although not a holiday area as such, peak season sees an ad hoc demand for camping and caravan pitches. The site benefits from good road links to the West Midlands and there is directional signing to the visitor centres. Studies show that people have a very strong preference for natural settings over man-made environments and these preferences cross cultures. People who live in communities that are walkable, have access to bike trails, and are near parks and green space are healthier than those in communities where those amenities are lacking. There is a link between nature and mental well-being.
- 2.14. Many footpaths and bridleways, including Forestry Commission trails and the Staffordshire Way, cross the site. The variety of the landscape with enclosed woodlands and open views over the hills makes it feel larger than it actually is. This helps in its ability to accommodate the many thousands of visitors attracted by its scenery.
- 2.15. The AONB hosts a wide range of events and activities such as walking, horse riding, orienteering, bike trails, horse rides and camping. There are guided walks, self-guided trails, including routes for people with disabilities. Electric scooters are available at Marquis Drive for people with mobility problems, with Segways and off-road driving found in Birches Valley. There are adventure playgrounds, picnic sites, BBQ stands, bird watching areas and a

recently reconstructed Great War Hut. Some facilities are more formal and support concerts, museums, exhibitions, a tree top adventure course, bike hire and service centres, gift shops and cafes. There are many car parks and toilets, including disabled provision.

***What could help or hinder us?***

- 2.16. The majority of visitors travel to the AONB by car but there is no clear starting point for a visit. Uncontrolled parking and congestion are significant concerns as this has a negative impact on the visitor experience. Roads in the AONB are commuter rat-runs with speeding vehicles. Use of vehicles off-road, though not a major activity, damages the land and visitor experience. Cyclists do not always respect the rights of way hierarchy. The cost of parking varies significantly between different operators and causes confusion. The public transport links between residential centres and the attractions in the AONB, and between attractions, are poorly used. In the past, a Hopper Bus service was trialled but it was not successful. Bus services do not seem attractive to visitors. There is no park-and-ride facility within the AONB. Coach drop-off points do not provide a good first impression of the area.
- 2.17. There is a need for an appropriate hierarchy of roads and rights of way and their management must enhance the sense of place. A roads management strategy can enhance the setting of the road network to and within the AONB and manage links with other destinations. Implementing an AONB-wide traffic management and car parking strategy can reduce the impact of motor vehicles on the area's special qualities and protect sensitive habitats.
- 2.18. Though the AONB is relatively small, it has a range of owners and managers each operating independently, often without a full consideration of the implications for their neighbour. There is a perception of disjointed management. Facilities are of variable quality and management practices are inconsistent. There is a need to improve the standard and design of all services and facilities used by the public. Offering good value for money will enhance the visitor experience and encourage repeat visits.
- 2.19. There are opportunities to encourage low carbon-cost leisure activities by developing walking and cycling strategies and reducing car journeys within the AONB. 'Green Gyms' will offer gentle exercise out in the countryside. Some activities, however, directly affect sensitive parts of the AONB. Lights and noise at night disturb wildlife and degrade tranquillity. Poor siting of events and facilities can inflict erosion on fragile habitats. There are indirect effects too; anything that uses fuel is likely to be carbon costly. There is a need for secure cycle storage to enable cyclists to use other attractions or facilities.

***Risks in meeting our objective***

- Different operational requirements and cultures may make it difficult for providers to work together for an improved offer and visitor choice.
- Financial constraints may affect delivery of environmental benefits.
- Changes to provision of facilities such as car parking may be unpopular with regular users.
- Increasing public transport costs make car travel more economical for extended family groups.
- Negative experience of the Hopper Service may deter investment in new experiments.

## Quality of people

### *Objective*

- To encourage and support local businesses and all frontline people to be proud ambassadors of the AONB, understand the needs of the visitors and be knowledgeable about the site and its designations.

### *The current position*

- 2.20. No matter how good the product, if the people delivering services do not have the right attitude, knowledge or skills then the visitor experience is diminished. The welcome on offer and the interaction with visitors influences how they behave and whether they return and make recommendations to friends and families. There are a wide range of people and organisations associated with Cannock Chase who either wish for, or rely on, there being a high quality environment. For some people, this is their business, for others it is a career or a leisure activity. Some people are paid; many are volunteers. The majority are passionate about the environment and many are committed to conserving natural and cultural heritage. They work for, or support, a range of organisations and there are a number of different teams. Only a few of these people are employed to look after the AONB and the other designations.

### *What could help or hinder us?*

- 2.21. Custodians need good information, training and support. Countryside staff are rarely trained as visitor hosts; hospitality and commercial staff experience only their own enterprise. Consequently, not all staff can offer visitors detailed information about the site and its facilities. The justification and implications of the conservation requirements are not widely understood. Population demographics are changing and new cultures are in evidence. There is often a poor understanding of the new needs. There are opportunities to design more coherent and effective support for local teams and businesses that respects the need to secure the purposes of designation and enhances the visitor experience. In turn, this can help build a more inclusive society with employment and skills programmes and projects designed to respond to local need. Enhanced co-ordination of volunteering programmes can widen volunteer opportunities and experience. Shared training and regular communication of key messages will keep all staff up to date.
- 2.22. Funds will always be scarce and it makes sense to pool resources. There is a need to encourage site managers and custodians to work as one team and engage with all who use or benefit from the AONB. Local partnerships that work well can make a significant contribution in improving the effectiveness and responsiveness of service providers. Such partnerships, whether they are informal or formal, co-ordinate objectives, reduce overlap and can deliver tangible improvements in the lives of local people. Equally, many partnerships fail to deliver and simply become a frustrating round of meetings and reports, all taking up valuable resources but delivering little tangible gain for the community. There are five essential practices for effective partnership working<sup>24</sup>:
1. Recognising when to work through partnership and when not to. It takes time and energy to building strong working relationships and secure the different skills needed for working in partnership.

---

<sup>24</sup> After Greengage Consulting – making a breakthrough in local collaborative working

2. Identifying clear goals for the difference the partnership will make and precise actions that the partnership will take to achieve those goals.
3. Creating a climate where partners can be candid about their views and differences in opinion can be explored leading to breakthroughs in the thinking and actions of the group.
4. Ensuring that it is clear who takes decisions and how decisions are made, how the partnership collects information from the range of people it needs to work with and how decisions are communicated so that they result in action and change on the ground.
5. Making sure that people and organisations do what they say they will do and creating a feedback loop on the success or failure of actions to produce results so that the partnership can adjust its plans to produce the results it wants.

2.23. There is a need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty whilst maintaining it as a living, working environment. By encouraging local businesses to secure green accreditation, such as the Staffordshire Environmental Quality Mark or similar, there could be reinvigorated partnerships with the leisure industry that nurture the AONB and create ways for businesses and individuals to support conservation. The Staffordshire Environmental Quality Mark is presented to a business that:

- helps to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of Staffordshire;
- minimises the local and global environmental impact of its activities, safeguarding and protecting natural resources;
- helps customers understand, enjoy and conserve the special qualities of Staffordshire;
- plays an active role in the economic and social well being of local communities within Staffordshire and global communities.

These criteria reflect the purposes of AONB designation.

***Risks in meeting our objective:***

- The hospitality sector needing to develop so it can offer better wages and career progression opportunities, reducing staff turnover;
- Resource constraints placing staff under pressure and affecting customer service and experience;
- Competition and rivalry may hinder an area approach. Visitor-focussed provision requires all sectors to work closely together and a willingness to enhance the reputation of every aspect of the AONB.
- Local businesses may not seek a quality standard that demonstrates sustainable behaviour and commitment to the environment.

### 3. DELIVERING QUALITY

#### Actions

- 3.1. Many of these actions will require further work to determine exactly who will progress them and how. However, they explain the targets for 2015/16. The partnership can achieve much in the next few years but some plans will be much harder to implement and take longer to achieve.

#### Delivery

- 3.2. This framework for action sets out objectives for all who care for or benefit from the Cannock Chase AONB. The AONB Partnership has facilitated the process of developing this framework. It will play a part in its delivery but it needs new partners. To achieve the aim and objectives, all local stakeholders must be willing to support the shared purpose, aims and objectives in the Plan and its key performance indicators. They also need to agree what action they can each take and what their different responsibilities will be.

#### Performance Measurement

- 3.3. A system of measuring performance needs to be in place so that the partnership can measure the progress in meeting the objectives. Natural England and the AONB Partnership already collect some data as a part of their State of the Environment reporting. Some new surveys will need to be commissioned or existing surveys enhanced.
- 3.4. As with any performance measurement system, it will be important to consider the costs of gathering more data against the benefits. The performance measurement method will need to distinguish between outcome indicators that measure long-term overall changes, and input indicators that measure progress in delivering the actions that lead to change. The input indicators will need regular review (quarterly) whilst the outcome indicators need less frequent reviews (annually, depending on the availability of data).

## A framework for action

To be effective, this strategy requires the Partnership to keep its framework for action under regular review. The AONB Partnership will identify champions for each action who will generate momentum. An Action Plan will be refreshed each year using the following template:

Action	Risks	Managing the risks	Journey stage	Timescale	Lead responsibility	Stakeholders	Resources	Progress
Shown below					Completed in the annual Action Plan			

## Cascade of actions

Action n°	Action	Risks	Managing the risks	Journey stage	Timescale				
					Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5
Quality of heritage									
<b>Objective:</b> To celebrate, conserve and enhance the landscape character, habitats, wildlife and cultural heritage of the AONB by developing a welcoming, informative culture that supports a balance between the sustainability of the area and visitors' enjoyment and use of it.									
H1	Develop an AONB opportunity map to grade areas by sensitivity to impact from leisure activities to include effects on tranquillity, flora, fauna and heritage assets; consider linking to an interaction management-planning tool.	Lack of data Lack of IT skills	Share best practice Build on the AONB historic and landscape characterisation studies, National Character Area data and modelling Develop Natural England's Ecosystem Service Tool Agree a SAC Strategic Access and Management Scheme with Natural England	Dreaming & planning On-site					
H2	Assess the capacity of habitats to absorb visitors without inflicting irreversible harm to the integrity of the conservation interest. (Three-year experimental project)	Lack of data Quality control	Build on best practice Use best-fit data Agree a SAC Strategic Access and Management Scheme with Natural England	n/a			→		



## Cannock Chase AONB Visitor Management Strategy (final)

Action n°	Action	Risks	Managing the risks	Journey stage	Timescale				
					Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5
H3	Agree and implement an integrated information and interpretation strategy with all local and regional stakeholders, informed by the customer journey model for each target audience, to ensure a consistent message, increase knowledge of the Cannock Chase designations and promote only areas of the AONB that can absorb leisure activities without any significant harm to the special qualities.	Competition and rivalry may hinder an area approach No consensus on the message Engagement	Develop a sector-wide professional group Tie closely to the customer journey model Secure statutory objectives of designation	All					
H4	Develop and promote a virtual 'one-stop-shop' to link the public with partners and accredited businesses to ensure the consistent and effective management of on-line information and messages.	Competition and rivalry may hinder an area approach Quality control	Develop promotional aspects to win buy-in Develop Customer Relationship Management Skills	Dreaming & planning Booking Visitor stories					
H5	Actively engage with on-line user generated resources and social media forums and respond to user comments to reinforce essential messages and secure feed-back.	Time consuming Virtual becomes disengaged from the physical The AONB may not be the authoritative voice	Develop Customer Relationship Management Skills Circulate findings to all partners	Dreaming & planning Visitor stories					→
H6	Establish a continuous evaluation of the visitors' experience and understanding of the Cannock Chase designations to refine future work programmes.	Time consuming Data not used	Develop automated systems on-site and on-line Regular updates on findings published	Journey home Visitor stories					→
H7	Undertake regular surveys and monitoring to maintain knowledge of visitor activities and preferences	Time consuming Data not used	Regular updates on findings published Engage volunteers	Dreaming & planning On-site					
<b>Quality of opportunity</b>									
<b>Objective:</b> To balance the desires of the people who wish to enjoy the AONB with the need to deliver a sustainable high-quality visitor experience to all whilst conserving and enhancing its natural and cultural heritage.									
O1	Identify gateway visitor centres and coordinate information	Competition and	Establish a sector-wide	Booking					

Action n°	Action	Risks	Managing the risks	Journey stage	Timescale				
					Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5
	and facilities around them. The style of functional information is to be consistent with a design to reflect a sense of place. Greater depth will lie behind the basic messages for those that want more and these will be site specific but will follow AONB-wide themes and stories.	rivalry may hinder an area approach Too costly Seen only as economic assets Investment programmes will not dovetail	management group Develop a prioritised work programme Secure statutory objectives of designation Offer design / best kept centre prize	On-site Journey home Visitor stories					
O2	Review the standard and design of all structures and facilities used by the public; agree an AONB standard to improve the quality of the built environment and reinforce a sense of place; agree and implement an improvement programme.	Providers may put financial gain before environmental benefit.	Establish a sector-wide management group Develop a prioritised work programme Secure statutory objectives of designation Seek regional / national recognition	On-site Visitor stories					
O3	Develop and implement an AONB-wide traffic management and car parking strategy with the highway authority and all stakeholders to reduce the impact of motor vehicles on the area's special qualities and protect sensitive habitats.	Perception of passing on a problem May price people out of the AONB	Engage local communities Agree design and maintenance guidelines Identify cost savings	Journey to AONB Journey home					
O4	Develop and implement a roads management strategy with the highways authorities and all stakeholders to enhance the special qualities of the AONB and manage links with other destinations.	Not a priority in the local transport plan	Engage highway directors and managers at the outset Agree design and maintenance guidelines Identify cost savings	Journey to AONB On-site Journey home					
O5	Develop and implement an access strategy to encourage low carbon-cost leisure activities by developing walking, riding and cycling, and reducing car journeys within the AONB. The style of way marking and directional signs is to be consistent across the AONB with a design to reflect a sense of place.	Unable to create a suitable network Lack of credibility from visitors	Engage transport operators Identify a rights of way hierarchy to prioritise budgets Engage activity groups	On-site					

Action n°	Action	Risks	Managing the risks	Journey stage	Timescale				
					Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5
O6	Where sensitive habitats and sites are at risk from recreational pressure, identify 'Suitable Accessible Natural Green Space' elsewhere both in and away from the AONB and promote its use.	Perception of passing on a problem Lack of infrastructure	County-wide strategy required Engage local authority planning teams	Dreaming & planning					
O7	Undertake a review of the quality of on-line and mobile communication networks across the AONB to enable the effective dissemination of real-time information; agree and implement an improvement programme that does not affect the special qualities of the AONB.	Lack of technical expertise Innovation too rapid to accommodate Resistance to virtual delivery Intrusive infrastructure	Seek best practice examples Work with existing network providers	Dreaming & planning Booking Visitor stories					
<b>Quality of people</b>									
<b>Objective:</b> To encourage and support local businesses and all frontline people to be proud ambassadors of the AONB, understand the needs of the visitors and be knowledgeable about the site and its designations.									
P1	Encourage site managers and custodians to work as one team and engage with all who use or benefit from the AONB to improve efficiency, productivity and site sustainability as well as increased user satisfaction.	Competition and rivalry may hinder an area approach Organisational cultures may block coordination Work programmes will not dovetail	Identify current common priorities Build on national campaigns and codes on conduct Park problem areas for first phase	n/a			→	→	→
P2	Develop and implement a formal accreditation scheme to recognise those local businesses that are committed to safeguarding the special qualities of the AONB and ensuring the sustainability of leisure activities on which so many of their livelihoods rely.	Too bureaucratic Costs out way the benefits Quality control Enforcement	Share best practice Secure champions Build on existing schemes Engage trade bodies and Chamber of Commerce Offer branding and promotional opportunities	n/a					

Action n°	Action	Risks	Managing the risks	Journey stage	Timescale				
					Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5
P3	Commission a brand manual for all businesses and partners to deliver consistent and accurate information about the AONB and build trust with visitors.	Competition and rivalry may hinder an area approach No buy in	Build on Staffordshire Destination Management Planning initiatives Offer advertising and sponsorship opportunities	n/a					
P4	Enhance the training and support for all who conserve or explain the AONB; support staff induction programmes and promote Cannock Chase Ambassadors in local communities.	Quality control Lack of continuity Time consuming Perceived as costly	Engage HR and Community Development staff Build on national initiatives Seek CPD accreditation	n/a		→	→	→	→
P5	Engage with the education sector and promote vocational qualifications at Key Stage 3 to promote careers in countryside management.	Not a priority for the education sector Too long a lead in time	Tie into curriculum development teams	n/a					

## A plan for 2015

Action		Risks	Managing the risks	Journey stage	Timescale	Lead responsibility	Stakeholders	Resources
Heritage 1	Develop an AONB opportunity map to grade areas by sensitivity to impact from leisure activities to include effects on tranquillity, flora, fauna and heritage assets; consider linking to an interaction management-planning tool.	Lack of data Lack of IT skills	Share best practice Build on the AONB historic and landscape characterisation studies, National Character Area data and modelling Develop Natural England's Ecosystem Service Tool Agree a SAC	Dreaming & planning On-site	Year 1	Natural England	AONB Partnership Planning Authorities Developers Business Sector	Under review - subject to Natural England support + time

Cannock Chase AONB Visitor Management Strategy (final)

			Strategic Access and Management Scheme with Natural England					
Heritage 3	Agree and implement an integrated information and interpretation strategy with all local and regional stakeholders, informed by the customer journey model for each target audience, to ensure a consistent message, increase knowledge of the Cannock Chase designations and promote only areas of the AONB that can absorb leisure activities without any significant harm to the special qualities.	Competition and rivalry may hinder an area approach No consensus on the message Engagement	Develop a sector-wide professional group Tie closely to the customer journey model Secure statutory objectives of designation	All	Year 1	Supported by SCC Tourism	AONB Partnership Tourism Sector	£5,000 + time
Opportunity 4	Develop and implement a roads management strategy with the highways authorities and all stakeholders to enhance the special qualities of the AONB and manage links with other destinations.	Not a priority in the local transport plan	Engage highway directors and managers at the outset Agree design and maintenance guidelines Identify cost savings	Journey to AONB On-site Journey home	Year 1	To be agreed with the Highway Authority	AONB Partnership Parish Councils Tourism Businesses	£5,000 to £15,000 + time
People 4	Enhance the training and support for all who conserve or explain the AONB; support staff and volunteer induction programmes and promote Cannock Chase Ambassadors in local communities.	Quality control Lack of continuity Time consuming Perceived as costly	Engage HR and Community Development staff Build on national initiatives Seek CPD accreditation	n/a	Each year from year one	People champion to be agreed	All	£5,000 yr one then up to £1,000 pa or in kind + time

## Appendix 1: Existing local and wider strategies

### Local strategies

#### AONB Management Plan

- 3.5. The Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan is a statutory document and forms an important part in the delivery of services by the local authorities. Local authorities with an AONB in their area must prepare and publish a management plan, and review that plan every five years<sup>25</sup>. There are five relevant local authorities for the Cannock Chase AONB. They are Staffordshire County Council, Cannock Chase Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire Council and Stafford Borough Council. All public bodies have a statutory duty to 'have regard' to the 'purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area'<sup>26</sup>.
- 3.6. The AONB Management Plan (2014-19) Vision is that "by 2034, Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will be an enhanced area of national and international importance in terms of landscape beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, centred on its heaths and woods. Improved management of the whole area will connect the AONB to its surrounding landscapes, biodiversity and people. Conservation and enhancement programmes will bring about a better quality of life for local communities and visitors. Habitats; biodiversity; geodiversity; public access for quiet enjoyment; understanding of the area's fragility and importance; and positive visitor behaviours will continue to thrive under a plan for a balanced and sustainable AONB landscape". In striving to achieve this vision, the Management Plan will aspire to meet seven high level objectives. These are set out in Table 5.

**Table 5: AONB Management Plan High Level Objectives**

1	Develop Cannock Chase AONB as a special, peaceful and tranquil place for everyone who lives in, works within or visits the area.
2	Conserve and enhance the distinctive and nationally important landscape of Cannock Chase AONB and the locally, nationally and internationally important biodiversity and geodiversity it supports, ensuring links between habitats within the AONB and surrounding landscape.
3	Develop a place valued and understood by everyone who comes into contact with Cannock Chase AONB, so that they can contribute positively to the shaping of its future.
4	Ensure a safe, clean and tranquil environment that can contribute to a high and sustainable quality of life.
5	Support a balance between a working landscape where prosperity and opportunity increase, biodiversity flourishes and pressure upon natural resources is diminished.
6	Create a place of enjoyment for everyone, providing opportunities for quiet recreation and maintaining ecosystems that contribute positively to physical and mental well-being.
7	Maintain and develop a successful partnership, working together to manage Cannock Chase AONB effectively.

- 3.7. There is a range of policies and actions relating to visitors and recreational activity to support this Vision. These seek to create a place of enjoyment for everyone, providing opportunities for quiet recreation and maintaining ecosystems that contribute positively to physical and mental well being. There is a wish to support a balance between a working landscape where prosperity and opportunity increase, biodiversity flourishes and pressure upon natural resources diminish. The list of relevant policies is set out in Table 6.

<sup>25</sup> Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000: Section 89

<sup>26</sup> Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000: Section 85



**Table 6: AONB Management Plan Policies relevant to visitor management**

<b>People</b>	
PP1	The importance of the AONB will be communicated clearly and consistently to foster a greater appreciation and respect for the designation.
PP2	Co-ordinated, high quality information, interpretation and educational material will be provided and available to everyone about Cannock Chase AONB to support sustainable visitor management.
PP3	Centres of excellence will be created at the network of local AONB visitor centres to explain the importance of Cannock Chase AONB.
PP4	Communities, visitors and businesses will be engaged actively.
PP5	The Partnership will seek to influence those who control highways and traffic issues to ensure solutions appropriate to the AONB.
PP6	The Partnership will seek management measures that minimise the potential for crime and anti-social behaviour.
PP7	A strategy integrating visitor access and management (including car parking, public transport, walking and cycling) will be developed and implemented.
<b>Recreation</b>	
RP1	Recreation activities will be supported through positive, consistent and area wide management in areas that are the least vulnerable and most capable of absorbing impacts, including other areas nearby.
RP2	New Recreation Policy Integrated strategies will be developed in Partnership to manage visitors, enabling their enjoyment of the area appropriate to its sustainability and linking with other visitor destinations nearby.
RP3	Peace and tranquillity will be protected.
RP4	A welcoming, informative culture will be developed to support a balance between the sustainability of the area and visitors' enjoyment and use of it.
RP5	The Partnership will work closely with those engaged in the preparation and implementation of sustainable tourism strategies and in accordance with the national accord between Defra, National Association for AONBs and Visit England.
RP6	Improvement of the access networks will minimise degradation of sensitive areas.
RP7	Visitors of all abilities will be encouraged to take healthy activity.
RP8	Respect for all those using the area will be improved through provision of information and education.
RP9	Clear signage and a range of physical and virtual interpretation appropriate to the character of the AONB will be developed and implemented to support sustainable visitor management whilst protecting the scenic beauty and quiet enjoyment of the area.
RP10	Partners will create and implement a consistent visitor management strategy for the area, linked to other nearby areas. In particular, consistency will be sought across the publicly owned areas of land that form the majority of the AONB.

### Country Park Management Plan

- 3.8. First published by Staffordshire County Council in 1980 (revised in 1997<sup>27</sup>), the Country Park Management Plan establishes habitat conservation as the priority and recognises that the carrying capacity of the land relates to the conservation requirements. Access levels and types of use must be such that the habitat can absorb them without damage or loss. The plan acknowledges that the demand for access is a secondary consideration. The full list of objectives is set out in Table 7.

<sup>27</sup> Staffordshire County Council (1997), Cannock Chase Country Park Management Plan

**Table 7: Country Park Management Plan Objectives**

<b>Conservation</b>	To maintain and enhance the landscape and biological interests of the Cannock Chase Country Park and to improve heathland management and continue the appropriate woodland management regimes.
	To minimise public pressure on sensitive habitats for plants, birds and other animals.
	To foster public understanding and support for the management regimes required to achieve the objectives.
<b>Recreation</b>	To contain activity to a level and type compatible with the defined zones and with the objectives detailed above.
	To minimise conflict between legitimate users and to restrict activities to those which can be defined as low key countryside activities.
	To minimise penetration of visitors to sensitive areas of the Park without impediment to their statutory rights of access.
	To provide information and guidance on activities and routes with a view to securing responsible, safe and courteous use of the Country Park.

### **Country Park Higher Level Stewardship Agreement**

- 3.9.** Cannock Chase Country Park contains the largest area of unenclosed heathland in the West Midlands, comprising some 1,335 hectares of dry heath, ancient and more recent woodland, grassland, fen, mire and open water habitats. The majority is included in the Cannock Chase SSSI and SAC with a smaller area also designated as a geological SSSI. A Local Nature Reserve includes Brocton Quarry and part of Oldacre Valley. The 10-year Higher Level Stewardship scheme commenced in 2008 and its key objectives are to protect key wildlife habitats and species cited in the SAC and SSSI designations, as well as to conserve and enhance historic features. Work is overseen by specialists within the county council to ensure that all aspects of importance in the country park are given due consideration, including landscape and visual appeal. There are opportunities for teams of local volunteers to participate in practical tasks and the Council's Ranger Service runs educational activities.

### **Cannock Forest Estate**

- 3.10.** By 2020, the Forestry Commission expects the public forest estate on Cannock Forest to attract over 1 million visits each year. Cannock forest is to be a welcoming place that provides excellent value-for-money access. Access on foot, for cyclists, and for horse-riders will be available in most CRoW dedicated areas and will typically be free at the point of delivery. Income derived from car parking and other business opportunities will support the ongoing management of paths and infrastructure. Where resources are available, the Commission will work with local communities and groups who want to develop and manage additional facilities and services where it is appropriate.
- 3.11.** For Birches Valley Forest Centre, the vision is that by 2020, the centre will engage people with trees and forests through active recreation, relaxation, fun events and learning programmes. The Forest Centre is to be sustainable, contributing positively to tourism, the local economy and generating employment opportunities. The centre will provide a range of activities and services that support the Forestry Commission brand values<sup>28</sup>. The range of activities and services are likely to focus on mountain biking, community art, adventurous play

<sup>28</sup> Activity examples include: walking, cycling, natural play, high ropes, horse-riding and electric personal vehicles. Service examples include: equipment hire, catering and retail.

and high ropes experiences. Funding for visitor facilities and face-to-face engagement with the public will come from car parking, entry charges, events and business tenants.

### **Castle Ring Management Plan**

- 3.12. Castle Ring is a 7.75-hectare Scheduled Ancient Monument and Site of Scientific Interest located near the village of Cannock Wood. Castle Ring is the name for a large Multivallate Iron Age Hill Fort around 2,500 years old. It is one of seven large Multivallate Hill Forts in Staffordshire and is the most complete. The ring is owned and managed by Cannock Chase Council. The site management plan (2007-2017)<sup>29</sup> vision is to 'enhance and maintain the intrinsic form and character of the site for the benefit of people and wildlife. This will be in a sensitive manner and one that engenders the original and ancient feel of the site whilst meeting modern day requirements and increasing people's knowledge and understanding of the site and its special features'. Castle Ring has been awarded a Green Flag for the last four years and an application has been submitted for 2014. It is also a Green Heritage Site. The Green Flag Award is one of a number of accreditation schemes that recognises excellence in the management of public spaces. Awards are given on an annual basis and winners must apply each year to renew their Green Flag status. Green Heritage Site Accreditation, sponsored by English Heritage, recognises a high standard in the management and interpretation of a site with local or national historic importance.
- 3.13. There is a large car park and good views across the monument from the top of the main entrance steps. The main path around the top of the monument was created by the Victorians and is mostly flat however there are two gradients, one by the original entrance to the Iron Age hill fort on the eastern side and a second on the western side adjacent to where the Victorian carriage way cuts into the site.

### **Gentleshaw Common Higher Level Stewardship Agreement**

- 3.14. Gentleshaw Common, owned by Lichfield District Council, is located in the southern part of the AONB. It is the sixth largest area of lowland heath in Staffordshire, covering 86 hectares. The Common is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Grade 1 Site of Biological Importance. Early in 2010, the council secured a 10-year Higher Level Stewardship funding to deliver enhanced habitat management. A key component of this work is to increase local awareness, understanding and involvement in the importance of the heathlands and the need for their active management.

### **Shoal Hill Common Stewardship Agreement**

- 3.15. Shoal Hill Common is 73 Hectares of Lowland Heath and Woodland owned by South Staffordshire Council. The area is managed by the Shoal Hill Common Joint Committee and in 1991, the Joint Committee embarked on a 10-year Countryside Stewardship Scheme to restore the declining heathland by instigating a programme of bracken, tree and scrub control and heather rejuvenation by rotational cutting. In 2001, the Joint Committee secured a further 10-year Stewardship Agreement to continue the restoration works. The main aim is to reinstate the open nature of the heathland. This will ensure a rich tapestry of plants and associated animals survive today and for future generations of local people.

---

<sup>29</sup> Cannock Chase Council (2007 updated 2012), Castle Ring: A Large Multivallate Iron Age Hill Fort Management Plan 2007 – 2017

### **Shugborough Estate Plan**

- 3.16. The National Trust was gifted the Shugborough Estate in 1960. The whole site is inalienable and the majority is leased to Staffordshire County Council, who manages the estate and opens it to the public. There are eight Grade I, six Grade II\* and twelve Grade II listed buildings within the park, as well as one Scheduled Monument. Shugborough is included in the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest at Grade I. The park also falls within the Great Haywood and Shugborough Conservation Area.
- 3.17. The estate is a diverse and well-used visitor attraction, offering a unique combination of mansion house, restored servants quarters, county museum collection, working farm, garden and parkland, brought to life through its marketing as the 'complete working estate'. The estimated annual numbers of paying visitors are in the region of 120,000 for both events and day visits (this excludes the use of the sports fields and Outdoor Education Centre).
- 3.18. Natural England has agreed a Higher Level Stewardship Plan to secure environmental benefits from the agricultural activities. A draft woodland management plan for the Shugborough Estate has been prepared by Staffordshire County Council. The National Trust commissioned a new conservation management plan in 2014<sup>30</sup>. Its management objectives are:
- To ensure that the historic parkland character of Shugborough as largely defined by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century is restored and enhanced and becomes a driving factor behind management decisions at Shugborough.
  - To ensure that the significance of the multiple layers of the designed landscape are conserved, enhanced and in some parts restored as identified within this Plan.
  - To protect and interpret the above and below ground archaeology across the park, both known and unknown.
  - To conserve, enhance, interpret and, where appropriate, actively use all aspects of the architectural and built fabric.
  - To conserve and enhance the nature conservation values of the estate.
  - To promote the long history of production at Shugborough, reviewing land management practices to ensure compatibility with the interests of the designed landscape.
  - To ensure that the estate continues to be used and cared for by the local community, comprising its tenants, the surrounding towns and villages, and visitors to the area.
  - To protect the estate and its setting as an entity by actively managing all inalienable land and by maintaining a watching brief on proposed developments which may affect the setting of Shugborough. The development of a setting study should be considered to assist in decision-making.
  - To promote a cohesive network of historic access that encourages the distribution of the visitor throughout the wider landscape.

### **Wolseley Bridge Visitor Site**

- 3.19. Staffordshire Wildlife Trust's 26-acre visitor site at Wolseley Bridge attracts over 30,000 visitors a year through the visitor centre and many more to the grounds. Over the last 11 years, the Trust has used its wildlife expertise to turn the site of a garden park into a haven for wildlife. There are accessible footpaths and a boardwalk that leads over pools, alongside the River Trent, and through woodland and meadows. To enhance the visitor experience there are

---

<sup>30</sup> Cookson & Tickner (February 2014) Shugborough Parkland Management Plan *Final Report*

features such as wildlife sculptures and a natural play trail as well as plenty of wildlife viewing opportunities. The Trust's strategy for visitors is to promote understanding, enjoyment and involvement in the natural world, inspiring visitors to want to value and protect wildlife.

### **George's Hayes Nature Reserve**

- 3.20. Staffordshire Wildlife Trust manages the George's Hayes Nature Reserve on land owned by the Girl Guides Association and formerly part of the old Beaudesert Estate. Covering 19.4 hectares, it consists of two separate woodland blocks. George's Hayes is an ancient woodland and best known for its native wild daffodils. Access is encouraged and there is a small car park.

### ***Wider strategies***

#### **Public Forest Estate**

- 3.21. The Forestry Commission works with others to protect, improve and expand the nation's forests and woodland, increasing their value to society and the environment. The Public Forest Estate seeks to balance the needs of wildlife with the desire for people to use their woodlands for recreation. Forest Enterprise manages the Public Forest Estate with the following aims<sup>31</sup>:
- to make a significant contribution to economic activity, rural employment and green growth;
  - to increase the environmental contribution made by the forest to the range of ecosystem services delivered and to protect and enhance its overall biodiversity and heritage value; and
  - to extend access across the forest and to expand opportunities for communities to become involved with the Estate and take part in activities that improve quality of life, health and learning.

Their corporate vision is:

"As many people as possible, wherever they live, will enjoy and benefit from the public forest estate. Our programmes and activities will help to achieve a new 'woodland culture' enabling people everywhere to connect more fully with the nation's trees and forests so that they understand their importance and act positively to safeguard them for the future".

### **Tourism Strategies**

- 3.22. Visit England is the national tourist board for England. Its role is to grow the value of tourism by working in partnership with the industry. Visit England's vision is 'WISE GROWTH: Growing tourism responsibly in a finite world, creating resilience and prosperity for all'. Visit England intends to increase the value of the nation's tourism by 5% per annum over the next ten years. In consultation with the industry, Visit England launched the first national tourism strategy for England in ten years<sup>32</sup>.

---

<sup>31</sup> Forestry Enterprise (2013) Strategic Plan for the Public Forest Estate in England

<sup>32</sup> Visit England (2010 revised 2011) 'England: A Strategic Framework for Tourism 2010-2020', supported by a Rural Tourism Action Plan 2011

- 3.23. Destination Staffordshire is the Destination Management Partnership for the county of Staffordshire, including Stoke-on-Trent. It is a public/private sector partnership with the aim of attracting more tourists into the county, keeping them there longer and providing the highest standards of customer care. It has been funded to date mainly by Staffordshire County Council with contributions from tourism partners and the Staffordshire district councils together with specific help for rural tourism from the Rural Development Programme for England. Destination Staffordshire provides a range of marketing services for members.
- 3.24. Staffordshire County Council is very active in local tourism development. It recognises the importance and huge potential of the leisure and business tourism sectors<sup>33</sup>. In summary, the County Council's objectives in delivering a strong strategy for the visitor economy are as follows:
- an increase in income of 15.5% in the Staffordshire leisure tourism economy;
  - an increase in income of 13% in the Staffordshire business tourism economy;
  - an increase in employment of 10% in the leisure tourism economy; and
  - an increase in employment of 8% in the business tourism economy.

### **Local Authority Local Plans**

- 3.25. Cannock Chase Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire Council and Stafford Borough Council each produce a Local Plan. These plans set the rules for how the area will develop over time. The Local Plan, along with any neighbourhood plans, forms the overall development plan for the local area. Planning decisions must normally be in accordance with the development plan. The National Planning Policy Framework states that the Local Plan should meet local development needs and reflect local people's views of how they wish their community to develop. It sets out a need to plan for healthy living, quality countryside and recreational opportunities. Each authority has policies in place that support the development of tourism and leisure. They also seek to conserve and enhance the Cannock Chase AONB and maintain the integrity of the SAC. However, there is evidence that proposed development within the Local Plans will result in an increase in the order of 15% in the number of visits to the AONB. This could cause some harm to the habitats if left un-managed.

### **SAC Mitigation Strategy**

- 3.26. In order to maintain the integrity of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a Cannock Chase SAC Partnership was created. The Cannock Chase SAC Partnership comprises of the following authorities and organisations:
- Cannock Chase AONB Unit
  - Cannock Chase District Council
  - East Staffordshire Borough Council
  - Lichfield District Council
  - Natural England
  - South Staffordshire District Council
  - Stafford Borough Council
  - Staffordshire County Council
  - The Forestry Commission
  - Walsall Council

---

<sup>33</sup> Staffordshire County Council (2012), Tourism Strategy, 2012-2014



- Wolverhampton City Council

- 3.27. The objective of the partnership is to use statutory planning processes and specific site and visitor management measures to secure appropriate mitigation for recreation impacts on the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation, thereby ensuring that the integrity of the SAC is maintained.
- 3.28. The SAC Partnership has commissioned a range of reports to provide an up to date evidence base. Following an updated AONB and SAC Visitor Survey during 2010-11, recommendations for mitigation measures were presented<sup>34</sup> including:
- a) Habitat Management
  - b) Access Management and Visitor Infrastructure
  - c) Publicity, Education and Awareness Raising
  - d) Alternative Sites
- 3.29. Following a review of the evidence base by Natural England during 2013, the SAC Partnership is progressing a mitigation strategy focusing on access management and monitoring (encompassing subject areas b and c above). The overall aim is to ensure no net increase in recreation pressure (and ideally a reduction in pressure) and enhancement to the SAC. The visitor management strategy will help to address areas (b) and (c).

### **Transport Plans**

- 3.30. Local councils publish a Local Transport Plan to maintain and improve transport in the area. In April 2011, Staffordshire County Council published the Strategy Plan for Staffordshire's third Local Transport Plan<sup>35</sup>. It sets out the County Council's proposals for transport provision within the county, including walking, cycling, public transport, car based travel and freight, together with the management and maintenance of local roads and footways. Because transport is not an end in itself but rather a way of providing access for people, goods and services, it can impact upon a number of wider issues including the economy, community safety, the environment and health and quality of life. Chapter 7 deals with respecting the environment. It seeks to minimise the impact of transport on the environment and enhance the landscape through the management and maintenance of the highway network. In addition, there are District Integrated Transport Strategies for each District and Borough in Staffordshire. These strategies summarise the transport issues and priorities in each given area.

### **Rights of Way Improvement Plan**

- 3.31. Staffordshire County Council, as highway authority, has the responsibility for recording, maintaining and protecting the 4,400 kilometres of public rights of way within the County. Under Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the county council had a duty to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan by 2007. The purpose of this plan is to give authorities an opportunity to reassess their existing local rights of way network and its relevance to the people who use it now and those who may wish to do so in the future. They considered:
- The extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public.

---

<sup>34</sup> J. White, R. McGibbon & J. Underhill-Day (2012). Impacts of Recreation to Cannock Chase SAC. Unpublished report. Footprint Ecology.

<sup>35</sup> Staffordshire County Council (2011), Local Transport Plan 2011

- The opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of outdoor recreation and the enjoyment of the area.
- The accessibility of local rights of way to the blind or partially sighted people and people with mobility problems.

**3.32.** A Statement of Action is required by statute and forms the basis of a long-term management strategy for the Rights of Way network. Staffordshire has set five key themes.

- A better signed, maintained and accessible path network
- A more connected and safer network
- Encouraging greater community involvement
- Protecting the path network
- Encouraging greater use of the network

### Economic Strategies

**3.33.** The Staffordshire County Council Tourism Team heads a West Midlands ERDF Programme known as 'Staffordshire Visitor Economy Development'. This is a project to accelerate growth in the under-developed Staffordshire visitor economy, generating increased employment levels through activities to improve the quality, performance, perception, awareness, competitiveness, productivity and sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises<sup>36</sup> within the sector. It seeks to increase the volume of day leisure visitor trips from 18.8 million in 2010 to 20.3 million in 2014 and increase the number of staying leisure visitor trips from 1.3 million in 2010 to 1.4 million in 2014. The County Council commissioned a Tourism Economic Impact Assessment<sup>37</sup> that reported on the whole county and each district. A brief summary of the findings is in Table 8.

<b>Table 8: Staffordshire Tourism Economic Impact Assessment</b>		
	<b>Staffordshire County 2012</b>	<b>Cannock Chase District 2011</b>
Number of trips	24.8 million	1.6 million trips
Number of day trips	23.4 million	1.5 million
Number of overnight trips	1.4 million	0.1 million
Bed nights	4.0 million nights	0.3 million nights
Annual tourism spend in the local economy	£1,147 million	£81 million
Value from overnight trips	£198million	£13.1 million
Value from irregular day trips	£949 million	£68 million
Direct tourism related jobs	Approximately 19,942	Approximately 1,500
Additional non-tourism jobs	Approximately 7,915	Approximately 309

<sup>36</sup> Small enterprises employ up to 50 employees, medium-sized enterprises have up to 250 employees: after European Commission Recommendation 2003/361/EC (Official Journal of the European Union L 124, p. 36 of 20 May 2003).

<sup>37</sup> The Research Solution (2012), Staffordshire Tourism Economic Impact Assessment for Staffordshire County Council