



Annual Review

2019-20



'a landscape for everyone'



Landscapes
for life
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THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
Areas of Outstanding
Natural Beauty

Welcome from our Chair

Welcome to this Annual Review for the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership, highlighting just some of our many achievements in the period 1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020.

This has been a hugely significant year for Cannock Chase and the wider AONB family. Nationally, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act – the primary legislation that created our National Parks and AONBs. The Designated Landscapes Review was published on 21 September. It proposes far-reaching changes for the purposes of AONBs and how they are governed and resourced, so that they are fit for the 21st century.

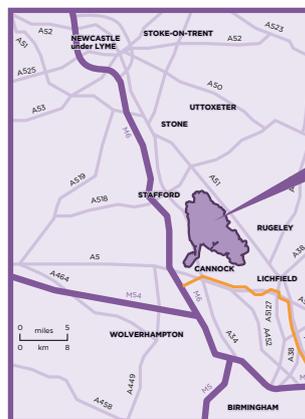
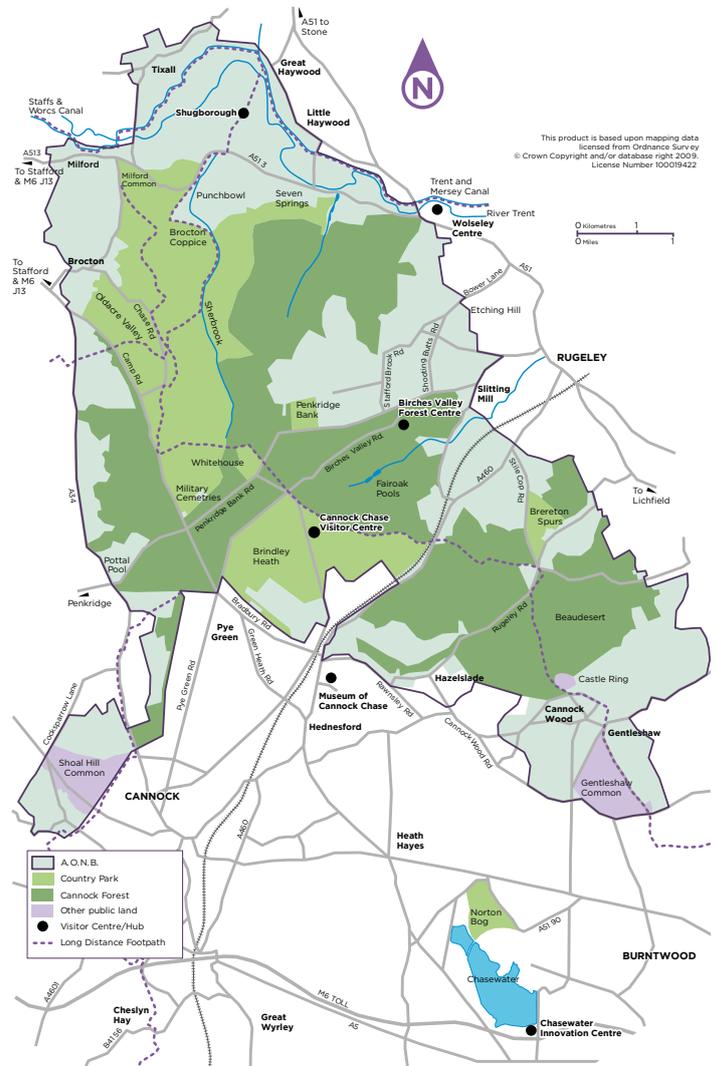
Locally, we are in a strong place to be able to respond to these challenges. We now have an agreed AONB Management Plan, steered by our latest State of the AONB Report. A new AONB staff unit is in post, and is working hard with partners across our Task and Finish Groups delivering an ambitious programme of activities. Their combined efforts are supporting the recovery of nature in the AONB (page 5), improving the scenic quality of our wonderful landscape (page 6), publishing guidance to ensure that development in and around the AONB is of the highest quality and sensitive to natural beauty (page 7), and creating new ways to engage and raise awareness and understanding of Cannock Chase and what we do (page 10).

The year has ended with everyone facing the worry and uncertainty of the coronavirus outbreak. Its impacts are likely to be far-reaching, profound and long-lasting for individuals, families and the nation as a whole. When we come through the present crisis, more than ever before we will need protected landscapes, like Cannock Chase, for inspiration, raising our spirits, and improving our physical wellbeing.

As ever, I thank everyone for their continued co-operation and commitment to the AONB.



Councillor Frances Beatty MBE
Chair, Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee



Cannock Chase

Cannock Chase AONB is situated in the West Midlands within easy access of several large towns.

Wild and Beautiful

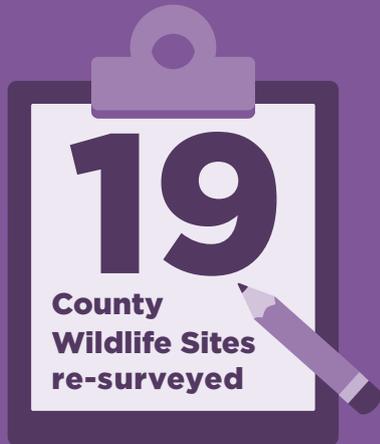
Designated in 1958 and covering 26 sq miles (68 sq kms) of forests, heaths and historic parklands, Cannock Chase is mainland England's smallest AONB.

Cannock Chase AONB Partnership

The AONB Partnership comprises all those bodies and individuals that collaborate to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of Cannock Chase. More information on the Partnership is available at:

www.cannock-chase.co.uk

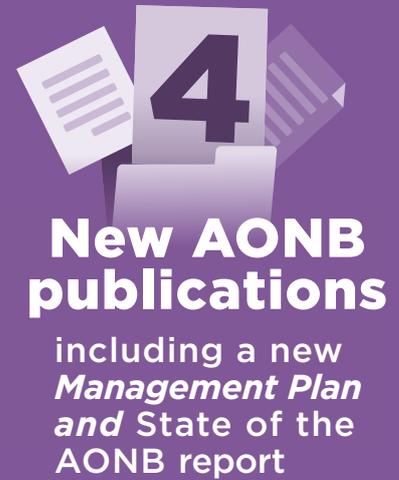
2019/20 in numbers



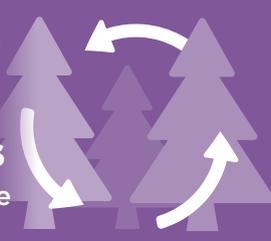
19
County
Wildlife Sites
re-surveyed



3
nature recovery
projects



4
New AONB
publications
including a new
Management Plan
and State of the
AONB report



£19,000
awarded to 6 local
community groups
through the AONB Sustainable
Development Fund



3.5 kms
overhead electricity lines
removed and replaced
underground



27 planning
applications
on which the AONB Unit
has made comments



2,000
volunteer hours contributed



5 e-learning
training
courses
published



£192,000
of National Grid's
Visual Impact Provision
fund secured for habitat
management



22p

Annual resident
cost to support
the AONB

A new Management Plan for Cannock Chase AONB

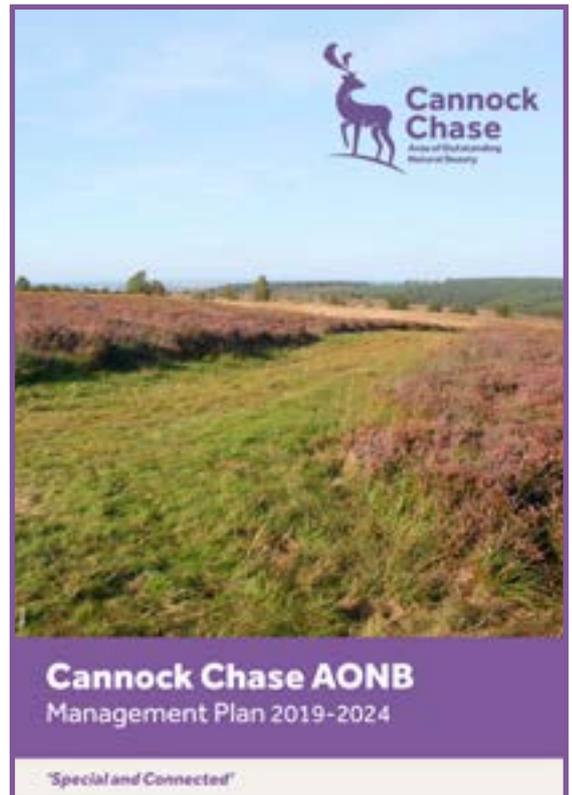
A new AONB management plan launched in 2019 sets out an ambitious agenda to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of Cannock Chase over the five year period between 2019-2024.

Incorporating the views of the AONB Joint Committee and a wide range of public, private and voluntary bodies and individuals, the plan presents an overarching vision for the landscape of Cannock Chase, rather than any individual organisation or partnership.

It is also intended as a guide for everyone involved with the AONB on the actions they can take to help care for and improve the area's natural beauty.

It is available to download at:

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/publications/aonb-management-plan/



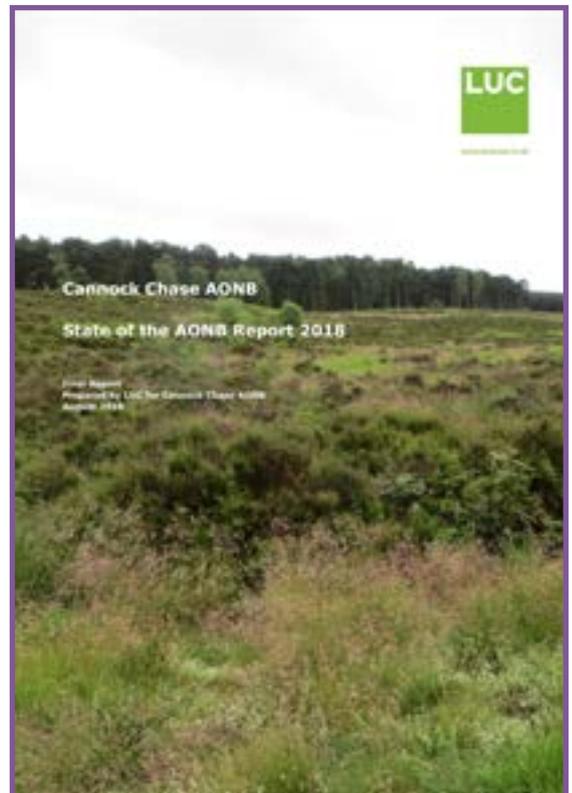
AONB Management Plan

The State of Cannock Chase AONB

The state of the AONB report is a sister publication to the AONB management plan. Drawing on a wide range of environmental and socio-economic data, it provides a snapshot of the state of the AONB, enabling trends to be identified and the reasons behind them to be explored. The evidence base underpins the AONB management plan and provides an updated and comprehensive baseline against which future landscape changes can be monitored.

The state of the AONB report can be viewed as a storyboard or downloaded at:

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/publications/state_of_the_art_aonb/



State of the AONB Report

Nature recovery

The wildlife of Cannock Chase is internationally renowned and locally cherished by residents and visitors. In 2019/20 the AONB Partnership pursued a number of initiatives to protect and recover nature.

Gentleshaw Common into the future

The AONB Partnership was awarded £192,291 from National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative to improve Gentleshaw Common. The project will be delivered by our partner Staffordshire Wildlife Trust over the next six years, and will help make the SSSI buzz with heathland wildlife and a stunning place to visit.

Learning about nightjars

Cannock Chase is a stronghold for the European Nightjar. A partial survey of the Chase, funded by the AONB Partnership and carried out by the West Midlands Ringing Group, recorded 10 nests from which 15 birds successfully fledged. The study provided valuable insights into potential factors that impact on breeding success, such as, disturbance, and is helping to inform the conservation of this enigmatic species on the Chase. It has also produced some wonderful footage of nightjars at the nest, which can be viewed on our website.

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/what-we-do/land-management-and-biodiversity/

A helping hand for the white-clawed crayfish

The Chase also holds nationally important populations of the native white-clawed crayfish. Our local population has been given a helping hand through the creation of artificial reefs and other refugia, and the capture and removal of its alien American cousin - the signal crayfish.

Revisiting County Wildlife Sites

The nature conservation resource of Cannock Chase AONB includes over 20 County Wildlife Sites. During the year, the AONB Partnership commissioned Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to re-survey 19 of them. 13 of the sites retained their designation, 2 were recommended for downgrading, whilst 4 are no longer considered worthy of being designated. The survey identified opportunities for habitat restoration, which will be shared with the landowners.

More, bigger, better and joined up

To help nature recover and spread, the Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan seeks to enlarge and re-connect the remaining heathland areas and reintroduce sustainable management regimes. It is great news, therefore, that in 2019 Staffordshire County Council, working with the RSPB and Natural England, has entered into a new 10 year countryside stewardship scheme to move the open habitats on Cannock Chase Country Park into a 'favourable condition' for wildlife. Works will include heather cutting, bracken and scrub control, as well as reintroducing livestock grazing, which was the traditional way the Chase was managed before the Great War.

The AONB Partnership is also discussing with Forestry England the feasibility of restoring part of the public forest estate to heathland, if an equivalent area of land for compensation tree planting can be found. This long-term project offers the exciting potential to consolidate the major surviving heathland fragments into a single large block, thus improving the resilience of the habitat and allowing for more efficient management. In turn, the new area of compensation planting could provide public benefits, such as, helping to mitigate air pollution and additional access for quiet recreation, potentially reducing pressure on the Chase if located nearby.



Cannock Chase is the West Midlands stronghold for breeding nightjar.

Understanding and protecting our views

Cannock Chase occupies a raised domed plateau of ground offering wide-ranging and often uninterrupted views for many miles, especially to the west. These outstanding views are one of the defining and special qualities of the AONB, and are particularly enjoyed by local residents and visitors alike. Two key initiatives have been undertaken this year to help protect our views.

Undergrounding power lines

The views around Marquis Drive Visitor Centre, one of the most popular venues in the AONB, have been improved by removing and placing underground some 3.5 kilometres of overhead electricity lines. This is part of an ongoing £2.3 million initiative by Western Power Distribution to enhance the UK's protected landscapes.

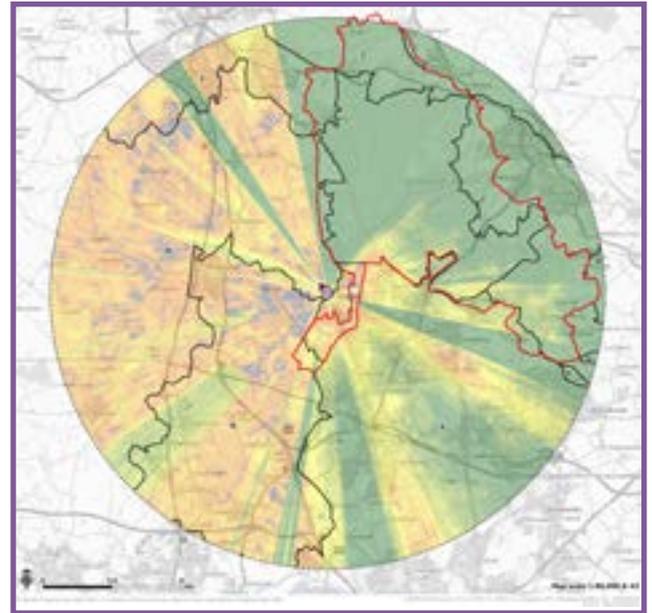
Views and setting guide

A milestone study has been published that defines key representative views and helps ensure that new development is effectively

integrated into its landscape setting when viewed from within the AONB as well as looking towards the AONB from outside it. The guide sets out principles which should be considered by those involved in planning and determining new developments so that they don't detract from people's enjoyment of views from or towards the AONB.

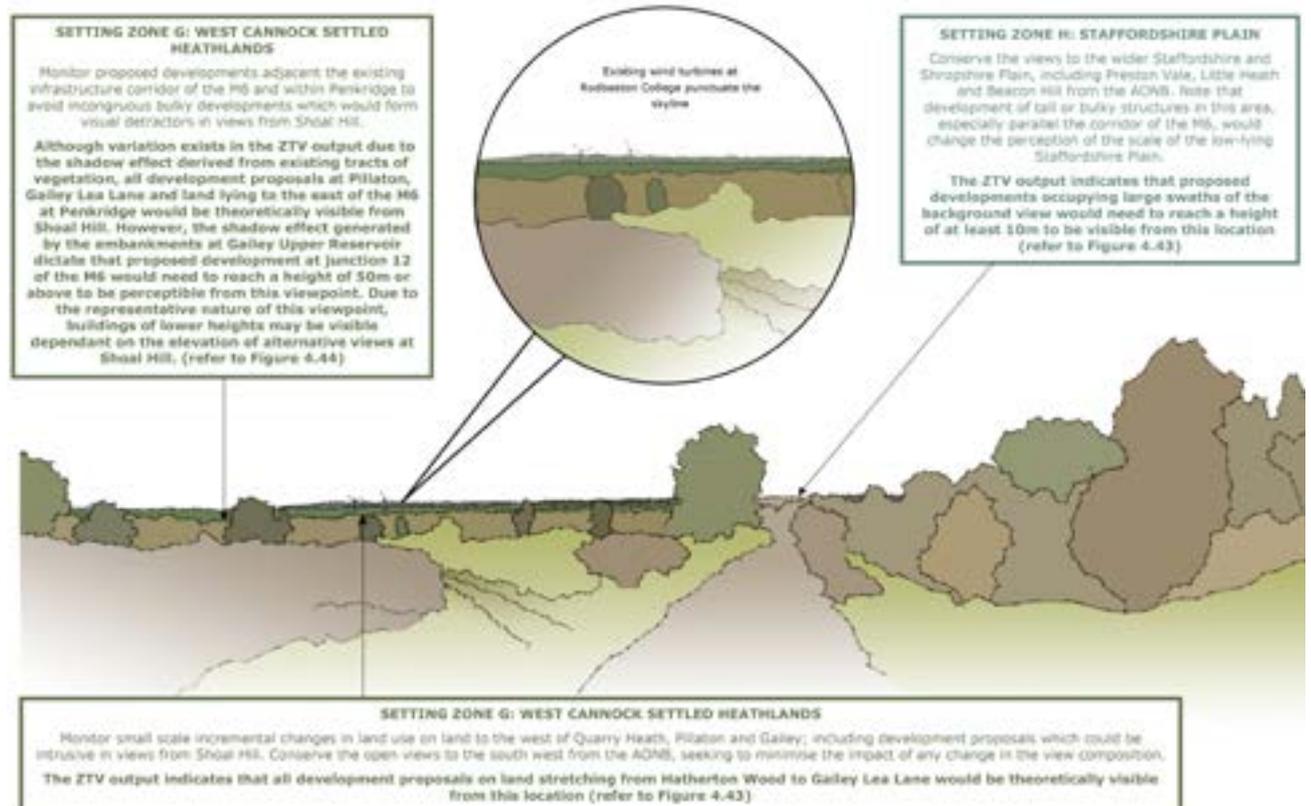
The guide can be downloaded at:

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/publications/technical-documents/



Extracts from Views and setting guide: zone of theoretical visibility from Shoal Hill viewpoint and accompanying advice.

Figure credits: Land Use Consultants



High quality, landscape-led design

Like all AONBs, Cannock Chase is a living and working landscape. To meet local needs there will be a continuing demand for new development and alterations to existing buildings within, and in proximity to, the protected area. Inappropriate and poorly designed development can be detrimental to the natural beauty of the AONB and the character of its settlements. The integrity of the Chase may also come under increasing pressure over the next decades from the cumulative impacts of housing development planned for the surrounding areas.

Building Design Guide

The AONB Partnership has published a new guide for developers, architects and decision-makers to ensure that any development is of the highest quality design and environmental standards, respects local distinctiveness, and is complementary in form and scale with their surroundings.

The Design Guide aims to provide succinct, practical and consistent advice to set clear design expectations for new development within the AONB. It complements, and sits alongside the views and setting guide. The guide will assist anyone proposing building alterations and development needing planning permission, and will also support local authorities in preparing local plans and making planning decisions.

The guide can be downloaded at:

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/publications/technical-documents/



Example of a sympathetic conversion, the original features such as door and window openings and the ventilation holes have been retained. The rooflights are small and discreet. Additions such as the gate are in keeping with the character of the original barn.

HS2 Design Principles

The AONB Partnership has been working with the Trent Sow Parklands HS2 Group to prepare a set of design principles for the construction of the new high speed rail where it passes to the north of the AONB. These were handed over to HS2 in February 2020, and seek to inform and shape emerging designs on certain key elements that will have a high visual impact, including Great Haywood Viaduct, Ingestre Green Overbridge, landscape earthworks, balancing ponds/attenuation features, and planting. The AONB is hosting the web pages for the Trent Sow Parklands HS2 Group, where the design principles are available to download at:

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/what-we-do/trent-sow-parklands-and-cannock-chase-AONB-hs2-group/

Planning protocol

In 2019 the AONB Joint Committee and the AONB constituent local authorities agreed an updated protocol setting out the formal procedure/communication on planning matters within and adjoining or directly affecting the AONB. The protocol aims to improve consistency in different local planning authority's approach to planning issues in the AONB, both in terms of policy formulation and dealing with planning applications.

Advising on development

During the year the AONB was consulted on 2 pre-application discussions; reviewed 75 planning applications; and made comments on 27 which it considered would have an adverse impact on the local landscape character and/or scenic beauty of the AONB, or affect its setting. The AONB also responded to 5 consultations on emerging planning policy and SPDs.



Example of an unsympathetic conversion, the windows, door and gate are out of character with the original barn, an unattractive aerial has been added and some of the original features have been lost. The conservatory and dormer windows are out of character with the original barn.

Understanding the past

Chase Through Time II

The successful HLF funded Chase Through Time project (2016-18) unravelled over 2,000 years of human activity across Cannock Chase using a variety of archaeological techniques, professional expertise and volunteer enthusiasm. 114,268 archaeological features were transcribed during the project, amounting to 565 sites, of which 436 were new to the Staffordshire Historic Environment Record (HER).

The AONB Partnership has completed an assessment of all heritage asset data for the AONB to improve our understanding of their significance, vulnerabilities, suitability for visitor access and interpretation, and the priorities for conservation management. Funding will now be sought to deliver a strategy and project plan for the sustainable management, access, and interpretation of these assets.

This will include a theme focussing on the AONB's numerous historic parklands, and improving their understanding and conservation.

Assessing the condition of heritage assets

As part of a new joint initiative between the Staffordshire County Council Historic Environment Team and the National Trust at Shugborough, ten members of the Chase Through Time volunteer group have received training on assessing the condition of heritage assets in the field. The group will be co-opted into Shugborough's newly created Heritage and Archaeology Ranger Team (HART) which will carry out condition surveys on heritage assets across Shugborough and the wider AONB. They have already started survey work within the National Trust estate and will begin planning surveys in the wider area once the results of the next phase of the Chase Through Time project have been reviewed and finalised. This information will assist landowners and stakeholders to make informed decisions on managing the important and extensive archaeological resource on Cannock Chase.



The 19th century gatehouse is all that remains of Tixall Hall.
Photo credit: Ian Marshall

Improving the visitor experience

Visitor infrastructure and user improvements

The AONB Partnership has worked closely with the Cannock Chase Special Area for Conservation (SAC) Partnership on the preparation of detailed implementation plans to improve visitor management and public education. These plans aim to increase the resilience of the important wildlife habitats on the Chase to the additional visitors expected from the new homes being built in Staffordshire and neighbouring counties over the coming decades. Landowners and key stakeholders can now approach the SAC Partnership for funding for works that comply with the plans.

Communications review and strategy

An independent review has recommended a number of improvements to the AONB Partnership's communication activities. These include: better clarity of purpose, increasing communications capacity, co-ordinating communications activity (particularly with the SAC Partnership), stakeholder management, branding, and digital communications. An accompanying communications strategy has been put in place to support the Partnership to raise the profile of the AONB and the work of the partners, and inspire and motivate people to come together to look after this nationally important landscape.

New look website

Two of the strategy's key recommendations are already being implemented. *The Cannock Chase AONB website* has undergone a major refresh. It is the main source of information and news about Cannock Chase and the work of the AONB Partnership, and now includes a wide range of publications available for download, including the latest AONB Management Plan and State of the AONB Report. The website complements the Cannock Chase visitor hub launched this year by the SAC Partnership, that provides information on events, what to do, attractions, places to eat, and where to stay.

www.cannockchase.org.uk

A place brand for Cannock Chase

The AONB Partnership has also been working with partners and stakeholders to develop an umbrella place brand for Cannock Chase, conveying the message that it is a special place. The design of the new brand captures the essence of the Chase's distinctive, scenic landscape quality with an air of tranquillity and wildness, wide views and open spaces – and that it is a landscape for everyone. The focus will now turn to implementing the place brand in publicity, signage and interpretation.



Wednesday morning Chase Fit Health Walk.

Photo credit: Neil Hudson on behalf of Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles

Inspired learning

Online training courses

A new series of short online training resources has been produced with Inspiring Health Lifestyles to help raise knowledge and understanding of AONBs and Cannock Chase. Developed as part of the Love Cannock Chase initiative, the easy format of the courses makes them suitable for anyone wanting to learn more about our protected landscapes, what makes Cannock Chase so special, and how they can help to look after it.

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/get-involved/

Monitoring landscape change

Cannock Chase has one of the longest-running fixed point photography projects of any AONB in England and Wales. Twice a year since 2005, our volunteers under the expert guidance of Steve Welch, have gone out to photograph the same view from some 56 viewpoints in and around the Chase. This monitoring allows us to identify landscape change on the Chase and to respond accordingly. The project's webpages are now incorporated into the new Cannock Chase AONB website.

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/what-we-do/fixed-point-photography-project/

Life in the Great War training camps

The Great War Hut at Marquis Drive underwent some maintenance and TLC during the year. Our volunteers continue to bring to life what it was like for the training recruits in the great camps on the Chase before they went off to fight on the Western Front.

Annual AONB Conference

Our 2019 Annual Conference held in October at Brocton Golf Club attracted over 75 delegates. In addition to an update and discussion about AONB progress, the conference explored how landowners, local communities, interest groups and user groups on Cannock Chase can come together to ensure that heathlands are part of our future.

Co-ordinating volunteer activities

The AONB Partnership is working with Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles to better co-ordinate volunteering activities on the Chase. The 'Green Volunteer Network' matches-up the volunteering opportunities offered by the different organisations operating on Cannock Chase with members of the public or business organisations who want to volunteer and develop new skills, knowledge and experience.

Sustainable Development Fund

Between 2019-20 the Sustainable Development Fund awarded £18,943 to six community projects. The projects included the preparation and installation of interpretation panel/information boards by Longdon and Brereton and Ravenhill Parish Councils, parkland tree planting on the National Trust's Shugborough Estate, the construction and installation of bird boxes by the Chelmarsh Ringing Group, providing access to the arts and eco-therapy through the Beaudesert Eco Arts Trails, and the development of the Love Cannock Chase initiative by Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles.



Volunteer-led geophysics survey at Castle Ring.
Photo credit: Mary Cartright

www.

www.

National collaboration

Cannock Chase is part of the UK's family of 46 AONBs, and benefits greatly from the breadth of knowledge and experience of fellow AONB officers and Committees, in addition to the strong collective voice provided by the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB).

The Colchester Declaration

Closing the Landscapes for Life Conference in Colchester in July 2019, NAAONB Chief Executive Howard Davies made the Colchester Declaration on behalf of AONBs throughout the UK. The Declaration takes the form of specific targets to increase the scale and pace of nature recovery in AONBs.

Art in the landscape

In 2019, Cannock Chase joined the National Association for AONBs in making a statement of intent to explore how working with artists can inspire visitors to our countryside. £15,000 was secured from the Arts Council England to help AONBs build a nationwide programme of inspiring and thought-provoking artworks in AONBs. This new programme will also enable best practice to be shared across AONBs, increasing collaboration and ultimately giving more people a good reason to visit the countryside time after time.

Designated Landscapes Review

The Government appointed Independent Panel's review of AONBs and National Parks was published on 21 September 2019 and can be found here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/designated-landscapes-nationalparks-and-aonbs-2018-review

As part of the evidence gathering for the review, Cannock Chase AONB Partnership submitted a written response as well as having the opportunity to discuss issues with the Panel's Chair Julian Glover during a visit to the Chase.

The underlying argument of the Review, which covers England, is that our system of national landscapes should be a positive force for the nation's wellbeing.

Central to the proposition is:

- A rephrasing of the purpose(s) of AONBs and their alignment with those of the National Parks
- A restating of the need for closer working between AONBs and National Parks
- The renaming of AONBs as National Landscapes, served by a new National Landscapes Service shared with National Parks
- Strengthening of the focus on nature recovery and engaging people in nature
- A heightened ambition around inclusion, diversity, and delivering for the nation
- A greater voice on development
- Increased funding for AONBs
- The encouragement of a wider range of non-designated systems of landscape protection, which should be members of the national landscapes family and served by the National Landscapes Service

Whilst waiting for the Government's response to the Review, Cannock Chase AONB Partnership has already begun to consider how it can deliver the recommendations.

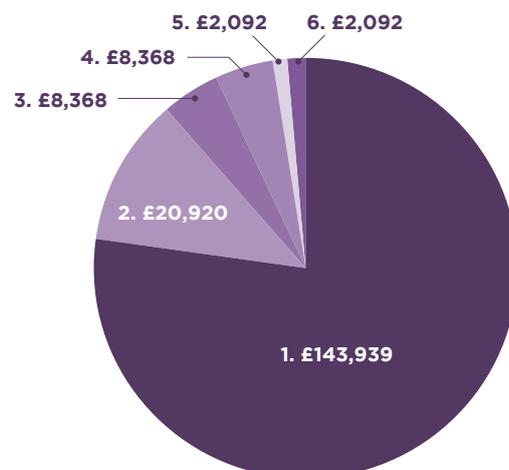


Simon Armitage, National Poet Laureate, at the 2019 National Moment celebrating 70 years of AONBs.
Photo credit: Ruth Colbridge

AONB finances

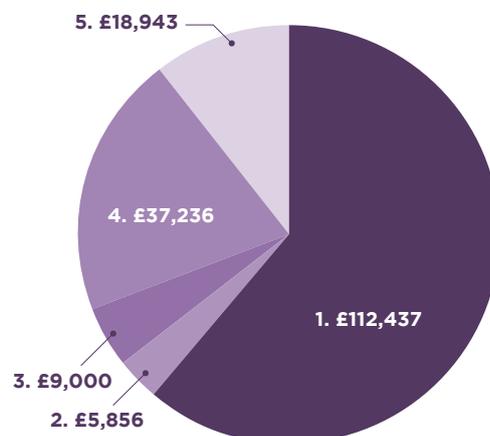
Income

1. Defra	£143,939
2. Staffordshire County Council	£20,920
3. Cannock Chase Council	£8,368
4. Stafford Borough Council	£8,368
5. Lichfield District Council	£2,092
6. South Staffordshire Borough Council	£2,092
7. Transfer to AONB reserves	-£2,308
Total	£183,472



Expenditure

1. Staff and associated costs	£112,437
2. Office equipment and other costs	£5,856
3. Partnership running costs	£9,000
4. Core programmes	£37,236
4. Sustainable Development Fund	£18,943
Total	£183,472



Utilisation of Underspend*

Description	£
Planning guide - views/setting	23,998.00
Planning guide - design	22,770.00
Chase through Time legacy	17,783.00
Online e-learning training courses	2,000.00
Land exchange feasibility evaluation	7,500.00
County Wildlife Sites survey	18,250.00
Crayfish recovery	6,300.00
Nightjar survey	2,268.28
Funding Drawdown from Reserve	97,100.00
Balance - funded from Core Activity in 2019/2020	3,769.28

*In 2019-20 the AONB Partnership has utilised an underspend accumulated on previous years' budgets to deliver a range of activities identified in the AONB Management Plan.

Cannock Chase AONB Unit

AONB Development Officer: Ian Marshall
AONB Land Management Officer: Richard Harris
AONB Landscape Planning Officer: Julia Banbury (part time)

The AONB Partnership



Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is supported by:

Defra, Cannock Chase Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire Council, Stafford Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council, Forestry Commission England, Natural England, Historic England, National Trust, RSPB, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, British Horse Society, Cannock Chase Cycle Centre, Cemex UK Operations Ltd, Country Land and Business Association, CPRE, Friends of Cannock Chase, Hanson Aggregates, National Farmers Union, Ramblers, Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association, Walton Chasers, West Midland Bird Club.



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