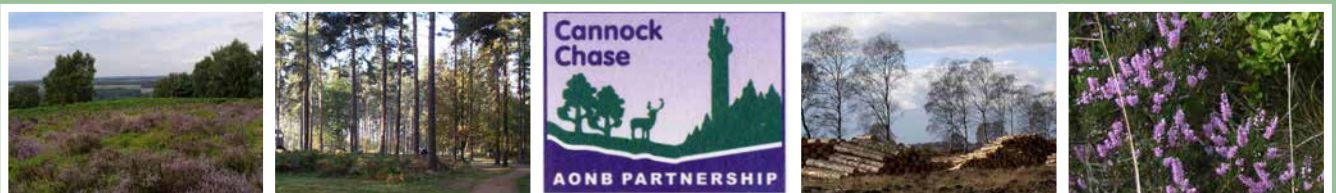


# Cannock Chase

## Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

### Interpretive Strategy 2006

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CANNOCK CHASE AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

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# **Cannock Chase**

## **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**

### **Interpretive Strategy**

### **2006**

*Cannock Chase AONB Partnership*



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## 1. Context

Cannock Chase was designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958. At 68 square kilometres it is the smallest mainland AONB in the UK (see Figure 1). The basis to the designation of the AONB rests on:

- the quality of its landscape which includes tracts of lowland heath that are of international importance and parts of which have been accorded candidate Special Area for Conservation (cSAC) status under the European Habitats Directive; extensive areas of woodland including areas of ancient oak; historic parkland and a working landscape of mixed farming and village settlements.
- the extended history of human occupation that is reflected in a visible legacy that dates from the Bronze Age and which includes subsequent use of the Chase as a royal hunting forest; as an area of medieval industry and later a period of intensive coal mining; as an area of land improvement and 18th century emparkment; and as a site of military training during both the First and Second World Wars.



- the ecological importance of the different habitats, particularly the heathland but also including a diverse range of woodland environments, valley wetlands and agricultural land that together provide habitats for a wide range of flora and fauna, many of which are rare.



*These criteria are reflected in the vision statement for the AONB:*

“By 2024, 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 both habitat and public access will bring an increase in biodiversity and contribute towards a better quality of life both for local communities and visitors.”

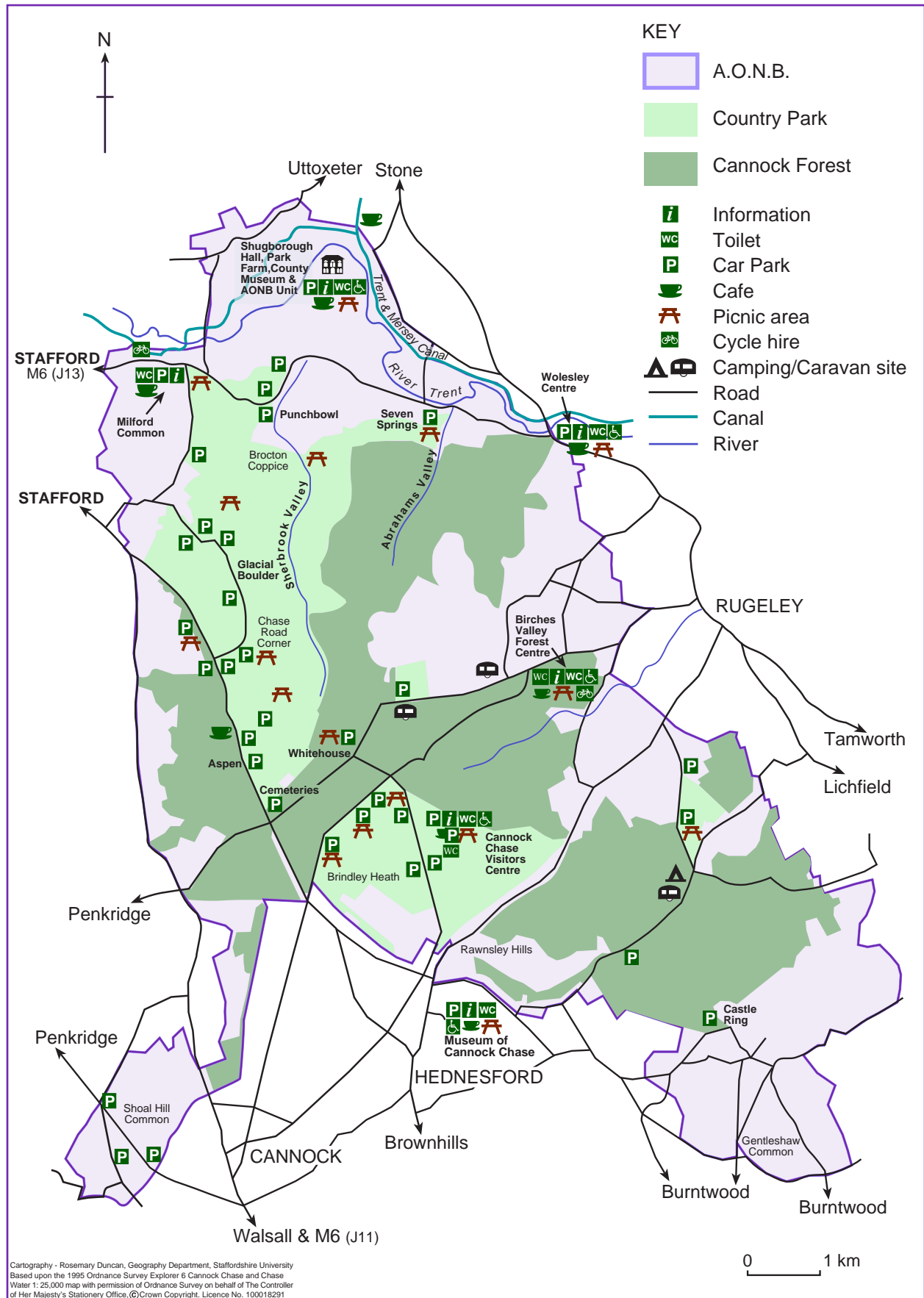
In working towards this vision, the maintenance of the special qualities of the AONB is a central concern. Thus, in addition to a focus upon the maintenance of important landscapes, habitats and historic sites of human occupation, management needs to protect the less tangible qualities of the AONB that are defined as “special”, including peace and tranquility, qualities of wilderness, the aesthetics of attractive, open countryside and the opportunity to engage with nature in its many forms.

However, the AONB is also a working environment with a range of economic activities centred on agriculture, forestry and quarrying and is a popular local and regional destination for recreational trips, attracting around 1.5 million visits a year. Successful management of the AONB is therefore dependent upon effective integration of a range of competing demands with the wider objectives of conservation and enhancement of the AONB.





Figure 1 Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



## 2. The Role of Interpretation

The Interpretive Strategy provides an important medium through which integrative management may be achieved. Interpretation is not simply the provision of information (although information is clearly a part of interpretation) but rather it is a means to affect the way people think and behave through instilling knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the sites that are being visited and an empathy with management objectives. In so doing, effective interpretation will also make a visit more enjoyable and rewarding for the visitor.

### *Effective interpretation needs to be:*

- **thematic**

Themes stay with us even when we forget the facts that support them. They are not topics or subject matter like geology or military history. They are the messages that we want visitors to receive - messages that will help them to connect intellectually and emotionally with the AONB and appreciate and therefore support its protection.

- **organised**

Interpretation should have a logical flow and should not make use of too many messages. (A single, over-arching message and five primary interpretive themes are used within this interpretive strategy). Moreover, messages and themes need to be delivered with consistency and with a positive tone.

- **relevant**

Interpretation should be linked to what visitors already know and to be meaningful, interpretation should use non-technical language and should, if possible, be personalised. When interpretation is made personal, it inevitably becomes relevant.



- **enjoyable.**

Entertainment is not a primary purpose of interpretation, but it is one of its essential qualities. Most visitors to the countryside seek enjoyment and an imaginative approach to interpretation can often make it more fun and thus more memorable.

To be relevant and enjoyable to a wide spectrum of people, interpretation needs to use a wide range of media. Some people learn by reading, some by listening and some by doing, but most people remember more when a variety of senses are engaged. This is an important principle that affects the delivery of interpretive material to the public at large.





It is also important to appreciate that interpretive strategies work through three, related areas of response: emotional, learning and behavioural.

- **Emotional** responses relate to the feelings that visitors experience when they are at, or reading about, a site. For Cannock Chase these might include the enjoyment of the feeling of openness and freedom; the appreciation of the special ecology of the AONB and the wildlife that it sustains; the rewards of recreational participation; or the acquisition of pride and a sense of ownership of the AONB.



- **Learning** responses identify the specific messages that visitors acquire through their visit. These will include important messages about how the experience of nature may enrich our lives and how through interaction with nature, people may acquire an enhanced understanding of, and respect for, the natural environment. The learning approach is also about instilling appreciation of the endangered nature of many of the AONB habitats and the species they support; the role of conservation and land management in maintaining these threatened environments and the special qualities of the AONB; the evolutionary nature of landscape; the role of people in producing the landscape of the Chase and how the actions of people can contribute to the wider objectives of conserving the AONB.



- **Behavioural** responses are the most difficult to achieve but often realise the greatest benefits to managers, especially when more responsive and responsible behaviours become instilled. Important modifications to visitor behaviours on Cannock Chase that the interpretive strategy should address will include wider adherence to codes of good practice (such as avoidance of fire risk, littering, control over dogs and consideration of other users); better observance of legal controls (such as speed limits on roads in the AONB or the prohibition of motor vehicles on footpaths and bridleways); and wider public interest and enhanced opportunities for participation in the management of the AONB that are consistently and actively supported by staff on the ground.



### *3. The Aims of Cannock Chase AONB Interpretive Strategy*

Better interpretation is a stated aspiration of the Management Plan. In striving to achieve the AONB Vision, the Management Plan aims “to develop the sense of Cannock Chase AONB as a special place for everyone who lives in, works within or visits the area” and “to 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”.

This may be achieved through:

- the consistent provision of co-ordinated, high quality information, interpretation and educational material about Cannock Chase AONB that is available to everyone and which aims to explain the importance of Cannock Chase AONB and which supports visitor management.
- the creation of centres of excellence in interpretation through the network of AONB visitor centres.
- active engagement with Cannock Chase AONB communities, visitors, businesses and AONB partners in the development and delivery of the interpretive strategy.

Within these broad objectives, the following specific aims may be identified:

- to raise public awareness about the nature and extent of the AONB and the implications of AONB designation for issues of land management, conservation and public access.
- to ensure consistency in approach to the presentation of AONB policies and objectives to stakeholder groups and the public at large.

- to instil public empathy for the objectives of the AONB and in so doing, exert positive influences on visitor behaviours.
- to enhance public understanding of the special nature of Cannock Chase and the issues that affect the management of the AONB.
- to improve the quality of the visitor experience through increased understanding of the landscapes, environments, history and culture of Cannock Chase and associated opportunities for enjoyment of the AONB.
- to provide a framework within which local people - both individually and collectively - may contribute to the development and presentation of information and interpretation of the AONB, thereby instilling a wider sense of “ownership”.
- to identify appropriate media and technologies for the delivery of interpretation to differing audiences and user groups - including users with established patterns and preferences who do not make use of existing interpretive provision - and to identify the optimal locations for siting of interpretative resources.

The strategy should aim to identify a framework for interpretation that is capable of delivery within the timespan of the current AONB Management Plan (which runs to 2009) but which will remain relevant to the wider needs of the AONB until at least 2015.





## 4. The Key Themes in the Interpretive Strategy

The Interpretive Strategy aims to convey a single, over-arching message that is articulated through five, inter-related key themes, each of which is capable of further development through specific interpretive subjects. Each subject may, in turn, be developed through specific topics, providing a hierarchical framework in which messages and associated information may be arranged. The over-arching message is:

*Cannock Chase is a living, working landscape comprising a complex mosaic of both natural and man-made environments. It is recognised as a conservation area of international significance that is protected by law and is an amenity that is valued by local and regional communities for its qualities of peace and tranquility, its varied habitats and its unusual plant and animal species.*

The five key themes and their associated interpretive subjects that are proposed are:

### Theme 1

#### *Cannock Chase is a protected landscape.*

This theme aims to raise public awareness of the position of Cannock Chase as an AONB and the implications of designation for the development, use and management of the area. Interpretive subjects that may be used to develop the theme should include:

- **What is an AONB?** - which explains the place of AONBs within the framework of designated land in the UK and how the special qualities that form the basis to AONB designation are supported through the law. This subject should also explain how AONB designation affects

issues such as land development and rights of public access.



- **How is the AONB conserved?** - which explains how the AONB is conserved both through the general application of conservation management and the particular use of SSSI and SAC designation to protect important locations and habitats.
- **Cannock Chase as an AONB** - There is a need to provide clear factual information on the physical extent of Cannock Chase AONB, its basic character and, particularly, a précis of the special characteristics that form the basis for its designation. (This latter subject intersects with Themes 2 and 3).



## Theme 2

### *Cannock Chase is a valuable natural landscape*

This theme focuses upon the explanation of the significance and special characteristics of the Chase landscapes and the flora and fauna that inhabit the area. Whilst the presence of rare lowland heath requires particular emphasis, the heathland needs to be placed into the wider context of landscapes of the Chase that includes the different types of woodland and areas of farming. Hence this theme aims to emphasise the interconnections between different ecosystems and encourage an holistic view of the natural components of the Chase. It also needs to raise awareness of the fragility of many of the natural ecosystems and explain the need for their management. It should explain how particular management approaches are designed to work. Interpretive subjects that may be used to develop the theme will include:

- **Vanishing Heathland** - which should trace and explain the disappearance of lowland heaths within the UK and Europe in order to emphasise the significance of the heathland on Cannock Chase and the ways in which it has to be managed in order to conserve what remains.
- **Heathland Wildlife** - which would illustrate both the typical and rare species (both flora and fauna) that inhabit the heath and the significance of the heath as a habitat.
- **The Natural History of Woodland and Plantations** - which aims to complement the interpretation of heathland habitats and their wildlife by illustrating and explaining the ecological qualities of the different woodland environments of the AONB and the contribution that woodland makes to the biodiversity of the AONB.

- **The Natural History of Farmland** - which aims to complement the interpretation of woodland and heathland and raise public awareness of the role of farmland as a key component within the landscape of the AONB.
- **Species At Risk** - a subject based around the illustration of plants and animals that were once indigenous to the Chase but have either been rendered extinct or are threatened with extinction. This theme would raise awareness and reinforce messages relating to the need to work positively to conserve existing species.



- **The Cannock Chase Deer** - given the high levels of public interest in the deer populations of the Chase, a subject theme dealing with the origins, character, behaviour and management of the deer provides opportunity to convey further messages relating to the role of management, whilst also meeting a significant area of public interest.





### Theme 3

#### *Cannock Chase is a landscape of occupation.*

This theme addresses the significant role that people have played in shaping the character of the Chase. There are important messages to be conveyed that the Chase is a heavily modified landscape rather than a purely natural one, and that there is consequently a rich history of occupation and resource exploitation that has shaped the character of the Chase and is still reflected in the contemporary landscape. There are a large number of potential narratives that may be used to develop this theme but key interpretive subjects should include:



- **Early Settlers on the Chase** - which would illustrate the patterns of settlement and related activity of Bronze and Iron Age settlers, with a particular emphasis upon the interpretation of Castle Ring, as well as subsequent Anglo Saxon colonisation.



- **The Medieval Chase** - which provides the opportunity to relate several narratives around the establishment of settlements, developing forms of agriculture, early forms of extractive and metallurgical industry, forest clearance and the Chase as a royal hunting forest.



- **Chase Estates** - which should explain how the actions of major landowners have helped to shape the landscape of the Chase and how the estates at Shugborough, Beaudesert and Tixall were developed and organised.
- **The Chase in the Age of Industry** - explores the role of the Chase in the Industrial Revolution, especially the mining of coal and the development of associated communities and transport infrastructures.
- **The Chase at War** - illustrating the role of the Chase as an area of military training during both the First and Second World Wars, the experiences of the men and women who passed through the camps, and the visible evidence that remains.
- **The Chase Today** - would illustrate and explain the modern patterns of settlement and human activity across the AONB. (This latter subject intersects with Themes 4 and 5).



## Theme 4

### *Cannock Chase is a place of recreation.*

This theme presents an important opportunity to influence visitor behaviours by highlighting those activities that the AONB can accommodate and which are broadly complementary to the principles of AONB designation and the specific qualities of Cannock Chase, and those activities that create conflicts with, in particular, the conservational objectives. Material developed within this theme also has a key role to play in promoting public enjoyment through provision of information on where to go, what to do, what to see and how to recognise landscape features or different species of flora and fauna. Part of this theme should also address the issue of visitor management and associated codes of conduct. Interpretive subjects may include:

- **A Place to Breathe** - which articulates the contribution that the AONB makes to delivering quality of life for local people and the communities in which they live; the special qualities that will appeal to recreational visitors; and the recreational opportunities that Cannock Chase can support.



- **Walks and Trails** - an essential part of the delivery of the interpretive themes (see Section



5) relates to guided and self-guided walks and trails that provide information and explanation of where to walk (or ride) and what to see.

- **Visitor Centres** - although the visitor centres are a primary focus for delivery of interpretation through the concept of the “gateway” (see Section 5), their differing nature and roles within the Interpretive Strategy requires that these functions are themselves explained through interpretation. Visitors need to know what each centre can offer and where to go to explore particular themes.
- **Managing the Visitor** - would aim to explain why visitor management of the AONB is essential to delivering the wider objectives of conservation and protection and how adherence by visitors to codes of conduct/good practice enables everyone to contribute to the preservation of the AONB. It may also be appropriate to appraise visitors of what “sustainable” recreation and tourism actually means in the context of Cannock Chase and to demonstrate how the AONB contributes positively to the local economy.



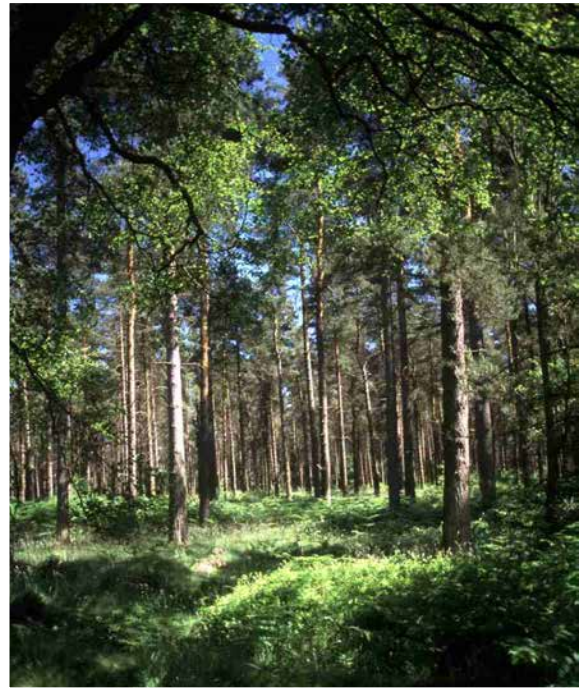
## Theme 5

### *Cannock Chase is a managed, productive landscape*

This final theme aims to raise awareness of the Chase as a working, productive landscape which has evolved through time as the productive economy has changed and which requires on-going management in order to maintain its productive functions. This theme connects with Theme 2 in showing how management is essential to ensuring the long-term conservation of the special qualities of the AONB and also aims to familiarise the public with the organisational structures within which the AONB is managed and how individuals and groups can contribute to this process. Interpretive subjects may include:



- **Modern Forestry on the Chase** - which explains the significance of the AONB as a source of timber supply and the role of the Forestry Commission as a manager of timber plantations. An important aspect of this topic is to explain how plantations are managed and how management approaches aim to balance the needs of production, conservation and recreation.



- **Modern Agriculture on the Chase** - which explains the role of agriculture in shaping the modern landscape of the Chase (including the role of grazing in the maintenance of heathland) and the value of farmland and its associated features (such as hedgerows) to both wildlife conservation and recreational usage.
- **Quarrying on the Chase** - provides explanation of both the historic and contemporary role of quarrying, the uses to which quarried stone, sand and gravel are put and how the management of industry aims to balance commercial demands for minerals with the conservational and amenity remit of the AONB.
- **Managing the AONB** - explains how the management of the AONB is organised, identifies the different agencies whose work impacts upon the Chase and the role of the AONB Unit in bringing together organisations and individuals to ensure the future protection of the landscape.





## 5. Delivering the Themes

The AONB Visitor Survey completed in 2000 revealed that people use Cannock Chase for a wide range of popular outdoor activities and value many different qualities in the AONB. Moreover, although certain favoured locations draw heavy levels of use from both the local and regional populations, the spatial patterns of activity are often complex, with many locations attracting usage. Therefore, the range of key messages that the Interpretive Strategy should deliver, when combined with the diversity of audiences, their associated needs and their spatial patterns of use of the AONB, requires that the delivery of themes is arranged through a range of interpretive media delivered through a number of key, secondary and other locations.

### 5.1 Key Locations

#### 5.1.1 Visitor Centres

At the heart of the Interpretive Strategy are the five, existing visitor centres:

- **Cannock Chase Visitor Centre**  
(Staffordshire County Council)
- **Birches Valley Forest Centre**  
(Forestry Commission)
- **Museum of Cannock Chase**  
(Cannock Chase District Council)
- **Wolseley Centre**  
(Staffordshire Wildlife Trust)
- **Shugborough Estate**  
(Staffordshire County Council/National Trust)

The five centres are fundamental partners in telling the stories of Cannock Chase. Each has a different emphasis and possesses existing strengths in

interpretation based around established themes. Several of the centres are presently undertaking (or giving consideration to) programmes of refurbishment and development, which provides opportunity to integrate new interpretive themes and material into existing provision. The Interpretive Strategy should aim to build on the strengths of each centre by giving each a different focus in the AONB story and to specialise, rather than risk duplication of messages. However, it is essential that each centre should present the same, over-arching messages that relate to the AONB as a whole and that this is achieved with a consistency of both message and style. It is proposed that the general message should comprise:

- the over-arching message given at the head of Section 4;
- the five primary interpretive themes;
- basic guidance on visitor management and any associated codes;
- information relating to the positions and roles of the five centres;
- summary explanation of how the AONB is managed and the roles of the key partners.

Alongside the general message, each visitor centre may have a number of specific messages that reflect the particular focus of the centre in question.

By enhancing the specialist role of each of the centres, the Strategy aims to develop the concept of the visitor centre as a “gateway”. This is intended both figuratively and, in some cases, literally. Hence, each centre can act as a gateway to knowledge and understanding of the themes that the centre is presenting, but where local geography permits, may also act as a point of departure from which visitors may access specific sites, trails or walks where first-hand experience of the presented theme may be acquired.

The thematic focus that is proposed for each of the visitor centres (and which strives to build upon existing practice) are as follows:





**Cannock Chase Visitor Centre is well placed to interpret:**

- Cannock Chase as a protected landscape
- the ecology of the surrounding heathland;
- the Chase as a place of military training during the two world wars;
- the management of visitors.

**Birches Valley Forest Centre is a key site for explaining:**

- the evolving relationships between the landscapes of woodland and heathland;
- the changing priorities of forestry, from timber production to conservation and recreation;
- the wider role of modern resource development, which might also include quarrying;
- the international, national and local ecology of woodland environments;
- the management of visitors and the role of forests in improving quality of life.

**The Museum of Cannock Chase has existing expertise in telling the story of mining and the mining communities that forms a basis for a wider remit for social and cultural history, including:**

- the early settlement of the Chase
- medieval agriculture and industries
- the Chase in the Industrial Revolution

**The Wolseley Centre presents an important opportunity to interpret:**

- the wider ecology of the AONB;
- general elements of natural history;
- the role of designations (nature reserves, SSSI and SAC) in protecting wildlife.



**The Shugborough Estate is an appropriate location to interpret:**

- the role of royal forests and private estates in shaping the AONB landscape;
- modern farming in the AONB.

The matrix in Appendix 1 summarises this arrangement and shows the proposed distribution of responsibilities for promoting both the general messages and the specialist themes amongst the visitor centres.

To try to ensure that the visitor centres maximise their potential as key sites for the delivery of interpretation to the public, it is essential that the provisions within the Cannock Chase Highway Design Guide that advocate clear directional signage from major roads to the visitor centres is fully and effectively implemented.



### 5.1.2 Secondary Locations

In addition to the five visitor centres, selected interpretive material should be made available at a range of other locations at which significant concentrations of visitors are known to be present or at which specific features that will benefit from interpretation are present. These should comprise:

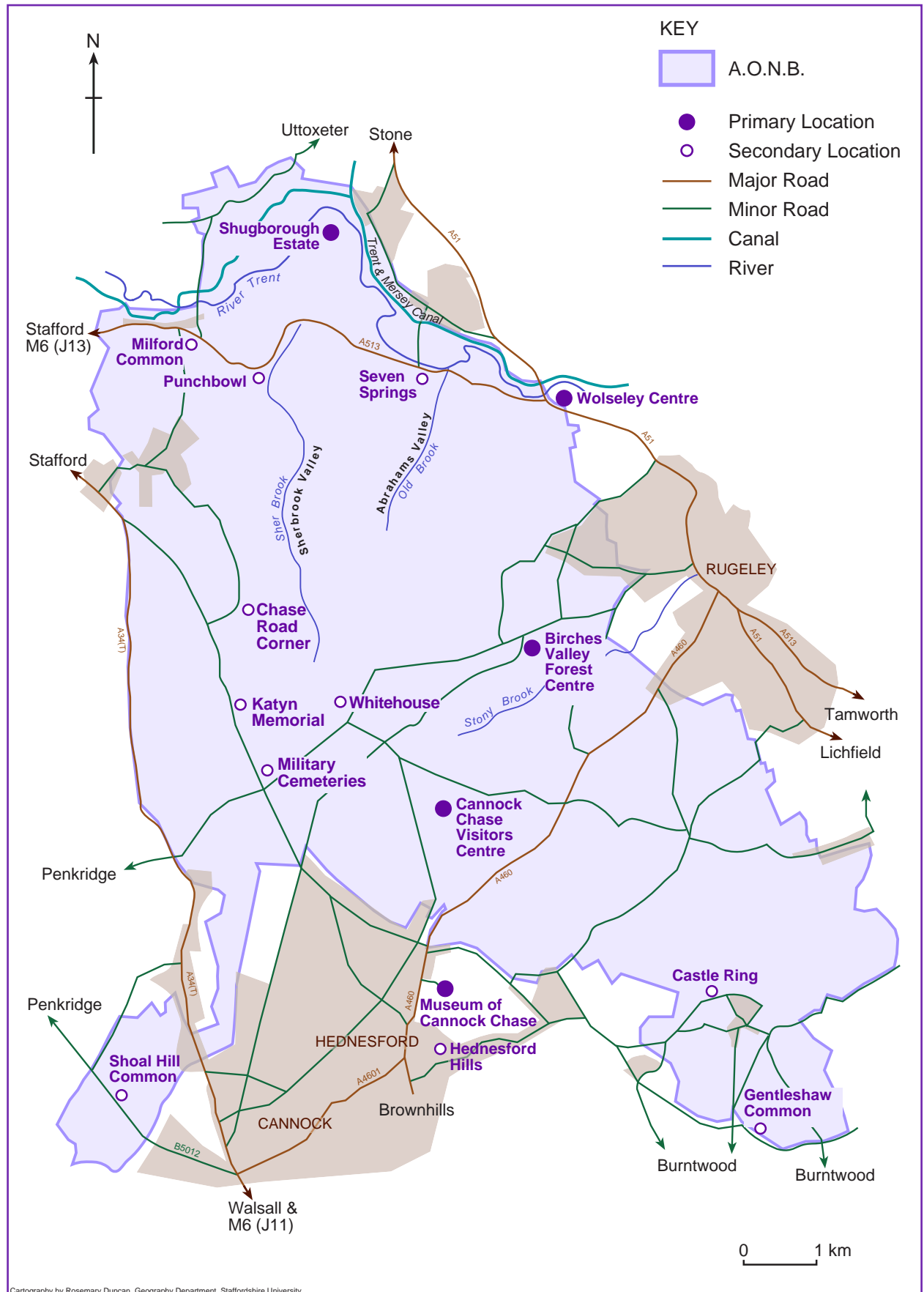
- the Information Point at Milford Common;
- the Commonwealth and German Military Cemeteries;
- Castle Ring;
- Gentleshaw and Shoal Hill Commons;
- Hednesford Hills;
- the Katyn Memorial;
- the principal car parks at Milford Common, the Punchbowl, Seven Springs, Whitehouse and Chase Road Corner.

The arrangement of primary and secondary locations is illustrated in Figure 2





Figure 2 Primary and secondary locations for interpretive media





### 5.1.3 Other Locations

Additionally, consideration will be given to other outlets for interpretive material that will connect with users who are not habitual visitors to the primary and secondary locations identified above, or whom may even assume that interpretive messages are not intended for them. Local press and radio clearly have a part to play in conveying such messages and consideration should also be given to placement of some interpretive material in the villages that surround the Chase - in schools, village halls, community centres, libraries, on parish notice boards and similar public spaces. The AONB Highways Design Guide also proposes that consideration be given to using facilities such as bus stops as locations at which some forms of information (especially orientational material) may be sited.



### 5.1.4 Virtual Locations

Although not a location in a conventional sense, websites offer interpretive resources of very real value, which are now widely accessible to the public at large. A major project within the delivery of the interpretive strategy should be to develop the interpretive capability within the AONB website to deliver a wide range of interpretive messages and supporting information. Ideally these will include:

- the main messages and narratives of the AONB interpretive strategy;
- images and other media that help to convey the special qualities of the AONB;
- a wide range of documents (including maps, guides to all aspects of the landscape, ecology, economy, society and history of the AONB, educational materials, guided walks, codes of practice, advice, factual information and key contacts with both AONB management, partner organisations, appropriate voluntary organisations and user groups). All documents should be capable of being read on-line or downloaded as pdf documents;
- active, reciprocal links to websites of partner organisations, voluntary groups and other agencies whose work impinges upon the use or management of the AONB.

## 5.2 Interpretive Media

The interpretive media to be used in delivering the strategy falls into two primary categories: written/visual media, or spoken/recorded media.

The principal forms of written/visual media that will be deployed are:

- **information/interpretation panels** - which may be used internally in the built facilities of the main visitor centres, or as external features, either at centres or the other locations identified in 5.1.2 (above);
- **publications** - that should include an overall guide to the AONB; a wide range of general and thematic guides that reflect the main interpretive themes and their subjects; a revised and improved AONB map; an AONB Country Code and, where relevant, educational materials for use by schools;



- **on-line media** - as described in 5.1.3 (above);
- **self-guided walks and activities** that relate to primary themes and subjects or may also explore special interest topics.



The principal forms of spoken/recorded media may include:

- **guided walks and activities** led by appropriate individuals or groups, including countryside rangers; members of special interest groups drawn from local communities; or, in some situation, self-guided audio trails;
- **video or cinematic presentations** within visitor centres;
- **inter-active**, touch-screen computer presentations in centres;
- **performing arts** projects and/or community art.

In all cases media need to be developed in ways that take into account the special needs of specific groups within the community (including all categories of disability) and where particular target groups are proposed, for example school children, materials must be aligned with their learning needs and capabilities.

To facilitate effective delivery of the different interpretive media, a training programme for relevant staff and volunteers aimed at developing interpretive and presentational skills should be developed and implemented.





### 5.3 AONB Identity

In all aspects of interpretive provision, materials should be designed to promote a consistent and recognisable identity for the AONB. Central to the promotion of identity are:

- development of a more prominent design for the AONB boundary marker and, as recommended in the Highways Design Guide, placement of markers at all entry points to the AONB;



- also in line with recommendations in the Highway Design Guide, the adoption of a common approach to the signing of villages and other places in the AONB which promote

AONB identity through integral use of a logo or standardised form of wording that draws attention to the AONB;



- development and installation throughout the AONB of an AONB design for signage of footpaths and bridleways that include - where necessary - supplementary symbols that relate to themed, self-guided walks;
- development and application of a single, distinctive “house style” for AONB publications and literature;
- development and application of an equivalent style for other interpretive media, such as information panels.

It is recognised that in some situations, the corporate needs of individual partners may preclude or modify the application of AONB identity to interpretive media or signage, however this is not felt to be an issue that negates the broad principles outlined above and which should be applied wherever possible.





## 6. Key Projects

This section summarises the key projects that should be developed to implement the Interpretive Strategy. However, before any projects may be implemented, agreement must be reached within the Partnership on who will take responsibility for the management and delivery of each of the projects and a timeframe in which actions should be completed.

Project	Priority	Timescale
To re-establish the Visitor Centres Managers Group as a key forum for the development and implementation of the Interpretive Strategy.	High	With immediate effect
To develop a programme of authorship of new interpretive materials that reflect the five primary themes of the interpretive Strategy and which draw on a range of subject experts and local people to create informed and relevant narratives.	High	Within one year
To develop the role of the visitor centres as primary sites for the delivery of interpretation of the AONB, ensuring both consistency of message and clear presentation of specific interpretive themes, as appropriate to the primary role of each centre.	High	Within 3 years
To develop the “gateway” concept as a means of connecting the five visitor centres to the AONB.	Medium	Within 3-4 years
To develop an interpretive website and supporting materials within the AONB website.	High	Within 2 years
To develop new programmes of guided and self-guided thematic walks and trails and revise and update existing provision.	Low	Within 3-5 years
To develop and apply a corporate style for AONB signage, publicity and materials.	High	Within 2-3 years
To develop and implement a standard design for orientation and interpretive panels to be deployed at key locations.	High	Within 2-3 years
To pursue commercial sponsorship as a means of financing parts of the Interpretive Strategy, especially where the commercial interests of sponsors relates to specific areas of interpretation.	High	On-going with immediate effect
To implement a training programme in interpretive and presentation skills for key staff and volunteers involved in the interpretation of the AONB.	Medium	Within 3 years
To develop and implement a programme of work aimed at raising awareness of the AONB amongst minority or low usage groups.	Medium	Within 2 years
To develop appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of interpretive media.	High/Medium	Within 2 years



## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are an essential part of the process of planning, implementing and improving interpretive provision. It helps managers to understand if the interpretive, or management objectives, are being met, if the target audience is being reached and if the messages are really being understood and appreciated. It will also reveal areas of success and areas for improvement.

interpretive objectives - did the intended message get across? Questions such as “Do the readers understand the concepts and terminology?”; “Are the graphics clear?” or “Does the panel attract AND hold their attention?” may also be answered.

This technique is particularly important when designing and building interactive exhibits. Creating



### 7.1 Pre-Testing: A Valuable Technique

Pre-testing is a cost-effective way of evaluating interpretation before high levels of resources are committed. Production techniques available to organisations allow for reasonable quality graphics and images to be placed before audiences as part of a pre-testing process.

Small quantities of leaflets can be produced and distributed for feedback - not just on design, colour and readability but the all important testing of the

prototypes and inviting school and adult groups to use, and experience, exhibits and then test their understanding of what it is trying to do is particularly valuable. It can often identify ‘weaknesses’ in either the message or the exhibit design which can be rectified with benefit before it is completed and installed.

Pre-testing will take time and money but it should be seen by all involved as an opportunity to get queries and misconceptions solved before commissioning expensive interpretive media.





## 7.2 Evaluation Techniques

Once interpretive media are commissioned they should be subject to periodic evaluation. Evaluation is needed to ensure that the approach remains relevant, that media such as interpretive boards remain in good condition; that content and style continue to reflect the aims of the organization; and that visitors continue to be satisfied, enlightened and inspired. Targets are needed that ensure interpretation contributes to the way visitors react and behave, and performance measures need to be developed. It is important that prior to the application of performance measures, work is completed to establish the baseline position against which changes in behaviour may be assessed. Thereafter, possible performance indices may include:

- increased website use;
- increased purchase of publications;
- increased requests for information;
- increased local conservation activity;
- increased attendance at AONB events;
- increased interest in local products.

To achieve this, the strategy should include a range of provision for evaluation. At managed sites valuable feedback may be obtained through use of self-completion or interview questionnaires, which should aim to include qualitative measures on changes in attitudes, feelings and perceptions. Focus groups may also provide an effective method for acquiring evaluations of public responses to interpretive media. Observations on how visitors react to on-site interpretation should be collated.

For remotely managed sites without regular staff cover, arrangements should be made periodically to survey or question visitors about any fixed media. These might include feedback forms for printed material as well as staff or volunteer surveys. First-person media such as walks or talks will be easier to test through direct questioning and the handing out of simple questionnaires.



Virtual visitors can be tested more subtly through web counters and other feedback mechanisms and prompts.

Other approaches that might also be deployed may include any, or all, of the following:

- auditing by an expert;
- direct measures of behaviour;
- observation of audience attention;
- length of viewing or listening time;
- self-testing devices;
- focus groups;
- suggestion boxes.





## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1: Proposed distribution of responsibilities for interpretive themes

<input type="checkbox"/> Interpretive Themes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Specialist Subjects					
<b>Interpretive Themes and Subjects</b>	<b>Cannock Chase Visitor Centre</b>	<b>Birches Valley Forest Centre</b>	<b>Museum of Cannock Chase</b>	<b>Staffordshire Wildlife Trust</b>	<b>Shugborough Estate</b>
<b>Overarching message</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Cannock Chase is a protected landscape</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>What is an AONB?</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
<i>How is the AONB conserved?</i>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Cannock Chase as an AONB</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Cannock Chase is a valuable natural landscape</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Vanishing heathland</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
<i>Heathland wildlife</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Natural history of farmland</i>				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Natural history of woodland and plantations</i>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<i>Species we have lost</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
<i>The Cannock Chase Deer</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
<b>Cannock Chase is a historic landscape of occupation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Early settlers on the Chase</i>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
<i>The medieval Chase</i>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Chase estates</i>					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>The Chase in the age of Industry</i>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
<i>The Chase at war</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
<i>The Chase today</i>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
<b>Cannock Chase is a place of recreation</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>A place to breathe</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
<i>Walks and trails</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Visitor Centres</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Managing the Visitor</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Cannock Chase is a managed productive landscape</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Modern forestry on the Chase</i>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
<i>Modern agriculture on the Chase</i>					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Quarrying on the Chase</i>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
<i>Managing the AONB</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## **APPENDIX 2:** Organisations consulted during the production of the Interpretive Strategy

- Countryside Agency
- English Nature
- Forestry Commission
  
- Staffordshire County Council Countryside Services
- Cannock Chase District Council
- Lichfield District Council
- South Staffordshire District Council
- Stafford Borough Council
  
- Museum of Cannock Chase
- Shugborough Estate
- Staffordshire Wildlife Trust
  
- Cannock Chase AONB Unit
  
- Members of the Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan Managing Visitors Topic Group

## **APPENDIX 3:** Key background documents

ARUP/Latham Architects (2005) "Cannock Chase AONB Highway Design Guide".

Ball, R.M., Bonner, L. and Williams, S. (2001) "Cannock Chase AONB Visitor Survey 2000".

Cannock Chase AONB (2004) "Management Plan 2004 - 2009".

Ledbury, C. and Jenner, L. (2005) "A Breath of Fresh Air: A Draft Interpretive Strategy for Cannock Chase AONB".

## **APPENDIX 4:** A note on the compilation of the Interpretive Strategy

The Interpretive Strategy that is presented in the preceding pages draws directly upon the draft strategy - "A Breath of Fresh Air" which was commissioned by the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership from consultants Chris Ledbury and Lorna Jenner. The draft strategy was discussed at the Cannock Chase AONB Annual Conference in May 2005 and was subsequently reviewed in detail by the Managing Visitors Topic Group that was set up as part of the on-going development and implementation of the AONB Management Plan 2004-9. This final version therefore represents a revision of "A Breath of Fresh Air", amended in the light of those discussions and further consultation with the bodies identified in Appendix 2 (above).

Several sections from the draft strategy have been reproduced directly in this final document and many of the passages were directly informed by the original work conducted by Ledbury and Jenner. A primary purpose of this Note is, therefore, to acknowledge formally their contribution to the final document. Other material and amendments to the draft strategy are the work of Professor Stephen Williams of Staffordshire University, who was commissioned by the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership to produce the final strategy.

Designed by Rosemary Duncan, Geography Department, Staffordshire University - March 2006





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