

Cannock Chase AONB Car Park Improvements

A guide to key landscape principles






Contents

Introduction and background	2	Key Landscape Principles	5
Status of the key principles	4	Layout – considerations	5
Environmental considerations	4	Layout – key principles	5
Planning consent	4	Detailed design – considerations	6
Local community	4	Detailed design – key principles	6
		Car Parks / laybys to be closed – considerations	7
		Implementation and construction – considerations	8

Introduction and background

These key landscape principles are intended to assist all those involved in improving car parking provision on Cannock Chase.

There are currently around 123 car-parking locations (car parks, lay-bys, gateways or similar) on or just outside Cannock Chase, in the ownership and management of a range of different bodies¹. **Map 1 indicates current car parking locations.** 

A car park implementation plan² has been commissioned by the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Partnership with the aim of managing car-parking provision at Cannock Chase to accommodate anticipated increases in recreational use without causing harm to the area's sensitive nature conservation interests. Financial support for car park improvements that comply with this plan will be available through the SAC Partnership. The level of financial support provided by the SAC Partnership will be determined on a case by case bases and will be subject to the signing of a conditional grant agreement. How to apply for funding to support car park improvement/closure works is detailed in the SAC Partnerships car parking implementation plan².

Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is one of England's finest landscapes, and has been protected since 1958 for the natural

beauty of its heaths, forests and historic parklands, presenting an unspoilt wilderness that contrasts with the surrounding conurbations of the West Midlands. Recreation is not an objective of AONB designation, but the demand for recreation is met in so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty, and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses on the Chase.

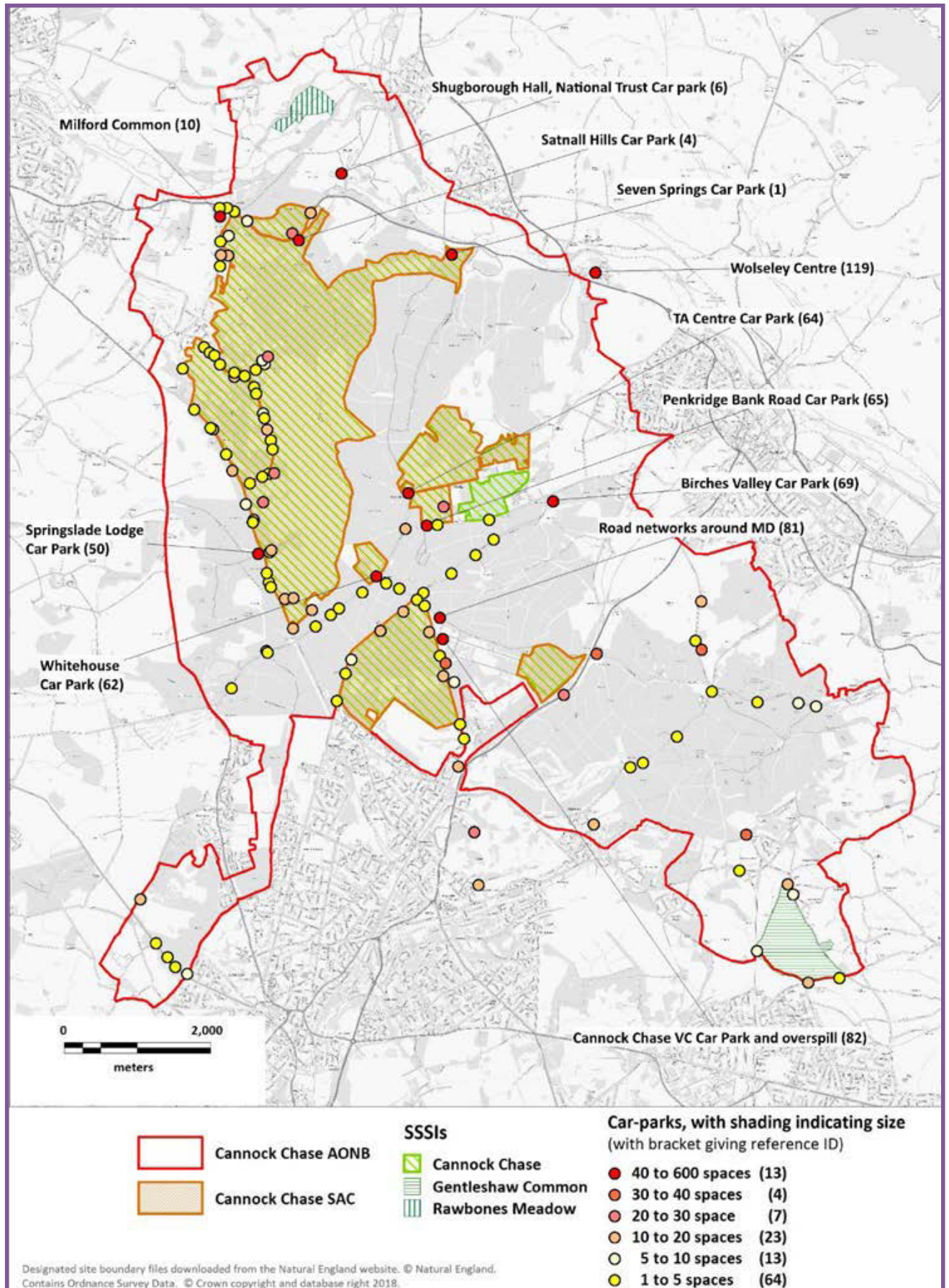
These key landscape principles have been prepared with the aim of ensuring that car park provision and improvements are sympathetic to the natural beauty of the AONB. Natural beauty encompasses landscape quality, scenic quality, perceptual qualities (like tranquillity and wildness), natural and cultural heritage. Key to this is the desire to:

- Minimise the visual impacts of any car parks, parked cars and associated visitor infrastructure.
- Ensure that car park improvements reinforce the local landscape character and avoid harm to wildlife and heritage.
- Create a welcoming and safe experience for visitors and a positive first impression of Cannock Chase and all it offers.

1. Footprint Ecology (21 November 2018) Evidence base to inform a car-park strategy and a site users strategy for Cannock Chase.

2. Footprint Ecology (19 September 2019) The Cannock Chase Special Area of conservation (SAC), strategic Access Management & Monitoring Measures Detailed Implementation Plan: Car Parking.

Map 1: Parking locations with large car parks (40+ spaces) labelled



Status of the key principles

These key principles are recommendations to assist the integration of any car park improvements into the special landscapes of the AONB. By following them public bodies (such as local authorities and Forestry England), statutory undertakers and other organisations with an influence on car park provision will fulfil their obligations under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000³. The CROW Act 2000 places an obligation on such bodies to consider the conservation and enhancement of the AONB in everything they do that affects the area, and contribute to the implementation of the Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan⁴. The Management Plan itself represents local authority policy for managing the AONB and for carrying out local authority functions in relation to that policy.

These key principles do not change any safety, technical or environmental standards or other obligations that exist. The guide should be read in conjunction with Local Plan Policy, highway design standards where these apply, British Standards, Good Practice Guidance and Natural England's advice on wildlife legislation.

Environmental considerations

Environmental factors must be fully considered when planning car park improvements and/or closures, whatever their size. Impacts on the biodiversity, landscape, heritage and natural beauty of the area will need to be assessed and mitigated on a site by site basis, as well as contributing to enhancement. Specialist professional advice should be sought at an early stage to ensure environmental issues are fully considered and resolved. Cannock Chase supports protected plants and animals, for which separate consents may be required under wildlife legislation prior to work commencing. Works that may directly or indirectly affect Sites of Special Scientific Interest and/or the Cannock Chase Special Area for Conservation (SAC) require specific consents and may require a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA).

The AONB also holds nationally important populations of Annex I heathland birds, for which there are special protections, including where they occur outside designated Special Areas for Conservation or Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Appropriate timing of any surveys will need to be factored in to work programmes. To ensure design and mitigation is informed by local character, refer to the Cannock Chase **AONB Review of AONB Landscape Character Framework**⁵, which describes the area's landscape character.

Planning consent

The relevant local planning authority should be consulted from the outset to establish whether a planning application is required.

Local community

Discussions with the local community and other relevant stakeholders are recommended at an early stage, allowing the project design to reflect their views where possible and to gain support and understanding for its objectives. Community liaison should continue throughout the project lifetime. Special measures may need to be put in place during construction in the interests of public safety.

3. Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 states that, in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in AONBs, relevant authorities "shall have regard" to their purpose.

4. Cannock Chase AONB Partnership (2019) Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan 2019-2024.

5. Ashmead Price for Cannock Chase AONB (2017) Cannock Chase AONB Review of AONB Landscape Character Framework

Key landscape principles

The following principles are applicable to new or reconfigured / extended car parks:

Layout - considerations

Considerations for the layout for new or reconfigured / extended car parks include:

- Layout in response to topography, ground conditions and site features
- Level of formality
- Creating a setting for the car park
- Practical requirements and user needs
- Relationship with access routes and rights of way.

Layout – key principles

- Detailed surveys should be carried out before design work commences. Presence of trees will require a tree survey in accordance with BS5837:2012. Trees should be retained and incorporated into the layout where possible. A landscape and visual appraisal will assist in identifying sensitive locations and where mitigation for proposals may be necessary.



Castle Ring car park: Low perimeter bund in keeping with local character encloses the site frontage and provides some partial screening of vehicles.(Cannock Chase AONB)

- The level of formality in the layout should be directly related to the inherent character of the landscape. In more formal locations serving visitor hubs, formal layouts will be appropriate; whilst more isolated car parking on the Chase will need to reflect the site's natural setting.
- In order to minimise detrimental impacts on the landscape, car parks should be integrated into the local landscape and should not dominate.
- Distant views of car parking on the skyline or on rising ground where light reflected off cars would detract from the landscape should particularly be avoided.



Car parking set into the landform and with clear banking to delimit and limit landscape impact (Footprint Ecology)

- Car park layout should respond sympathetically to topography, and not be elevated above surrounding ground levels to avoid visual intrusion. Landform can be used for containment where the opportunity arises.



Established vegetation provides a setting for the car park and filters views of vehicles). (Cannock Chase AONB)

- Where possible, existing site features should be retained and incorporated into the design as these will aid assimilation into the landscape. Retaining existing trees and structures creates a setting for the car park and reduces landscape and visual impact.
- Visual mitigation must be balanced with ensuring a reasonable level of surveillance to reduce opportunities for antisocial behaviour.
- Car park design must accommodate the space requirements of different users and make adequate allowances for a landscape framework.
- Layout should be readily understood without the need for signage. Limited signage may be acceptable to aid orientation on sites where this is both necessary and appropriate.

- In larger more formal car parks small signs to denote disabled or family parking bays may be desirable.
- Signage should be low key in terms of number, size and colour, using sustainable materials such as natural wood and stone, or other materials appropriate to the location. The aim should be to provide effective communication without introducing a proliferation of signs that create visual clutter.
- Car park facilities should be integrated in a way that defines clear patterns of activity and maximise their use and effectiveness.
- Location should maximise access to existing rights of way without encouraging new path creation.

Considerations for the detailed design of new or reconfigured / extended car parks include:

Detailed design - considerations

- Respecting local landscape character
- Design of car park components
- Surfacing
- Signage (external and internal)
- Furniture
- Parking bay definition
- Car park definition and edges
- Surface water drainage
- Choice of materials
- Wildlife
- Soft landscaping (for mitigation)

Detailed design – key principles

- Choice of materials and construction details should be sensitive to the location but sufficiently robust for the level of use anticipated.
- Permeable surfacing materials are preferred.
- Limestone surfacing materials are not appropriate in the AONB as these would adversely affect local ecology. Materials of neutral or slightly acidic pH should be used.



Wooden bollards appropriate in a more formal area to delineate parking

Large areas of hard surfacing should be avoided where possible.

Larger areas of parking can be either accommodated around existing trees, taking Root Protection Areas into account, or broken up by new areas of planting.

Use local materials to improve landscape fit and reduce transport requirements.

Material selection should avoid increasing urbanisation. In informal car parks edge restraints may not be necessary. Where kerbs are required stone edging or concrete with a natural stone finish should be used, and in the latter case these should be positioned to minimise visual intrusion.

Tarmacadam surfacing should generally be avoided and is only appropriate at visitor centre hubs where the level of use may justify its selection. Using a bound aggregate surfacing or spray-and-chip in and appropriate neutral colour aggregate would create a softer and more informal appearance.

Design of larger car parks should consider management of surface water runoff in extreme rainfall events, and any impacts on adjoining property and habitats.

Car park perimeters may need to be defined to discourage unauthorised parking. A ditch and low bank just beyond the car park perimeter will discourage vehicular access and can provide habitat enhancement. Alternatively, timber ‘dragon teeth’ or a low timber knee rail is an acceptable informal solution.

If required, entrance/exit height barriers should ideally be located where they are not visible on the skyline or appear incongruous in the landscape, and be finished in a recessive colour.

Signage and interpretation should be located at natural collection points such as close to converging footpaths or points of interest, and ideally be located where they are not visible on the skyline.

Incorporating the new Cannock Chase Place Brand (launched 2021) will be welcomed.



Information boards on angled plinth incorporating Cannock Chase Place Brand can help to enhance the sense of place and ensure consistent messages

- Other infrastructure such as car park charging machines should be located with interpretation and should be of a design and colour that is functional but sympathetic to the location. In larger car parks where multiple machines are required these should be located to minimise visual impact and clutter.
- Car parking bays in informal car parks do not necessarily require delineation. In more formal situations a timber marker at the front of the bay, or studs/timber set into the surfacing are likely to be adequate to demarcate bays.
- In car parks at visitor hubs and those anticipating high use it may be desirable to provide furniture such as seating, and/ or picnic tables. FSC timber furniture in keeping with the rural location is appropriate.



Example of Interpretation panel and car park charging located together finished in recessive colours sympathetic to the surroundings. (photo credit Halcrow)

- Electric vehicle charging points are supported in principle and may be appropriate at car parks at visitor centres, provided they can be incorporated sensitively, and the infrastructure required to support them is already in place or installation would not itself have unacceptable impacts on natural beauty, landscape, heritage or wildlife.
- Lighting would only be considered appropriate around visitor centres, and if required should be minimal, downward directional and only lit

during restricted periods to minimise impacts on landscape and wildlife (e.g. 4-6pm in winter subject to operational requirements). Simple low-level bollard lighting or similar would be most appropriate.

- Visitors should be encouraged to take litter home and recycle. Recycling bins could be provided at main visitor centres as long as they are finished in recessive colours and suitably located to be unobtrusive and fit in with the local landscape. Dog waste bins and/ or waste bins would also be appropriate at main visitor hubs and larger key car parks, and where the landowner will ensure frequent emptying so that waste does not accumulate. Bins should be located where they would not be a visual detractor.
- New planting may be needed to aid assimilation into the landscape and enhance visual mitigation. Planting should be native and ecologically appropriate to the location though birch and pine should not be used to limit these seed sources. Location and type of planting should consider site user safety.
- Minimise impacts on sensitive wildlife in adjacent habitats and take opportunities to encourage wildlife. Where possible incorporate small-scale wildlife habitats (such as sloping bare ground for invertebrates).

Car Parks/laybys to be closed - considerations

Considerations for the closure of car parks/laybys include:

Access

Access will need to be prevented to closed car parks. Acceptable methods of deterrent include installing a low timber barrier or ditch and bund positioned across the access track and arranged to prevent bypass.

A low bund or ditch and bund would be appropriate to prevent access on to closed laybys. Imported soils should be natural unscreened 'as dug' sandy subsoil from a local source.

Restoration

- All infrastructure such as signage or height barriers should be removed
- Laybys next to main highways should be restored to semi-natural grass verge to deliver rapid reinstatement and visual enhancement. Other car parks and laybys should either be left to recolonise through natural regeneration or restored to create a heathland mosaic, depending on location and the extent of the area to be restored.

- Smaller areas are likely to be more suited to natural colonisation as larger areas may be more prone to erosion and if left bare have greater visual impact. A combination of techniques could be considered if larger car parks are closed.
- Supplementing with locally sourced heather brash can encourage more rapid establishment, and this would be welcomed to reduce long term visual impacts in appropriate locations.
- The inclusion of some bare ground and early successional areas is helpful as these are otherwise lacking across the AONB.
- Informal laybys on compacted in situ soils should have access prevented, be de-compacted and the surface loosened to encourage natural colonisation or restoration.
- Areas of hardstanding should be removed. The substrate should be re-profiled as necessary to marry in with adjacent ground levels and de-compacted. Any imported material required to make up levels should be uncontaminated as dug subsoil from a local source and / or similar in composition and pH to existing in situ soils. If topsoil is present, soil inversion is recommended to reduce nutrient levels.
- Natural regeneration / restoration will require regular monitoring to ensure successful establishment. Some issues resulting from poor establishment such as soil erosion or long-term visual effects detrimental to the AONB may require remedial action. Removal of undesirable competitive species such as bramble is recommended. Additional interventions such as additional heather brash or a grass seed nurse, could be considered on larger areas of failed establishment. In the SAC advice should be sought from Natural England on any proposed nurse grass seed mix.



Heathland restoration on subsoil can require long periods for establishment but delivers biodiversity and landscape enhancement: Pipehill Junction (Staffordshire County Council)

Implementation and construction - considerations

Considerations for implementation and construction include:

Site management

Sensitive areas or features will need to be protected from damage during construction. The need for protection should be considered during the design process and protection measures put in place prior to commencement on site. This will also apply to contractor's compounds, temporary parking for contractor's vehicles and access routes. In some locations works may need to take place outside of the bird breeding season to avoid negative impacts though disturbance and habitat changes on birds nesting in surrounding scrub and on adjacent land. Measures must be put in place to avoid any pollution risk.

Public safety will need to be a key consideration for the duration of the management of the works.

Reinstatement

Any areas of the site, access routes or adjacent ground affected by the works will need to be reinstated using retained local soils and sympathetic to local character. These areas should be left in as good or better condition than before work commenced. Careful site management and protection of site features will minimise the need for reinstatement. Often natural regeneration will be most appropriate, but there may be opportunities for encouraging heathland restoration in larger areas using locally sourced heather brash.

Vegetation Management

Long term vegetation management is likely to be required after establishment. This should be programmed and carried out with a similarly sensitive approach to the design principles. Extent of vegetation management and timing of operations should consider site user safety and wildlife and landscape conservation and enhancement.

Produced by the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership
www.cannock-chase.co.uk
 Date: February 2021



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



South
Staffordshire
Council



Stafford
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Staffordshire
County Council

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.



‘wild and beautiful’



**Cannock
Chase**
Area of Outstanding
Natural Beauty