



**Cannock Chase AONB Partnership
Meeting of the Joint Committee
12th July 2023 at 14.00 HRS**

To be held at the Rising Brook Community Church, Burton Square, Stafford ST17 9LT

(please park behind the church and not in front of the shops – thank you)

Members of the public are welcome to attend in person.

No	Item	Item for	Page
1	Election of Chair and Vice Chair This item to be overseen by John Rowe, Honorary Secretary of the Joint Committee	DECISION	
2	Welcome and introductions		
3	Apologies for absence		
4	Minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2022	NOTING	3
5	Public questions		16
6	Finance report – Revenue Budget 2023/24 <i>To report to members the final outturn position for 2022/23; that the revised net revenue budget is approved and current progress and its current forecast outturn position are noted; that progress on spend for the Farming in Protected Landscape Programme is noted</i> Report of the Treasurer to the Joint Committee	DECISION AND NOTING	17
7	AONB Annual Review 2022-23 <i>To report to members the achievements of the AONB and seek approval to publish, with any amendments</i> Report of the AONB Communications Officer	DECISION	26
8	AONB Business Plan 2023-25 <i>To seek members' approval for a new 2-year Business Plan, with any amendments</i> Report of the AONB Development Officer	DECISION	28
9	National Landscapes rebrand <i>To update members and seek views on the development of a National Landscapes brand including the re-naming of AONBs as 'National Landscapes'</i> Report of the AONB Communications Officer	DECISION	31

10	<p>Representation on Assessment Panels for Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and AONB Sustainable Development Fund</p> <p><i>To seek member representation on panels for (a) the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and (b) the AONB Sustainable Development Fund</i></p> <p>Report of the Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer and AONB Land Management Officer</p>	DECISION	36
11	<p>Cannock Chase Charitable Fund</p> <p><i>To seek approval for the establishment of a Cannock Chase Charitable Fund for voluntary and business giving</i></p> <p>Report of the AONB Development Officer</p>	DECISION	38
12	<p>Dark Skies project - AONB Good Lighting Guide</p> <p><i>To update members on the delivery of community engagement activities on dark skies and, seek approval for the publication of a Good Lighting Guide for Cannock Chase AONB</i></p> <p>Report of the AONB Development Officer</p>	INFORMATION AND DECISION	41
13	<p>Date, time and venue of next meeting</p> <p><i>Wednesday 6 December 2023, 2-4 pm</i></p>		
	<p>Exclusion of the Public and Press</p> <p>The Chairman to move:</p> <p>"That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business which involve the likely disclosure of information as defined in the paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the local Government Act 1972 (as amended) indicated below"</p> <p>Part Two</p> <p>(All reports in this section are exempt)</p>		
14	<p>Staff update and proposals</p> <p>Report by Sarah Bentley, Head of Environment and Countryside</p>	DECISION	

Note: the previous meeting scheduled for March 2023 was cancelled

Item 4 **Minutes of the meeting held on 8th December 2022**

Item for: Noting

Author: Julia Banbury, AONB Landscape Planning Officer

Financial implications: None

Recommendations: The Committee notes the minutes of the meeting and considers any matters arising.

**Cannock Chase AONB Partnership
Meeting of the Joint Committee
Thursday 8th December 2022 at 10.00 AM**

Held at the Rising Brook Community Church, Burton Square, Stafford ST17 9LT

(Draft) Minutes

Attendees

Members present

Cllr Frances Beatty (FB)
Cllr Len Bates (LB)
Cllr Adrienne Fitzgerald (AF)
Cllr Iain Eadie (RC)

Representing

Stafford Borough Council
South Staffordshire Council
Cannock Chase District Council
Lichfield District Council

Officers

Ian Marshall	(IM)	AONB Unit
Julia Banbury	(JB)	AONB Unit
Richard Harris	(RH)	AONB Unit
Samantha Hall	(SH)	AONB Unit
Colin Manning	(CMa)	AONB Unit
Catherine Mann	(CM)	Staffordshire County Council
Sarah Bentley	(SB)	Staffordshire County Council
Nikola Mihajlovic	(NM)	Staffordshire County Council

Advisers

June Jukes	(JJ)	Friends of Cannock Chase
Lisa Horritt	(LH)	Staffordshire Association of Parish Councils
Mel Dyer	(MD)	RSPB
Jamie Murphy	(JM)	RSPB
Chris Evans	(CE)	West Midlands Bird Club
Doug Smith	(DS)	British Horse Society

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 Councillor Beatty opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the meeting of the AONB Partnership Joint Committee (JC). Samantha Hall was introduced as the new Communications Officer for the AONB.

2. Apologies for absence

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillor Victoria Wilson	Staffordshire County Council
Councillor Justin Johnson substituting)	Cannock Chase Council (Cllr Fitzgerald)
Mary Cope	Beaudesert Park Farm
Patrick Walker	Staffordshire Council
Wendy Bannerman	British Horse Society
Mark Kelly	Cemex
Helen Dale	CLA
Scott Latham	SAC Partnership
Roger Broadbent	West Midlands Bird Club (Chris Evans substituting)

IM reported that Natural England have informed the AONB that they are unable to field any officer to Joint Committee meetings for the time being due to staff changes.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 14th July 2022

- 3.1 CE reported that Para 7.13 of the Minutes was inaccurate regarding the Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) carried out by WMBC. This stated that the survey and analysis had been completed whereas at that time the data had not yet been completely collected from surveyors and analysed. This is now complete, and the booklet is nearly ready for publishing. The BBS indicates that Tree Pipit is doing ok, whereas records of Skylark are down.
- 3.2 IM reported that a field day arranged for October 2022 had to be cancelled due to lack of uptake. FB reiterated the importance of getting Members and Ward Councillors out onto the Chase so that they get a better understanding of what the AONB has to offer and the importance of conserving it. There may be an opportunity for next year. Now that SH has started as Comms Officer, she will be looking at how to engage better with Ward Members and others.
- 3.3 JJ suggested that there may be opportunities for Ward Members to join one of the Friends of Cannock Chase's walks from the new programme being developed. This could provide an opportunity for an informal introduction to the Chase.
- 3.4 **Resolved:**
The minutes of the previous meeting are agreed as a correct record and were approved.

4. Public Questions

4.1 No questions were received

5. **Finance Report – Revenue Budget 2022/23**

5.1 Nikki Mihajlovic, Senior Finance Business Partner, presented the revenue budget for 2022/23. The approved budget presented at the last Joint Committee for the AONB for 2022/23 was £221,95. This has been increased by £66,435 to £288,385 to reflect additional core funding for AONBs awarded by DEFRA for Access for All projects. The current forecast outturn position when compared to budget is a breakeven position.

5.2 The individual projects, totalling £3,764 for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) include the £1,000 administration fee. Unallocated money from SDF totalling £6,236 has been re-allocated to the AONB projects.

5.3 The individual projects, totalling £87,821 for the AONB projects are set out in the Appendix. This includes the re-allocation of funds from the SDF of £6,236 and the additional DEFRA funding of £66,435 for Access for All projects, to increase the approved budget from £15,150 to £87,821.

5.4 The net position for the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme forecasts an outturn against the programme of £254,620, which will result in an underspend against the grant of £35,000, which will have to be repaid to Defra. CM reported that he is working to contact as many landowners as possible. FiPL can be used to fund projects outside the AONB. FB requested partners to encourage local landowners to consider making applications.

5.5 The balance on the Cannock Chase AONB Reserve currently stands at £66,515 for 2022/23. NM confirmed that this is invested in line with LG Treasury Management Strategy and attracted £44 interest on the balance last year.

5.6 Salary increases in 2022/23 combined with anticipated further increases in 2023/24 are going to place pressures on the revenue budget for 2023/24. As the level of increase for next year has not yet been announced NM presented two scenarios for the budget for 2023/24 for Member's discussion and decision. These options are set out in detail the Finance Report.

5.7 In brief, Option 1 assumes an inflationary uplift on pay of 4% and pension contributions of 1% and no inflationary uplift on other expenditure budgets. Option 2 assumes an inflationary uplift on pay of 2% and pension contributions of 1% and no inflationary uplift on other expenditure budgets. Both options included proposals to fund the Annual Conference through in-kind contributions or charging for attendance. The assumption has also been made that the AONB website hosting and support costs of £2,500 could be funded from the reserves. Option 1 includes reallocation of SDF to the core fund, which would mean LPAs would have to be requested to make an additional small contribution.

5.8 IM explained that he and FB had been discussing whether to try to find a sponsor or make a small charge to attendees for the Annual Conference. He also explained that the AONB website is hosted by SCC and is coming to the end of a 3 year contract. He

has negotiated a fee of £5K for the next 3 years and proposed this comes out of the AONB reserves.

- 5.9 The purpose of the AONB reserve was discussed. The reserve needs to be adequate to ensure funding for staff redundancies if this proved necessary, and 'exceptional costs' such as the Management Plan Review or to meet shortfalls in funding. IE commented that he would be unable to commit his Authority to additional funding as he didn't know the detail of the Authority's other funding obligations and budgets are difficult. He felt they would not be keen for a further commitment at this time and considered this would be appropriate use of AONB reserves rather than cutting funding to AONB projects.
- 5.10 LB supported IE and added that he is not in favour of charging attendees for the Annual Conference as this would reduce attendance.
- 5.11 LH mentioned that the Staffordshire Association of Parish Council were looking at arranging sponsorship for their conference and suggested this might in any case be a good option for the AONB to explore.
- 5.12 LB agreed, suggesting businesses may be persuaded to sponsor the AONB Conference, possibly collectively by being able to promote their business and the AONB. DS suggested putting forward sponsorship as a raffle where each business provided £100 to appear on advertising as a sponsor.
- 5.13 SB pointed out that the amount of additional funding contribution from each Authority would be very small, with most of the funding (50%) coming from the County Council.
- 5.14 FB understood the reluctance of voting Members to commit to additional contributions now but felt that Joint Committee should be reviewing the level of contributions more frequently than has been done, as the level has stayed the same for many years. She suggested it should be reviewed next year.
- 5.15 IE requested the financial liability of the AONB be calculated should there be a need to wind it up, so that Members were aware of the minimum figure that needs to be held in the reserve.
- 5.16 Resolved:**
- (1) The Committee noted the final outturn position for 2021/22 for the Core, Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), AONB Projects, Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme and the closing balance held on the AONB reserve.**
 - (2) The Committee noted progress on spend for the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme progress on the spend for the FIPL programme**
 - (3) The Committee resolved to assume a 4% increase on salaries for inflationary uplift; to take the whole funding shortfall from the reserve; and requested officers with look for a sponsor(s) for the Conference rather than charge attendees.**

6. Access Funding

- 6.1 IM reported that DEFRA has recently confirmed an award to all AONBs and National Parks for Access Funding. This comprises an uplift in core grant in order to make

protected landscapes more accessible to people of all ages and abilities and from all backgrounds. This is capital works for physical and digital improvements. It is a 3 year package of funding although there is no funding in Yr2, and underspend cannot be carried forward. Cannock Chase AONB has been allocated:

- 2022/23 £66,435.48* (includes additional £6,891)
- 2024/25 £70,748.87

6.2 The following projects are being developed:

- Resurfacing the path from Marquis Drive Visitor Centre to the ToCH platform
- Making Cannock Chase an accessible destination through audio and visual guides, for example by preparing videos of walking trails so that people can visit virtually and will know the kind of terrain to expect and features of interest.
- Improved waymarking of AONB promoted trails (will require audit and replacement of signage)
- Field Study Council Guide to Cannock Chase highlighting aspects of the historic environment, wildlife, geology etc. Will be available as hard copies and digitally

More ideas are needed so please get in touch with IM.

6.3 JJ suggested work to the Hide, which is in a poor state of repair, and access to Brocton Pools. Trees are restricting access, and this is a good location for all abilities. CE supported this suggestion saying that she had received complaints about the condition and accessibility. There have also been complaints that the car park at the end of Old Acre has been closed which makes access more difficult.

6.4 There aren't many paths that are suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs and this needs to be improved.

6.5 FB asked who will be running the project delivery? IM confirmed that it would be very helpful if other organisations come forward with project ideas and would then be in a position to deliver the projects themselves with the available funding.

6.6 Resolved

The Committee notes the update on the uplift in core funding.

7. Diversity and Inclusion

7.1 IM presented the background and findings of the Study carried out for the AONB by A Meredith Associates and The Research Solution. The key questions of the brief were:

- What is the current situation - who does and doesn't get the opportunity to visit and connect with Cannock Chase?
- What does the community think - for those who do not use the AONB, why don't they and what are the barriers?
- What changes are required to make Cannock Chase more welcoming and accessible to a greater diversity of people?, and:
- How inclusive and diverse are the governance structure and operations of the AONB Partnership, and does the culture of the Partnership need changing and how?

7.2 The findings were not particularly surprising and not unusual for a Protected Landscape. The study found engagement is unequal, some audiences are underrepresented, including people with disabilities and their families. Barriers included lack of awareness of what is on offer and what there is to do; poorly maintained paths and lack of seating; user conflicts (mountain bikers, horse riders, dogs and dog litter, inconsiderate behaviour); visitor infrastructure; perceptions of safety.

7.3 Suggested changes include:

- **Increasing audience reach** including physical/access; support for people alone/lacking confidence/needing assistance; reducing conflicts with other users; more information and greater levels of communication.
- **Building connections with existing access groups** like The Disabled Ramblers/Black Girls Hike UK/Muslim Hikers to help build the awareness and confidence of visiting groups for them to subsequently make future self-led or individual visits.
- **Practical actions on the ground to overcome physical hurdles.** Investing in routes to increase accessibility so they do not feature any obstacles to climb over; designed for people with limited mobility including those who use wheelchairs, mobility scooters, as well as families with pushchairs.
- **Working with specialist community and health organisations for enhancing mental wellbeing** through the exploration of the outdoors and landscapes.

7.4 The composition of the AONB Partnership does not reflect the wider population we serve. There is no representative for example for the Arts, Education or young people. The report proposed

- **Improved insight** – bring in specialist insight, guidance and advice by creating a champion for equality, diversity and inclusion, or an equality advisory panel
- **Broadening governance** – including: advocates for people with disabilities; minority ethnic communities; community and business organisations already nominally engaged; groups representing the arts/cultural sector and academia.
- **Member and staff training** – broaden awareness of inclusivity issues and provide for improved knowledge and understanding of equality issues.
- **Learn from approaches of existing partner organisations** - linking with local authorities and other partners to better understand, embed and deliver Equalities plans based on their own organisations' approach.
- **Promote volunteering opportunities to a broader range of audiences and organisations** within the AONB and close by.
- **Build stronger links with local communities and under-represented groups**
- **Develop tailored audience engagement projects with 'hard to reach' sectors** by working with partners in these domains.
- **Provide activity / taster days for under-represented groups** - through working with neighbouring organisations and through outreach to West Midlands groups.
- **Undertake more accessibility related work** with partners where necessary and make rights of way easier to access at key locations.

7.5 A five-point plan is suggested to Committee for discussion and decision:

1. **Diversity and Inclusion Statement** - Express our commitment to diversity and inclusion by developing and publicising a statement of what we are trying to achieve

2. **Appoint a Champion for Diversity and Inclusion** - Appoint a Champion for Inclusion and Diversity to share best practice, boost awareness and inspire and lead change in the AONB
 3. **Prepare an Action Plan** with external advisors, to bring back to the Joint Committee for approval
 4. **Broaden representation** - Improve representation of the voices reflected in decision making by reviewing membership and attendance, and filling gaps
 5. **Embed diversity and inclusion practices into AONB activities and projects** - so these become integral to our core business and our day-to-day activities.
- 7.6 IE observed that resources for this would be challenging, and one has to be pragmatic about what can be taken forward on limited resources. Suggested most useful would be a Champion for Diversity and Inclusion. Has worked well in Lichfield where they have a Youth Council working together with those with special educational needs. They could be tasked with looking at how to improve the situation. Lots of young people use the Chase for Duke of Edinburgh Award so they might be a good source of interest and ideas. DS agreed – Riding for the Disabled has an Equality and Engagement Group that works well.
- 7.7 AF suggested there would be potential interest from Scouts and Guiding groups (as part of a badge), or some of the young people engaged in the Woodland Wonderfest or other Arts / community engagement areas.
- 7.8 MD said that this is probably the most important thing that the AONB will do in the next 5 years. The Environmental Sector is the least diverse sector in the UK. This is a very important piece of work that she is very happy to put time into. Cannock Chase AONB has potential to deliver on this in a big way because of its catchment.
- 7.9 LH stated that some Parish Councils have tried Youth Councils and she could see which are still active – perhaps there would be representatives willing to help here?
- 7.10 IM advised that the AONB used to have a youth forum and the AONB has been working on youth engagement recently with the Future Guardians project and developing a badge for Scouts and Guides.
- 7.11 IE suggested gathering information on what Youth Councils there are in the area and putting a public call out for a Champion.
- 7.12 Several suggestions were made for potential sources of support. FB requested ideas be sent to IM for him to report back at the next Committee Meeting in March.
- 7.13 Resolved**
The Committee notes the findings of the Inclusion and Diversity Report and supports the appointment of a volunteer Champion for Diversity and Inclusion.
- 8. Carbon Baseline assessment and pathway to net zero**
- 8.1 IM had previously reported that the AONB had appointed Small World Consulting to prepare this assessment and recommendations for the AONB’s pathway to net zero.

Along with the Cotswolds AONB, we are the first English AONB to carry out such a study.

- 8.2 To avoid skewing the study due to Covid the assessment was based on figures for 2019. One might expect visitors to make the largest quantity of greenhouse gas emissions, but the findings indicate that it is residents who are the highest contributors. Residents emit more than half (56%) of the total (mainly from flying, and household electricity and fuel emissions).
- 8.3 The footprint of visitors travelling to and from the AONB is by far the lowest of any UK Protected Landscape (reflecting that most visitors come from within the local catchment). However, vehicle fuel accounts for over 70% of the footprint of visitors coming to the AONB.
- 8.4 The relatively large area of semi-natural vegetation on the Chase is capturing carbon and counteracting other emissions.
- 8.5 The report looks at the options for the AONB to attempt to achieve net zero by 2024 and tries to consider what the AONB could influence and in practical terms this is likely to be very challenging. The largest recommended increase in annual carbon sequestration between 2019 and 2050 would be from planting new broadleaved or mixed woodlands as well as grassland improvement with legumes.
- 8.6 A five point action plan is suggested:
- **Climate Change Statement** - Develop and publicise a statement of ambition and what we are trying to achieve.
 - **Champion for Climate Change** - Appoint a Champion for Climate Change for the AONB to share best practice, boost awareness and inspire and lead change in the AONB.
 - **Climate Change Action Plan** - Work within the Partnership to explore in more detail the opportunities presented in the proposed interventions and prepare a long-term Climate Action Plan to bring back to the Joint Committee for approval.
 - **Raise awareness** – Raise awareness of the impacts of climate change on Cannock Chase, how we need to adapt, and how everyone can contribute.
 - **Embed climate change considerations into AONB activities and projects** - so that they become integral to our core business and are an automatic consideration in our day-to-day activities.
- 8.7 LB advised that Patrick Walker supports the plan as a sensible starting point. It would be helpful to have more information on how emissions could be reduced. South Staffs Council has been working on this topic LB wanted to discuss further with PW. IM welcomed the offer of support.
- 8.8 FB pointed out that other action by the government and in changes to farming will be contributing. Need to be aware of all other activity from other bodies and understand how these will influence the Chase.
- 8.9 IE welcomed the report and suggested that the approach needed to be in manageable chunks. A Climate Change Champion is a good idea. The role of the Partnership is to

influence land management and possibly to influence residents to change behaviours. The rest is really down to Local Plan Policy.

- 8.10 MD pointed out that there is also a Biodiversity crisis, and this is closely meshed with the Climate Crisis. Planting trees to contribute to carbon sequestration is only appropriate in the right place. Planting trees on the heathland, for example, would be counterproductive in halting the biodiversity crisis and therefore such a proposal needs to be carefully considered. Right trees, for the right reasons, in the right place. MD suggested any Statement should cover Climate Change and Biodiversity

8.11 Resolved

The Committee notes the findings of the Carbon Baseline Assessment and Report and supports the appointment of a volunteer Champion for Climate Change

9. Delivery of AONB activities

- 9.1 RH presented a snapshot of the Committee Report on activities.

9.2 Fixed Point Photography

JB summarised the activities of the FPP project and encouraged people to look at the newly updated website, which provides an insight into changes in the landscape since the project began in 2005.

- 9.3 JB confirmed that the AONB Highways Design Guide is currently awaiting agreement of Staffordshire County Council (Highway Authority) before publication.

9.4 Dark Skies

We are working with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to deliver some bespoke sessions on Dark Skies during their February Half Term Activities, to raise awareness of dark skies. These dates coincide with CPRE's national Star Count.

We are also working in partnership with CPRE to deliver a Dark Skies Event for Scouts and Guides at Beaudesert. This will be supported by astronomers from Keele University.

9.5 FIPL

RH presented slides of a few of the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) projects that CM has been facilitating with landowners. CM has been approaching landowners and there are now 17 approved projects. Example projects included creating herbal leys which are better for wildlife and enhance soil structure and carbon capture on a farm, and heathland regeneration of a former conifer plantation at Beaudesert Golf Club.

9.6 Wildlife and Nature

Adder project is progressing with the Amphibian and Reptile Group ARGUK, looking at modelling potential distribution of adders. Surveys will be carried out by volunteers, and they are investigating the possibility of radio tracking.

9.7 Deer management

Previously deer population estimates have been based on surveys carried out by volunteers. A thermal imaging drone is now available, which was deployed in November 2022 and should provide a more accurate assessment. Working with

partners towards a Deer Management Strategy that will sustain a healthy deer population.

9.8 **Historic Environment**

The condition of Ordnance Survey Triangulation points (Trig points) is currently being assessed. Some of have suffered from erosion at the base and these will be made safe and reinstated.

9.9 **Experience and Enjoyment**

'Local Cultural Place Makers, Global Change Makers' arts programme which the AONB is contributing funding towards, has seen young people working with artists. A slide was shown showing the lanterns created by children from out-of-date leaflets from the AONB. These formed part of a temporary installation in Rugeley. New interpretation panels have been installed incorporating the new AONB place branding using AONB and SAC Partnership funding. There are 5 new panels at RAF Hednesford, 2 at Brindley Village.

9.10 **Community and business**

Working with the Ramblers and the Cannock Chase SAC Partnership, 6 walking routes have been agreed as part of a new 'Walking Cannock Chase' programme. These will be launched in the New Year. There is a new Visitor Welcome at Milford Common, manned by volunteers. Since April, there have been 791.5 volunteer hours recorded by volunteers for the AONB.

9.11 **Resolved:**

The Committee notes the update on activities and thanked the team for their hard work.

10. **Planning Update**

10.1 JB provided a brief update planning matters. An outline of consultations commented on can be found in the committee report.

10.2 The Planning Appeal for a site in the AONB in South Staffordshire near Hatherton too place in August. JB was pleased to report that the Planning Inspector dismissed the appeal allowing 12 months for site restoration.

10.3 **Resolved:**

The Committee noted the report.

11. **Communications**

11.1 SH reported that she has been with the AONB team since 2nd November. She is working to the Communications Strategy approved by Joint Committee and will be aiming to raise the profile of Cannock Chase as a National Landscape, valued by all. She's been meeting other Partner's Communications Officers, visited the Visitor Centres and been involved in meetings with the National Association of AONBs Communications Lead Officers. Key pieces of work that she is already engaged in include:

- Website improvements – would like to make improvements to content and images. Visuals are very important, and so will be requesting images for inclusion both for website and social media.
- Social media – looking to set up a new Facebook page as unable to use the old address for administration reasons. New Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest accounts to be set up to help target some of the audiences mentioned above.
- E newsletter – this has already gone out to 1700 people who have signed up. Call out to increase sign ups as this is an excellent way to communicate about the work of the AONB and partners.
- Partnership Bulletin – This will be a new tool to help communication between partners. Sam will request contributions for inclusion in the bulletin.

11.2 Resolved

The Committee welcomed SH to the AONB and are optimistic for the difference that will be made as a result of her appointment.

12. Management Plan Review

12.1 At the last Meeting, Joint Committee resolved to delay preparation of the Management Plan to allow for national reforms and guidance to be published. To comply with the law Protected Landscapes need to provide a ‘light touch’ review in which they commit to producing a new Management Plan after the guidance is published.

12.2 IM presented the proposed Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan 2025-2030 Light-touch review for one-year extension 2024-2025, as set out in Appendix 1 of the Committee Papers. The objectives for 2024-2025 include continuing to deliver on the current Action Plan and beginning to address issues around climate change and inclusion and diversity. FB requested reference to biodiversity issues be included.

12.3 Resolved:

The Committee approved the ‘light touch’ review to the Management Plan for 2024 - 2025 and this be sent to Natural England for approval.

13.0 Protected Landscapes Reforms

13.1 IM summarised that, as reported previously the Government has not responded formally to the consultation on the Glover Review of England’s protected landscapes. However, things are nevertheless being discussed at officer level and being moved where possible to implement reforms that do not require legislation.

13.2 It is understood that AONBs will have a second statutory duty of public enjoyment and engagement. The government will need to find legislative space to implement this through being tabled by an MP. It could be potentially included in the proposed Levelling up Bill, or, if not through this avenue, DEFRA would need to sponsor a Bill.

13.3 Consultants have been appointed to draft the new Management Plan Guidance, which is expected in for completion around March/April 2023. Natural England will be ensuring that Management Plans make contributions to national targets.

- 13.4 Targets and Outcomes - The Landscapes Review recommended improving the monitoring and reporting in protected landscapes to help us to understand the state of nature and prioritise action towards desired environmental outcomes. New outcomes will be agreed for the role of protected landscapes in delivering on the government's goals for nature recovery and climate, aligned with the revised 25 Year Environment Plan, targets under the Environment Act 2021 and the Net Zero Strategy. Targets will be apportioned to individual AONBs. Given that AONB teams have limited powers and resources to deliver direct change, the accountability for the delivery of the targets and outcomes needs clarification (will this be the AONB or the entire Partnership?).
- 13.5 National Landscape Service – The government was initially keen on this suggestion however rather than being a new service, this will now take the form of a collaborative new partnership including National Parks, AONB and National Trails. There is a group looking at the possible remit of the partnership. The chair will be a ministerial appointment.
- 13.6 Branding – The Glover Review found that the public do not understand and relate to the name AONB, and their national significance should be highlighted in their name. The government agrees with this, and Defra is working with the National Association for AONBs to identify the best way to exemplify the values which underpin the family of protected landscapes in their branding. As part of that work, the proposal is to rename AONBs as 'National Landscapes'. We have jumped ahead and have already embraced the term with the new Place brand. The national change might come into effect on the 1st April 2023, and we will be invited to 'become' Cannock Chase National Landscape. Some AONBs are not yet convinced by the proposal.
- 13.7 Resourcing - All English AONBs have recently received a 3 year financial settlement from Defra which provides for an increase in funding. This settlement falls well short of supporting the transformative change for AONBs envisioned by Julian Glover, particularly if AONBs take on a second statutory duty. The Defra Landscapes team have indicated they will do as much as possible on additional resourcing for AONBs. In the short-term additional funds are likely to come as 'project' money – eg, Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and 'Access for All'.
- 13.8 The NAAONB is liaising with Defra to develop more capacity for AONBs to realise Green Investment opportunities with corporate businesses wanting to invest in nature recovery. This area will be one of the new roles for the new National Landscapes Partnership.
- 13.9 Resolved:
The Committee noted the report.**
14. **Date, time and venue of next meeting**
Joint Committee Meetings for the year have been arranged to avoid Thursdays which are difficult for several members due to obligations to other Committees.
Wednesday 22nd March 2023 - 14:00. – 16.00
Wednesday 12th July 2023 - 14:00. – 16.00
Wednesday 6th December 2023 - 14:00. – 16.00

All meetings will be held at Rising Brook Community Church, Burton Square, Stafford ST17 9LT, unless informed differently.

Item 5**Public questions****Item for:**

Questions received (in advance) from members of the public

Author:

None

Financial implications:

None

Recommendations:

The Committee notes the questions and is invited to respond.

6. The individual projects, totalling £94,362 for the AONB Projects are set out in Appendix 3. The projects show an overspend of £6,541 when compared to the original budget of £87,821. An additional contribution not originally budgeted was received from the SAC Partnership of £10,000 towards year 2 cost of £17,500 for the awareness for young people programmes (future guardians). A slight underspend against other projects has resulted in a reduction of funds re-allocated from SDF projects of £1,645 along with a transfer of funds back to the Core budget of £1,814.
7. The detailed net position for the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme is set out in Appendix 4 and is compared to the original budget of £289,620. The final spend against the programme was £226,764, which resulted in an underspend against the grant of £62,856, which will have to be repaid. This is due to reduction in costs originally anticipated for the project

Revenue Budget update 2023/24

8. The budget for the AONB for 2023/24 of £237,700, which was previously approved by the Joint Committee at the December 2022 set out in Appendix 5. The budget included a contribution from the AONB Reserve to balance the budget of £15,750. The current forecast outturn position when compared to budget is breakeven, one-off savings generated following the retirement of the AONB Landscape Planning Officer following her retirement have been utilised to fund a consultant to cover the role through to 31st October 2023, this has resulted in a forecast underspend of £2,766, which has been utilised to reduce the amount required from the AONB reserve during the financial year to balance the budget.
9. The level of funding for the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) £10,000 and AONB Projects £15,150 remain unchanged from the previous year allocations.
10. The individual projects against the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) for 2023/24 are fully allocated as set out in Appendix 6, with projects approved or committed amounting to £10,000, including £1,000 administration fee deduction.
11. The individual projects against the AONB Projects for 2023/24 are set out in Appendix 7, with projects approved or committed amounting to £8,338 in total, which leaves a balance of £6,812 unallocated.

Reserve

12. The balance on the Cannock Chase AONB Reserve at the end of the financial year 2022/23 stood at £70,448, after transfers in of sales income, donations for the great ward hut, SDF administration fees, underspend against the core budget and interest accrued. The reserve currently stands at £58,464 for 2023/24 after assuming the transfer of admin fees into the reserve and the contribution from reserve to the core budget of £12,984. A summary of the Reserve is attached as Appendix 8.
13. It has previously been recommended that the priorities for the use of the Reserve Fund should be as follows:
 - Income from sales, donations and consultancy work should be available to supplement the delivery of projects within the Annual Action Plans and to provide 'matched funding' for any major grant applications and;

- The remaining funds should be earmarked to enable the AONB unit to respond to the implications of any potential future reductions in funding.

14. These priorities are reviewed annually in December of each year.

Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

15. Since July 2020 the AONB has been delivering the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme collaborating with farmers and land managers. The funding is for a four-year programme (ending 31 March 2025) and is provided by Defra and is additional funding on top of the annual core grant that the AONB receives.

16. A summary of the budget position for the programme is attached as Appendix 9. The budget for 2023/24 is £390,355 and the predicted outturn for the programme at the end of the financial year is a breakeven position.

Equalities Implications

17. This report has been prepared in accordance with the Equal Opportunities policies of the County Council.

Legal Implications

18. Actions recommended in this report are in accordance with the provisions of the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership Agreement.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

19. This report recommends actions to ensure the continued efficient delivery of the Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan and reflects the principles set out in the Partnership Agreements.

Risk Implications

20. If continuity of funding and spend are not continued as recommended to the Joint Committee, then the five authorities involved in the current Partnership will need to seek other methods of fulfilling their statutory obligations for the AONB under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Recommendations

21. The following recommendations are made to the Joint Committee:

- (1) That the final outturn position for 2022/23 for the Core, Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), AONB Projects, Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) Programme and the closing balance held on the AONB reserve are noted.
- (2) That progress on the current net revenue budget for 2023/24 and its current forecast outturn position are noted.
- (3) That progress on spend for the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme is noted.

Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee

Cannock Chase AONB Core & Project Costs

Outturn for 2022/2023

	Budget	Outturn	Variation
	£	£	£
Core Budget			
Salaries	172,670	161,555	-11,115
Training Expenses	1,510	0	-1,510
Travel and Subsistence	700	713	13
Staff and Associated Costs	174,880	162,268	-12,612
Office Equipment	1,400	3,543	2,143
Annual Audit	0	0	0
Volunteer Costs	500	78	-422
National Liaison	3,160	2,789	-371
Print & Publicity	4,140	15,374	11,234
AONB Website	0	0	0
Annual Conference	2,000	2,940	940
Core Activity (including monitoring, community involvement, etc)	1,720	1,597	-123
Partnership Running Costs	9,000	9,000	0
Core Budget Subtotal	196,800	197,588	788
Sustainable Development Fund	10,000	5,409	-4,591
AONB Projects	15,150	27,587	12,437
SDF/AONB Projects Subtotal	25,150	32,996	7,846
Total Budget/Initial Forecast Outturn	221,950	230,584	8,634
New Projects to be developed - Access for All	66,435	66,775	340
Outturn as at 31 March 2023	288,385	297,359	8,974
Funded By:			
DEFRA Grant			
Core	-147,600	-147,600	0
Sustainable Development Fund	-10,000	-10,000	0
AONB Projects	-15,150	-15,150	0
Additional Projects Allocation - Access for All	-66,435	-66,435	0
DEFRA Grant Subtotal	-239,185	-239,185	0
Local Authority Contributions			
Lichfield District Council	-2,460	-2,460	0
South Staffordshire District Council	-2,460	-2,460	0
Cannock Chase District Council	-9,840	-9,840	0
Stafford Borough Council	-9,840	-9,840	0
Staffordshire County Council	-24,600	-24,600	0
Local Authority Contributions Subtotal	-49,200	-49,200	0
Sales and Donations	0	0	0
Membership Fee Income	0	0	0
SAC Partnership Contribution to Future Guardians AONB Project	0	-10,000	-10,000
Funding from(+)/to reserve(-)	0	1,026	1,026
Total Funding	-288,385	-297,359	-8,974

Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee

Sustainable Development Fund

Outturn for 2022/23

	Budget £	Outturn £	Variation £
Approved Projects			
Long-eared owl audio survey	600	600	0
Quinquennial breeding bird survey for Cannock Chase (phase 2)	2,164	3,809	1,645
Reallocation of funding to AONB Projects	6,236	4,591	-1,645
Approved Projects Total	9,000	9,000	0
Admin Fees	1,000	1,000	0
TOTAL	10,000	10,000	0

Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee

AONB Projects

Outturn for 2022/2023

	Budget £	Outturn £	Variation £
Approved Projects			
Contribution to Art in the Landscape programme (yr2)	5,000	5,000	0
Contribution to awareness programme for young people (yr2) (Future Guardians Project)	5,000	12,500	7,500
Deer census (phase 2)	2,795	2,795	0
Small World Consulting	4,908	4,908	0
Poetry Workshop	500	478	-22
Dark Sky Engagement Activities	1,433	556	-877
Trig Points Structural Assessment and Stabilisation Works	1,500	0	-1,500
Great War Hut - Sign Copyrighting	250	0	-250
Access for All Projects	66,435	66,775	340
Species at risk for Cannock Chase	0	350	350
Contribution to NAAONB Arts Council bid	0	1,000	1,000
Approved Projects Total	87,821	94,362	6,541
Original Budget allocated	-15,150	-15,150	0
SAC Partnership Contribution to Future Guardians AONB Project	0	-10,000	-10,000
Re-allocation of Funds from SDF Projects	-6,236	-4,591	1,645
Re-allocation of Funds To Core Budget	0	1,814	1,814
Additional DEFRA Funding	-66,435	-66,435	0
TOTAL	-87,821	-94,362	-6,541

Farming in Protected Landscapes Grant

Outturn for 2022/2023

	Budget £	Outturn £	Variation £
Farming in Protected Landscapes Expenditure:			
Programme Administration	25,290	17,417	-7,873
Programme Advice & Guidance	42,993	34,833	-8,160
Project Spend	221,337	174,514	-46,823
Total Budget/Initial Forecast Outturn	289,620	226,764	-62,856
Farming in Protected Landscapes Grant	-289,620	-226,764	62,856
Total Funding	0	0	0

Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee

Cannock Chase AONB Core & Project Costs

Forecast for 2023/2024

	Budget	2023 Actuals	Predicted Outturn	Variation
	£	£	£	£
Core Budget				
Salaries	188,420	28,349	170,054	-18,366
Consultancy Costs	0	0	15,600	15,600
Training Expenses	1,510	0	1,510	0
Travel and Subsistence	700	353	700	0
Staff and Associated Costs	190,630	28,702	187,864	-2,766
Office Equipment	1,400	235	1,400	0
Annual Audit	0	0	0	0
Volunteer Costs	500	0	500	0
National Liaison	3,160	2,928	3,160	0
Print & Publicity	4,140	1,773	4,140	0
AONB Website	0	0	0	0
Annual Conference	2,000	-2,640	2,000	0
Core Activity (including monitoring, community involvement, etc)	1,720	0	1,720	0
Partnership Running Costs	9,000	0	9,000	0
Core Budget Subtotal	212,550	30,998	209,784	-2,766
Sustainable Development Fund	10,000	-461	10,000	0
AONB Projects	15,150	-44,976	15,150	0
SDF/AONB Projects Subtotal	25,150	-45,438	25,150	0
Total Budget/Initial Forecast Outturn	237,700	-14,440	234,934	-2,766
Funded By:				
DEFRA Grant				
Core	-147,600	43,188	-147,600	0
Sustainable Development Fund	-10,000	0	-10,000	0
AONB Projects	-15,150	0	-15,150	0
DEFRA Grant Subtotal	-172,750	43,188	-172,750	0
Local Authority Contributions				
Lichfield District Council	-2,460	0	-2,460	0
South Staffordshire District Council	-2,460	0	-2,460	0
Cannock Chase District Council	-9,840	0	-9,840	0
Stafford Borough Council	-9,840	0	-9,840	0
Staffordshire County Council	-24,600	0	-24,600	0
Local Authority Contributions Subtotal	-49,200	0	-49,200	0
Sales and Donations	0	0	0	0
Membership Fee Income	0	0	0	0
Funding from(+)/to reserve(-)	-15,750	0	-12,984	2,766
Total Funding	-237,700	43,188	-234,934	2,766

Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee

Sustainable Development Fund

Budget Update for 2023/24

	Budget	Spent or Committed to Date	Predicted Outturn	Variation
	£	£	£	£
Approved Projects				
West Midlands Ringing Group - Nightjar thermal drone	3,706	0	3,706	0
John Bamford Primary School - wildlife garden	3,500	0	3,500	0
West Hill Primary School - bat, bird and wildlife boxes	486	0	486	0
Beaudesert Park Farm - improved learning opportunities	1,308	0	1,308	0
Approved Projects Total	9,000	0	9,000	0
Admin Fees	1,000	0	1,000	0
Currently Unallocated	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	10,000	0	10,000	0

Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee

AONB Projects

Budget Update for 2023/2024

	Budget	Spent or Committed to Date	Predicted Outturn	Variation
	£	£	£	£
Approved Projects				
Future Guardians of Cannock Chase	1,610	0	1,610	0
Museum of Cannock Chase display	188	0	188	0
Brindley Heath, Milford Common, RAF Hednesford Trails	290	0	290	0
Walking Cannock Chase promoted routes	500	0	500	0
Dark skies	1,000	0	1,000	0
Veteran trees	250	0	250	0
Trig point reinstatement	3,000	0	3,000	0
Cannock Chase Charitable Fund	1,500	0	1,500	0
Approved Projects Total	8,338	0	8,338	0
Currently Unallocated	6,812	0	6,812	0
Re-allocation of Funds from SDF Projects	0	0	0	0
Additional DEFRA Funding	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	15,150	0	15,150	0

Cannock Chase AONB Reserve

Financial Year	Opening Balance	Income/Sales	Great War Hut Donations	Membership Fees	Visitor Survey Work	Admin Fees	Transfer to/from Reserve	Balance of Admin Fees / Underspends	Interest	Transfer To Fund Core Service	Closing Balance
	£	£	£		£	£	£	£	£	£	£
2007/2008	10,214						-1,766	-1,766			8,448
2008/2009	8,448	572				9,303	-1,590	7,713			16,733
2009/2010	16,733	1,326				6,166	-371	5,795			23,854
2010/2011	23,854	896		525	9,564	4,744	-921	3,823			38,662
2011/2012	38,662	1,240		1,367	17,845	3,983	-4,204	-221			58,893
2012/2013	58,893	387		1,108		3,218	-533	2,685	195		63,270
2013/2014	63,270	1,001		1,675		2,459	0	2,459	249		68,654
2014/2015	68,654	596		1,720		1,327	-54	1,273	289		72,532
2015/2016	72,532			569		500	-2,383	-1,883	293		71,512
2016/2017	71,512	1,475		553		1,565	-108	1,457	132		75,129
2017/2018	75,129	1,471		52		1,809	30,703	32,512	189		109,353
2018/2019	109,353	169		104		2,056	34,361	36,417	685		146,728
2019/2020	146,728					2,307	-94,792	-92,485	577		54,819
2020/2021	54,819					1,307	0	1,307	78		56,204
2021/2022	56,204	5,740				1,000	3,418	4,418	44		66,406
2022/2023	66,406	50	594			1,000	1,026	2,026	1,372		70,448
2023/2024	70,448					1,000				-12,984	58,464
		14,925	594	7,673	27,409	43,744	-37,214	6,530	4,103	-12,984	58,464

Appendix 9

Farming in Protected Landscapes Grant

Forecast for 2023/2024

	Budget	2023 Actuals	Predicted Outturn	Variation
	£	£	£	£
Farming in Protected Landscapes Expenditure:				
Programme Administration	18,570	3,355	18,572	2
Programme Advice & Guidance	37,140	6,710	37,143	3
Project Spend	334,645	-2,722	334,640	-5
Total Budget/Initial Forecast Outturn	390,355	7,343	390,355	0
Farming in Protected Landscapes Grant	-390,355	-38,968	-390,355	0
Total Funding	0	-31,625	0	0

Item 7 **AONB Annual Review 2022-23**

Item for: Decision

Author: Samantha Hall, AONB Communications Officer

Financial implications: Provision for desktop publishing the Annual Review is allowed within the AONB budget.

Recommendations: The Committee approves the AONB Annual Review 2020 for publication, with any amendments.

Background

1. The production of an Annual Review summarising the year's achievements of the AONB Partnership is an essential component of the AONB's Communication Strategy. It provides an opportunity to:
 - Record formally the Partnership's successes in delivering our core purpose to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of Cannock Chase
 - Demonstrate our ability to deliver through examples of our work
 - Showcase what we are about, and why partners would want to work with us
 - Provide financial details of the Partnership and its ability to manage its financial affairs
 - Raise our profile nationally to Defra, that we offer value for money, and that we are contributing within the AONB family to the national agenda for protected landscapes.

Overview – AONB activities

2. The AONB Annual Review for 2022-23 highlights a selection of the key activities we have delivered with our partners and volunteers under the themes set out in our AONB Management Plan:

Landscape character and planning

- Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme; Dark skies; Fixed Point Photography; Trent-Sow Parklands HS2 Group; Highways Design Guide

Wildlife and nature

- Conserving adders; 2022 breeding bird survey; Veteran trees; Deer management; Habitat enhancements for crayfish; Priority conservation species

Historic environment and culture

- Conserving our trig points; Conservation works at Castle Ring; Condition surveys of non-designated heritage assets; Scheduled Monuments visits and inspections; 'Natural memorial' to the Armed Forces at RAF Hednesford; Interactive touch-screen kiosk at Cannock Chase Visitor Centre

Experience and enjoyment

- Connecting with nature and landscape through the arts; Visitor engagement; Supporting SAC Partnership car park and site user implementation plans; Commonwealth Games mountain biking event

Communities and Business

- Future Guardians of Cannock Chase; Access for All Fund; AONB Sustainable Development Fund; Volunteering; Diversity and Inclusion

Governance and communication

- Appointment of AONB Communications Officer; NAAONB Annual Conference; Cannock Chase AONB Annual Conference; Protected Landscapes Reforms; Carbon baseline assessment and pathway to net zero; AONB enewsletter

Overview - AONB finances

3. Financially our income and expenditure left an overall budget balance of £1,431 to be added to AONB Reserves. The Defra grant included an additional allocation of £66,435 for the Access for All Fund. During the year there was £10,404 of additional project income.
4. The Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme awarded £174,514 of grants for environmental outcomes. An underspend of £63K was returned to Defra - mainly arising from projects that were unable to be completed during the year.

Recommendation

5. The Committee approves the Annual Review for publication, with any amendments.

Appendix (issued separately)

Annual Review 2022-23

4. The Business Plan will ensure that the AONB Partnership continues to conserve and enhance Cannock Chase through targeted deployment of resources (staff and budget) and building on the strong links with local people and groups.
5. It is assumed that AONB core funding comprising 75% from Defra and 25% from constituent local authorities will continue at current levels.
6. Whilst many of the actions identified in the work programme can be delivered within the current budget and resources of the AONB, additional funding will be required if some are to proceed. Wherever possible, therefore, the AONB will develop actions collaboratively with partners and pool resources where aims are shared and this will lead to mutual benefits.
7. Key priorities are set out in the table below, against the AONB Management Plan themes.

Management Plan Theme	Key priorities for 2023-25
Landscape Character and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of Highways Design Guide • Promotion of Dark Skies • Delivery of Yr 3 and Yr 4 of the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme
Wildlife and Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution to 30 by 30 and publication of Nature Recovery Plan • Development of priority species and habitat conservation projects • Publication of deer management strategy
Historic Environment and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of heritage strategy • Development and delivery of conservation, access and interpretation measures • Condition assessments of non-designated heritage assets
Experience and Enjoyment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of actions to improve visitor welcome and experience • Preparation of updated strategies for interpretation and visitor management • Collaboration with national arts programme and development of local projects
Communities and Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of Future Guardians of Cannock Chase resource materials • Delivery of actions to improve diversity and inclusion • Promotion of Sense of Place toolkit with local businesses
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building resilience and adapting to a changing climate • Preparation of AONB Management Plan 2025-30 • Establishment and promotion of Cannock Chase Fund for business and voluntary giving

Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broadening the AONB’s presence in all communication channels• Preparation of a new communications strategy• Implementing the Cannock Chase place brand and National Landscapes re-brand
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Recommendations

12. The Committee approves a new 2-year Business Plan (2023-25), with any amendments

Appendix (issued separately)

Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Business Plan 2023-25

What the re-brand is hoping to achieve

8. The rationale behind the brand strategy is appended. In brief, the re-brand is seeking to achieve:
- A strong and distinctive brand that raises the profile of AONBs and helps people understand their value
 - A more unified identity across the AONB family to better show its collective size, ambition and potential impact
 - A more accessible and inclusive brand
 - A statement of the AONB family’s collective ambition; creating a stronger case for investment opportunities.

What is being proposed

9. Naming - whilst the legal designation of ‘Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ will remain, the name of the Place and the Organisation of each AONB will change. For example:

	From	To
Place	Cannock Chase AONB	Cannock Chase National Landscape
Organisation	Cannock Chase AONB Team Cannock Chase AONB Partnership AONB Officer	Cannock Chase National Landscape Team Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership National Landscape Officer

10. Visual identity - A new suite of brand logos, one for each AONB, has been developed to create a strong visual approach, greater consistency and collective power. The proposed logo for Cannock Chase National Landscape is below. The pink colour has been chosen to represent heathland, and various hues would be available to use.



**Cannock
Chase
National
Landscape**

11. Brand guidelines – Brand guidelines will be issued for AONBs to follow in their day-to-day work for use in all communications.

Next steps

12. The National Association for AONBs anticipates announcing the rebrand of the National Association at the annual conference of AONBs in early September, with individual AONBs following according to their readiness. Each AONB will determine their own timescale and priorities for implementing the brand.

Observations and implications for Cannock Chase

13. For the last 3 years Cannock Chase has been implementing a new place brand for Cannock Chase.



- The brand was introduced as one of the key recommendations of a Communications Review and Strategy for Cannock Chase in 2019. It has adopted the name National Landscapes, as proposed by Glover, and created a visual identity, supporting narrative, graphics and photographic imagery and colour palette for a design concept developed with the involvement and support of local partners and stakeholders. Joint Committee endorsed the recommended design option on 16 July 2020.
14. Over the intervening years the brand has been implemented as opportunities have arisen. It has been universally welcomed, creating a strong and unifying visual identity for Cannock Chase, that promotes and explains its special qualities and conveys consistent key messages for its protection.
 15. Cannock Chase is, therefore, already referring to the place as a 'National Landscape', and extending the term to the organisation will be straightforward and is considered unlikely to be contentious.
 16. In contrast, however, the replacement of our existing Cannock Chase brand with a new visual identity is complicated and of concern.
 - It will have been imposed nationally and will have no local 'ownership' by partners and stakeholders.
 - Its implementation so soon after the introduction of the Cannock Chase Place brand may cause confusion and, possibly, loss of support.
 - The goodwill and momentum generated by the introduction of the Cannock Chase Place brand could be compromised.
 - The implementation of a new visual identity will have significant financial implications. The cost of re-designing, re-writing and re-printing/manufacturing the range of materials that have been developed as part of the roll out of the Cannock Chase Place brand is estimated to be IRO £100,000.
 - The AONB runs reputational risks from accusations of changing its direction and wasting resources.

Conclusions

17. The renaming and rebranding of AONBs as National Landscapes is being pushed through without new purposes, powers and resources and not as part of a complete package to strengthen AONBs as proposed by Glover. It is hoped that developing the re-brand first will lead to the other elements being unlocked.
18. Whilst the re-brand may deliver the perceived benefits nationally, there are concerns that it would impact on our own local brand, create confusion, and have financial and reputational consequences. In particular, the timing is not good for Cannock Chase and threatens to compromise the support for, and progress being made implementing, our existing Cannock Chase brand which underpins our collective efforts to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB.
19. Adoption of the 'National Landscapes' name and re-brand is an individual choice for each AONB, as is the timescale for implementation (if accepted). It is understood that there are no penalties for rejection or deferment of either the National Landscapes name or re-brand.

Options

20. On balance of the national and local considerations, two options for Cannock Chase have been identified.

Option 1

We use the name 'National Landscapes' for both the place and organisation. The adoption of the new visual identity and logo proposed for Cannock Chase is delayed until April 2025 to coincide with the start of the new AONB Management Plan (2025-30).

This option would allow the momentum and co-operation around the current Cannock Chase brand to continue and strengthen for a further 20 months, followed by a period of transition to the new brand after 1st April 2025. The new brand could be presented as part of the new 5 year vision for the AONB. We have already been using the name 'National Landscape for the place, and extending it to the organisation is straightforward and would have minimal costs. Additional, significant, resources would be required, however, to implement the new place brand – estimated to be IRO £100,000, at current prices.

Option 2

The new visual identity and logo proposed for Cannock Chase is rejected. We continue to use our current Cannock Chase brand, and refer to ourselves (place and organisation) as 'National Landscape'.

This option offers continuity for the present local situation and sustains the momentum and co-operation that has been generated around our brand identity within the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership. However, rejection risks isolating Cannock Chase nationally and compromising the aspirations and wishes of the National Association for AONBs and wider AONB family. The implementation of the existing Cannock Chase

brand would continue as opportunities arise and the costs could be absorbed within the existing AONB budget.

21. Regardless of which option is pursued, we would seek to continue to be engaged in the national conversation around the National Landscapes brand, as well as the new purposes, powers and resources for AONBs.

Recommendation

22. The Committee notes the update, considers the implications and options for Cannock Chase and agrees a proposed course of action.

Appendix (issued separately)

Rationale for the National Landscapes Rebrand

Item 10 **Representation on Assessment Panels for Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and AONB Sustainable Development Fund**

Item for: Decision

Authors: Colin Manning, Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer
Richard Harris, AONB Land Management Officer

Financial implications: None. Funding for the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and AONB Sustainable Development Fund are 100% funded through Defra.

Recommendations: The Committee notes the report and is invited to confirm Member representation on panels for (a) the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and (b) AONB Sustainable Development Fund

Part A Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

1. The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (2021-25) offers funding to farmers and land managers in England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Parks for projects that:
 - Support nature recovery
 - Mitigate the impacts of climate change
 - Provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage
 - Protect or improve the quality and character of the landscape or place.
2. In Cannock Chase AONB in the first two years of the Programme (2021-23) some £205,000 of grants has been awarded to 20 applications delivering a range of environmental outcomes:
3. A Local Assessment Panel considers and decides on applications for projects (above £10,000) submitted to the programme, according to the agreed criteria defined by Defra. Panel meetings are scheduled every two months, and take place online via Microsoft Teams. Members are provided with a summary paperwork for each application in advance of meetings and are expected to familiarise themselves with the activities proposed. The AONB Team provides all secretariat for meetings and the work of the Panel.
4. The membership of the panel comprises representatives from the local farming community, CLA, NFU, British Horse Society, South Staffordshire Water, Natural England, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, the AONB Joint Committee and the AONB Team. Mary Cope, a local farmer and member of the AONB Partnership is the Chair.
5. Owing to recent changes arising from local elections, the Joint Committee representative on the Panel has been vacated, and a replacement is invited.

Part B AONB Sustainable Development Fund

6. The AONB Partnership operates a grant fund, the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) to support projects that help to conserve, enhance and raise awareness of Cannock Chase.
7. Local communities and other organisations, businesses and individuals can apply for financial support for projects that result in positive benefits for Cannock Chase AONB – its environment, local communities, and economy so that the unique landscape of the AONB is conserved and its natural beauty enhanced, making it more enjoyable for all. The panel meets after each round of applications – no more than twice a year. The AONB Team provides all secretariat for meetings and the work of the Panel.
8. The current annual budget for the Fund is £10,000, which includes an administration fee of £1,000.
9. The membership of the panel comprises representatives from the Friends of Cannock Chase, Ramblers, the AONB Joint Committee and the AONB Team.
10. Owing to recent changes arising from local elections, the Joint Committee representative on the Panel has been vacated, and a replacement is invited.

Recommendations

11. The Committee notes the report and is invited to confirm Member representation on panels for (a) the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme and (b) AONB Sustainable Development Fund

Item 11 Cannock Chase Charitable Fund

Item for: Decision

Authors: Ian Marshall, AONB Development Officer

Financial implications: Fees to cover the costs of managing the Fund would be charged by the Staffordshire Community Foundation and AONB Partnership. Legal costs for oversight of the Draft Agreement would be allocated from the AONB budget.

Recommendations: The Committee approves the establishment of a Charitable Fund for Cannock Chase between Cannock Chase AONB Partnership and the Staffordshire Community Foundation

Background

1. In 2017 the former AONB Team with external consultants explored various models to improve the financial sustainability of the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership in response to concerns at the time about a possible future reduction in Defra core funding.
2. The preferred option from those investigations to create a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) has not been progressed, and the perceived threat of reduced Defra core funding for AONBs has receded over the intervening years.
3. Whilst the threat to the core funding of AONBs is diminished it is nonetheless prudent to consider ways to broaden our funding base to allow us to support and expand the delivery of AONB activities. Specifically, setting in place a means whereby we can receive donations from residents, businesses and visitors who want to invest in Cannock Chase.

Proposal for a Cannock Chase Charitable Fund

4. Given that our needs have changed, a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) is over and above what we now require. Discussions have, therefore, taken place with the Staffordshire Community Foundation for an alternative option that would be less complex and lighter in its administrative burden for the AONB Partnership. The Mendip Hills AONB has set up the [Mendip Hills Fund](#) in partnership with the Somerset Community Foundation, and is an example of the kind of arrangement that better suits our needs. Annually, this brings in c.£15,000 per annum. The money is held by the Somerset Community Foundation who do due diligence on applications. The AONB Team administers the independent panel that make the grant award decisions. The AONB and Community Foundation each take a management fee from the funds to cover the costs of management and administration of the fund.
5. A draft agreement between the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership and Staffordshire Community Foundation for a Cannock Chase Charitable Fund is appended, based on the Mendip Hills Fund model. This would be signed by Staffordshire County Council on behalf of the AONB Partnership.

Key points about the Fund and its operation

6. The establishment of a Charitable Fund for Cannock Chase would enable us to take advantage of businesses, individuals and visitors who want to invest in the future of the AONB. We would also be able to explore the potential for raising (voluntary) contributions on overnight stays, event registration etc.
7. Grants would be given to support community and voluntary groups as well as the non-statutory activities of the Partnership itself that further the aims of the AONB Management Plan.
8. The Community Foundation would manage the application process, deal with enquiries, vet applications and forward to the AONB Partnership those that they believe meet the criteria for funding.
9. An independent Panel would be set up and run by the AONB Team to assess the applications. Initially, it is proposed that this would be the existing panel set up to assess applications to the Sustainable Development Fund (see section below).
10. The Community Foundation would take a management fee to establish and operate the fund (proposed at 9% of the income generated each year). The AONB Partnership would take a management fee to provide the secretariat to the independent panel (proposed at 6% of the income generated each year).
11. The Charitable Fund would supplement the core funding we have available for AONB projects thus enabling us to fund a greater range of activities.

Relationship with the AONB Sustainable Development Fund

12. A Sustainable Development Fund has been operated by Cannock Chase AONB since 2006/07, supporting projects that demonstrate a strong level of support for the AONB and its environment, and the social and economic needs of the local community. The amount within the Fund has diminished over recent years, and currently stands at £10,000.
13. If members agree to the proposed establishment of the new Charitable Fund for Cannock Chase it is proposed to operate this concurrently with the Sustainable Development for a trial period of 2 years so that its viability and success can be gauged. If the new fund is successful, then it is proposed that it would replace the Sustainable Development Fund at the end of the trial period. The budget allocation for the Sustainable Development Fund can then be permanently transferred to AONB projects delivered by the AONB Team.
14. During this trial period it is proposed that the current Sustainable Development Fund panel assesses applications made under both the new Cannock Chase Charitable Fund and Sustainable Development Fund.

Next steps

15. If members approve the establishment of the Cannock Chase Charitable Fund, the following next steps are proposed:
- Make any amendments to the Agreement and agree these with the Staffordshire Community Foundation
 - Secure legal oversight of the final Agreement
 - Staffordshire County Council (on behalf of the AONB Partnership) and Staffordshire Community Foundation sign the Agreement.
 - The Community Foundation establishes the infrastructure for donations and the grant-application process.
 - Webpages are set up on both the AONB and Community Foundation websites.
 - The new Fund is promoted and launched in September 2023 to coincide with the 65th anniversary of the confirmation of the Designation Order of Cannock Chase AONB.

Recommendations

16. The Committee approves the establishment of a Charitable Fund between Cannock Chase AONB Partnership and the Staffordshire Community Foundation

Appendix (issued separately)

Draft Cannock Chase Charitable Fund Agreement

currently only able to deliver the family activities, due to staffing. SWT delivered the two bespoke Dark Skies events for families (each for approximately 30 people) on 20th and 22nd February, as free events supported by the AONB. The events were advertised initially by SWT on their social media channels and proved very popular being fully booked overnight.

7. Activities focussed on why light pollution affects creatures that are active at dusk / dawn or at night and showcasing these at The Wolseley Centre; adaptations for seeing / foraging in the dark; discovering basic constellations and ending with a campfire in the outdoor classroom and a look at animal skulls found locally.
8. Staffordshire CPRE also organised a Dark Skies event for Scouts and Brownies which the AONB supported financially. 72 children attended 2 one-hour sessions at Beaudesert Scout and Guide Camp on 15th February, where astronomers from Keele University, who had kindly given their time voluntarily, explained about the wonders of the night sky, with an opportunity to observe the constellations through telescopes.
9. All events were co-ordinated to coincide with the few days around the new moon which means that the stars are more visible.
10. Numbers had to be limited for all the events but there is clearly great enthusiasm and interest in the night sky from the local community and a demand for similar events in future.

AONB Good Lighting Guide

11. Originally a piece of work to be commissioned, it was decided that the guide would be prepared in-house. After much research, AONB Officers sought permission from Blackdown Hills AONB to incorporate elements of their published Good Lighting Guide to inform the preparation of a bespoke guide for Cannock Chase AONB. Officers also consulted Bob Mizon of the Commission for Dark Skies during the preparation of the guide.
12. The guide explains that light pollution has the potential to erode and destroy tranquillity and a sense of remoteness. It diminishes the ability to see and understand the dark night skies and beauty of our galaxy. It also has adverse impacts on our health and wellbeing, wildlife behaviour, and wastes resources. Artificial lighting also introduces a suburban feel and can detract from the landscape beauty of the AONB. Evidence is included of the darkness of the skies in and around the AONB, along with the results of the Sky Quality Survey of the AONB carried out by volunteers in 2021.
13. The purpose of the guide is to raise awareness of dark skies, and to demonstrate how simple changes to the way we light our homes, businesses and neighbourhoods can have big impacts. It provides information and advice to individuals, businesses and decision makers interested in reducing and avoiding light pollution so that we keep Cannock Chase special.

14. A position statement is included in the guide:

- Building on the adopted AONB Management Plan and mindful of the simple improvements that can be made to provide good and adequate lighting without prejudicing dark skies, Cannock Chase AONB Partnership takes the position that all artificial external lighting within its borders, or within the setting of the AONB, should be muted, screened, and the minimum required. Any temporary lighting that may be required for safety at permitted events should be similarly limited to the minimum necessary. The appropriateness of proposals for temporary decorative installations, such as on historic assets, should be carefully considered to avoid impact on dark skies and wildlife.
- Advice is separated into information for owners and developers, and for local authority decision makers. The aim of the guide is to raise awareness of lighting issues; encourage residents and developers to use less light polluting, more efficient lighting to reduce environmental impacts from light pollution; provide information on good practice and point readers to further information to inform their decisions. Checklists are provided for ease of reference.

15. The guide has been prepared in consultation with Staffordshire Highways and partner local authorities.

Recommendations

16. (1) The Committee notes the success of the community engagement element of the Dark Skies project.
- (2) The Committee approves the Cannock Chase AONB Good Lighting Guide and its publication on the AONB website.

Appendix (issued separately)

Light Pollution and Dark Skies in Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Good Lighting Guide