



Cannock Chase Annual Review 2022-2023

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Welcome From Our Chair

On behalf of the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership I am proud to welcome you to the Annual Review of our achievements for 2022/23.

Over the past year the combined efforts of the AONB Team, Joint Committee and wider partnership working together with land managers, communities, businesses and visitors has helped to conserve, enhance and celebrate the natural beauty of this nationally important protected landscape.

We have delivered a wide range of activities across all themes in our statutory AONB Management Plan. A particular focus of our activities this year has been to make Cannock Chase more welcoming, accessible and relevant to people. Much of this work has been possible through the additional funding made available from Defra through its Access for All Fund. I'm also delighted that the national success and impact of the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme has resulted in it being extended until 31 March 2025. The programme has enabled us to foster working relationships with our farming communities and deliver a wide range of environmental outcomes.

The year ahead offers ongoing challenges and opportunities for the AONB Partnership to deliver more for nature, climate, people and place. We need to consider how we can contribute to the Government's target of 30 by 30 (protecting 30% of our land for nature by 2030). Creative thinking will also be required if we are to reach our pathway for the AONB to being net zero by 2034 and deliver the challenging tree planting targets and changes to agricultural practices this will require. We will also need to continue

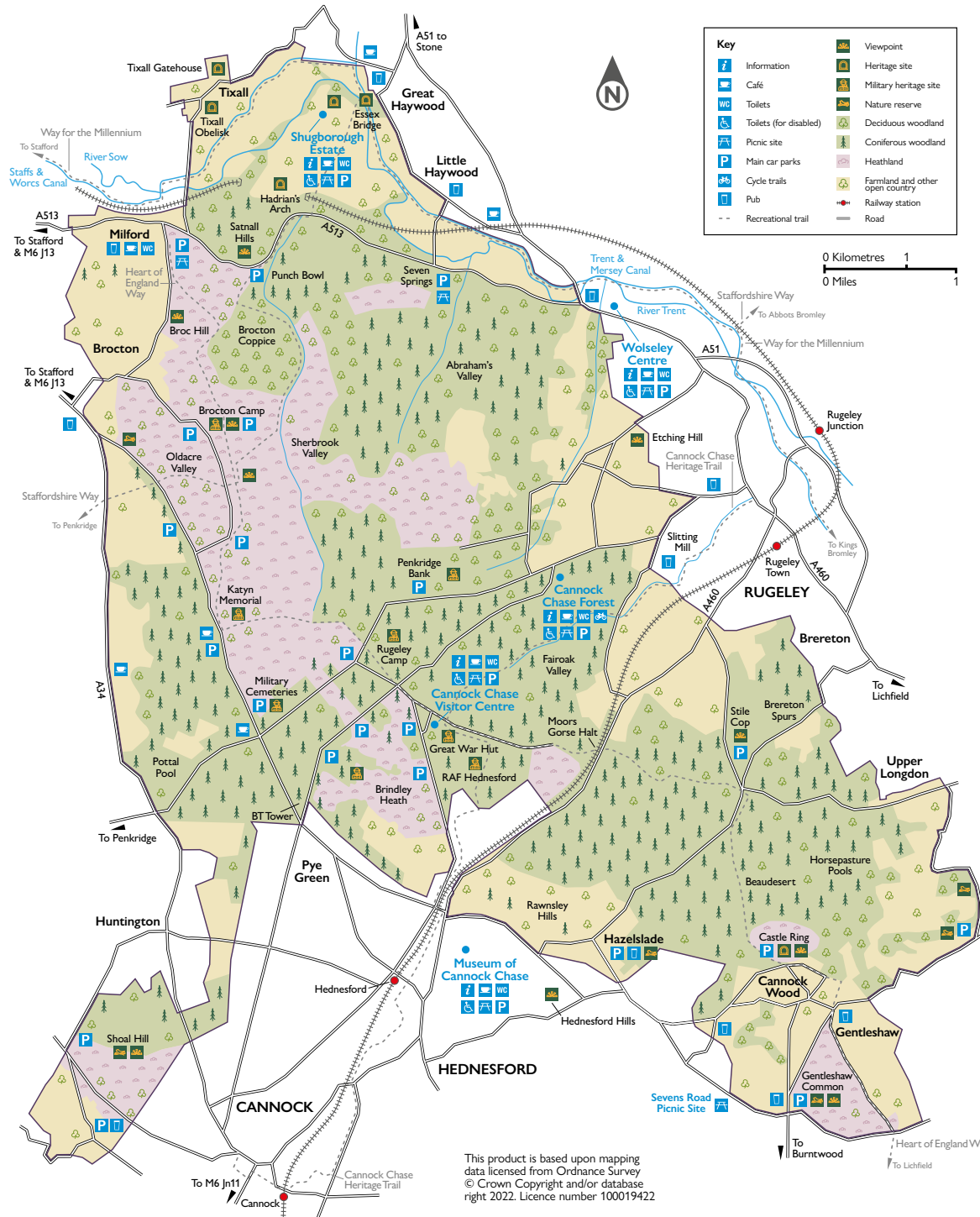
our efforts to change the perceptions and behaviours of the 2.7 million visitors who come to enjoy Cannock Chase each year.

In addition, we also hope that the Government's long-awaited response to the Glover Review of Protected Landscapes will be published, bringing with it proper resourcing for AONBs to meet the increased expectations placed on Protected Landscapes to deliver for the nation.

I must stand down from the Chair and Committee because of the vagaries of politics, but I will continue to strive for the protection of Cannock Chase, its nationally important landscapes, its internationally important fauna and flora; to tell its story and for better control of the greatest threat to its future – human beings.



Frances Beatty
Chair, Cannock Chase AONB
Joint Committee



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Cannock Chase

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

Wild and Beautiful

Designated in 1958 and covering 26 sq miles (69 sq kms) of forests, heaths and historic parklands, Cannock Chase is mainland England's smallest AONB.

Cannock Chase AONB Partnership

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

2022/23 In Numbers

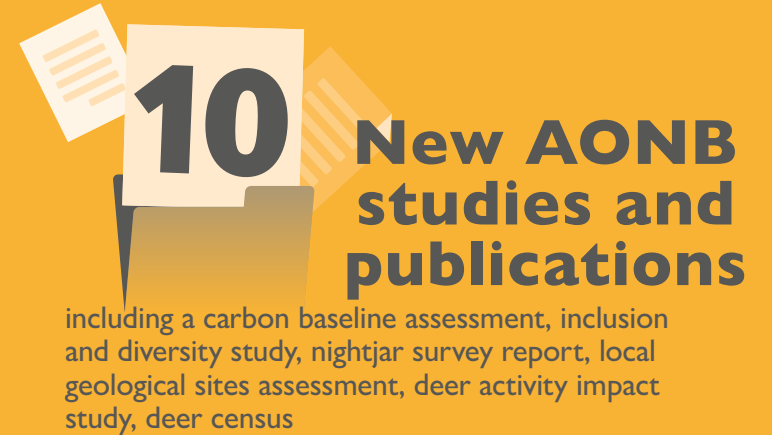
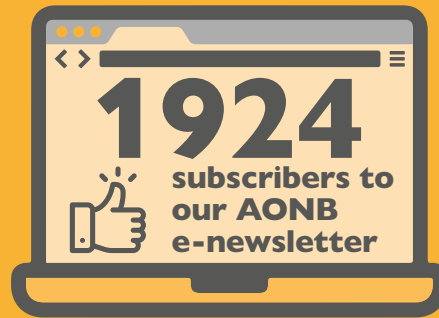
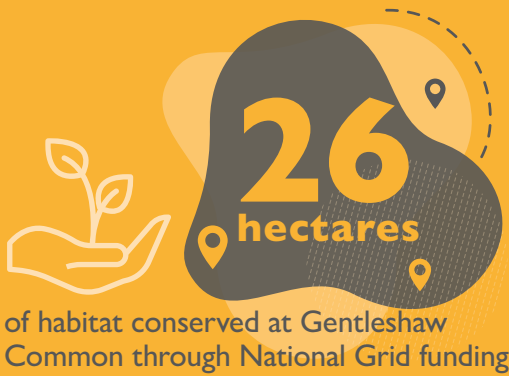




Image: Photo credit Sam Carpenter

Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

During 2022-23 a further 17 farmers and land managers in the AONB were supported with grants totalling £132,089.42 to deliver outcomes for nature, climate change, public access and sustainable farming practices.

By the end of March 2023 the following outcomes have been delivered through the [Programme](#):

- 22.39 ha land managed for regenerative farming
- 1640 metres hedgerow planted, 66 hedgerow trees planted
- 77 wildlife boxes installed
- 640 ha total area of land supported by all approved projects
- 1 historic structure conserved
- 3 projects supporting public engagement in land management

We were delighted to learn that Defra has extended the Programme for a 4th year, until 31 March 2025.



Image Funding work in progress

Dark Skies

The importance of Dark Skies for nature and our health and wellbeing has been promoted in interpretation and awareness-raising projects during [Dark Skies](#) week 2023. The AONB supported a star-gazing session with CPRE Staffordshire for Scouts and Brownies on 15 February 2023 and two family friendly dark skies events on 20 and 22 February at Wolseley Bridge run by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. In total 90 children and their guardians attended and discovered the wonder of our dark skies.



Image: Dark Skies event. Photo credit CPRE

The AONB Team has drafted a Good Lighting Guide 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.

Other activities in brief...

- New viewpoints have been added to our long-running **Fixed Point Photography Project**. These will monitor changes to the landscape arising from HS2 works as well as the National Trust's wood-pasture restoration project.
- We have continued to provide landscape design input to the **Trent-Sow Parklands HS2 Group** for enabling works and environmental enhancement projects.
- Together with Staffordshire County Council Highways we have been updating the **Highways Design Guide** for the AONB. This will feature guiding principles to inform all those involved in making alterations to the highways, highways infrastructure, and verge management in the AONB. The Guide will be ready to be presented to Joint Committee for adoption in July 2023.



Images: Peace Vista from top, 2004, 2014 and 2022



Conserving adders

A collaboration between the major landowners on the Chase and the AONB Team, with expert support from Amphibian and Reptile Group (ARG) UK and Shropshire and Staffordshire Amphibian and Reptile Group, is looking to better understand our adder population and inform future management to protect and increase numbers and range.

The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology is developing a computer model of the Cannock Chase landscape to predict the likely suitability for the presence of adders. This will be ground-truthed by field surveys during 2023. Further planned initiatives include a land manager training day, and possibly radio-tracking the movements of adder using telemetry of tagged snakes.



Image: Adder. Photo credit Steve Welch

2022 breeding bird survey

Over a thousand hours of volunteer time by members of the Stafford Branch of the West Midland Bird Club has culminated in the publication of the 7th quinquennial survey of the breeding birds of Cannock Chase.

The diverse range of habitats on the Chase supports significant populations of nationally threatened species of birds. The report demonstrates that whilst many species on the Chase follow nationwide trends in expansion or decline, some do not follow these patterns and still maintain healthy populations, such as nightjar, willow warbler and cuckoo. The AONB is pleased to have supported the continuation of this essential work through its Sustainable Development Fund.



Image: Photo credit Joe Banton

Other activities in brief...

- A training day for 16 volunteers to identify and record **veteran trees** took place on 18th October 2022 at Wolseley Park plantation, near Etchinghill, Rugeley. Organised by the Woodland Trust, Cannock Chase AONB Team and Forestry England, the training will enable volunteers to improve our knowledge of this important resource on the Chase. A further training day is planned for 2023.
- A further census of the **deer population** on the Chase took place in November 2022. Together with the findings from the spring census, as well as an impact study, this evidence will inform a deer management strategy to be prepared during 2023.



Image : Measuring a veteran tree

- Staffordshire Wildlife Trust with the support of Staffordshire County Council carried out 1.3km of **habitat enhancements for crayfish**. Reintroductions of this priority conservation species are being planned for Sherbrook and Oldacre Valleys.
- With the support of the Staffordshire Ecological Record and partners a longlist of **priority conservation species** is being compiled. This will comprise all taxonomic groups recorded on the Chase, e.g., birds, bats, reptiles and amphibians, terrestrial mammals, flowering plants, bryophytes. In consultation with specialists this will then be refined to produce a shortlist of priority species for inclusion in a future Nature Recovery Plan for the AONB.



Image: Fallow bucks. Photo credit Steve Welch

Conserving our trig points

Works to conserve the three surviving Ordnance Survey (OS) triangulation pillars on Cannock Chase (more commonly known as trig points) have taken place. About 4' tall and made of concrete, these familiar features in the countryside were used by the Ordnance Survey in order to determine the exact shape of the country. With the expertise of Staffordshire County Council Highways and Built County, the support of the landowner and advice of the County Archaeologist, the AONB commissioned works involving ground stabilisation, re-painting and reinstating of original features at the 3 trig points located at the Butts (north of Rifle Range Corner), the Glacial Boulder, and Stile Cop.

At least 8 other trig points have disappeared from the Chase, and the AONB is considering reinstating some of them so that these iconic landmarks can, once again, feature in the landscape.



Image: Trig points before and after restoration

Conservation works at Castle Ring

The first phase of conservation works has got underway at Castle Ring – the largest Iron Age hillfort in Staffordshire. Self-regenerating trees and scrub are threatening to damage the earthworks of this scheduled monument. Their clearance and treatment will reduce root damage, and allow visitors to see more of the form of the hillfort with its banks and ditches. The works will also maintain and improve wildlife habitats.

The project is a collaboration between the landowner - Cannock Chase District Council, Historic England, arbor specialists and the AONB Team, and has been financially supported through the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme. Further works are planned for 2023/24.



Image: Castle Ring Iron Age Hillfort

Other activities in brief...

- Volunteers (Chase Through Time and National Trust) have had refresher training from the National Trust and carried out **condition surveys on non-designated heritage assets** on the Shugborough Estate.
- Four of our **7 Scheduled Monuments have been visited and inspected** this year as part of potential applications for funding through the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme.



Image: Essex Bridge Shugborough Estate. Photo credit Sam Carpenter



Image: Interpretation panel, RAF Hednesford Trail

- A lasting '**natural memorial**' to the **Armed Forces** has been created by Staffordshire County Council Ranger Service at the former RAF Hednesford training camp. Native wildflowers have been sown on the footprint of 6 of the wartime barrack huts, accompanied by a new interpretation panel. All activities have been funded through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme.
- A new **interactive touch-screen kiosk in Cannock Chase Visitor Centre** tells the story of The Chase Through Time through 4 themes: The Thrill of the Chase, Home is where the Heath is, Making a Living and, The Chase at War.



Image: Former RAF Hednesford training camp

Connecting with nature and landscape through the arts

To celebrate National Poetry Day in October, local nature poet Cherry Doyle and the Poet Laureate of Wolverhampton, Kuli Kohli, led a poetry workshop on the theme 'The Environment of Cannock Chase' at the Museum of Cannock Chase. Seven budding poets who were new to either poetry, nature poetry, or to the stunning landscapes of Cannock Chase, took part and created their own poems based on what they had observed and learned during the day.

The AONB continued support for the 'Local Cultural Place Makers, Global Change Makers' arts programme with young people, co-ordinated through the Cannock Chase Cultural Education Partnership. A number of activities have now been delivered engaging with young people. As part of the 'Celebrating Birmingham 2022' an artist was commissioned to work in schools. Using old leaflets and out of date maps from the AONB, local school children created lanterns that were temporarily installed in Rugeley and were again on display in the welcome area at the Commonwealth Games 2022 Mountain Biking Event.

Other projects under development include 'Digital Discoveries' - an App game aimed at families, which encourages users to collect 'prizes'. The game will follow a trail at the site of the former RAF Hednesford training camp, and include key messages from the Cannock Chase Code presented in a fun interactive way.



Image: poetry workshop. Photo credit Cherry Doyle

Visitor engagement

After a gap of several years, the information hut at Milford Common has re-opened to welcome visitors to this popular location. Thanks to the efforts of a new group of volunteers, the hut has been repaired and updated with new interpretation panels. The volunteers are on hand to meet and greet visitors most weekends as well as bank holidays.

Updated self-guided trail leaflets have been prepared for RAF Hednesford, Brindley Heath and Milford Common. The leaflets complement the interpretation panels recently installed at RAF Hednesford and Brindley Heath.

Visitors to the Great War Hut next to Cannock Chase Visitor Centre may have noticed that it now features the number 'H21' on its front door! New research highlighted that each barrack hut in the huge training camps on the Chase had its own unique number. The font and colour of 'H21' is an authentic reproduction of those used during the Great War.

Other activities in brief...

- The AONB Team has continued to support the SAC Partnership to deliver the **car park and site user implementation plans**, including proposed improvements to the Punchbowl car park.
- The AONB Team attended the mountain biking events for the **Commonwealth Games** held at Cannock Chase Forest on 8th August 2022 along with Forestry England, the SAC Partnership and Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles. It provided an opportunity to engage with members of the public and distribute copies of our new Welcome leaflet and Guide booklet.



Image: AONB Team at the Commonwealth Games

Future Guardians of Cannock Chase

Jointly funded by the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnerships, the Future Guardians of Cannock Chase programme aims to boost awareness amongst children and young people about the Chase and environmental issues. The hope is that today's youngsters will be the Future Guardians of Cannock Chase tomorrow.

A series of interactive materials, activity sheets and resources has been developed by environmental educational consultant Amy Johnston in partnership with Staffordshire Libraries, Duke of Edinburgh, Staffordshire Scouts and Girl Guiding Staffordshire. The resource content informs, explains and inspires about the special qualities that define the area and create its unique sense of place (natural heritage, cultural heritage, landscape character and scenic qualities, tranquillity and wildness), its vulnerabilities, and how young people can get involved to look after it. This includes the core of the Chase designated a Special Area of Conservation and of international importance for wildlife.

The materials are freely available for children and young people to access and use with their families, library staff, guiding and scouting leaders and DofE instructors. See [Future Guardians of Cannock Chase](#)



Image: Launch of Future Guardians of Cannock Chase

Access for All

The Access for All Fund is part of Defra's commitment to make targeted access improvements in England's protected landscapes, national trails, forests and the wider countryside to help bring the benefits of spending time in nature to everyone. The Fund comes on the back of the inclusion and diversity study carried out on the Chase during 2022, and will help us on our journey to becoming a more welcoming, accessible and diverse protected landscape.

Funding this year has contributed to delivering the following outcomes:

- Re-surfacing 95 metres of the Toc-H trail linking Cannock Chase Visitor Centre to Brindley Heath viewing platform, to improve accessibility for mobility-impaired people (part of the wider Cannock Chase Wayfinding Project).
- The publication of a destination accessibility audit and guide to make Cannock Chase more welcoming to people with disabilities.

- The preparation of information/exploratory videos for walking trails at Milford Common, Brindley Heath and RAF Hednesford to help people with disabilities to plan their visits.
- Improved waymarking signage on 6 new AONB promoted walking routes to aid navigation and improve visitor's confidence walking on the Chase (installed by Staffordshire Council's Public Rights of Way Team and the Ramblers).
- A fold-out guide on the '**Features of Cannock Chase**' to raise awareness of the conservation value and special features of Cannock Chase, in accessible format.
- A new interpretation panel for the Great War Hut, telling the story of the re-constructed barrack hut and the Great War army training camps on Cannock Chase. (A contribution to the refresh of the Chase Heritage Trail led by Cannock Chase Council and Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles)
- Supporting Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles to purchase an additional 8 inclusive and adaptive bikes that will be available for disability groups to use at Cannock Chase Visitor Centre.



Image: Consultation event by Direct Access

Other activities in brief...

- In 2022/23 the AONB Partnership awarded £2,764 to 2 projects through the **AONB Sustainable Development Fund**. This included contributions to the publication costs of the Cannock Chase Breeding Bird Survey, and an audio survey of the long-eared owl.
- The combined number of people **volunteering with the AONB** on our Fixed Point Photography project, and at the Great War Hut and the re-opened Milford Hut has risen to over 40. We are always seeking new volunteers to support us, or our partner organisations. Volunteering is great way help to look after our special landscape, as well as to make friends, learn new skills and keep active.
- The AONB Partnership has agreed a 5-point plan to take forward the findings from a study investigating **diversity and inclusion on Cannock Chase** and within the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership. This includes commitments to prepare a Diversity and Inclusion Statement, appoint a Champion for Diversity and Inclusion, set out a Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, broaden representation on our governance bodies, and embed diversity and inclusion practices into AONB activities and projects.



Image: Features of Cannock Chase, Field Studies Council Publication

AONB Communications Officer

Samantha Hall joined the AONB Team on 2nd November in the new role of AONB Communications Officer. Sam is delivering the communications objectives of the AONB Partnership - promoting the profile and understanding of Cannock Chase; inspiring people to want to love and look after the area, and; strengthening the profile of the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership and support for its work.

NAAONB Annual Conference, 12-15 September

Engagement was the theme of this year's annual conference of the National Association for AONBs, held at the University of Lancaster. The Chair of the Joint Committee together with the AONB Team heard speakers from inside the protected landscape network and the wider world talked about a range of subjects: ethnic minority communities, financial and social deprivation, young people, improving mental health, education, effective use of social media, farming, nature recovery and biodiversity.

Cannock Chase AONB Annual Conference

On 8th March 2023 around 80 delegates came together at Brocton Hall Golf Club for the **AONB annual conference**. The theme for this year was The Chase Through Time – Legacy, Lessons and What happens next. Delegates heard about projects that help understand the past, tell the stories of the Chase, and care for our heritage. Further details and copies of the presentations can be found on the website.



Image: Some of the speakers at the Annual Conference

Protected Landscapes Reforms

Whilst the Government's response to the Glover Review of England's Protected Landscape is still awaited, work has been carrying on developing a number of reforms that do not require changes to legislation. These include:

- New guidance for strengthened AONB Management Plans which set clear priorities and actions for nature recovery and the response to climate change.
- Nationally aligned targets set for all 44 protected landscapes as part of a new Targets and Outcomes Framework.
- A Protected Landscapes Partnership to provide national leadership and co-ordination for National Parks and AONBs.
- Testing the re-naming and re-branding of AONBs as National Landscapes.

In order to allow these reforms to be published and considered, we are delaying the review of our AONB Management Plan by 12 months. The present Plan will, therefore, run until 31 March 2025.

Other activities in brief...

- The AONB Partnership has agreed a 5-point plan to take forward the findings from a **Carbon Baseline Assessment and pathway to net zero**. This includes commitments to: prepare a Climate Change Statement, Appoint a Champion for Climate, set out a Climate Change Action Plan, raise awareness of the impacts of climate change on Cannock Chase, how we need to adapt, and how everyone can contribute, and; embed climate change considerations into AONB activities and projects.
- Subscribers to our [AONB newsletter](#) increased by 37% over the last 12 months. Our target for next year is to hit and exceed the 2,000 mark! [Subscribe here](#).



Image: News - Cannock Chase (cannock-chase.co.uk)



Image: Photo credit Robert Cartwright

'Core' Income

1. Defra ¹	£239,185
2. Staffordshire County Council	£24,600
3. Cannock Chase Council	£9,840
4. Stafford Borough Council	£9,840
5. Lichfield District Council	£2,460
6. South Staffordshire Borough Council	£2,460
Total	£288,385

¹ Defra Grant includes additional allocation of £66,435 for Access for All Fund

'Core' Expenditure

1. Staff and associated costs ¹	£162,268
2. Other 'core' costs ²	£26,324
3. Partnership running costs ³	£9,000
4. Sustainable Development Fund ⁴	£5,409
5. AONB projects ⁵	£94,359
Total⁶	£297,360

¹ Salaries, training expenses and travel and subsistence for the AONB Team

² Other 'core' costs include office equipment, national liaison, print and publicity, Annual Conference, core activities

³ This is paid to our host authority, Staffordshire County Council in return for services such as HR, Finance and IT support.

⁴ This supports community projects that contribute towards the purpose and aims of the AONB.

⁵ Projects undertaken by the AONB Team and partners that help to deliver priorities in the AONB Management Plan. This includes additional expenditure on Access for All programme projects.

⁶ £10,404 of externally funded contributions to the core budget for 2022/23 have left an overall budget balance of £1,431 to be added to AONB Reserves.

Additional AONB project income

SAC Partnership – Future Guardians awareness programme for children and young people (external funded contribution, year 2)	£10,000
Sales and donations	£404
Total	£10,404

Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

Income	
Defra	£289,620
Expenditure	
Programme administration	£17,417
Programme advice and guidance	£34,833
Project spend (grants)	£174,514
Total	£226,764

¹ Underspend of c.£63k returned to Defra. Mainly arising from projects that were unable to be completed within the financial year.



Image: Photo credit Ron Evans

Cannock Chase AONB Team

AONB Development Officer: Ian Marshall

AONB Land Management Officer: Richard Harris

AONB Landscape Planning Officer: Julia Banbury (part-time)

AONB Communications Officer: Samantha Hall (part-time)

Farming in Protected Landscapes Officer: Colin Manning

Contact Us

cannockchase@staffordshire.gov.uk

www.cannock-chase.co.uk



Image: Photo credit Ian Jones