Cannock Chanse Chasse National Landscape an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Annual Review 2024-2025

Cannock Chase National Landscape

Welcome from our Chair



This year has been a story of reflection and renewal – as it coincides with the preparation of a new five-year Management Plan for Cannock Chase.

This major undertaking for the National Landscape Partnership has required us to take stock, gather evidence about the state of the National Landscape and the pressures it faces, listen to people's concerns and wishes, and set new priorities for the coming years. The exercise has reminded us what a beautiful, special and precious place Cannock Chase is – and why its conservation and enhancement is so important for our health and economic wellbeing, for recovering nature, tackling climate change, celebrating our cultural heritage, and providing access and enjoyment.

The Government expects England's Protected Landscapes to do more for nature, climate,

people and place, and Cannock Chase National Partnership is up for the challenge with huge ambitions. Our latest Annual Review illustrates the wide spectrum of activities undertaken by the National Landscape team and our partners. Collaboration is at the heart of what we do. Our achievements are only possible thanks to the hard work, dedication and passion of staff, elected Members, partner organisations and volunteers, working together with landowners, local councils, charities and communities. When we come together for the common good of the Chase we can achieve great things. As the saying goes, "The whole is truly greater than the sum of the parts".

Councillor Tony Pearce

Chair of the Cannock Chase National Landscape Joint Committee

Front cover image: Fairoak Pool



Map. Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Cannock Chase

Cannock Chase National Landscape 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 National Landscape.

Cannock Chase National Landscape Partnership

The National Landscape 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

At a glance. What Cannock Chase provides for us

A new infographic captures some of the benefits that Cannock Chase provides for us all – environmentally, socially and economically.



Nature



Adder conservation

Adder conservation on the Chase has moved forward

at pace, thanks to the enthusiasm and guidance of the Amphibian and Reptile (ARG) UK Group, local volunteers from the Birmingham & Black Country and Shropshire & Staffordshire ARG groups, local land managers and partners, and funding from the **Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)** programme.

Phase 1 involved on the ground surveys and monitoring to establish the distribution and abundance of adders and produced an 'adder habitat suitability model'. This enabled the identification of sites where remedial habitat works could improve or connect 'good habitat' to encourage more sustainable and resilient adder populations.

Phase 2 of the project supported practical habitat works in the locations highlighted by the surveys and model developed in Phase 1.

Recording days in September and October found 11 adders and 61 common lizards. Excitingly, these included newly born adders.

The vulnerable fragmented adder populations found across the landscape to the east of Hazelslade Local Nature Reserve and Castle Ring Ancient Monument are being connected with support from Forestry England and Cannock Chase District Council. Elsewhere, on the National Trust Shugborough Estate

bracken is being managed to create a mosaic of vegetation ranging from deep cover to bare ground to benefit a range of wildlife species, including reptiles.



The quality of our watery environment

The National Landscape commissioned Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to carry out a survey of the forest streams that drain off the Cannock Chase plateau



Orange-striped Stonefly *Perlodes mortoni* nymphs from Nick Mott.

to assess the invertebrate species that call them home. The presence, or absence, of particular invertebrate species can reveal a great deal about water and habitat quality and any adverse pressures they have been enduring. A method known as 'biometric fingerprinting' was employed which uses aquatic invertebrates to measure the overall water quality of rivers and streams.

Using this method, it is possible to identify any negative pressures (for example: nutrient loading, silt burdens, low flows, or pesticides) affecting the overall health of the watercourse reach and its inhabitants. Out of 11 watercourses surveyed 6 are rated good-moderate for their invertebrate quality (Oldacre, Sher, Old, Stafford, Fallow, Stony), 4 are rated moderate-poor (Rising, Shropshire, Brereton and Ben), and 1 is rated poor (Redmoor). Several nationally scarce invertebrate species were also recorded. Results confirm Cannock Chase as nationally important for the globally-endangered White-clawed Crayfish. The survey has given us a new understanding of the water quality of the watercourses on the Chase and an overall assessment of the condition of the habitats along the stream corridors.

The full report and appendices can be found on our website **here** under the Land Management and biodiversity section.

Ancient trees

Cannock Chase National Landscape has a large collection of old trees. These living monuments are hundreds of years old, and remarkable relics from former times when the Chase was managed for the dual purpose of growing trees and grazing deer and livestock.

Ancient trees are of great cultural, landscape and biodiversity value. Our knowledge and understanding of the ancient trees on the Chase is incomplete, however, and so we have been encouraging volunteers to identify and record them on training days led by the **Woodland Trust**.



Oak tree on Cannock Chase

Ancient trees need careful management. Seventy ancient oak trees in Brocton Coppice have been halo-thinned by Staffordshire County Council rangers – a very gentle process of removing competing trees from the immediate area to protect the oak.

Helpful heifers

It's been over a year since Staffordshire Wildlife Trust began managing an important heathland corridor on Cannock Chase. The Trust has taken on the lease from Forestry England and has been working hard with volunteers and contractors all winter to remove scrub and repair fences and gates. A small herd of cattle has now moved in to gently graze the site during the summer, and help to create a mosaic of different height vegetation that supports a variety of wildlife. At the end of summer, the bracken will be rolled and cut before more scrub clearance takes place over winter. You can read all about the Trust's work here.



Grazing cattle

Conservation work both here, and at Etching Hill Nature Reserve (where volunteers have contributed 235 hours) provides key breeding and overwintering habitat for priority and protected species of reptiles, invertebrates and birds. Locally important plants, such as the Cannock Chase berry and heather have also made a return, adding to the interest and longterm resilience of the landscape.

Nature



Restoring Beau Desert Golf Club heathland.

Golf for the Birdies

Combining recreation and conservation can be a winning formula, as demonstrated by Beau Desert Golf Club, who have recently completed their second heathland restoration project with the support of the **Farming in Protected Landscapes** programme.

Heathland plants and animals are making a return to this important ecological and historical part of the Chase, through the long-term management of heathland involving conifer removal, bracken control and turf stripping. The introduction of terrestrial and wetland scrapes adds value across the site, while maintaining a welcoming and high-quality experience for club members, course visitors and walkers.

Other news in brief

With a grant from our **Sustainable Development Fund**, the West Midlands Ringing Group has been testing the use of **thermal drone technology for recording nightjar** nesting on Cannock Chase. With consent from landowners , the British Trust for Ornithology and Natural England surveys between June and August successfully recorded nightjar roosts and nests on both lowland heath and in forest plantations. The new technology is a useful aid to improve the efficiency of species monitoring and reduce disturbance.



Thermal imagery in use by West Midlands Bird Ringing Group.

In 2024 Forestry England updated its **Cannock Chase Forest Plan** that outlines its vision for the forest over the next 50 years. Its key management objective is to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services while balancing the demand for access, timber resources and nature conservation. Forestry England is the largest landowner in the National Landscape. In 2024 they harvested 10,000m3 of timber from Cannock Chase Forest, planted 120,000 trees and cleared invasive vegetation from 17ha of heathland.

Nature

Cannock Chase District Council is renewing stock fencing around acid grassland at Hazelslade Local Nature Reserve. A new, more durable, metal system has been installed and despite the extra cost, it needs less maintenance and allows the Cannock Chase Countryside Service team to put extra time and resources into other important conservation projects. More native breeds of cattle have arrived at Cannock Chase Country Park to continue the grazing trial at Moors Gorse.



Dinky and Daisy Dexter cattle at Hazelslade Local Nature Reserve.

Conservation work has continued at Gentleshaw Common by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, with help from the volunteers, who have given over an amazing 770 hours of their time in the last year. Tasks, such as, bracken management, scrub clearing to open up heathland glades again, scrape creation and maintenance for our incredibly important solitary bees and wasps, and other invertebrates such as bees and butterflies have all taken place.



taffordshire Wildlife Trust volunteers.



Staffordshire Wildlife Trust volunteers.

A mass planting of 1,200 marsh violets by Staffordshire County Council in the Sherbrook Valley aims to change the fortunes of the beautiful small pearlbordered fritillary butterfly. Marsh violets are the main foodplant of this butterfly - and Cannock Chase is home to the only remaining population in Staffordshire of this nationally declining species.



Small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly.

Climate



Forest garden work in progress at Shugborough Estate.



Peatland potential

Peatlands are significant carbon stores, helping in the fight against climate change. They are also

home to rare and characteristic wildlife species and are an important archive of past human activities. Penny Anderson Associates consultants have been helping us collate and analyse studies and data to identify existing peat deposits, and areas of interest which have the potential to contain peat. The final output details the presence and likely extent of confirmed peat deposits, and maps the areas of potential deposits, running on a sliding scale from areas of higher potential to areas with some evidence of the likelihood of potential deposits. The National Landscape includes 20.1 Ha of confirmed peat deposits with an additional 87.6 Ha identified for further investigation with high priority being given to potential peat deposits on the River Sow floodplain. Using this information, we can identify how best to protect and restore this important resource. Site-based investigations will be carried out in Phase 2 of the project in 2025/26.

Full report can be found on our website **here**.

Arcadia; Every Garden Counts

Work is underway to create **'Arcadia' the National Trust's first Forest Garden at Shugborough Estate**. 80,000 plants are being planted in the east slip gardens, as part of a wider project to redevelop the walled garden.

Arcadia will be home to a variety of smaller, interconnected gardens including a demonstration garden, medicinal garden and a global garden. Each area will be filled with a variety of plants with diverse uses, environmental benefits and designed to inspire visitors to try forest gardening techniques at home.

This innovative garden is also being planted to build resilience to climate change by acting as its own sustainable eco-system, that will feed water and fertilise itself.

The project has been part funded by the Defra Trees For Climate programme through Forest of Mercia CIC, as well HSBC UK and funds raised through donations from NT Associations and individual donors. The National Landscape's Access for All Fund also contributed financially to improve the garden's accessibility.

Other news in brief

As part of the HS2 Trent and Sow Group Environmental Enhancement fund, the National Trust Shugborough estate has planted 1000 trees and hedgerow plants at Haywood Park Farm. The planting is part of the Trust's wider wood pasturescape work and will increase habitat diversity on this edge of Cannock Chase. New fencing and cattle handling facilities have also gone in to allow for grazing to take place later in the year. Funding from the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme (FiPL) has also supported habitat creation work for reptiles and rare invertebrate species, along with some traditional hedge laying. On 12th and 26th February 2025 the National Landscape and CPRE Staffordshire ran two star gazing sessions for Scouts and cubs at the Wolseley Centre. Each event included a presentation by Keele Observatory and the chance to view the night sky through a telescope. Afterwards the cubs were taken for a night walk around the grounds by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust staff ending in

toasting marshmallows on the fire pit.

The FiPL programme is supporting carbon capture by planting 5km of hedgerow along with 200 hedgerow trees. Shelter belts, in-field copses, orchards and successional parkland tree schemes have all been established with an additional 1,100 trees planted.



Dark Skies events with Staffordshire Scouts and cubs.

People

Visitor counts

The Cannock Chase SAC Partnership has repeated its visitor survey last carried out in 2018. 801 interviews

were carried out at multiple locations across the Chase between late August and October. The full report is available on the **SAC Partnership website**.



Recreation on the Chase.

In August 2024 the SAC Partnership also funded a botanical survey at 13 survey plots on the Chase. The survey found that the quality of habitats was lower and the level of disturbance higher in the survey plots closest to car parks. In many ways it was a predictable result - however the work carried out in 2024 will allow for future surveys in exactly the same locations so that changes in the quality of habitat and levels of disturbance can be tracked over time. The full survey report can be read here **Cannock Chase Botanical Survey**.

Raising awareness about heathlands

The SAC Partnership has continued to raise awareness amongst dog owners about the unintended effects that our doggy friends have on the Chase, and how owners can help. Over 50% of people who visit Cannock Chase come with a dog and the impact of those four-legged visits affect everything from dog waste to the ecology of the soil and protected species. Banners were installed on eight sites around the Chase during the groundnesting bird season and approximately 2,000 information cards with advice and

information on Chase wildlife and dog management have been handed out to visitors.



Seasonal Engagement Wardens have also been appointed for the first time by the SAC Partnership. Sasha and Claire spent time out on the Chase speaking to visitors and attending events as well as supporting partners with their engagement activities and carrying out monitoring work.



Seasonal Engagement Wardens at an event.

People

Heath Week

Heath Week ran from 27th July - 4th August to raise awareness and celebrate the special qualities of heathland in general, and Cannock Chase in particular. The week had a variety of activities including family activity mornings, guided walks, a guided horse ride, drop in children's activities, and an event to share memories of Cannock Chase. Many organisations from around the Chase got involved.

Improving access for all

The third year of Defra Access for All funding has supported a range of projects helping to make Cannock Chase more accessible for people of all ages and abilities and from all socio-economic backgrounds.

This year's funded projects include:

- The purchase of replacement mobility trampers for Cannock Chase Country Park and Shugborough.
- The creation of tactile maps for visually impaired visitors to use at Cannock Chase Country Park.
- The installation of steps to improve accessibility to the sculpture trail around the Museum of Cannock Chase.
- Surface improvements to paths for multi-user use in the new Forest Garden at Shugborough.
- The purchase of adaptive and inclusive bikes and riding equipment for local groups to use at Marquis Drive, run by the Community Wellbeing Team at Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles.
- The installation of an interactive kiosk for the Great War Hut at Marquis Drive bringing to life the story of the Great War on the Chase.



Family enjoying Heath Week.



Enjoying adaptive and inclusive bikes out on the Chase.

- The purchase of audio and visual aids to improve visitors' experiences of Cannock Chase during guided walks.
- The installation of additional accessible picnic benches across the Shugborough Estate.

People



Local school developed an area for children to learn in the outdoors.

Other news in brief

Our **Sustainable Development Fund awarded £8,011** to two local schools to develop their grounds for nature and a sensory garden, as well as for an ecotherapy programme helping adult participants in abstinent drink and drug addiction recovery through creative expressive arts and crafts activities.

Officers from the National Landscape team participated in '**Nature Calling**' – an ambitious Arts Council England funded development programme that aims to bring to life, celebrate and increase access to the country's national landscapes through the arts. Going forward, it is hoped that arts can break down barriers and enable more people's engagement with the National Landscape. The training that officers have received will help them to create and commission new art works as well as how to deliver engagement and communication through working with artists.

School participation in hedgerow planting and environmental education has expanded, with the second in the series of educational packs linking farming and food being viewed over 1,400 times.

There have been a total of **1042 volunteer hours** at Milford Hut and the Great War Hut.



Visitor looking at Great War Hut interpretation panel.

Place



Historic barn restoration in progress.

Farming in Protected Landscapes programme

The on-going success of Defra's Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme has seen the completion of 26 new and 9 multi-year projects with landowners on and around the Chase this year. With a focus on nature recovery, climate resilience, and encouraging people to enjoy experiencing the Chase, highlights include:

- Improving wetland habitat and watercourses at eight sites to benefit wildlife, livestock and future-proof land for changing climate conditions.
- Restoring rare lowland heathland at five sites.
- Improving access, security and farm safety by installing nearly 30 field and kissing gates.
- Collaborating at fifteen sites with horserelated land use.

- Installing over 50 wildlife boxes to provide safe breeding and overwintering opportunities for a range of species.
- Extending educational outreach through classroom packs, guided walks and practical opportunities for volunteers, who have contributed an estimated 1,000 hours towards critical tasks over the last 12 months.
- Restoring an historic sawmill (now barn) that formed part of the Beau Desert Estate, bringing an important building back into use on a working farm while providing a tangible link to the history of the area.

By supporting a wide range of projects, the FiPL programme strengthens our capacity to invest in the future of our landscape, farming community, wildlife and society. For information on how these funds could support your ideas in 2025/26, **please visit here**.

Place



Chase Through Time volunteers.

Investing in Cannock Chase Visitor Centre

Staffordshire County Council has announced a major, multi-million funding commitment to improve its green spaces over the next five years, including investing £10 million to upgrade the visitor facilities at Cannock Chase Country Park, Marquis Drive. The ambition is to develop a high quality, multi-purpose Discovery Centre, that welcomes visitors to the Country Park and introduces them to the National Landscape.

Work got underway in autumn 2024 on feasibility and master planning studies, leading to presenting development options for the site. This feasibility work is also being supported by the Cannock Chase SAC Partnership as the re-development of the site will reduce recreational pressure on the Special Area of Conservation and raise awareness of the special nature of Cannock Chase, its habitats and species.

The new Discovery Centre should be open by 2029.

Connecting with the past

Chase Through Time volunteers have continued to improve our knowledge and understanding of the Chase's diverse historic environment. The group has carried out surveys on the Brindley Heath/ Brindley Hospital and RAF Hednesford/ Moors Gorse areas. They have also recorded the condition of Rock Cottage at Broc Hill - the site of a 19th century (or earlier) thatched cottage, which was partially built into a sandstone outcrop.

Cannock Chase National Landscape has recently funded the purchase of an app and new tablets that will help the group to digitally record the condition of heritage assets in the field. This will make surveys a lot easier and avoid 'double-handling' of data.

The Group has also been busy cataloguing the archive created during the excavation works at the Messines Terrain Model in 2013. This, along with another archive from excavations at Brocton Camp in 2006, will be deposited at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent in due course.

Place

Shaping Shugborough; Designing for a Sustainable Future

Work has started to create new visitor facilities on the Shugborough Estate. Lead contractors, O'Briens, have commenced works which includes building a new larger car park, reinstating the lost Lichfield Drive and creating a new visitor welcome building. Due to open in Spring 2026, the facilities will enable more people to enjoy Shugborough all year round. Other additions include new walking and cycling routes, a new play area and café. As work continues other conservation works will be completed including the removal of two old car parks which will be reinstated as parkland, repairs to the historic walled garden walls and the protection of veteran oak trees.

Creative Collaboration Transforms Chase Heritage Trail

The 10-mile **Chase Heritage Trail** has been transformed by blending technology with tradition. Visitors can now access a series of amazing animated stories and audio narratives simply by scanning QR codes. These are found on the newly installed interpretation panels along the route which links Cannock, Hednesford, and Rugeley. Chase Tales Trail and Hear Our Heritage brings local history to life through creative collaborations between Birmingham Rep, schools and community actors, resulting in high quality musical animations and audio interpretations of its historical sites.





New visitor facilities in progress on the Shugborough Estate.

Other News in brief

A new video celebrating Cannock Chase National Landscape has been released, urging visitors to be kind to Cannock Chase and respect this special, beautiful, wilderness. New photographs and drone images of the Chase have also been commissioned to use in our media and communications work. The video accompanies our Essential Guide to Cannock Chase, which has been updated and is available to all those wanting to find out more about the National Landscape and how it is protected.

A **booklet of 14 circular walks** in the National Landscape has been published. The walks range from 1 and 2 mile short routes to longer day hikes such as the 9 miles Rugeley and Cannock Chase Forest route. The longer routes are in quieter parts of the Chase. Each walk is accompanied by a detailed description and a map. The booklet has been distributed in a variety of outlets and libraries around the Chase and is £3.50 to purchase.



Purchase of Brindley Hospital album

The volunteers at the Great War Hut were able to fund the purchase of a photograph album showing never before seen images of the Great War Hospital on Cannock Chase.



Brindley Hospital.

Media coverage this year has included:

- New Facebook page created in April 2024 where news is posted and partners information shared. Our page has 295 followers.
- Posting and sharing news on X with 1650 followers.
- 14 e-newsletters sent out, 2664 subscribers and 40% open rate
- December 2024 media release on draft
 Management Plan consultation
- Joint press release with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust regarding Connecting Cannock Chase and call for volunteers



Volunteers clearing scrub to restore heathland.

AONB Management Plan 2025-2030

Following a formal public consultation process, our 2025-2030 Management Plan was approved by the Cannock Chase National Landscape Joint Committee on 10th March 2025 for adoption from 1st April 2025. This is the fifth edition of our statutory Management Plan, which is the single most important policy document for the National Landscape

The programme of work for the next five years is wide-ranging, ambitious and challenging. The Plan will drive forward nature recovery and contribute to the Government's target of protecting 30% of our land for nature by 2030 (30by30). We have set a pathway for the National Landscape to be net zero and will need to think creatively about how we deliver the challenging tree planting targets and changes to agricultural practices this will require. We will be taking measures to reinforce the Chase's distinctive sense of place and protect its landscapes and rich heritage. We will also be continuing our essential work to make people feel a part of Cannock Chase, including improving our welcome and the quality of the experience for visitors from all backgrounds and abilities. Working collaboratively for the National Landscape and pooling our skills, expertise and resources is essential to delivering our ambitions, and everyone can make a contribution.

National showcase

The Cannock Chase National Landscape along with our neighbours in the Shropshire Hills, Malvern Hills and Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscapes hosted the National Landscapes Association 2024 Annual Conference at Harper Adams College.

This years' conference, attended by 232 delegates from across the UK, explored what role there is for natural beauty and landscape designation and the different types of working and resilience required for the future. Cannock Chase National Landscape hosted a field trip on the Chase which examined the visitor welcome and experience in a backdrop of urban expansion, increasing recreational demands and a changing climate. In partnership with disability consultants Direct Access we also ran a workshop for delegates exploring how we can make National Landscapes more inclusive.



Hosting delegates from the National Landscapes Association conference.



Cannock Chase

National Landscape finances

Expenditure

Total	£348,640
Access for All projects ⁶	£70,750
AONB projects ⁵	£43,845
Sustainable Development Fund ⁴	£8,905
Partnership running costs ³	£9,000
Other 'core' costs ²	£18,225
Staff and associated costs ¹	£197,915

¹Salaries, training expenses and travel and subsistence for the National Landscape Team.

²Other 'core' costs include office equipment, national liaison, print and publicity, annual conference, core activities.

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

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

⁵Projects undertaken by the National Landscape Team and partners that help to deliver priorities in the AONB Management Plan.

⁶This includes additional expenditure on Access for All Fund projects.

Funded by

Defra ⁷	£303,152
Staffordshire County Council	£24,600
Cannock Chase Council	£9,840
Stafford Borough Council	£9,840
Lichfield District Council	£2,460
South Staffordshire Borough	£2,460
Council	
Funding from reserve	£3,712
Total	£348,640

⁷Defra Grant includes additional allocation of £70,750 for Access for All Fund.

Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme

Expenditure	
Programme administration	£16,713
Programme advice and guidance	£87,444
Programme advice and guidance (admin fee)	£5,156
Project spend (grants to farmers)	£445,939
Historic Building Restoration project	£85,675
Total	£640,927
Funded by	
Defra ⁸	£640,927

⁸Funding from Defra for the Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme is separate from Defra core funding allocation for Cannock Chase National Landscape.



Cannock Chase National Landscape Team

Team Leader: Ian Marshall Land Management Officer: Richard Harris Communications Officer: Samantha Hall (part-time) Farming in Protected Landscape Officer: Claire Geoghegan Farming in Protected Landscape Officer: Karen Davies (part time)



Cannock Chase National Landscape

c/o Staffordshire Place, Stafford ST16 2DH cannockchase@staffordshire.gov.uk www.cannock-chase.co.uk



Please sign up here to find out the latest news from the National Landscape

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