



Cannock Chase National Landscape

Guidance for Local Planning Authorities: Planning policies and decision-making in relation to Cannock Chase National Landscape and its setting

Cannock Chase National Landscape has produced this guidance to assist local planning authorities in making planning policies and decisions in relation to the designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or its setting, and help them to meet their legislative and policy requirements.

In carrying out their functions, planning teams (officers and committee members) should carefully consider the impacts of any policy-making, decision-making or actions on the statutory purposes of National Landscapes and their settings in line with the National Planning Policy Framework and any government guidance, the AONB Management Plan and any supporting documents, relevant development plan policies, as well as their statutory duties in relation to National Landscapes.

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Cannock Chase AONB (National Landscape)

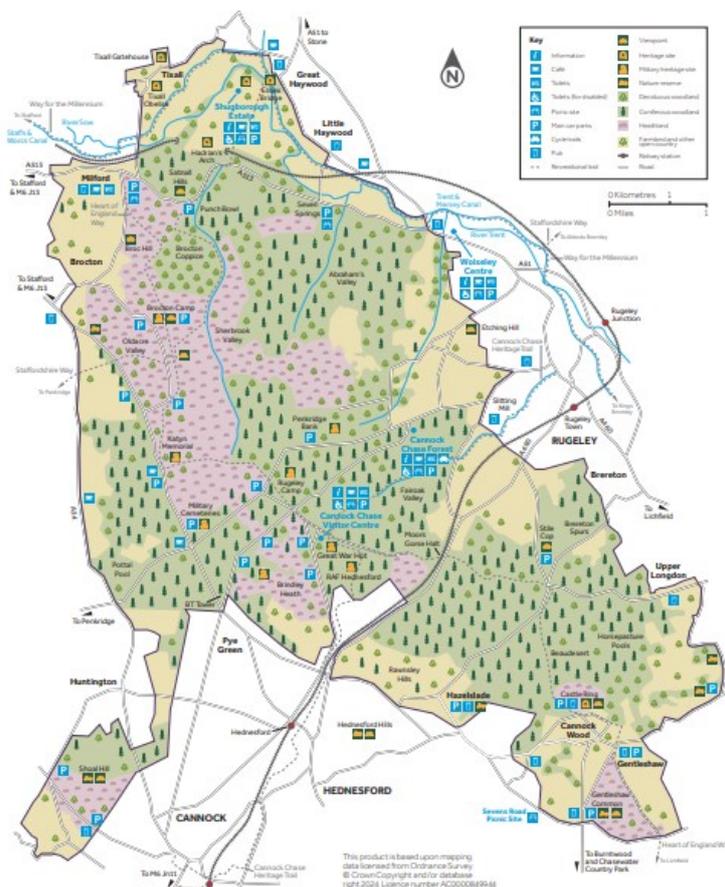
Cannock Chase was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958 in recognition of its extraordinary natural beauty, representing an unspoilt almost semi-natural wilderness of heathland and forests, standing in contrast to the surrounding built-up conurbations.

In November 2023 all AONBs became known as National Landscapes. Cannock Chase National Landscape remains an AONB insofar as all policy, legislation and guidance applies to the designated landscape.

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.

In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other industries and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.

Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.



National Planning Policy Framework

The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\) 2024 \(amended 7 February 2025\)](#) gives AONBs the highest status of protection.

Paragraph 187 states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, which include National Landscapes, commensurate with their statutory status. Furthermore, it should be recognised that the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ does not automatically apply within National Landscapes, as confirmed by paragraph 11 and footnote 7, due to other policies protecting National Landscapes elsewhere within the Framework.

For decision making the application of NPPF policies that protect a National Landscape ‘provides a clear reason for refusing development proposals’ (paragraph 11[d]). Furthermore paragraph 11(b) explains that, for plan making, being in a National Landscape provides ‘a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area’.

It also states (paragraph 189) that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in these areas. This paragraph is also clear that the scale and extent of development within all the designated areas of National Landscapes and National Parks should be limited. Furthermore, development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise impacts on the designated areas.

Paragraph 190 is explicit that when considering applications for development planning permission should be refused for major development, other than in exceptional, public interest, circumstances. Footnote 67 also provides for the decision maker to regard development less than the threshold defined in the NPPF glossary as ‘major’ in the context of a National Landscape or National Park. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of: a) The need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy; b) The cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and c) Any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.”

Also relevant to the design of development within National Landscapes are:

Paragraph 131. “The creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities...”, and

Paragraph 139 “Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into

account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes“.

National Design Guide

The [National Design Guide](#) forms part of the Government’s planning practice guidance and sets out the characteristics of well-designed places through ten identified characteristics. These characteristics reflect the Government’s priorities and provide a common overarching framework. The ten characteristics of well-designed places are:

- Context: enhances the surroundings
- Identity: attractive and distinctive
- Built form: a coherent pattern of development
- Movement: accessible and easy to move around
- Nature: enhanced and optimised
- Public spaces: safe, social and inclusive
- Uses: mixed and integrated
- Homes and buildings: functional, healthy and sustainable
- Resources: efficient and resilient
- Lifespan: made to last

National Planning Practice Guidance for the Natural Environment

The Government’s National Planning Practice Guidance explains key issues in implementing policy to protect and enhance National Landscapes in the [Natural Environment](#) section.

Paragraph 39 explains the statutory duties of local planning authorities in relation to National Landscapes set out in section 85 of the CRoW Act 2000, as amended by Section 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. (See [Duty to seek to further the purposes of AONBs](#) in this Guidance for more explanation).

Paragraph 40 highlights the value of AONB Management Plans in setting the strategic context for development, and that they may contain information which is relevant when preparing plan policies, or which is a material consideration when assessing planning applications.

Paragraph 41 is clear that NPPF policies for protecting NLs may mean that it is not possible to meet objectively assessed needs for development, and any development in a NL will need to be located and designed in a way that reflects its status as a landscape of the highest quality. Paragraph 41

Paragraph 42 highlights the importance of National Landscapes settings, their contributions to natural beauty, and the harm that can be done by poorly located or designed development especially where long views from or to the NL are identified.

Cannock Chase National Landscape AONB Management Plan 2025-2030

The [Cannock Chase National Landscape AONB Management Plan 2025-2030](#) is a statutory document, approved by the Secretary of State and adopted by the constituent councils - Staffordshire County Council, Stafford Borough Council, Cannock Chase District Council, Lichfield District Council and South Staffordshire Borough Council. The Plan 'formulates their policy for the management of the area and carrying out of their functions in relation to it', as required by Section 89 (2) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

It is the principal vehicle for ensuring that the statutory purpose to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape (AONB) is met, and the Plan is a material consideration in the planning process. The Plan is the single most important document for the Chase, and no decision affecting the future of the National Landscape should be taken without reference to it.

Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB (National Landscape) will normally mean, as a minimum:

- conserving and enhancing the character components or special qualities identified in the Management Plan
- supporting the Management Plan Strategic Aims, Objectives and Policies, and
- following any Management Plan actions set out for each.

Supporting documents to the AONB Management Plan

The AONB Management Plan is supported by additional guidance documents that provide more detailed advice and position statements relating to subjects such as design, views and setting, dark skies and light pollution, and highways, and these should also be considered in the planning policy-making and decision-making process, as should any Landscape Character Assessments / Historic Character Assessments that have informed the Management Plan. Relevant documents in this regard are listed here and are available on the [publications pages](#) of Cannock Chase National Landscape website:

Design Guide 2020: The AONB Design Guide has been prepared in response to policies and actions in the AONB Management Plan. It aims to promote good practice and encourage any future development to be landscape-led and sympathetic to existing character, so it does not detract from the natural beauty of the AONB.

Views and Setting Guide 2020: The AONB Management Plan recognises that wide ranging uninterrupted views from the AONB are one of the AONB's special qualities. Views towards the distinctive profile of Cannock Chase are also an important attribute within the surrounding area. The AONB Views and Setting Guide provides a guide to help ensure that the surroundings of the AONB are developed & managed in ways that conserve and enhance its significance and inherent special qualities.

Good Lighting Guide 2023: Cannock Chase National Landscape has the highest levels of light pollution of any National Landscape in England Wales. The Good Lighting Guide inform and advice to individuals, businesses and decision makers interested in reducing and avoiding light pollution in and around the AONB.

Guide for highways improvement and management 2025: This guide seeks to ensure that the environmental impacts of highways and the ways in which they are maintained and improved, are sympathetic to the natural beauty of the National Landscape.

Landscape Character Framework 2017: An understanding of landscape character underpins the approach to planning and management within Cannock Chase AONB, ensuring that all decisions affecting the designation conserve and enhance the area's special qualities. This framework describes the key elements and qualities that make up the distinctive landscape character of the AONB; the strength of their character and condition. A short vision statement summarises the overall aims of management for each landscape character type, supplemented by practical management guidelines to help planners and land managers tackle specific environmental and recreational issues.

Historic Environment Assessment 2015: The Historic Environment Assessment reviews the significance of this resource, and highlights the contribution of the historic character and heritage assets to the AONB. It sets out opportunities for the enhancement and/or management of heritage assets, the need for further investigations, and ways in which the history of Cannock Chase and the visitor experience can be enhanced through interpretation and education.

Duty to seek to further the purposes of AONBs

Section 85 of the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW Act) (as amended by [Section 245 \(Protected Landscapes\) of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023](#)) requires relevant authorities, in exercising or performing any function that affect AONBs in England to **“seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.”**

This is a statutory duty, which has been in force since December 26, 2023. The use of the word 'duty' in the legislation means that it is something all 'relevant authorities' must do; it is not discretionary.

Within the planning context, relevant authorities are the Local Planning Authorities, the Planning Inspectorate and the Secretary of State (for example, for called-in decisions), along with Parish and Town Councils producing Neighbourhood Plans. The duty applies to all aspects of the development management process and the plan-making process: for example, planning application decisions, enforcement, and decisions relating to planning policies and site allocations in Local Plans.

The duty is considered to require a pro-active approach by the decision-maker. Relevant

authorities are expected to be able to demonstrate that they have fulfilled the duty, and how compliance with the duty has been embedded in the plan-making and decision-making process. Natural England advise is that relevant authorities must take all reasonable steps to explore how the statutory purposes of the Protected Landscape can be furthered.

The duty applies to plan-making and decision-making 'in relation to, or so as to affect, land in an AONB', not only in considering proposals within an AONB, but also, for example, affecting its setting.

It is important to ensure that 'to conserve and enhance' is treated as a singular purpose: both parts should be considered together, in every relevant decision.

It is important to remember that 'natural beauty' is holistic. 'Natural beauty' is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features, and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries.' It includes landscape and scenic quality, natural heritage (species, habitats, geology and physical geography), wildness, tranquillity and dark skies, and cultural heritage (including cultural traditions and the historic and other built environment that makes the area unique). Historic England make clear that the historic environment is fundamental to the distinctive character, sense of place and natural beauty of each AONB.

It is the conservation and enhancement of all this natural beauty (set out in the AONB Management Plan) that is the primary purpose of designation, and that Local Planning Authorities must consider in discharging their duty.

Government has provided guidance on this matter [Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK](#)



Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK.pdf

The National Landscapes Association has also produced [Guidance for Local Planning Authorities in applying the duty.](#)



CRoW-s.85-duty-guidance-for-LPAs_NLA-Briefing-Nov-24 (1).pdf

The guidance should be read in full, but the main points are summarised below.

Local Planning Authority decision-making process

Local Planning Authorities must be able to demonstrate that they have complied with the strengthened duty in any decision or action that impacts or could potentially impact on the AONB. To demonstrate that they have sought to further the purpose of designation in

making decisions regarding planning policies, site allocations, and development management (including planning enforcement), LPAs will need to:

- Establish the facts about the natural beauty of the area, especially with reference to the statutory AONB Management Plan. Identify what comprises the natural beauty, using:
 - descriptions of natural beauty, including Statements of Significance, description of key characteristics and special qualities, as set out in AONB Management Plan
 - the reasons for designation as an AONB.
- Understand the key objectives in the AONB Management Plan which give an indication which actions or approaches will further the purpose of designation. These objectives:
 - relate to the applicable legislative purposes
 - are evidence-based
 - have been agreed between local partners, in a process convened by the AONB team
 - include, but are not limited to, national or locally apportioned government targets and outcomes.

Duty in planning policy plan-making

The duty to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs applies to the full range of aspects of the plan-making process. An LPA will need to be able to demonstrate how it has, throughout all stages of the preparation of the Local Plan, sought to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. This includes at examination stage, addressing the s. 85 duty actively in responses to Inspector's Findings and in any proposed modifications to Local Plans.

Each of the following apply both to an LPA's own Local Plan work, including Mineral & Waste Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), and to the LPA's consideration of Neighbourhood Plans.

- For setting the Local Plan vision and overall development strategy:
 - Ensure the overall vision and development strategy would align with the objectives/principles/policies of the relevant AONB Management Plan.
 - Identify how much of a district's objectively assessed need can be met without harming the natural beauty of the relevant AONB, particularly where meeting the need would require allocations that would not further the purposes of AONB designation (see below).
(N.B. this may involve setting a lower Local Plan housing requirement figure).
- For decisions relating to the drafting of planning policies (all Local Plan /SPD policies, not just those policies specifically dedicated to the AONB):
 - Assess the degree to which each policy would align with the objectives/principles/policies of the relevant AONB Management Plan.

- Assess the degree to which each policy would help deliver any actions/outcomes of the relevant AONB Management Plan.
 - Consider if the range and scope of the policies is sufficient to fully deliver the Management Plan's objectives/action/outcomes, i.e. are any additional policies /policy areas needed? (In this regard, a stand-alone policy closely aligned to the Management Plan objectives/principles/policies is recommended, though this is not considered sufficient to demonstrate compliance with the strengthened duty.
 - If a draft planning policy would not align with the duty to seek to further the applicable legislative purpose (e.g. if it would conflict with any of the Management Plan's objectives/principles/policies), then consider amending the policy such that you could confidently say the decision does seek to further the relevant purpose.
- For decisions relating to site allocations:
 - Assess what impact the proposed site allocation would have on the natural beauty of the AONB, considering its scale, location and landscape setting with reference to the character components/special qualities set out in the AONB Management Plan. (In this regard, consider including a specific criterion regarding 'natural beauty' within the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)/Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA), and within the Sustainability Appraisal).
 - Consider how the natural beauty of the AONB might be affected, were the site to be allocated for development. Remember to consider the holistic concept of natural beauty
 - Consider whether this would cause harm to the natural beauty of the AONB. Consider the objectives/principles/policies of the AONB Management Plan. Natural England have advised that the strengthened duty underlines the importance of avoiding harm to the statutory purposes of Protected Landscapes.
Ensure clear differentiation between any proposed measures that seek to mitigate or compensate for harm (e.g., like-for-like replacement), and those that further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB. Natural England have advised that measures that further the purposes are required in addition to mitigation
 - If the measures would have a neutral effect, consider what modifications would help Further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty
 - If promoting a site allocation would not align with the duty to seek to further the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, then consider amending or deleting a site allocation such that you could confidently say the decision does seek to further the statutory purpose. (For example, choosing not to allocate a particular site within or close to the AONB boundary could demonstrate compliance, where this results in avoiding harm.
 - Evidence how the LPA has sought to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the AONB in its decision, with reference to aligning with AONB Management Plan objectives/principles/policies.

Duty in development management decision-making

The strengthened duty to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs applies to the full range of development management decision-making, including considering applications for outline, full and reserved matters, listed building consent, applications for works to protected trees, and prior notifications, along with enforcement work on planning breaches. An LPA should also ensure that local validation checklists require the submission of sufficient, specific information to enable them to fulfil the duty in their decision-making.

The following apply to decision-making at both officer and planning committee level for decisions relating to planning applications:

- Assess what impact the proposal would have on the purpose of designation. Consider how the natural beauty of the area might be affected were the proposal to go ahead (remember to consider the holistic concept of natural beauty), and consider how the proposal would align with the AONB Management Plan objectives/principles/policies.
- Consider whether this would cause harm to the natural beauty of the area. Natural England have advised that the strengthened duty underlines the importance of avoiding harm to the statutory purposes of Protected Landscapes.
- Where harm is identified, 'enhancements' themselves, including biodiversity net gain (BNG) provision, are unlikely to be sufficient to align with the duty, which has the dual consideration of conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Also, ensure that any 'enhancements' within the proposal do genuinely align with, and help deliver, the objectives, principles and/or policies and resulting actions of the AONB Management Plan, by way of scope and location. Natural England have advised that the proposed measures should align with and help to deliver the aims and objectives of the designated landscape's statutory Management Plan.
- Ensure a clear differentiation between any proposed measures that seek to mitigate or compensate for harm (e.g. like-for-like replacement), and those that further the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the AONB. Natural England have advised that measures that further the purposes are required in addition to mitigation.
- If the measures would have a neutral effect, consider what amendments would help further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty. Could any conditions attached to any permissions help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty?
- As part of this assessment, consider the degree to which the effect on natural beauty has been articulated by the applicant (e.g. through Landscape Visual Impact Assessments), heritage statements, ecology and arboricultural assessments, lighting statements and transport assessments); scrutinise the submission against the Management Plan in this regard.
- If supporting an application would not align with the duty to seek to further the

conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, then consider seeking amendments or refusing permission, such that you could confidently say the decision does seek to further the statutory purpose.

- Evidence how the LPA has sought to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the AONB in its intended decision, with reference to aligning with AONB Management Plan objectives/principles/policies. It is recommended that this evidence is referenced in officer reports/committee reports.

Consultation on planning applications with the National Landscape Team by a Local Planning Authority does not in itself constitute compliance with the strengthened duty. It is the responsibility of relevant authorities themselves to comply with the duty, and to assess and record how they have complied with the duty, in exercising or performing any functions affecting the AONB.

For applications to make a tree preservation order (TPO), or when assessing applications for works to protected trees (those with a TPO or in a Conservation Area), actively consider the duty by:

- ensuring the impact on the natural beauty of the AONB forms part of the assessment of 'amenity' when considering whether to make a TPO; and
- when making decisions on applications for works to protected trees, ensure the impact on the natural beauty of the AONB forms part of the assessment of the amenity value of the tree or woodland and the likely impact of the proposal on the amenity of the area.

For enforcement cases:

- Ensure the duty is built into assessment criteria as to whether it is considered expedient to pursue enforcement action on a particular breach of planning control within, or affecting, an AONB.
- Remember that s.84 of the CRoW Act (2000) sets out that LPAs have power "to take all such action as appears to them expedient for the accomplishment of the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty, or so much of it as is included in their area".
- In considering the appropriate enforcement route, assess if the planning breach harms the natural beauty of the AONB, with regard to the AONB Management Plan Statement of Significance and objectives, principles and/or policies.
- Consider if any amendments could help further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty. Ensure clear differentiation between any proposed measures that seek to mitigate or compensate for harm (e.g., like-for-like replacement), and those that further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. Natural England have advised that measures that further the purposes are required in addition to mitigation.