



Annual Review

2020-21



Photo credit: Ron Evans

'a landscape for everyone'



Landscapes
for life
.org.uk



Welcome from our Chair

Welcome to our Annual Review for 2020/21. As always with these reports, our aim is to provide you with some insight into what we do and why we do it.

2020/21 has been an extraordinary year for us all. The global pandemic has changed our lives and the AONB Partnership too has had to adapt to the new situation and how it operates. Officers have worked from home, some partners have had to furlough staff, and volunteer activities have largely halted. However, many of our new working arrangements have had positive outcomes. Remote working has proven effective and reduced travelling has enabled officers to use their time more efficiently as well as reduce our carbon footprint. Webcasting our meetings has improved the transparency of our work and more people are now aware of what we do.

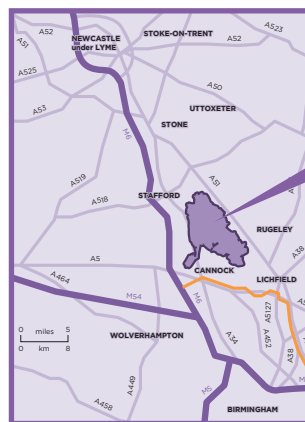
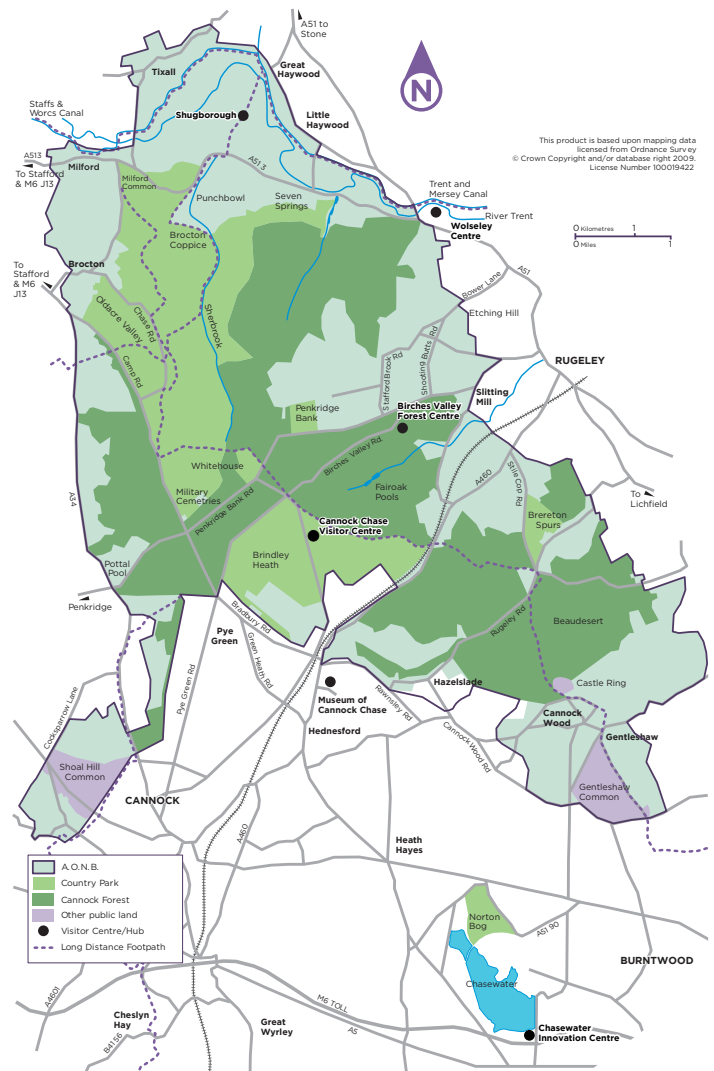
More than ever, the Chase has become the 'go-to' destination for relaxation, exercise and enjoyment for local people. The huge surge in visitor numbers during the national lockdowns and the unfortunate behaviour of a minority has, however, highlighted the fragility of this special place and how easily it can be damaged to the detriment of us all. Tackling these challenges has led to closer working between the main public landowners and emergency services on the Chase.

In spite of the pandemic, and the considerable impact it has had on officers, our partners and volunteers, much good work has gone on, as highlighted by the impressive range of achievements in this report.

The end of the year brought two significant Government announcements which, depending on the detail, could transform the role of the AONB. The first of these is a new three year 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' programme to be delivered by AONBs and National Parks. This will provide exciting opportunities for us to work with farmers and land managers to deliver objectives in the AONB Management Plan for landscape and nature recovery, heritage conservation, enhancing the visitor experience, and supporting businesses and communities. The second is for AONBs and National Parks to be brought together under a new National Landscapes Service. Greater collaboration between the Protected Landscapes could be beneficial, but any new working arrangements should not be to the detriment of local management, accountability and decision-making. Adequate core resourcing for AONBs to deliver all that is expected of them remains our overarching need.



Councillor Frances Beatty MBE
Chair, Cannock Chase AONB Joint Committee



Cannock Chase

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

Wild and Beautiful

Designated in 1958 and covering 26 sq miles (68 sq kms) of forests, heaths and historic parklands, Cannock Chase is mainland England's smallest AONB.

Cannock Chase AONB Partnership

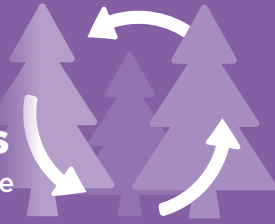
The AONB Partnership comprises all those bodies and individuals that collaborate to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of Cannock Chase. More information on the Partnership is available at:

www.cannock-chase.co.uk

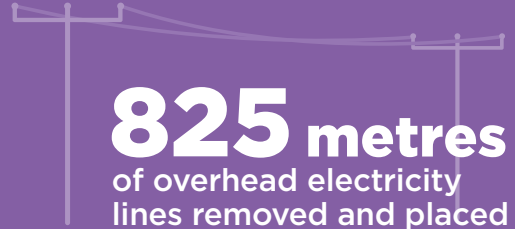
2020/21 in numbers

£4,078

awarded to 5 local community groups through the AONB Sustainable Development Fund



825 metres of overhead electricity lines removed and placed underground



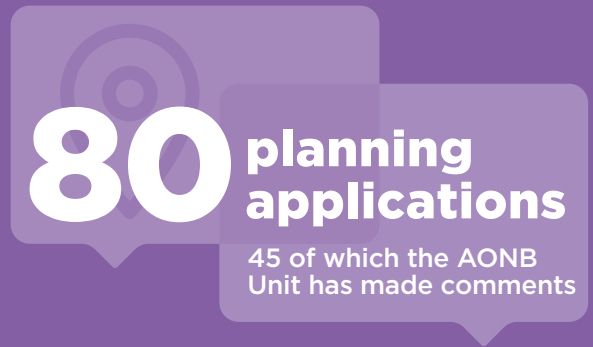
£57,000

of additional income secured for AONB projects



80 planning applications

45 of which the AONB Unit has made comments



1200

subscribers to our AONB e-newsletter



28 hectares



of habitat conserved at Gentleshaw Common through National Grid funding



22p

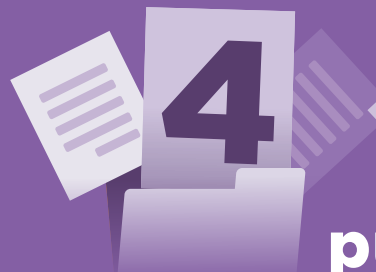
Annual Staffordshire resident cost to support the AONB



4

New AONB publications

including bat and invertebrate audits, heritage strategy, and landscape principles for car park improvements



Landscape Character and Planning

Dark skies

The AONB Partnership has teamed up with Staffordshire CPRE to study the stars over Cannock Chase and conserve its dark skies for people to enjoy and for nature to thrive. Dark starry skies are a magical sight, but glare from streetlights and buildings can mean that many of us don't get to see them. Cannock Chase has the highest levels of light pollution of all England's 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs): light spillage from outside the area creates a challenge to the AONB to deliver its core purpose to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the protected area. The AONB remains an oasis of darkness relative to its surroundings, however, and a forthcoming Good Lighting Guide will provide practical advice for homes, businesses, and decision-makers to avoid and reduce light pollution.



Orion T
Photo credit: Bob Mizon

Improving the view

Visitors to the National Trust's historic Shugborough Estate this year will notice that the views have just got better! 825m of intrusive powerlines have been placed underground, 10 poles have been removed and transformers have been repositioned as part of an ongoing £2.3 million regulatory-backed initiative funded by Western Power Distribution (WPD) to enhance protected landscapes across the country. The

undergrounding scheme at Shugborough was proposed jointly by the AONB and the National Trust to restore the historic character of this iconic Grade I listed park and improve the experience for visitors. In 2019 the AONB also secured funding from this initiative to underground overhead lines and improve the landscape along Marquis Drive, between the White House and Moors Gorse.

Key landscape principles for car park improvements

The AONB Partnership has published a guide setting out planning and environmental considerations that should be taken into account when planning and implementing alterations or car park closures on the Chase, along with key landscape principles, such as layout, detailed design, signage and restoration of car parks and laybys if these are closed. The guide has been prepared to support the SAC Partnership's recommendations for rationalising car parking on the Chase to reduce impacts on the Special Area for Conservation European wildlife site, through redistribution of parking locations with fewer locations to park but overall an increase in parking spaces. The guide can be downloaded at:

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/publications/technical-documents/



One of the car parks on Cannock Chase
Photo credit: Ian Marshall

HS2 high speed rail line

The Trent Sow Parklands HS2 Group (which includes the AONB Partnership) has now handed over to HS2 Ltd a set of general and detailed design principles to help enhance the design of the new high speed line where it crosses the Trent valley north of Great Haywood in the setting of the AONB. The aim is to achieve exemplary landscape and viaduct design so that it assimilates better into the area.

The Group has also been awarded £1.5 million to spend on projects that conserve and enhance this area's special qualities. A wide range of projects has come forward around the themes of: Landscape; Historic Environment; Biodiversity; Access, Enjoyment and Connectivity; and Community. Once approved by the Secretary of State the projects will be developed by the proposers and their progress and implementation will be monitored by the Group.

Environmental Land Management

Nearly 100 farmers and land managers in Cannock Chase AONB have been contacted and offered information about forthcoming changes to UK agricultural policy. Over the next seven years Direct Payments to farmers will be phased out and replaced with a new system that rewards farmers and land managers for delivering public goods for improving the environment. As part of

a national initiative across England's protected landscapes, Cannock Chase AONB is helping farmers and land managers in the designated area prepare for the new Environmental Land Management scheme. At the same time, we have taken the opportunity to learn more about farmer's attitudes and motivations towards environmental management, and their understanding about the AONB.

This engagement will lay the foundation for the new role that national parks and AONBs will be taking on from 2021-24 in providing advice and funding for farmers and land managers to manage the natural environment, cultural heritage and public access as part of the government's 'Farming in Protected Landscapes' scheme.

Commonwealth Games

Throughout the year AONB officers have been engaged in discussions about the mountain biking event taking place in Cannock Chase Forest as part of the 2022 Commonwealth Games. All elements of the Games (the construction of the course, access infrastructure and spectator management) as well as its legacy require careful consideration to ensure that the natural beauty of the Chase is not adversely affected, and that visitors have a great experience.



Farmland within the AONB
Photo credit: Steve Welch

Wildlife and nature

Looking out for bats

New research commissioned during the year by the AONB Partnership has shown that Cannock Chase provides a home for 9 out of Staffordshire's 12 species of bat. Broadleaved woodland, parkland and wood-pasture, agriculturally unimproved grasslands and river corridors are the best places to look for these flying mammals. Bats are valuable indicators of the health of our ecosystems as they are sensitive to landscape change and offer many economic benefits such as helping to control pests by eating insects. The findings from the research will help to shape and inform the way in which habitats and landscapes on the Chase are managed. The full report is available to download from our publications section.

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/publications/technical-documents/



Natterer's bat
Photocredit: Staffordshire Bat Group

Nature recovery

The AONB Partnership continues to support partners and landowners to manage habitats for the legally protected and endangered white-clawed crayfish and control its alien American cousin – the signal crayfish. In 2020 Staffordshire County Council translocated 200 white-clawed crayfish from the Birches Valley area to bolster an existing colony in the north west of the AONB. AONB funding has been provided towards a winter survey to sample aquatic macroinvertebrates from a watercourse on the Chase. The survey will support the case for future white-clawed crayfish reintroductions.

Our knowledge and understanding of the breeding success of nightjars on Cannock Chase moved a step closer, with a second year of survey work completed by the West Midlands Ringing Group. A pilot study of the long-eared

owl has also been carried out. The Chase is regarded as highly important for the species because of its suitable woodland habitat and conditions, but little is known about the density or winter population present. With funding from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund, the West Midland Bird Club has been using innovative programmable audio recording devices to detect the presence of the owl. It is intended the pilot will be followed up with a full survey in 2021.

It's a bug's life

Research carried out by Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust for the AONB Partnership has confirmed that Cannock Chase is a great place to discover insects and other invertebrates. Over 2,500 species have been recorded on the Chase over the past 25 years, of which 226 species are of 'conservation concern' (legally protected and/or threatened). Heathland areas, woodland habitats and decaying wood features, as well as diverse standing and running water wetland habitats are all important for their assemblages of invertebrates. Invertebrates make an important contribution to the UK's biodiversity but there is growing evidence of significant declines. The audit indicates that the invertebrate fauna of Cannock Chase is nationally important. Data analysis has identified 10 invertebrate hotspots on the Chase containing concentrations of records for species of conservation concern. This will help to target and prioritise future conservation efforts for these species.



Bog bush-cricket (*Metrioptera brachyptera*)
Photo credit: Darren Bradley/Buglife

Deer safety

Additional support has been given by the AONB Partnership to expand a successful scheme that is reducing the number of deer accidents on roads through the Chase. Over 80 additional deer deflectors will be installed on Camp and Penkridge Bank Roads. Headlights from approaching cars activate sounds and lights that warn off the animals. On average there are over 100 collisions with deer each year on the roads through Cannock Chase.

Historic Environment and Culture

Chase through time

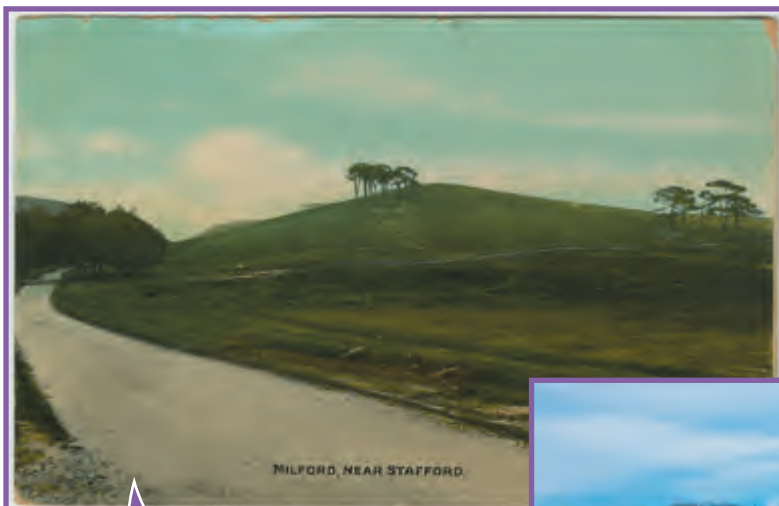
Over recent years the AONB Partnership has worked to improve our understanding of human activity on Cannock Chase: first with the HLF-funded Chase Through Time project (2016-18), followed in 2020 by an assessment of the significance, vulnerabilities of heritage assets and their suitability for visitor access and interpretation.

Heritage consultants, Fearn Heritage, have now taken forward that work and prepared a strategy to ensure that the Chase's rich historic and cultural environment will be protected and enjoyed by future generations. With the input of local stakeholders, the strategy responds to the needs of visitors and the heritage, containing advice, recommendations and ideas for projects that will protect and conserve assets, improve physical and virtual access, and enhance the visitor experience.

Shining a lens on the past

Photographers have been taking pictures of Cannock Chase for over 150 years. While modern-day satellite imagery provides a powerful tool for studying human activities, old photographs can reveal much about the pace and subtleties of landscape change.

Funded by the AONB Sustainable Development Fund, volunteers with the Friends of Cannock Chase have teamed up with professional local photographer Steve Welch to 're-create' historic views on the Chase with modern-day photographs taken from, or as close as possible, to the original photographer location. Comparing the modern-day view with its historical counterpart will shine a lens on how and why the landscape has changed over the intervening years. The project will help those with responsibility for managing and caring for Cannock Chase to better understand the extent of landscape change over the past century and a half and provide context for emerging interpretation strategies and schemes



View across Milford Common to Spring Hill, 1907
Photo courtesy of Staffordshire Past Track: Jake Whitehouse Collection

The same view in 2021
Photo credit: Steve Welch



Experience and Enjoyment

Unlocking the stories of Cannock Chase

Cannock Chase has a long and proud association with the Armed Forces. Today, our military heritage is revealed by poignant reminders of the past: camps, practice trenches, rifle ranges, assault courses and battlefield manoeuvres have all left their marks on the landscape.

The stories of two sites with military connections are being brought to life through new on-site interpretation. RAF Hednesford was built between 1938 and 1939 and many thousands of service personnel served here up until the camp was decommissioned in the late 1960s. Brindley Heath was the site for a purpose-built military hospital, opened in 1916 where staff cared for the high numbers of casualties returning from the Western Front. After the hospital closed in 1923 some buildings were converted to provide accommodation for local miners and their families until 1955. The Brindley Village Legacy Group has extensively researched the social history of this community. The panels on both sites are funded by the AONB and SAC Partnerships and Staffordshire County Council.

Managing recreational growth

Cannock Chase AONB receives the highest density of visitor footfall of any protected landscape in the UK. Annual visitor numbers currently exceed 2.5 million and are expected to rise to nearly 3 million over the next decade. Whilst more people are experiencing and

enjoying the wonderful landscape Cannock Chase offers, the fabric of the AONB is under pressure and resources of public authorities and emergency services are being stretched. In 2020 following public consultation, the Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Partnership published proposals offering a way forward to provide for the future growth in recreational use of Cannock Chase whilst safeguarding the area's wildlife, heritage and landscape.

The AONB Partnership published its support for the proposals in a Position Statement in September 2020. The Joint Committee concluded that the 'inevitable' increase in visitors sparked by housebuilding in the surrounding areas must be managed to protect Cannock Chase. Up to £7.8 million of developer funded contributions could be available to deliver future plans to improve trails, invest in more way signs and interpretation boards, provide conservation education to children and manage where people park by closing some parking areas in vulnerable parts of the Chase and creating more parking spaces, including free ones, in the more robust areas.

To help highlight how visitors and wildlife can co-exist on the Chase, local environmental group 'Sustainability Matters - Stafford' secured funding from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund to make a short film about the Chase with Mike Dilger, best known for his work on the BBC's 'The One Show'.

<https://youtu.be/OE5Fg3t7EPs>

Cyclists enjoying views across the Sherbook Valley
Photo credit: Ian Marshall



Communities and Business

A sense of place

Telling your customers that you're in one of England's finest landscapes makes business sense. The AONB Partnership has published a toolkit to help local businesses appreciate the special qualities of Cannock Chase and how they can use a sense of place to add value to their products and services. Registered businesses will be able to use the toolkit, Cannock Chase logo, business locators, and a selection of stunning

images by local photographers Ron Evans, Robert Cartwright and Steve Welch – all for free.

The toolkit has been designed around our new Cannock Chase place brand that captures the open landscape, freedom and sense of tranquillity of the Chase in words and pictures. The place brand is intended to help protect and enhance the natural beauty of this special place; inspire and unite local communities and partners; support rural regeneration; encourage social and capital investment. Over time the place brand will be woven into signage and interpretation across the Chase.



Art in the Landscape

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are cultural landscapes that are the product of people and place. The arts are a mechanism to explore a place through music, painting, poetry and dance and open up our experience and understanding of landscape.

The AONB Partnership is collaborating with Cannock Chase Local Education Partnership (CCLEP) and Arts Connect, the bridge organisation for the West Midlands, on a programme of arts development for young people from Cannock. The programme will offer opportunities for young people to experience the arts and culture working around themes

of the environment, sustainability and cultural heritage.



Art in the forest landscape
Photo credit: Ian Marshall

Governance and communication

Planning for the future

During the year we have prepared a new business plan setting out how the AONB Partnership will operate to deliver its commitments in the AONB Management Plan over the two-year period 2021-2023. It includes an indicative work programme agreed by the AONB Joint Committee.

The business plan can be viewed at:

www.cannock-chase.co.uk/about-the-aonb/about-us/

Working together

During 2020 the AONB and SAC Partnerships have brought together the major landowners on Cannock Chase, authorities and emergency services to discuss co-ordinated approaches to managing the unprecedented numbers of visitors to Cannock Chase during the COVID restrictions. This includes preventing and responding to adverse behaviours, such as, wildfires, litter, ASB, criminal and wildlife damage. The meetings have also provided a useful platform to share ideas about issues including mountain biking and grazing.

The meandering river corridor landscape of the Trent Valley

Photo credit: Robert Cartwright

Broader engagement

For the first time, during 2020 the AONB Joint Committee has webcast its meetings, allowing a wider audience to learn about its ambitions and achievements. Future meetings will continue to be webcast wherever venues and facilities allow.

Meetings of the Joint Committee have always been open to the public, but attendance has been rare. In the interests of further encouraging public engagement with the business of the Joint Committee public speaking at meetings is being introduced during 2021 in accordance with a published protocol.

Raising our profile

Following an independent review of its internal and external communications the AONB Partnership has adopted a Communications Strategy covering the period up to March 2024. Our communication has 3 primary purposes:

1. To promote the profile and understanding of Cannock Chase – the place
2. To inspire people to want to love and look after Cannock Chase
3. To strengthen the profile of the Cannock Chase AONB Partnership and increase the transparency and support for its work.

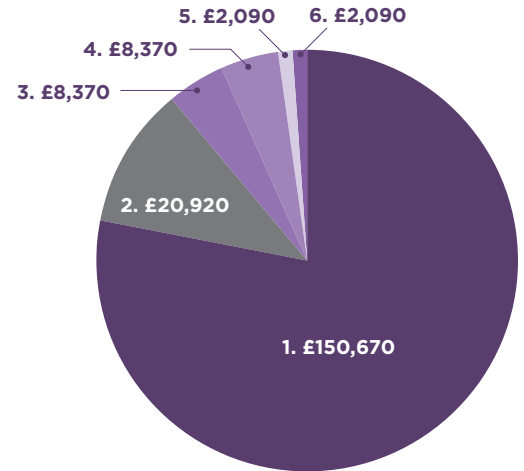
Most of our short-term objectives (2020-21) have been delivered, including: the development of the new Cannock Chase place brand; updating the AONB website; and creation of a new e-newsletter.



AONB finances

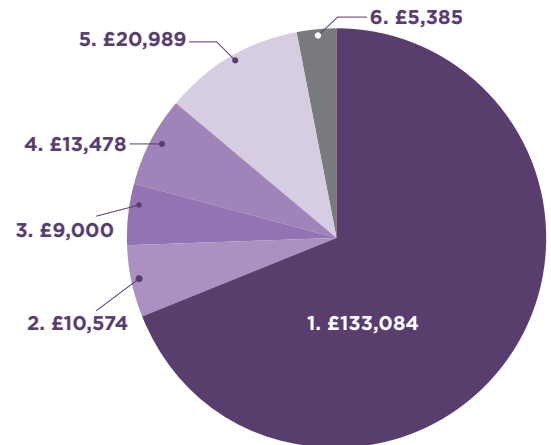
'Core' Income

1. Defra	£150,670
2. Staffordshire County Council	£20,920
3. Cannock Chase Council	£8,370
4. Stafford Borough Council	£8,370
5. Lichfield District Council	£2,090
6. South Staffordshire Borough Council	£2,090
Total	£192,510



'Core' Expenditure

1. Staff and associated costs	£133,084
2. Office equipment, printing and publicity, national liaison	£10,574
3. Partnership running costs	£9,000
4. Core activities	£13,478
5. AONB projects	£20,989
6. Sustainable Development Fund	£ 5,385
Total	£192,510



Additional project income (and expenditure)

Defra - Environmental Land Management Scheme	£5,210
NAAONB - Environmental Land Management Scheme	£2,000
National Grid - Landscape Enhancement Initiative (Gentleshaw Common)	£41,737
SAC Partnership - Brindley Heath on-site interpretation	£3,000
SAC Partnership - RAF Hednesford on-site interpretation	£5,000
Total	£56,947

Cannock Chase AONB Unit

AONB Development Officer: Ian Marshall
AONB Land Management Officer: Richard Harris
AONB Landscape Planning Officer: Julia Banbury (part time)

The AONB Partnership



Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is supported by:

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



Photo credit: Ron Evans

'wild and beautiful'

