

# CANNOCK WOOD CHARACTER ASSESSMENT

MARCH 2022





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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This Character Assessment covers the Cannock Wood Neighbourhood Plan Area (Plan Area) which was designated by Cannock Chase Council on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2019. This Plan Area is the whole of the civil parish of Cannock Wood which is outlined by the blue line on the map below. The map also shows outlined in red the settlement boundary as defined on the Local Plan Policy Map.



Under the Localism Act 2011, local communities can develop Neighbourhood Plans which set out planning policies used to decide whether to approve planning applications. A Neighbourhood Plan can be a powerful tool to ensure the community gets the right types of development in the right place. Neighbourhood Plan policies and their determination can be informed by Character Assessments which identify the elements which make up the character of the area.

This Character Assessment will be used to inform the Cannock Wood Neighbourhood Plan and form part of the evidence base for the Plan.

### **The Purposes of this Character Assessment**

The purposes of this Character Assessment are:

1. to enable the Cannock Wood Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan's Working Group to produce its Neighbourhood Plan by informing policies, in particular regarding the effect of development on the character of the natural and built environment of the Parish;
2. to enable better understanding of the character of the Cannock Wood Parish for applicants submitting planning applications for planning permission and decision makers determining planning applications or appeals for proposals in the area;
3. to inform other people whether residents, visitors, funders, project managers or investors who are interested in the area.

### **Stages of production including consultation**

This Assessment has been undertaken over a number of stages as outlined below.

1. An initial "Community Mapping" session was held with members of the Working Group on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2021 to capture general impressions and local cultural associations within the area.
2. A desk-based study that reviewed material available online from [cannockchasedc.gov.uk](http://cannockchasedc.gov.uk), [staffordshire.gov.uk](http://staffordshire.gov.uk), [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) and from Natural England, in particular existing Landscape Character studies and the policy context as well as the results of the Cannock Wood Neighbourhood Plan Survey held in November 2021.
3. A series of field visits around the parish recorded with photographs and notes.
4. Analysis of a number of aspects of the area:
  - Landscape and Topography
  - Biodiversity and Green and Natural Features
  - General Patterns of Built Form and Open Space
  - Main Uses and Mix of Uses

- Views and Enclosure
- Movement and Wayfinding
- Building Typologies
- Building Design: Scale, Details and Materials
- Heritage
- Streetscape
- Parking and Access
- Bin Storage
- Lighting and Security
- Gardens and Boundary Treatments, Public Private Interface

5. Mapping the area – plotting relevant features such as Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

6. Consideration of threats or implications of change on the built environment and surrounding landscape, and thereby the development of a series of recommendations to be used to inform the Neighbourhood Plan.

7. Additional professional advice offered by Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and Edward Taylor (MRTPI , PlanSpace).

## **How to use this Assessment**

When developing policies or making planning decisions for proposals within or, in some cases near to, the Parish, this Assessment should be consulted in order to help gain an understanding of the existing character when developing or making decisions about proposals or writing policies. Various categories for the Parish are detailed in Section 3 Assessment. Relevant Conclusions and Recommendations are referenced in Section 4.

## **Policy Context**

Neighbourhood Plans are required to conform with the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF) as well as the strategic policies of the Local Plan of Cannock Chase District Council. This Assessment and its general aims of preserving and enhancing the character of the built and natural environment of Cannock Wood are supported by both the NPPF and the strategic policies of the Local Plan.

### **1. National Planning Policy Framework 2021**

The NPPF creates a policy framework for neighbourhood plans to plan positively for design, environment and landscape. It puts sustainable development at the heart of the UK Planning system and sets out the three overlapping economic, social and environmental objectives.

- The economic objective;

- The social objective for the planning system includes a requirement “to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities”, including “by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being;”
- The environmental objective for the planning system is “to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment;”

The Framework further states that Planning policies and decisions should play an active role in guiding development towards sustainable solutions, but in doing so should take local circumstances into account to reflect the character, needs and opportunities of each area.

## 2. Cannock Chase District Council Local Plan

The Cannock Chase District Council Local Plan Core Strategy’s District Wide Objectives support the Character Assessment especially the following:

***Objective 1 Promote pride in attractive, safe, local communities.***

This objective relates to Design and Character

***Objective 2 Create healthy living opportunities across the District***

***Objective 5 Encourage sustainable transport infrastructure.***

These two objectives relate to walking, which is an important aspect of the character of the area, and encouraging access to the countryside which will help people better appreciate its character.

***Objective 7 Provide well managed and appreciated environments***

***Objective 8 Support a greener future***

These two objectives are important to the area as it lies within the Cannock Chase AONB and has two Sites of Biological Importance and the potential for wildlife corridors and biodiversity enhancement.

### Key Core Strategy Policies

The Core Strategy has a number of policies which support the production of a Character Assessment in particular:

#### ***Policy CP14 - Landscape Character and Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)***

This Policy lists ways in which the District’s landscape character will be protected, conserved and enhanced including:

- “The consideration of landscape character in all development proposals in order to protect and conserve locally distinctive qualities, rural openness and sense of place and maximise opportunities for restoring, strengthening and enhancing distinctive

landscape features including trees, woodland, canal corridors, sensitive edges of the rural areas and creating green infrastructure links in conjunction with new development. The reuse and sympathetic adaptation of existing buildings which make a positive contribution to their landscape setting will be supported (taking into account complementary Policies CP12 and CP15);”

- “The consideration of landscape character in all development proposals in order to protect and conserve locally distinctive qualities, rural openness and sense of place and maximise opportunities for restoring, strengthening and enhancing distinctive landscape features including trees, woodland, canal corridors, sensitive edges of the rural areas and creating green infrastructure links in conjunction with new development; “
- “The reuse and sympathetic adaptation of existing buildings which make a positive contribution to their landscape setting will be supported (taking into account complementary Policies CP12 and CP15).”

Cannock Chase Design Supplementary Planning Document April 2016 including Cannock Wood supplementary character area description and district profile includes a brief description, a more comprehensive selection of key features, and a set of Key Local Design Principles which support this Assessment.

### **Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan**

The Cannock Chase AONB Management Plan “provides planning authorities with policy direction for the AONB and is a material consideration that should be taken into account when preparing Development Plans and Neighbourhood Plans as well as determining planning applications”.

The Management Plan’s focus is on “delivering the statutory purpose of AONB designation: conserving and enhancing natural beauty, with considerations relating to wider environmental issues, the rural economy, communities and recreation dealt within the context of delivering this purpose”.

The Plan also sets out the special qualities of the AONB to provide character-based criteria to judge the impact on the AONB that may take place from development or other activities.

The AONB Plan aims to meet and then go beyond this statutory requirement for its production by “telling the story of this special, nationally important landscape it aims to galvanise, prioritise and inspire action; bring partners together and promote collaboration; and prioritise public investment in order to secure a future for the AONB where its natural beauty is conserved, enhanced and celebrated for the good of the nation and local communities”.



The AONB Plan sets out the 'Vision and Objectives for the AONB for 2019-2038:

## 1. Vision

By 2039, the landscapes, habitats and heritage of Cannock Chase AONB will be in good condition through positive management, with standards and facilities befitting their national and international importance. There will be high levels of connectivity between the AONB and its surrounds through its landscapes, habitats, heritage and cultural landscapes and communities.

The natural benefits of the AONB will have a positive impact on those who experience and enjoy Cannock Chase whether from local communities or further afield and these communities will in turn care for, feel pride in and celebrate the AONB.

## 2. Objectives

Themes	Objectives	Policy topics
<b>Landscape Character and Planning</b>	<b>Maintain quality &amp; distinctiveness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High standards of design in the built environment</li> <li>• The impacts of traffic in the AONB</li> <li>• Woodland management</li> <li>• Farmland management</li> <li>• Non-farming land uses</li> <li>• Quarrying and other working landscapes</li> <li>• High quality recreational infrastructure</li> </ul>
	<b>Enhance the landscape setting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protecting the setting</li> <li>• Softening the boundary</li> <li>• Strategic landscape links</li> </ul>
<b>Wildlife and Nature</b>	<b>Improve conditions for nature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of the importance of the SAC</li> <li>• Key species and their habitats</li> <li>• Effective management of heathland</li> <li>• Water bodies and wetlands</li> <li>• Invasive weeds, pests and diseases</li> <li>• Deer</li> <li>• Geological exposures</li> </ul>
	<b>Enlarge and connect habitats</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restoration of heathland</li> <li>• Bridges for nature outside the AONB</li> <li>• National leadership for biodiversity gain</li> </ul>

<b>Historic Environment and Culture</b>	<b>Conserve the Chase's historic environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving knowledge of heritage</li> <li>• Improving the condition of heritage</li> </ul>
	<b>Connect communities with the Chase's history &amp; culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspire through the Chase's history and culture</li> </ul>
<b>Experience and Enjoyment</b>	<b>Treading lightly in the Chase</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recreation management</li> <li>• Creation of alternative recreation resources</li> <li>• Group visits</li> </ul>
	<b>A greener experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a green identity</li> <li>• Relationship between visitors &amp; the environment</li> <li>• Sustainable travel</li> <li>• A clear message</li> </ul>
<b>Communities and Business</b>	<b>Natural benefits for the community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting community needs</li> <li>• Giving communities a voice</li> <li>• Coordination of volunteering</li> </ul>
	<b>Supporting the special qualities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harnessing enterprise</li> </ul>

It can be seen from these objectives that the AONB Management Plan supports the general aims of preserving and enhancing the character of the built and natural environment which this Assessment sets out to promote.

## **2 EXISTING PUBLISHED (LANDSCAPE) CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS/APPRAISALS**

There are three existing Character Assessments which provide relevant background information.

### **National Landscape Character Area Profile**

Natural England produces a series of National Character Area (NCA) Profiles which are designed to provide data for local decision-making and Cannock Wood lies within the Cannock Chase National Character Area. According to the NCA Profile for the Cannock Chase National Character Area:

“The NCA principally coincides with the historical hunting forest of Cannock Chase, with major remnants surviving within the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).”

The NCA profile adds:

“The current landscape is extremely varied, including extensive areas of urban development predominantly in the south of the NCA and extensive conifer plantations and heathlands in the north interspersed with farmland. The Forest of Mercia, a Community Forest, lies in the heart of the NCA. The NCA also has some outstanding geo-diversity interest, extensive industrial archaeology and a good number of historic parks. In addition to the ecosystem services of food and timber production, the NCA has an extensive rights of way network and areas of open access land offering good recreational opportunities to the surrounding population.

Recreational use of the Cannock Chase SAC is of some concern and needs to be managed to ensure that future housing development does not harm the biodiversity interest of the site. Changes as a result of development have been significant within the NCA for many years and are likely to continue. This provides opportunities for enhancing both the landscape quality and biodiversity value through green infrastructure and through continued local initiatives such as the Forest of Mercia and the Cannock Chase AONB.”

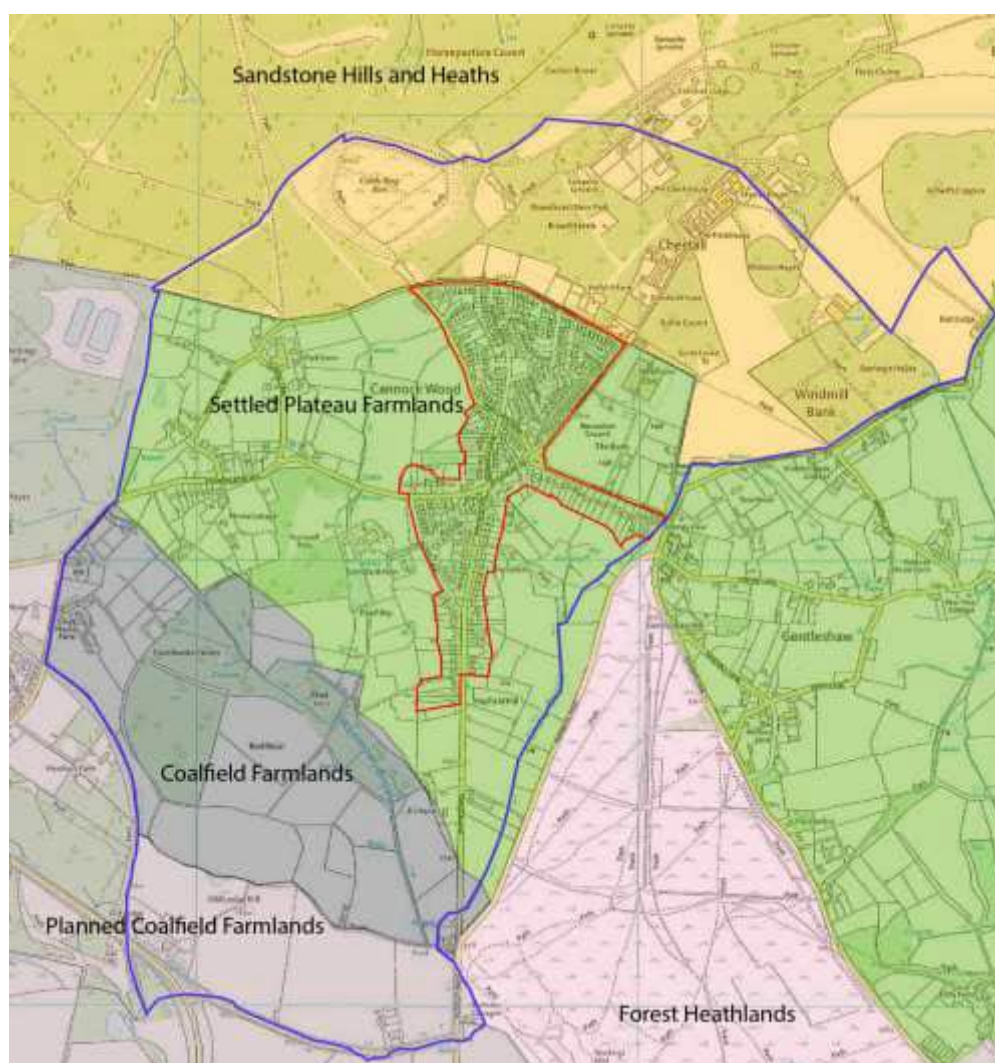
This National Landscape Character Area is much larger than Cannock Wood Parish and as such provides a very broad-brush background description and some aspects such as Special Areas of Conservation are not applicable to Cannock Wood. Nevertheless, there are some important elements that do apply to the Parish such as the extensive industrial archaeology with some long disused coalfields and medieval iron workings as well as the rights of way network which footpaths in the Parish link into. There are also opportunities for enhancing landscape quality and biodiversity value through green infrastructure.

## Review of the AONB Landscape Character Framework, Stage 2 Landscape Character Type Descriptions 2017

The Stage 2 Landscape Character Type Description in 2017 updates an earlier Staffordshire Landscape Character Assessment in 1994 for the Countryside Commission.

It provides a Revised Landscape Typology which identifies new Landscape Character Types, four of which can be found in the Parish and are described as follows:

- a) The northern-most part of Cannock Wood is classified as “Sandstone Hills and Heaths”.
- b) The central part of the Parish where the vast majority of housing lies is classified as “Settled Plateau Farmlands”.
- c) To the south of this is an area classified as “Coalfield Farmlands” and
- d) to the very south there is an area classified as “Planned Coalfield Farmlands”.



For each Landscape Character Type, the Review provides sections on Overall Character, Key Characteristics, Strength of Character, Summary of Condition, Vision Statement and Landscape Guidelines. These are discussed later in this Assessment under the various headings in Section 3 ASSESSMENT and Section 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS. For more detail on Landscape Character Types see APPENDIX 1: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES WITHIN CANNOCK WOOD.

## **Cannock Chase AONB Design Guide; Part1: Overview Of Cannock Chase AONB, July 2020**

The Cannock Chase AONB Design Guide is in two parts:

1. An overview of the AONB which includes a section of Landscape Character Context which refers to the Landscape Character Types identified in the Review of AONB Landscape Character Framework Stage 2 Landscape Character Type Descriptions 2017 outlined above.
2. A set of design guidelines for various elements of building design in the AONB.

The first part includes a Landscape and Built Character Overview with some points particularly relevant to Cannock Wood:

- “The character of the Cannock Chase AONB is primarily of a historic landscape of lowland heathland, forest and lowland broadleaved woodland with areas of open grassland and small villages located towards the edges of the area. These settlements act as ‘gateways’ into the largely unsettled ‘chase’ landscape. Smaller agricultural areas are found on the lower lying, peripheries which also often include areas of horse grazing with associated outbuildings.”
- “The former coal mining industry, which, at one time, featured large-scale collieries operating at Brereton Hayes Wood and Cannock Wood is now non-existent, although strong influences are still evident in the character of the landscape and settlements in the area.”
- “Today, as well as being a working landscape and setting for a number of small villages and settlements, Cannock Chase provides opportunities for recreation; a number of camp sites and outdoor activity centres together with numerous tracks and trails for walking, horse riding and cycling are all readily accessible within the AONB.”

It also includes a section on Settlements and Buildings in the Landscape:

“The overall pattern of settlement within the AONB is of relatively small villages, located predominantly towards the peripheries of the area.

Etchingill, Slitting Mill and Cannock Wood have a less formal pattern of expansion. These villages feature houses scattered along a triangular road pattern which have experienced infill development, resulting in a mix of ages and architectural styles.

There are patterns in the relationship between the settlements and the surrounding landscape. The combination of topography and extent of woodland coverage causes the small-scale hamlets and villages to be largely hidden within views. Where buildings are visible, they are generally viewed on a rising landform, as clusters of settlement located off straight roads, set within a structure of mature trees (Cannock Wood/Etchingill).”

This section identifies six areas “on the edge of the AONB that are likely to experience a higher sensitivity to new development through visibility or location.” Most relevant to Cannock Wood is Area 6 North of Burntwood about which it observes:

“This area currently shares intervisibility with the edge of Cannock Wood and is visible from adjacent elevated areas such as Gentleshaw Common.”

It states about these areas generally that:

“Development is not necessarily precluded from these areas, but the design and effects of any potential development on landscape character and views should be thoroughly considered. Development in these areas should consider analysis through Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) and should also consider the use of colour studies to ensure that materials are appropriate to the AONB and do not cause undue impacts to the views and setting.”

The Guide identifies Cannock Wood as an example of a Village Character types it calls **Informal Settlements** which it describes as follows: “These villages are of informal origins and generally lack a traditional village centre. Located on higher landform, properties are mainly mixed infill development along straight roads. Materials are mixed, but often feature white rendered properties.”

It then provides a short description of Cannock Wood.

“The settlement has a clustered form but with no obvious or planned settlement centre. The village has developed from infilling along the main routes resulting in a mixed character of ages and styles of buildings.

Housing is generally low density, mostly single or double storey and detached or semi-detached with some good-sized plots.

The material palette is mixed but features red brick walls with some light-coloured render, clay tiles and painted windows which are mostly white but with some feature colours.”

It also provides a colour study where it identifies colour swatches that “demonstrate an analysis of existing colours found within the settlement and surrounding landscape of Cannock Wood”.

Elements of this description are picked up later in this Assessment under the various headings. Some of the design guidance in the second part are relevant to Cannock Wood and where relevant they are picked up in the Conclusions and Recommendations Section.

### 3 ASSESSMENT

#### Overview of Area

Cannock Wood is a predominantly rural area with one main settlement and some clusters of buildings in the rural area. It is one of a small number of villages in Cannock Chase District and lies within the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty surrounded by undulating Green Belt countryside. Sandstone Hills and Heaths, Settled Plateau Farmlands, Coalfield Farmlands and Planned Coalfield Farmlands Landscape Character Types form the village setting. The Parish is at a sufficient elevation to get more snow in winter months than most of the immediate surrounding area and it benefits from views across the surrounding area from vantage points including Castle Ring.

The rural village feel is reinforced by roadside hedgerows and informal grass verges, particularly along traditional country lanes without pavements. Many protected mature trees and woodlands around village contribute to this character.

The main uses are residential, arable and pastoral farming, horse pasture and manèges and other recreation in particular walking, but also road cycling and mountain biking, as well as having a significant nature conservation function.

The settlement developed in 'linear' pattern along main roads mainly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries with later infill development especially post war which has created the suburban core of the settlement. The Parish is closely associated with Gentleshaw to the east within Lichfield District and is served by the Church and school in Gentleshaw. The next nearest settlements are Burntwood and Prospect Village, and slightly further away are Longdon, Cannock and Rugeley.

The Village is dominated by post-war residential development which is varied in character, predominantly low-medium density with detached and semi-detached bungalows and two storey houses on medium and large plots. Incremental development has created variety in the style and design and materials with some earlier properties mainly traditional 'cottage style'. Red/brown brick and blue/brown tiles predominate, with some rendered and painted brick properties.

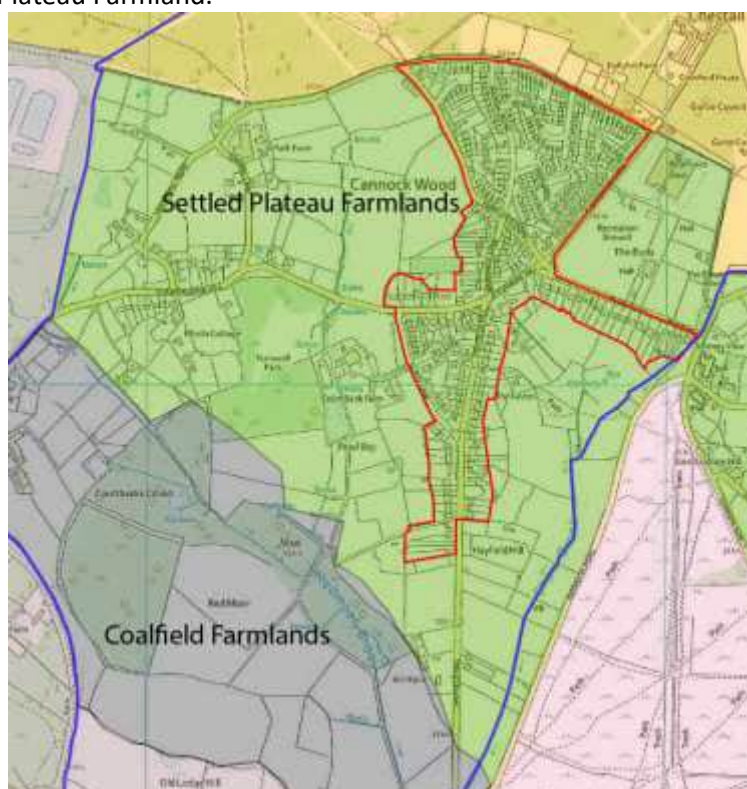
There are no listed buildings in the area but there are a number of buildings dating from before the Twentieth Century such as the Methodist Church, the Park Gate Inn and the Rag Inn as well as a number of houses and farmsteads. There are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments: the Iron Age Castle Ring which is listed as multivallate [surrounded by two or more ramparts forming multiple lines of defence] hillfort and medieval hunting lodge and the Moated Site and the Bloomery in Courtbanks Covert, see APPENDIX 2 LISTED BUILDINGS AND SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS. Both sites are also Sites of Local Biological Importance. There is also Beaudesert, a former parkland, lodge and Victorian walled garden of the former Hall which dated back to Elizabethan times; the remains of the Hall stand in Lichfield District.

## 1. Landscape and Topography

The 2017 Review of AONB Landscape Character Framework, Stage 2, identifies a number of Landscape Character Types character types for Cannock Wood and lists key characteristics for each type which provide a useful structure for discussing the Landscape and Topography of the Parish.

### a) Settled Plateau Farmland

The 2017 Review of AONB Landscape Character Framework, Stage 2 Landscape Character Type Descriptions identifies the central settled area of Cannock Wood as an example of Settled Plateau Farmland.



#### ***Key characteristics:***

- i. A gently rolling and folded landform— more open on rolling low plateau summits

This appears to be true of this area of Cannock Wood. Whilst there are significant variations in height across the Parish, the changes in altitude are gentle and while there are a few particularly good vantage points relatively high in comparison with the surrounding countryside there are no obvious peaks.





Looking towards Hayfield Hill, “Gently Rolling and Folded Landform”



Cannock Wood seen across farmland and Shaw Brook from Gentleshaw Common looking northwest

ii. Many small streams in shallow valleys.

There are a number of small streams in shallow valleys in Cannock Wood in particular Redmoor Brook and Shaw Brook which follow shallow valleys southwards on the West and the East of the Parish respectively while a smaller brook crosses Cumberledge Hill.

iii. Mixed pastoral and arable farming.

While there is some arable land and some pastoral farming, much pasture seems to be used for horses.

iv. A varied, well-defined pattern of small-medium sized fields

This would appear to be true of this part of Cannock Wood. Many of the smaller fields in the west of the parish exhibit signs of ridge and furrow cultivation possibly dating from medieval times.

- v. Small patches of enclosed former heathland.

(see Biodiversity below)

- vi. Network of narrow lanes, often with hedge banks.

This is true of this part of Cannock Wood (see “Enclosure” and “Movement” below)

- vii. Clusters of farmsteads and roadside cottages.

There are clusters of farmsteads and roadside cottages in Cannock Wood. There are also houses forming ribbon development especially along roads radiating out from the main settlement.

- viii. Traditional red brick farmsteads and dwellings with clay tile roofs

This is true but other materials also exist such as render (see “Materials” below.)

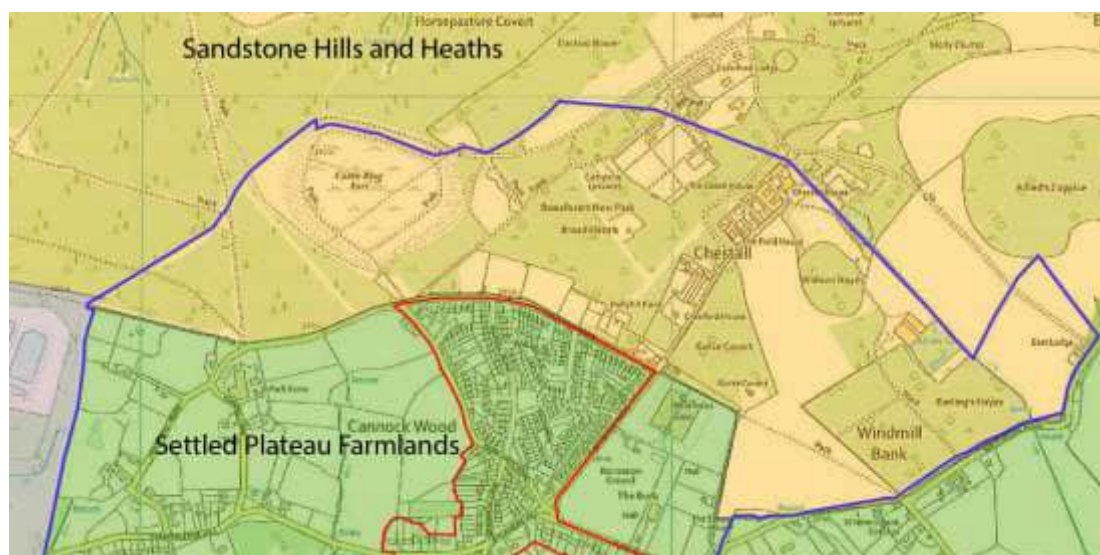
- ix. Horse pasture and small grazed paddocks with wire fences.

This is particularly true of Cannock Wood and is perhaps the predominant use of the fields in the parish. See “Land Use”, below.

In addition to the above features this area of the Parish has number of significant clusters of trees including Nunswell Park which are important elements of the landscape of the area as well as important to biodiversity (see Biodiversity below).

## b) Sandstone Hills & Heaths

The northern most part of the Parish is classified in the Review as Sandstone Hills and Heaths.



### ***Key characteristics:***

- i. Upstanding/undulating topography, with occasional steep sided valleys  
The land in the north of the Parish does have this characteristic.
- ii. Impoverished sandy soils with patches of bracken and gorse

There is bracken in the area around Castle Ring which has an important biological value as discussed under “Biodiversity and Green and Natural Features” below. However, bracken can be a threat to scheduled ancient monuments as it can damage both the sites themselves and the views surrounding them. Its roots can spread at a rapid rate causing extensive damage to archaeology.



- iii. Well wooded, cultivated landscape with a strong sense of visual enclosure

The northernmost part of Cannock Wood is the most wooded area of the Parish and there are areas where this provides a strong sense of enclosure, see “Views and Enclosure” below.

- iv. Estate farms with a regular pattern of large hedged fields

There is some farmland towards Windmill Bank

- v. Remnants of historic wood pasture

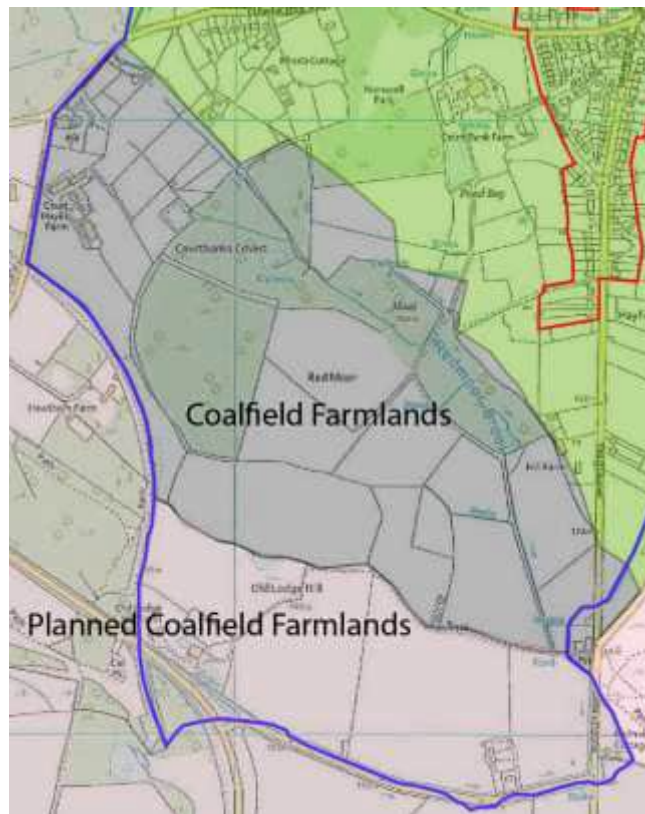
Much of the historic deer park has been actively managed by the Forestry Commission since 1919.

- vi. Sparsely settled, in places remote landscape with limited public access

There is very little in the way of housing of any kind. There is some public access in the area such as around Castle Ring while there are some parts where access is limited around Beadesert and Chestall Park.

### c) (Planned) Coalfield Farmlands

The Review classifies the Southernmost part of the Parish is as Coalfield Farmlands and Planned Coalfield Farmlands which are looked at together:



**Key characteristics:**

- i. Low rolling plateau

This is characteristic of this area with the shallow valley of Redmoor Brook.

- ii. Restored opencast sites with immature landscape features

The area was mostly opencast coal and marl pit sites and since their closure the landscape has been partly restored to farming and other uses.

- iii. Pockets of planned farmland enclosed by thorn hedges/fences

Such pockets exist in this area.



- iv. Pockets of ancient, settled farmland with thick mixed species hedgerows.

The Moated Site and Bloomery in Courtbanks Covert is evidence of ancient settlement in the area. Mixed species hedgerows are present in the area.



- v. Patches of secondary woodland on older restored sites.

There are some patches of trees in this area as shown in this photograph around Redmoor Brook and remnants of Ancient Woodland at Courtbanks Covert and areas of re-planted ancient woodland nearby.



- vi. Heathy origins strongly evident throughout, with relic wet heathland commons in less disturbed areas.

Heathy origins more apparent in the south-west in the area classed as Planned Coalfield Farmland.

- vii. A vacant landscape lacking in settlement, often adjoining a well-defined urban edge.

This is true as the landscape adjoins the edge of Burntwood as it extends south of the Parish boundary across Sevens Road.

- viii. Large scale urban elements including pylons, major roads and distribution warehouses.

There are some pylons in Burntwood, south of the Parish boundary and visible from Cannock Wood.

## 2. Biodiversity and Green and Natural Features

Biodiversity in Cannock Wood is supported by a network of habitats and green corridors including areas of woodland and heathland, hedges, ponds, brooks, trees and plants.

The Forestry Commission manages woodland to the north of the Parish and there are clusters of trees elsewhere such as Nunswell Park and on Court Bank Farm as well as many trees mingling with the extensive hedgerows and hedge banks in the area. These hedges that surround fields can be important habitats in their own right as well as providing links between other habitats. Areas of open land also provide important connectivity

There are two sites of Local Biological Importance: the Iron Age Castle Ring which is listed as multivallate [surrounded by two or more ramparts forming multiple lines of defence] hillfort and medieval hunting lodge and the Moated Site and Bloomery in Courtbanks Covert. These sites are also Scheduled Ancient Monuments and are shown on the Listed Building and Scheduled Ancient Monuments plan in APPENDIX 2.



A **Site of Biological Importance** (or **SBI**) is a non-statutory designation used locally by Staffordshire County Council to protect locally valued sites of biological diversity which are described nationally as Local Wildlife Sites.

Castle Ring



Common spotted orchid, June 2021, council owned area of Nunswell Park, grass has been left to grow long.

According to Staffordshire County Council's Biodiversity Strategy 2012-2015

"SBIs provide services not just for nature but also for social, economic and health benefits such as green infrastructure, recreation, water and air quality and climate change adaptation.

It is therefore important to have up to date information on the condition of these sites within the Borough. This will help identify any sites that are at risk, provide the correct long-term management and evaluate key sites. Work will continue with partner organisations in the resurveying of the Borough's SBIs. This will allow appropriate management through stewardship agreements and help ensure the long-term conservation of these sites. Ideally this work will be undertaken every ten years."

Small patches of enclosed former heathland are also found within the Parish

Deer roam in some nearby parishes and in the northern parts of Cannock Wood itself. Whether there will be further opportunities to enable this in the future or whether it is desirable is unclear as deer can overwhelm some vulnerable habitats through overgrazing.

### **3. General Patterns of Built Form**

#### *Within the Settlement Boundary*

Most of the housing in the Parish is located within the defined settlement boundary. The settlement is based mainly around three triangles.

- The largest of the three triangles is formed by Holly Hill Road, Park Gate Road and Chestall Road. Houses on the edge of the area back onto fields but within the area there are houses that back onto other houses thereby forming small perimeter blocks around through roads and cul-de-sacs.
- The smallest triangle is formed by Park Gate Road, Sycamore Hill and Bradwell Lane but significantly this links the other two triangles. Houses on the edge back onto fields while those in the middle back onto one another creating another perimeter block.
- The last triangle is formed by Hayfield Hill, Cumberledge Hill and Slang Lane. Again houses on the edge back onto fields while those inside the triangle back onto one another creating perimeter blocks with Ivy Lane.

Within these triangles there are mainly houses on both sides of the street which creates a sense of enclosure and a sense of place which is distinct from the rest of the area.

The effect of these perimeter blocks is to make the centre of these triangles of development feel distinct in character from the rest of the Parish and even the outward facing edges of the settlement boundary. Perimeter blocks may also be safer from intrusion from the rear than buildings which back onto roads or fields.

In addition to these three triangles there are strips of development along Cumberledge Hill,



Buds Road and Hayfield Hill within the settlement boundary.

Plot sizes are usually small in the areas of modern infill and where houses have been developed together they are uniform in size and shape. Elsewhere within the settlement boundary plot sizes are more varied with some large plots along Cumberledge Hill, Buds Road and Hayfield Hill.

There are a number of defined open spaces in the Parish including the grassed area around High Meadow and the Village Playing Field as well as an area to the rear of the Village Hall.



Areas of open land are part of the settlement character and can enhance it but so are enclosed areas, see “enclosure” below.

There is a risk of over development of large plots affecting the setting of the village as well as pressures of further ribbon development along roads radiating out of the settlement boundary for example along Hayfield Hill.

#### *Outside the Settlement Boundary*

Outside the settlement boundary there is a mix of isolated housing and strips of housing mainly towards the west along main roads, usually on one side or the other of the road, mostly set back behind hedges and often with large front gardens. Towards the south of the Parish there is little development outside the settlement boundary.

Plot sizes are larger and less uniform in size and shape.

#### 4. Main uses and Mix of uses

Housing makes up the main use within the settlement boundary although there are some important ancillary uses including the Village Hall, two pubs and playing fields where cricket and football are played. There is also the school and church and the Windmill Inn just on the other side of the road from the settlement boundary which lie just outside the Parish boundary in Gentleshaw. Where there is housing outside the settlement boundary it is usually restricted just to one side of the road and is mostly set back behind hedges and often with large front gardens. Towards the south of the Parish there is little development outside the settlement boundary. In practice Cannock Wood and Gentleshaw are often seen as being effectively the same place for many purposes with many residents of Cannock Wood attending or having attended school in Gentleshaw for example.

For grocery shopping people mainly either get food delivered or travel to supermarkets in Burntwood or Cannock.

The other main uses in the Parish are agriculture, keeping horses, recreation (walking, road and mountain biking, horse riding) and wildlife conservation.



The majority of fields appear to be used for keeping horses and there are a number of manèges built for this purpose but there is also some pasture for cattle and sheep as well as some arable farming.





There is a range of footpaths, many Rights of Way, which link with other footpaths as part of a wider network in the area including to the Heart of England (see “Movement” below).



## 5. Views and Enclosure

### *Views*

Due to the elevation of the area and the scenic beauty of the surrounding countryside, as recognised by its Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty status, one of the most important characteristics of the Parish is its impressive views. There are a number of points in the Parish that allow spectacular views in different directions.

Similarly, there are many important views into the Parish from outside such as those from Gentleshaw Common which is a popular walking route.

The Cannock Chase AONB Views and Settings Guide was limited to analysis of 20 viewpoints across the whole AONB. The views selected are not therefore the only views of importance. The Views and Setting Guide identifies three views of or from the Parish (9, 10 and 11) which have been analysed making use of a digital terrain model to produce the Zone of Theoretical Visibility from each according to the height of new structures. The model is based on topography (the variation in height of the landscape seen from the viewpoint). It does not take into account screening provided by vegetation, nor screening of buildings by others closer to the viewing point. It should not be used as a substitute for on the ground assessment of the impact on key views of individual sites.

The Cannock Wood Views Assessment identifies and catalogues with photographs 21 views around the Parish. These represent an indicative selection of the most important views but there are many others.

Around Castle Ring, invading scrub is threatening the biologically important area of acid grassland. It is also obscuring some views from the Iron Age hill fort so it may be appropriate to investigate ways to remedy both these issues. The site is owned by Cannock Chase District Council but most surrounding land is owned by the Forestry Commission. Castle Ring is a Scheduled Ancient Monument which is likely to affect management of the land.



View looking predominately north-eastwards from Castle Ring

### *Enclosure*

There are areas of strong enclosure within the Parish created by areas of trees, narrow roads with high hedges and hedge banks and by the arrangements of buildings.

In the north of the Parish in particular there are wooded areas where trees create a strong sense of enclosure.



Wooded area in North of Parish creating a strong sense of enclosure.



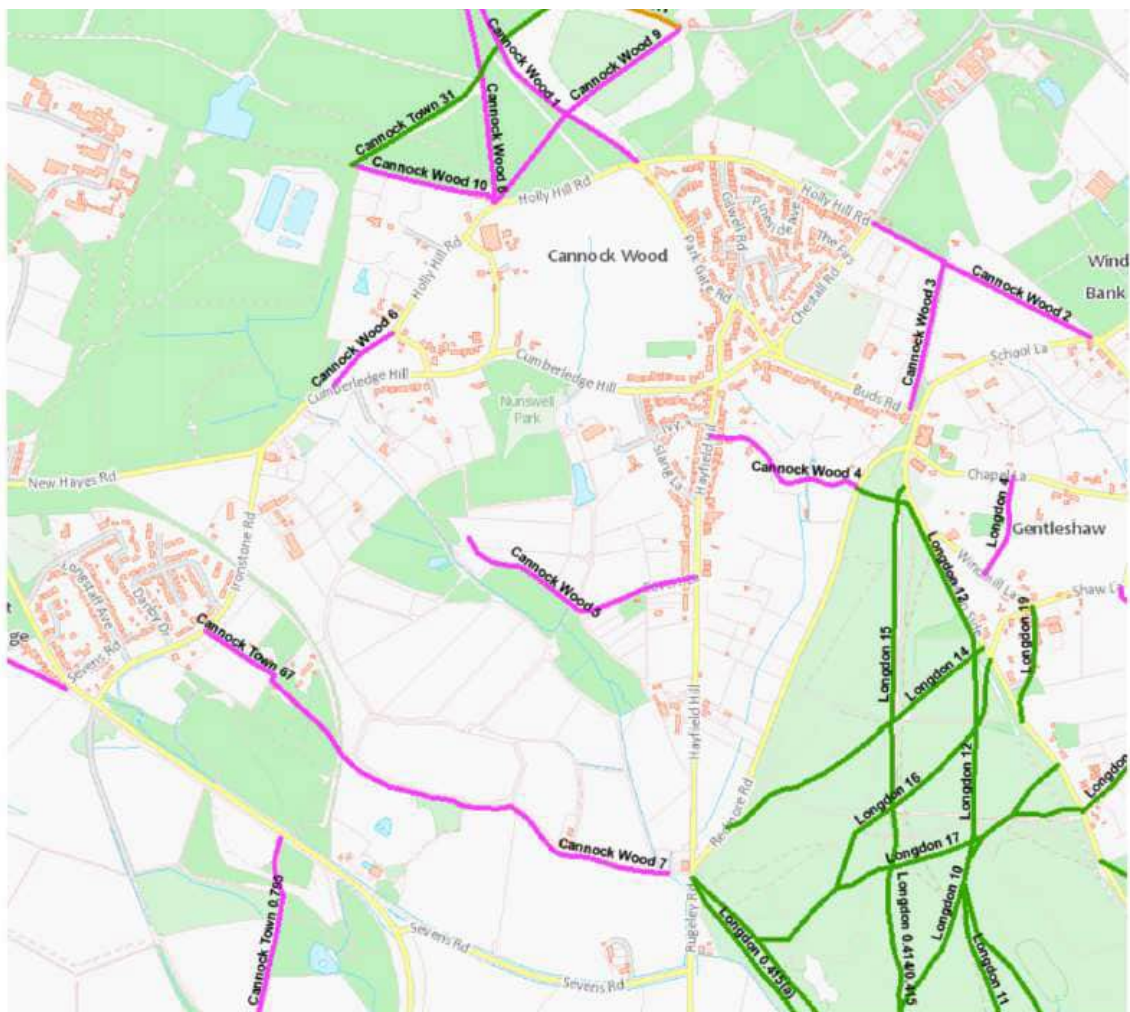
In the settled area, especially within the settlement boundary, the presence of housing on both sides of the road creates a sense of enclosure. This varies throughout the area but is particularly noticeable where there are smaller gaps between buildings and where the housing surrounds a green space such as around High Meadow. High hedgerows and hedge banks in both the settled area and along narrow lanes create a high sense of enclosure.

## 6. Movement & Wayfinding

Movement in Cannock Wood is achieved through a combination of a network of narrow lanes, more formal roads within the settlement boundary and on the main approaches into the Parish and a network of footpaths. The main street layout is likely to be original, based on country roads with some newer roads within the settlement boundary.

Cannock Wood is quite car dependent as there are limited community facilities in Cannock Wood, the nearest GP and secondary schools are a couple of miles distant, and public transport is limited to a single bus route with a limited timetable. Car usage is facilitated by high provision of off-street parking and well-maintained roads. Traffic speed and volume is an issue for people in the area according to the Survey. Pedestrian movement is limited by the state of pavements which on many roads are in poor condition or non-existent. The numerous footpaths in the Parish mainly give access to the surrounding countryside but routes Cannock Wood 2 and Cannock Wood 3 also provide access around the Village itself although the gate hampers people with wheelchairs or push chairs.

The map and sample photographs below show the Rights of Way within the Parish and vicinity. Routes in green are bridleways and routes in pink are public footpaths.



CW1



CW2



This route (CW2 and CW3) connects through to the Village Hall and the School in Gentleshaw. It is impossible to get a pram or buggy through this stile without dismantling it and it is inaccessible for wheelchairs.

CW3



CW4





### *Wayfinding*

Wayfinding is the ability of an area to be understood by people even if they are not particularly familiar with it so that they know where they are and can find their way around. Clear visual cues as to where you are such as edges, nodes, landmarks, distinct areas and 'paths' (which includes roads, footpaths etc.) enable wayfinding. Views and gateways can also help.

It is very clear on entering Cannock Wood at what point you are approaching and entering the main settlement because the vast majority of housing is located within the settlement boundary. Apart from the fairly clear distinction between the housing area within settlement boundary and the rest of the Parish, there are some distinct areas within rural Cannock Wood. North of Holly Hill Road, the area is distinctly more wooded, something which extends beyond the Parish boundary north into the centre of the AONB. To the East of the Parish views are dominated by Gentleshaw Common rising above the Parish. To the West along Cumberledge Hill there are many houses along either side of the road but rarely both, which leads to a feeling of the area being settled but without any clear settlement edge.

Away from the settlement, along the narrow country roads, wayfinding is reduced as many of the roads are similar; narrow rural roads edged with houses largely set back from the road or by high hedges offering only occasional glimpsed views of the fields beyond. The views do vary from different parts of the parish with Gentleshaw Common dominating the East while in the west there are more open views across surrounding areas and in the north views are towards the Forestry Commission run woodland.

There are no landmarks within Cannock Wood which are easily visible from elsewhere within the Parish as only two buildings are more than two storeys in height and while there are variations in the height of terrain there are no clear peaks that stand out. The main features that stand out are the two pubs: the Rag and the Park Gate Inn, the Methodist Church, Castle Ring and the covered reservoir but while they do provide points of reference for anyone passing none of these are easily visible from any distance.

There are a couple of important junctions, one of which, the junction of Buds Road and Park Gate Road, has a post box and shop on it could be defined as a small node, see photo.



## 7. Building Typologies

### *Housing Typologies*

There are a variety of housing types in Cannock Wood and these vary to some extent in their location. Most of the housing in the Parish is post war and this is particularly true within the settlement boundary.

Within the settlement boundary there are a number of detached houses as well as semi-detached houses and bungalows. Outside the settlement boundary houses are generally larger detached set back from the road often behind hedges and walls. More traditional houses are usually of more modest proportions and one traditional terrace fronts onto the pavement.

### *Other Rural Buildings*

Other rural buildings include historic farmsteads that have been adapted to modern farming practices, more modern farms, manèges and stables.

## **8 Building Design: Scale, Detail and Materials**

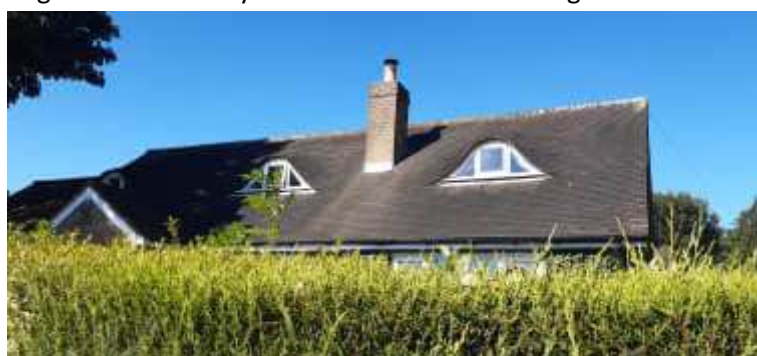
### *Height and Scale*

The largest buildings tend to be the larger detached houses outside the settlement boundary while the smallest are probably garages and small farm buildings as well as bungalows within the settlement boundary although there are some other small buildings such as the Methodist Church.

### *Detail*

While houses vary quite a lot in terms of design, whatever period they are from, they are usually relatively simple with few having details such as quoins or corbels. Roofs are mainly gable ended, especially older properties or gable fronted while there are some hipped roofs. While there are a variety of chimney designs they are also usually of relatively simple design.

Windows are typically of simple design, horizontally oriented casement style without ornate lintels. While some older properties have squarer windows, vertically oriented windows are much less common. There are a some forward facing dormer windows on houses and extended bungalows mainly within the main settlement, including a row along Cumberledge Hill towards Slang Lane and one eyebrow window house along Chestall Road.



There is a small group of front gabled houses with side dormers along Holly Hill Road towards Pineside Avenue. Bay windows are not common in the Parish.

Doors tend to be simple design and entrances uncelebrated. Porches while common are by no means ubiquitous and vary in design with gabled porches the most common type but also flat roofed, canopy, hipped and recessed designs are found.

Garages are very common and mostly built into the house with some projecting forwards but mostly flush with the main building line.

### *Materials*

Houses are predominantly made of red/brown brick, constructed using stretcher bond or rendered with some painted brick houses while roofs are typically blue/brown tiles. Park Gate Barn is a rare example of use of Flemish Bond while the Park Gate Inn appears to be constructed using a combination of Stretcher and Flemish Bond. Windows are mainly wooden or PVC, while doors are mainly timber. There are some houses within the settlement boundary that have weatherboarding in parts.

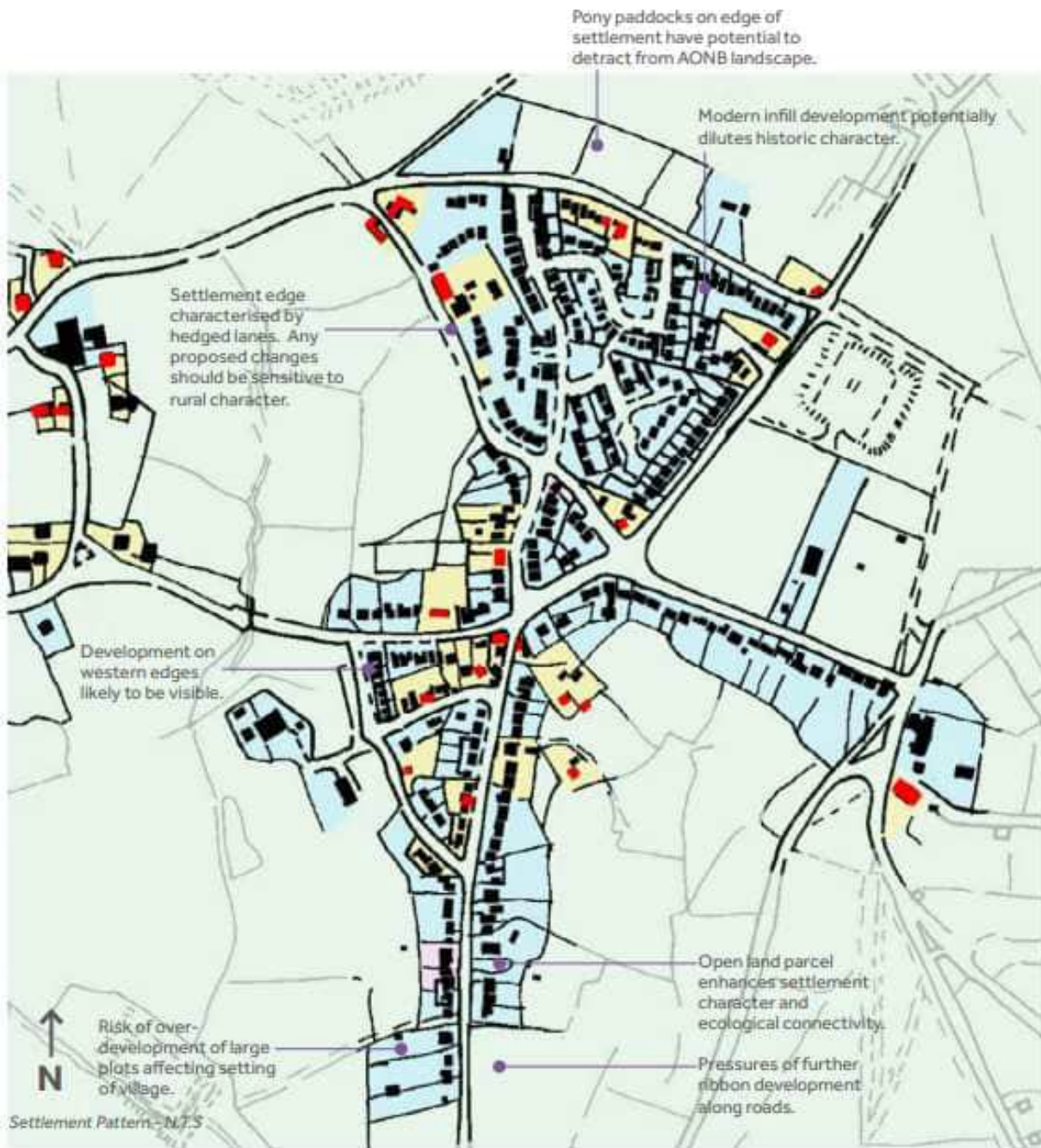
## **9. Heritage**

The village dates probably from 17th century with growth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century associated with agriculture and nearby coal mining and later 20<sup>th</sup> century housing. There are some surviving 19th century and mid-20th century properties e.g. the Methodist Church built in 1836 in Chapel Lane. The main street layout is likely to be original based on country roads with some newer, post war, roads within the settlement boundary.




Other key surviving features are historic farmsteads though adapted to modern farming practices. The settlement developed in 'linear' pattern along main roads with later infill development especially post war which has created the suburban core of the settlement.



The Village is dominated by post-war residential development which is varied in character, predominantly low-medium density with detached and semi-detached bungalows and two storey houses on medium and large plots. Incremental development has created variety in the style and design and materials with some earlier properties mainly traditional 'cottage style'. Red/brown brick and blue/brown tiles predominate, with some rendered and painted brick properties.

The AONB Design Guide from July 2020 identifies buildings of different periods with the red buildings on the plan below found on OS map 1843-1912 and yellow-coloured plots being of historic character dating predominantly from before 1890. Blue plots are modern development while the lilac plots are early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. There is a row of semi-detached houses overlooking the playing field which were developed in the late 1920s and those plots should also have been coloured lilac. The plot highlighted as 'open land parcel enhances settlement character and ecological connectivity' is no longer an open parcel of land as three large, detached houses have since been developed on the site.



**Key**

-  AONB Boundary (village lies wholly within AONB)
-  Historic Character (Development predominantly dates from pre 1890)
-  Denotes building evident on OS map 1843- 1912

-  Early 20th Century Character (Development predominantly dates from 1890- 1940. May include some buildings and some modern infill)
-  Modern Character (Development predominantly dates from 1920 onwards. May include some scattered older buildings)

There are no listed buildings in the area but there are two Scheduled Ancient Monuments: the Iron Age Castle Ring which is listed as multivallate [surrounded by two or more ramparts forming multiple lines of defence] hillfort and medieval hunting lodge and the Moated Site and Bloomery in Courtbanks Covert, see APPENDIX 2: LISTED BUILDINGS AND MONUMENTS. Both sites are also Sites of Local Biological Importance. There is also Beaudesert, a former parkland, lodge and Victorian walled garden of the former Hall which dated back to Elizabethan times; the remains of the Hall stand in Lichfield District.

Close by to the Moated site and Bloomery is a rock-cut well known as Nun's Well which may be medieval in date.



## 10. Streetscape

### *Building and Roof Lines*

There are some examples within the settlement boundary of groups of houses where a consistent building line or roof line are established due to the regular arrangement of similar houses. Examples include along Pineside Avenue, Gilwell Road and High Meadow. This creates a more formal suburban feel.



Houses with a common building line along Gilwell Road.

Such consistent building lines are much harder to find in the rural area due to the greater variation in size and distance from the road with many houses set back a long way behind hedges. This lack of a consistent building line or roof line is typical of rural housing and is a key characteristic as it reflects the way in which the area has developed over many years as well as the variety of ways that buildings are oriented to the road.

### *Rhythms*

Within the settlement boundary there are some examples of roads where, due to the regular arrangement of similar houses, the repetition of certain elements such as gables, doors and windows establishes a visual rhythm. Examples include along Slang Lane (see photo), Pineside Avenue, Gilwell Road and High Meadow.



Due to the dispersed nature of much of the development in the rural area, there are usually no rhythms established between repeating elements such as windows of adjacent buildings. In fact, in spite of some exceptions such as where there is ribbon development, the lack of such rhythms or repeating elements is a key characteristic as it reflects the piecemeal way in which the area has developed over many years as well as the variety of ways that buildings are oriented to the road.

## **11. Parking**

Parking does not appear to be a problem for housing in the area with practically all housing having some off-street parking provision. As a result there is very little on street parking in the area for most of the time. There is an issue around the school run when some on street parking occurs along Buds Road and during evenings and weekends also causes concern on Bradwell Lane and Pineside Avenue.



Hayfield Hill with off-street parking, free from on-street parking.

## 12. Bin Storage

Bin storage does not appear to be a problem in the area with most houses being either detached or semi-detached so have sufficient room to store bins to the side or rear of properties.

## 13. Lighting and Security

Roads within the settlement boundary appear to be to be well lit while some of the roads elsewhere are not so well lit by street lights which does make them less secure. While this pattern is typical of the area, there would unlikely be any harm to the character if lighting improvements were made for example on some of the streets and lanes where safety was considered a priority.

The Cannock Chase AONB Annual Review identifies Cannock Chase as having the highest level of light pollution of any AONB although this is put down to its proximity to major urban areas rather than lighting within the area itself and it still has relatively dark skies compared to elsewhere. Recent street lighting improvements provide improved night-time visibility. Some of the manèges have bright lights which may cause light pollution.

## 14. Gardens and Boundary Treatments, Public Private Interface

Most houses are set back from the pavement behind front gardens usually behind hedges, fences or walls typically with a clear distinction between public and private space. Front gardens are quite large in some cases, especially outside the centre of the settlement.



Front gardens with hedges on Holly Hill Road

Hedges and hedge banks are very common boundary treatments for fields and are an important element of the character of the area with some well over 2 metres high. This does sometimes limit views from roads to glimpses where there are field entrances but there are sufficient views in the area that this isn't a problem. Hedge loss is an identified problem within the Cannock Chase AONB leaving 'gappy' boundary coverage in places and while it does not seem to be particularly prevalent in Cannock Wood any such loss would be a potential threat to the character of the area.





## **4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This Character Assessment should be a useful basis for guiding development of any new housing or other uses within Cannock Wood whether within the settlement boundary, or the wider rural area. It should also be useful for developing policies for the Neighbourhood Plan and Design Code.

There are some general conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn as well as more specific conclusions and recommendations for each of the various aspects of character. It should be noted however that implementation of these recommendations needs to be combined with sound urban design principles.

### **General Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### ***AONB status***

Paragraph 177 of the National Planning Policy Framework July 2021 states:

“When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.”

As such it seems highly unlikely that larger proposals would come forward but smaller proposals may do in which case design principles should be set out in a design strategy/statement.

#### ***Design Policy and Design Code***

To help this process it would be useful to have design guidance in the form of Design Code which can be referred to in Policy the Neighbourhood Plan. There is already quite detailed design guidance in the form of the AONB Design Guide which covers many aspects of design of buildings although it is for the AONB as a whole and not all points are relevant to Cannock Wood. There are also extensive Landscape Guidance points in the Review of Landscape Character Types which are picked up below where relevant to the Parish. Policy and Design Code should be informed by the observations in the above Assessment above and conclusions and recommendations below with respect to the relevant aspects of Character.

#### ***Landscape Character Types***

There are some important differences within the area which have been detailed in the description of Landscape Character Types identified in the Review of AONB Landscape Character Framework, Stage 2 Landscape Character Type Descriptions 2017 (See section 2. EXISTING PUBLISHED CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS and APPENDIX 1: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES WITHIN CANNOCK WOOD).

Policy in the Neighbourhood Plan and the Design Code can refer to these Landscape Character

Types in order to distinguish between different parts of the Parish where appropriate as well as referring to the settlement boundary.

### ***Green Infrastructure Strategy***

Many of the elements which contribute to character outlined below can be regarded as Green Infrastructure (defined in the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 as “A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities”).

According to Planning Practice Guidance:

“Green infrastructure can embrace a range of spaces and assets that provide environmental and wider benefits. It can, for example, include parks, playing fields, other areas of open space, woodland, allotments, private gardens, sustainable drainage features, green roofs and walls, street trees and ‘blue infrastructure’ such as streams, ponds, canals and other water bodies. References to green infrastructure in this guidance also apply to different types of blue infrastructure where appropriate.”

*Paragraph: 004 Reference ID: 8-004-20190721, Revision date: 21 07 2019.*

As such, a Green Infrastructure Strategy might be a useful way of coordinating many of the elements discussed below in particular: Landscape and Topography, Biodiversity and Green and Natural Features, General Patterns of Built Form and Open Space, Main Uses and Mix of Uses, Views and Vistas and Enclosure, Movement & Wayfinding (with respect to Rights of Way), Gardens and Boundary Treatments, Public Private Interface.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations for Various Elements of Character**

### **1. Landscape**

#### *Landscape Recommendations by Landscape Character Type*

Recommendations can be specified using the Landscape Character Types and corresponding Landscape Guidelines identified in the Review of AONB Landscape Character Framework, Stage 2 Landscape Character Type Descriptions, 2017 (see APPENDIX 1 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES)

#### **a) Settled Plateau Farmlands**

The REVIEW OF AONB LANDSCAPE CHARACTER FRAMEWORK, STAGE 2 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPE DESCRIPTIONS 2017 puts forward the following Landscape Guidelines for the identified landscape character type Settled Plateau Farmlands in which it identifies the central part of Cannock Wood as lying.

- Conserve and where necessary restore the small to medium scale field pattern as defined by hedgerow boundaries.

- Encourage the conservation of species rich grasslands.
- Seek opportunities to conserve and enhance hedgerow tree cover to soften the impact of adjoining hard urban edges.
- Mitigate the suburbanising impact of sub-divided horse paddocks, manèges and stabling by promoting guidelines for appropriate management.
- Monitor the impact of new and extended dwellings in this landscape, encouraging the adoption of vernacular building styles / materials when considering new development proposals.

While these are general recommendations for this Landscape Character Type wherever it is found across the AONB, they appear to be reasonable measures within this part of Cannock Wood.

Deterioration of hedgerow is a threat to the character of the AONB generally creating gappy boundary coverage in places. Protection and enhancement of hedgerows is recommended and can be supported by policy.

Landscaping may be useful to ensure development does not adversely impact on the rural character of the Parish which extends into the settlements and appropriate landscaping strategies can help mitigate the effects of development.

Green spaces can form part of a wider biodiversity network and could be planned as such as part of a Green Infrastructure Strategy. In the built-up part of Cannock Wood there are opportunities to link such space with the countryside beyond visually and perhaps physically including through the use of green infrastructure, for example hedgerows, and routes including cycle paths, footpaths and bridleways and this could be an aspiration.

There may be an opportunity for existing or any new green space to have many uses such as play, performance, education, sports facilities etc. depending on the needs and wishes of the community.

Landscaping (combined with the arrangement of houses) should be used to break up edges in order to keep the gradual change and look of the current urban fringe/edge.

Cannock Wood offers the possibility of great views and vistas of the surrounding countryside and this should be considered in design.

Potentially negative impact of development on the character of rural areas can be minimised by:

- if possible limiting houses to two storeys or even just one in some cases although in practice this may be difficult to control through policy as proposals need to be judged on a case by case basis and may vary with location as to what is appropriate especially given the objective about views. Policy needs to be evidenced and there are unlikely to be many examples of applications for tall buildings in the area;

- preserving where possible the character of older properties which are essential to the character of the area;
- limiting the size of clusters of development including preventing clusters of development from linking up to form larger ones;
- setting development back from the edge of the road where appropriate; and
- providing off street parking to prevent the visual intrusion of on-street parking.
- It may be appropriate to map sensitive areas or views within the Parish where large buildings are less appropriate or use wording to limit them to less sensitive locations while noting that exceptions for certain farm buildings, engineering and Infrastructure projects such as utilities amongst other examples will still be permitted as set out in National Policy.

#### **b) Sandstone Hills and Heaths**

The Review puts forward the following Landscape Guidelines for the Sandstone Hills and Heaths landscape character type:

- Protect and conserve the strong woodland belts within and around the boundaries of this estate landscape.
- Conserve and strengthen roadside hedgerows and verges as valuable buffers alongside busy roads. Manage hedgerows and verges to maximise landscape and wildlife benefit.
- Conserve and restore areas of historic wood pasture within the old Beaudesert deer park in association with other project partners.
- Conserve and manage public access via the established footpath network. Take opportunities for improving linkages and access to the AONB from urban areas without creating undue pressures on landowners.
- Mitigate the impact of any new development on open farmland around the edge of the AONB by encouraging new native broadleaved woodland planting that links with the existing estate woodlands.
- Mitigate the suburbanising impact of sub-divided horse paddocks, manèges and stabling by promoting guidelines for appropriate management.

While these are general recommendations for this landscape type across the AONB, with the exception of the old Beaudesert deerpark which lies just outside the Parish, they appear to be reasonable measures within this part of Cannock Wood.

### c) (Planned) Coalfield Farmlands

The Review puts forward the following Landscape Guidelines for the (Planned) Coalfield Farmlands landscape character types:

- Conserve and strengthen pockets of older historic landscape character and encourage the positive management of primary field boundaries, hedgerow trees and woodlands.
- Encourage the creation of new grazed heathland habitats in areas of post mineral extraction landscapes.
- Encourage the creation of new belts of trees and small woodlands to buffer the impact of new housing development in this landscape.
- Create opportunities for new recreational routes to provide safe off-road access between existing settlements.

While these are general recommendations for this landscape type across the AONB they appear to be reasonable measures within this part of Cannock Wood.

Although there is little housing development in this part of the Parish, the encouragement of new belts of trees and small woodland would help buffer the impact of housing elsewhere in the Parish.

New recreational routes would be welcome, especially if they can be linked up to the wider network.

#### *General Landscape Recommendations*

As well as the above recommendations with respect to individual Landscape Character Types, Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) can be used to assess the impact of development proposals throughout the Parish.

## **2. Biodiversity**

Natural flora and fauna can be protected and encouraged by protecting and enhancing their habitats including hedges, ditches, ponds, woodlands, wild areas etc. These elements should be seen as forming part of a connected system and opportunities to enhance it should be taken. In particular there may be opportunities to link the Site of Biological Importance (SBI) at Castle Ring with the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Gentleshaw Common and the SBI at the Moated Site and Bloomery in Courtbanks Covert.

The Government's advice with respect to Local Wildlife Sites (known as SBIs in Staffordshire) is:

The series of non-statutory Local Sites seek to ensure, in the public interest, the conservation, maintenance and enhancement of species, habitats, geological and geomorphological features of substantive nature conservation value

While SBIs have no legal protection, they do receive some protection through different policies and they should be taken into consideration by Cannock Chase District Council Planners when deciding planning applications which may affect the site. As such the Neighbourhood Plan could potentially consider policies with respect to the SBIs.

Re-wilding projects have enhanced the biodiversity of waterways in the Ribble Valley among other places and this idea could be explored with a number of stakeholders including Cannock Chase District Council (owners of Castle Ring SBI), Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Cannock Chase AONB, adjacent Parish councils and District Councils and the Forestry Commission who manage land around the northern edge and other landowners in the Parish. The possibility of extending deer runs can be explored although this has to be managed carefully as overpopulation of deer has been blamed in some areas for preventing some wildlife habitats from developing.

A group called Wild Staffordshire <https://wildstaffordshire.com/about/#story> has been set up to “help individuals, communities and schools to grow a greener, wilder and more bio-diverse county by supporting them to transform green spaces into wildlife havens for all ages to enjoy and benefit from.” The Neighbourhood Planning group could explore the possibility of working with them as well as other partners.

### *Rewilding*

Rewilding can be achieved in many ways including along grass verges. *Plantlife* is a campaign promoting wildflower along roadside verges and could be a potential partner for such a project in the Parish, <https://plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk/roadvergecampaign>



A number of policy approaches/actions can be explored including:

- Requiring proposals to demonstrate Biodiversity Net Gain either on site or elsewhere.

According to the Government “Biodiversity net gain is an approach which aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than beforehand. “

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/biodiversity-net-gain-updating-planning-requirements>

- Identifying “Biodiversity Units” in the Parish - areas where biodiversity net gain is possible that can be paid for by schemes elsewhere for which Biodiversity Net Gain is required but is not possible on site so has to be provided on offset sites.
- Designating new or extending existing Sites of Biological Importance and Local Wildlife Sites.
- Defining Habitat Corridors.
- Identifying areas for potential Accessible Natural Greenspace.
- Creating a Green Infrastructure Strategy to tie together Biodiversity with other objectives such as landscape, views, open spaces, hedges.
- Identify approaches for the Parish with respect to biodiversity such as those identified in the 2010 Lawton Report: Making Space for Nature which highlights five key approaches to rebuild nature and addresses the weaknesses of the current series of wildlife sites -
  - (i) Improve the quality of current sites by better habitat management.
  - (ii) Increase the size of current wildlife sites.
  - (iii) Enhance connections between, or join up, sites, either through physical corridors, or through ‘stepping stones’.
  - (iv) Create new sites.
  - (v) Reduce the pressures on wildlife by improving the wider environment, including through buffering wildlife sites.

All these options can be used in isolation or in combination with others.

- Creation of nursery fields for horses where there is greater biodiversity than horse pastures.
- Fenced margins around certain fields to protect wildlife habitats.

In addition, Cannock Chase is currently looking for Biodiversity Enhancement Sites which Cannock Wood Parish Council could consider identifying.

Staffordshire Ecological Record can provide data to help with the above and Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, who maintain the record should be consulted.

### **3. General Patterns of Built Form and Open Space**

#### *Block Structure*

Within the settlement boundary there is only one clear potential development site which would, if developed, complete the row. There is little room for altering block structure

anywhere in the Parish as inside the main settlement boundary is the only place where perimeter blocks are present and it is practically full and any development elsewhere will be severely restricted due to AONB and Green Belt.

Incremental development along roads could, if uncontrolled, ultimately lead to strips of development joining up which could effectively create a new block or coalescence between settlements and this would be detrimental to the open character of the area. This should be avoided.

Where there are large plots there may be scope to sub-divide them but where this would lead to over development or irreparable loss of the village's character it should be avoided.

#### *Open Space*

The provision of open space can perform a recreational and biodiversity function. Appropriate siting and design of open space can enhance its ability to perform these functions as well as forming part of wider walking and cycling networks and, along with other landscaping form part of a landscaping strategy to mitigate loss of views due to development and this should be explored in applications. A Green Infrastructure Strategy could help coordinate this.

## **4. Views and Enclosure**

Cannock Wood's characteristic open views should be protected by ensuring any development has minimal impact. The potential impact of development on views should be considered when determining applications in the area. A Views Assessment has been compiled to accompany this Character Assessment and this should be seen as a starting point and the potential impact on other views should be assessed.

Landscape and Visual Appraisal can be used to assess the impact of development on proposals.

The impact of enclosure on character should not be underestimated and can be affected by the orientation of buildings as well as the proper use of boundary treatments and trees.

The appropriate level of enclosure for development given that of the surrounding character should be an important consideration in policy formulation and decision making and the various Landscape Character Types identified in the Review of AONB Landscape Character Framework, Stage 2 Landscape Character Type Descriptions, 2017 can inform this.

The Neighbourhood Plan could select several key views for a policy on maintaining openness etc., possibly including AONB's views 10 and 11 and any others that can be identified.

Some vegetation removal to enhance views may be possible. In the case of Castle Ring, the site is owned by Cannock Chase District Council which has a management plan for the site. The area in the centre is an important area of acid grassland but it is getting invaded by scrub and this is also impeding views so it may be appropriate to investigate ways to remedy both



these issues.

Similarly buffer planting for example around the settlement edge can be supported where it enhances the views across the Parish.

The design of developments and their sites can provide some mitigation by allowing planting to filter the impact of the structure on the view and by enhancing the site for biodiversity.

## **5. Movement and Wayfinding**

### *Movement*

Opportunities for improvement to Cannock Wood's network of public footpaths and bridleways should be explored such as Right of Way Cannock Chase 2 to make it possible to get a pram or buggy through this swing gate without dismantling it and make it accessible for wheelchairs. Neighbourhood Plan policies could support opportunities for enhancement of pedestrian links to surrounding rural areas including to key important features such as Castle Ring and Courtbanks Covert as well as longer distance footpaths and the wider network of footpaths in and around the AONB.

Links to public transport, schools and shops both in Cannock Wood and beyond should be enhanced where possible.

Consideration should be given to whether existing footpaths could be enhanced or better maintained. In some cases swing gates could be improved.

Any Rights of Way that can be shown to have been illegally stopped or obstructed should be reported to Staffordshire County Council as a request for enforcement action.

Traffic management options should be explored.

### *Wayfinding*

There may be options to improve wayfinding with or without signage. There are opportunities for enhancing wayfinding in ways which are sympathetic to the predominantly rural character of the area including planting of flowers at certain points which could work as small informal local landmarks or to enhance gateways. Signage could enhance gateways into the parish and/or village and to different parts of the Parish as well as helping to identify key routes around the village or to access the countryside but care must be taken to ensure that this does not lead to more street clutter.

## **6. Main uses and Mix of uses**

There would appear to be very little opportunity or need to significantly expand the residential offer in the Parish given the constraints of Green Belt, AONB and Local Strategic Policy and any significant expansion would likely harm the character of the area by altering the mix of uses. With respect to use of fields, there are concerns about the extent of manèges due to their lighting and the size of buildings compared to other pastoral uses and this should be monitored by the AONB and policy might seek to control this if possible.

## 7. Building Typologies

There should be no major developments in the Parish due to its location in an AONB as well as the Green Belt protection. However, smaller proposals such as limited infill or extensions may come forward. Such proposals should seek to provide the most appropriate typology for the location in terms of the impact on views and the site of neighbouring properties. Proposals to replace older buildings should be avoided where they are an essential part of the village character.

## 8. Building Design: Height, Scale, Detail and Materials

The AONB Design Guide has a “Detailed Domestic Design Guide” which, while it is for the AONB as a whole, can be used where appropriate to inform a Cannock Wood specific Design Code. Policy and Design Code could provide further guidance and this could vary depending on which part of the Parish developments are proposed, for example inside or outside the settlement boundary or by Landscape Character Type.

### *Materials and details*

Red/brown brick or render and blue/brown roof tiles should be the main materials on housing proposals. Following the AONB Design Guide, proposals could consider “the use of colour studies to ensure that materials are appropriate to the AONB and do not cause undue impacts to the views and setting”.

With respect to brick work and brick bonding patterns and render the AONB Design Guide offers relevant and useful guidance:

- The tone and texture of any brickwork should be carefully considered so that it complements the local characteristic brickwork.
- Examples of lighter buff brick or blue brick are found occasionally but these should only be used where there is a local precedent.
- Handmade or reclaimed bricks are preferable over machine made bricks and should be used where possible. However, traditional-style machine made bricks would be acceptable in order to reduce costs.
- Use of multiple shades of brick should be considered to avoid too much uniformity and emulate the varied tone and texture that is present within traditional clay brick buildings in the AONB. However, the brick tones should not be starkly different from one another.
- Proposed brick bonding should be appropriate for the character of the AONB.
- Proposed brick bonding should be in keeping with the character of the settlement and the local context.

- Render should only be used in well-designed developments where the impact on short and long-distance views has been assessed (see reference to Sensitive Edges, chapter 2.1), or, where there is precedent for use of render in the immediate context.
- Where coloured render is used, it must be respectful of the local colour palette.
- Earthy or muted tones are preferable over brighter colours as this is more appropriate for the AONB.
- Garish or reflective colours should be avoided particularly when visible from a long distance.
- Colours that appear glossy or shiny, or stand out in the landscape should be avoided.

### *Height/Scale*

Buildings should normally be just one or two stories and policy can attempt to control this. Extensions should be of an appropriate size to the building and the immediate character of the area and consideration should be given to the impact on the landscape and views when considering such proposals.

### *Windows, Lintels and Doors*

Doors should be appropriate for the size and scale of the building, generally of simple design and either left as natural finish or painted in a colour in keeping with the immediate local character. Double patio doors may be best restricted to rear elevations.

Windows should be simple in design and can be horizontally or vertically oriented.

In addition some of the recommendations from the AONB Design Guide could be usefully applied in Cannock Wood:

- Window openings should be kept in proportion with the size and scale of the building.
- Smaller windows on the principal elevations should be used where possible. Larger windows or large expanses of glass should be kept to rear elevations only.
- Darker coloured windows may be acceptable where contrasted with lighter coloured render.
- Imitation lead windows should be avoided.
- The paint colour should be in keeping with the character of the AONB.
- Dormer windows should be modest in scale and appropriate for the style of the building.
- Dormer windows should be low on the roof and designed to let light into roof spaces as opposed to creating more space in the eaves.

- Simple, casement style windows should be used which should preferably be constructed from timber.

With respect to large windows

- Use of non-reflective glass will help to reduce glare and its impact on the surrounding area.
- Breaking up large areas of glazing with glazing bars will help to reduce the overall impact.

In addition, window design can affect light pollution and Design Code could address this.

#### *Porches*

Porches should be of a design, material and construction that is appropriate to the character of the area and to the rest of the building including the size of the door and in the case of gable fronted porches, the pitch of the roof. A porch may not be suitable on certain buildings or in certain areas. In the case of Non-Designated Heritage Assets additional guidelines may apply where applicants wish to add a porch.

#### *Roofs and Chimneys*

Roofs should be of a design, material and construction that is appropriate to the character of the area. Normally roofs should be pitched with a central ridge and gable ended roofs are generally more typical of traditional buildings in area. Flat roofs should be avoided as they detract from the character of the area but may be acceptable if a green roof is used and if the impact on views is acceptable. Roof lights should be small and discreet, flush with the roof covering and designed to allow more light in, not create more space in the eaves.

In addition some of the recommendations from the AONB Design Guide could be usefully applied in Cannock Wood:

- Bargeboards should be appropriate for the style of the building. They should be made from timber and either left in a natural finish or painted.
- The use of solar panels may be appropriate in some cases but the visual impact must be carefully considered.
- Solar panels should not be placed on prominent elevations and should be kept low on the roof.

Chimneys should normally be of simple design and an appropriate size, scale and material for the building and the immediate character of the area.

## 9. Heritage

A high level of protection is already given to the two Scheduled Ancient Monuments. In the case of Castle Ring, it may be possible to identify sensitive ways to deal with the issue of erosion of access paths and emphasise the importance of this in policy to prevent insensitive proposals coming forward.

As noted above (Views and Enclosure) there are important views from Castle Ring Iron Age hill fort which would have had all round views. The area in the centre is/was important area of acid grassland but it is getting invaded by scrub and this is also impeding views so it may be appropriate to investigate ways to remedy both these issues. The site is owned by Cannock Chase District Council which should be consulted with respect to community aspirations but most surrounding land is owned by the Forestry Commission.

The fact that Castle Ring is a Scheduled Ancient Monument should be a consideration in any decision about this issue.

When considering site specific guidance or policies for Castle Ring, the Neighbourhood Plan should consider evidence from the Staffordshire Ecological Record as well as the Report on Geophysical Survey carried out at Castle Ring, Cannock Wood, Staffordshire, February 2019 (Mary Cartwright and Colin Evans).

The Cannock Chase Design Supplementary Planning Document encourages communities to “nominate buildings and features which merit inclusion on a Local List to be used to inform consideration of development proposals.” This Local list will include Non-Designated Heritage Assets i.e. buildings and features that are not designated as listed buildings or monuments or Conservation Areas but are nonetheless “valued by the local community in contributing to the special qualities of the area.” These could be identified by the Parish Council or other interested group, perhaps through the Neighbourhood Plan process. A Local List Nomination Sheet is provided on the Cannock Chase DC website as part of the Design SPD. At the time of writing this Assessment (March 2022), the local List has not been established but remains an aspiration of the District Council.

Policies could seek to preserve and enhance locally distinctive and historic features and respect and enhance the forms of historic farmsteads in their landscape context.

## 10. Streetscape

### Rhythms, Building Lines and Roof Lines

There are only a few areas where rhythms or consistent building and roof lines have been established. Given that due to the area’s location within an AONB major proposals are unlikely to come forward, it seems unlikely that any proposal could establish rhythms, or roof lines or building lines as it takes a number of buildings to do this. However, in the case of infill development where surrounding buildings have established a rhythm or building or roof lines then it may be appropriate for the proposal to respond positively to this cue.

## 11. Parking

In order to keep streets free of parked cars any new development should provide off street parking.

Unallocated parking spaces and parking courts should generally be avoided as they are often unused and often require extra circulation space compared to off street parking. Garages nowadays are often not used for the purposes of storing vehicles and tend to be used for other purposes with cars stored on driveways. The inclusion in housing proposals of a garage should not normally be a requirement.

## 12. Bin Storage

Any new development must provide secure bin storage out of sight of the road or views.

## 13. Lighting and Security

Better street lighting can enhance safety. However, this can sometimes be at an environmental cost i.e. light pollution. As such, lighting solutions should be designed so as to keep light pollution to a minimum.

In its conclusions, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution's report on Artificial Lighting Light stated:

**"6.12 We recognise that lighting of public space has benefits and is perceived by many in society to have advantages which outweigh the negative impacts. But it is equally clear that improved technology can deliver those benefits while minimising unwanted side-effects. The technologies to do this already exist. We recommend that lighting standards should require the provision of light at an intensity no greater than the minimum necessary to deliver the intended benefits and that the light should be directed at only those areas which are intended to be illuminated (5.6)."**

Artificial light should be considered at the planning stage. Decision makers should consult with a competent lighting professional to ensure that any proposed lighting installation conforms to the requirements of an area and its intended task, and so that appropriate planning conditions can be applied.

The institute for Lighting Professionals provides a useful technical guidance note: Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light GN01:2011.

The Parish Council could engage with Cannock Chase AONB on their emerging Dark Skies project.

Notwithstanding the issue of light pollution, improving street lighting for better safety would not negatively impact the character of the area.

The inclusion of a policy on light pollution in the Neighbourhood Plan and guidance in the Design Code should be considered.

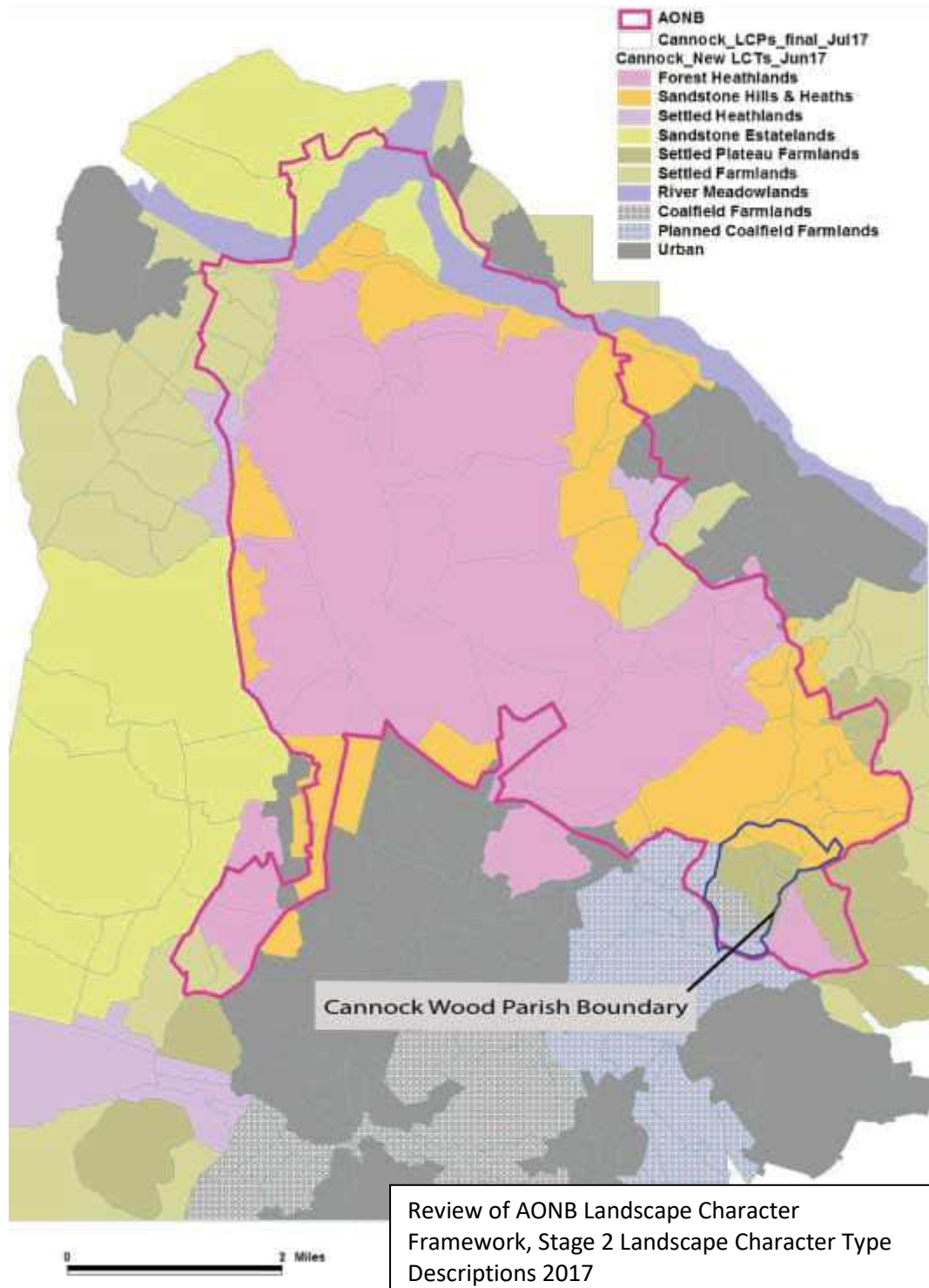
#### **14. Gardens and boundary treatments, Public Private Interface**

Any new proposals are likely due to the AONB status and Green Belt to be minor and limited to the exemptions permitted in Green Belt. However, the character of the Parish would benefit from any proposals that do come forward having appropriate boundary treatments that reflect those in the immediate area and views as well as a clear public/private interface. Front gardens would be acceptable but as there are some traditional terraces that do not have front gardens they should not necessarily be a requirement.

Boundary treatments can vary but boundary treatments for new development in the rural areas should reflect those in the immediate surrounding area. Hedges, in particular native hedges, are likely to be an appropriate choice in many cases and can form part of a network that supports biodiversity so should be encouraged where appropriate.

## APPENDIX 1: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES WITHIN CANNOCK WOOD

Landscape Character Types within Cannock Chase AONB are identified in The Staffordshire Review of AONB Landscape Character Framework, Stage 2 Landscape Character Type Descriptions 2017. Cannock Wood Parish includes four of these Landscape Character types.





The northern most part of Cannock Wood is classified as “Settled Heathlands” while the central part of the Parish where the vast majority of housing lies is classified as “Settled Plateau Farmlands”. To the south of this is an area classified as “Coalfield Farmlands” and to the very south there is an area classified as “Planned Coalfield Farmlands”.

## **SETTLED HEATHLANDS**

### **Overall character**

This landscape is mainly associated with areas of former heathland around the fringe of higher ground in the Chase. Here the underlying Permo-Triassic rocks are masked by deposits of glacial drift forming a more gently rolling topography. This drift mainly comprises reddish sandy till, producing impoverished fine and coarse loamy soils that reflect its former heathland origins. The latter is characterised by the recurring presence of bracken and birch in the woodlands and hedgerows, although here is little remaining heathland and much of the land is now used for stock rearing.

This landscape has been shaped by the planned enclosure of heathland in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the many place names referring to ‘heaths’ reflect areas of former heathland, for example, ‘Calf Heath’, and ‘Slade Heath’. Field enclosure resulted in the creation of a regular pattern of small / larger hedged fields and a network of generally straight lanes with uniform verges. The settlement pattern is dispersed, with a high density of roadside dwellings that may well have originated as common-edge settlements. The pattern typically comprises clusters of farmsteads and roadside cottages, often with associated horse paddocks. Where hedgerows remain intact, the landscape remains small scale and relatively well treed.

### **Key characteristics**

- 1) Gently rolling topography.
- 2) Glacial till with sands and gravels creating poor soils with a relic heathy character
- 3) Pastoral farmland and pony paddocks.
- 4) Regular pattern of small to medium sized, hedged fields.
- 5) Dispersed settlement pattern with many roadside dwellings.
- 6) Planned highway network with uniform verges and relic heathy vegetation.
- 7) Numerous heath names reflecting the presence of former heathland.

The proximity of the urban edge influences the general character of this landscape and whereas some areas retain a peaceful rural character of clustered farmsteads and older roadside cottages, in other parts this is an active landscape with much recent development and many busy roads. Together these factors reduce the overall tranquility of the landscape.

### Strength of Character

Natural: moderate Cultural: moderate **Overall: strong**

Since the landform is not particularly prominent and there is only relic habitat survival, the natural character of the Settled Heathlands is not very strong. The historic character is fairly distinct / unified, however and contributes to a reasonably strong strength of character for this landscape.

### Summary of Condition

**Overall: moderate**

The proximity and general pattern of the settlement edge influences the overall character of this landscape and although some areas retain a peaceful rural character of clustered farmsteads and roadside cottages, other parts are disturbed by busy roads and urban influences. Where this is associated with a decline in the maintenance of the landscape, in particular where farmland has been replaced by pony paddocks and/or hedgerows have deteriorated, becoming gappy or replaced by wire fencing, this often results in a disjointed/neglected appearance.

### Vision Statement

**Conserve and restore** the enclosed small scale pastoral character of this farmed landscape through the maintenance / replacement of hedgerow boundaries and hedgerow trees.

### Landscape Guidelines

- 1 Encourage the conservation and management of species rich permanent pastures by issuing guidance to landowners and land managers.
- 2 Encourage traditional field boundary management and conservation of hedgerow trees, particularly along roadsides.
- 3 Mitigate the suburbanising impact of sub-divided horse paddocks, menages and stabling by promoting guidelines for appropriate management.

**The Review defines “SETTLED (PLATEAU) FARMLANDS” as follows:**

#### “Overall character

The Settled Farmlands is a well-defined cultural landscape with a varied pattern of small to medium sized hedged fields set within an irregular pattern of rural lanes. The Settled Plateau Farmlands has a similar cultural pattern, but in addition is characterised by patches of relic common, with a more planned pattern of regular fields, straight roads and wayside dwellings. The latter also has a gently rolling ‘upland’ character, associated with low glacial summits. Both landscapes lie around the edge of the Cannock plateau where the

underlying Permo-Triassic rocks, comprising Mercia mudstones, create a well-rounded, rolling topography. The mudstones produce fertile, easily cultivated reddish brown soils, giving rise to a productive agricultural landscape of dairying and mixed farming within a relatively unwooded setting.”

**It goes on to identify certain key characteristics of settled (Plateau Farmlands) as follows:**

“Key characteristics

1. A Gently rolling and folded landform– more open on rolling low plateau summits
2. Many small streams in shallow valleys.
3. Mixed pastoral and arable farming
4. A varied, well-defined pattern of small-medium sized fields
5. Small patches of enclosed former heathland
6. Network of narrow lanes, often with hedge banks.
7. Clusters of farmsteads and roadside cottages.
8. Traditional red brick farmsteads and dwellings with clay tile roofs
9. Horse pasture and small grazed paddocks with wire fences”

The Review adds:

“Stream side willow/alder are locally prominent, while areas of semi-natural grassland can be found in a number of places, especially in stream valleys and on more steeply sloping ground. These provide habitat and ecological diversity within the landscape.

Both landscapes [Settled Farmlands and Settled Plateau Farmlands] are well settled with a clustered pattern of medieval villages and hamlets, roadside dwellings and a scattering of small farmsteads. These are connected by a network of narrow, sunken lanes, often enclosed by hedge banks and hedgerow trees.”

The review then assesses the strength of natural and cultural and overall character of the landscape type.

**“Strength of Character**

**Natural: weak**

**Cultural: strong**

***Overall: moderate***

The natural dimension of the Settled (Plateau) Farmlands is not very strong, as the landform is not particularly prominent and there is only relic habitat survival. The historic character, however, is coherent and in places unified, contributing strongly to the strength

of character of both landscapes.

**Summary of Condition      Overall: declining**

The pattern and scale of the historic enclosure pattern greatly influences the overall character of this landscape and although some areas retain a peaceful rural character, other parts have been disrupted by agricultural intensification, or the proximity to urban centres/busy roads. Where this is associated with a decline in the maintenance of the landscape, in particular where hedgerows have deteriorated, becoming gappy, or replaced by wire fencing, this often results in a fragmented/neglected appearance.”

This appears a reasonable description of some of the key characteristics of Cannock Wood’s landscape character and will be discussed below in the relevant sections of this Assessment.

The Review then identifies a Vision and Guidelines for Settled Plateau Farmlands as follows:

**“Vision Statement**

***Conserve and restore*** the structure and overall historic integrity of the farmed landscape through the maintenance / replanting of hedgerow boundaries and look for opportunities to enhance tree cover in order to soften hard urban edges.

**Landscape Guidelines**

- Conserve and where necessary restore the small to medium scale field pattern as defined by hedgerow boundaries.
- Encourage the conservation of species rich grasslands.
- Seek opportunities to conserve and enhance hedgerow tree cover to soften the impact of adjoining hard urban edges.
- Mitigate the suburbanising impact of sub-divided horse paddocks, manèges and stabling by promoting guidelines for appropriate management.
- Monitor the impact of new and extended dwellings in this landscape, encouraging the adoption of vernacular building styles / materials when considering new development proposals.”
- This Vision and guidelines can inform for recommendations for protecting and enhancing the Character of Cannock Wood.

## **(PLANNED) COALFIELD FARMLANDS**

### **Overall character**

A varied industrial / urbanised landscape of former mining villages and areas of disturbed / restored land, with in places pockets of ancient settled farmland, set within a matrix of planned farmland originally reclaimed from woodland and heath. This landscape occurs along the southeastern edge of the AONB, where although underlain by a mix of interbedded mudstones, siltstones and sandstones, with deposits of coal and ironstone, the landform is strongly influenced by a covering of glacial drift. The mixed rocks of the coal measures and the overlying sandy drift give rise to a rolling topography with heavy, in places impoverished soils, which are very much reflected in the heathy origins of this landscape. To the north of the A5 the landform becomes more undulating as it rises up to Heath Hayes and Hednesford on the edge of the Forest Heathlands. In this area, which has been widely disturbed by open castcoal mining, there are often wide views over the adjoining lower lying land.

### **Key characteristics**

- 1 Low rolling plateau
- 2 Restored opencast sites with immature landscape features
- 3 Pockets of planned farmland enclosed by thorn hedges/fences
- 4 Pockets of ancient settled farmland with thick mixed species hedgerows
- 5 Patches of secondary woodland on older restored sites
- 6 Heathy origins strongly evident throughout, with relic wet heathland commons in ~~the~~ disturbed areas
- 7 A vacant landscape lacking in settlement, often adjoining a well-defined urban edge
- 8 Large scale urban elements including pylons major roads and distribution warehouses.

The advent of recent and extensive land use change in the coalfield area has resulted in the creation of a new locally distinctive character. The area north of the A5 and M6 Toll Road, as far as Prospect village and Wimblebury, has undergone complete transformation due to recent opencast coal mining activities. The original planned enclosure landscape, formerly open heath, has largely been destroyed and a new restored/planned landscape has now taken its place. Some of the spoil heaps have been re-vegetated with secondary woodland, disguising their landforms and creating a localised well treed character. In some places new patches of heath have been re-created as a reminder of the extensive areas of unenclosed land that once dominated this landscape prior to enclosure and the development of the Cannock coalfield. Areas of open water, subsidence flashes, and wet grassland are also a characteristic feature of this area.

Elsewhere, the presence of pylons, large distribution warehouses, landfill sites and the open exposed landform emphasises the large-scale industrial character of the landscape, in contrast to the pocket of more ancient farmland around Nuns Well. This area, which is used mainly for stock rearing, comprises small to medium sized fields defined by an older pattern of mixed hedges. Many pockets of agricultural land in this landscape are surrounded by urban settlement and/or land disturbed by extensive coal mining and clay winning.

### Strength of Character

Natural: moderate

Cultural: weak

**Overall: moderate**

The undulating landform in the area around Heath Hayes is more prominent than in most of the Planned Coalfield Farmlands to the south of the A5 and although there are patches of surviving heathland and other relic semi-natural vegetation, these only contribute to a moderate strength of character for the natural dimension of the landscape. Apart from the pocket of more ancient farmland around Nuns Well, the cultural dimension of this recent, planned landscape is weak, giving an overall moderate strength of character.

### Summary of Condition

**Overall: poor**

Overall, this is a landscape in decline, although it still contains many patches of semi-natural habitat that are worthy of conserving and restoring. Where opencast coal mining and arable intensification have occurred, the scale of the landscape has enlarged, creating a more open, less enclosed character, often with wide views to the surrounding urban edges. Other pressures for change include the development of the M6 toll road.

### Vision Statement

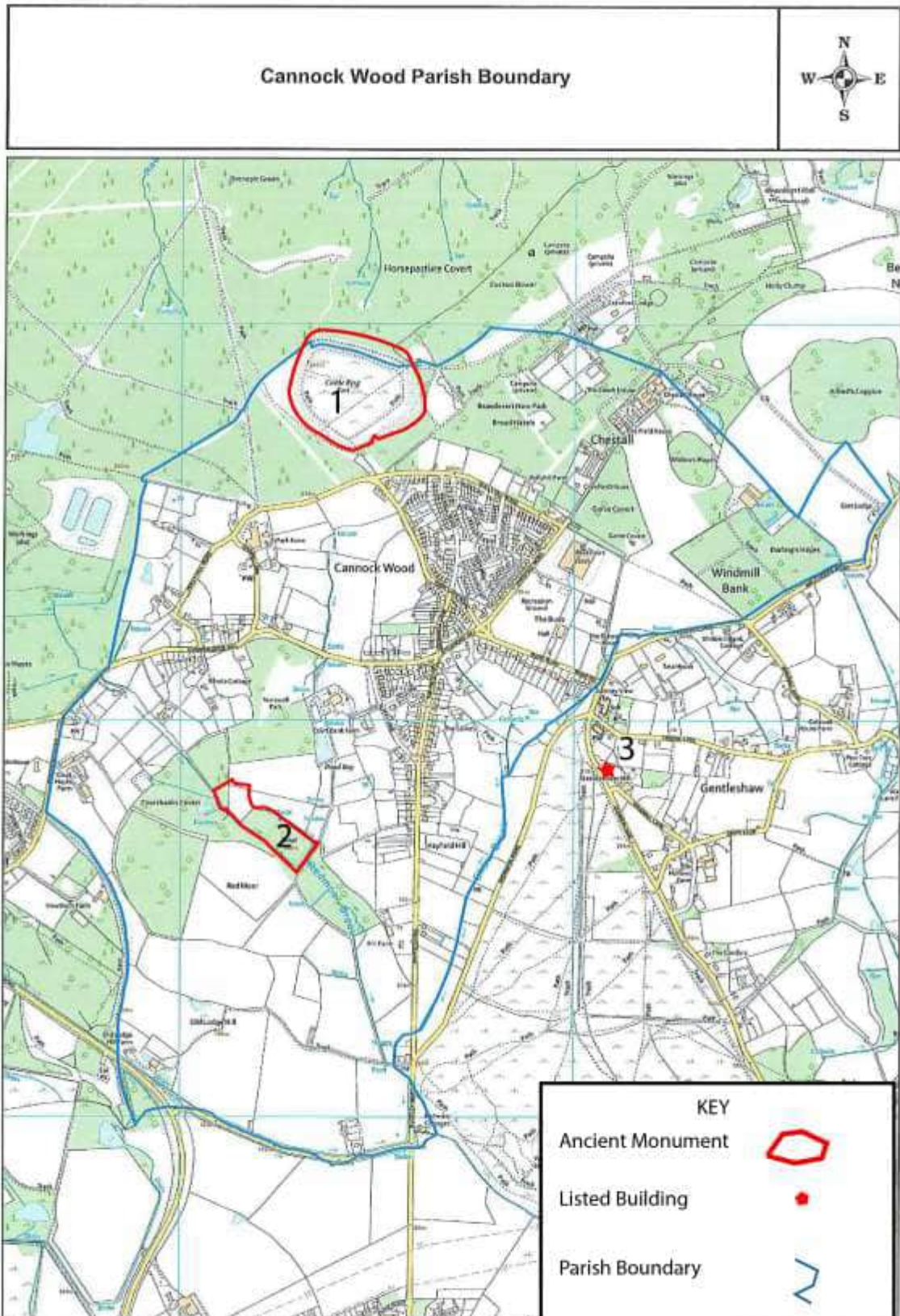
**Restore and enhance** the character and overall structure of the landscape and seek opportunities for the creation of new areas of heathland linked to the Biological Enhancement Area within the Planned Coalfields area.

### Landscape Guidelines

1. Conserve and strengthen pockets of older historic landscape character and encourage the positive management of primary field boundaries, hedgerow trees and woodlands.
2. Encourage the creation of new grazed heathland habitats in areas of post mineral extraction landscapes.
3. Encourage the creation of new belts of trees and small woodlands to buffer the impact of new housing development in this landscape.
4. Create opportunities for new recreational routes to provide safe off-road access between existing settlements.

## APPENDIX 2: LISTED BUILDINGS AND SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS

<p><b>1 Castle Ring, a multivallate hillfort and medieval hunting lodge</b>  List Entry Number: 1014687  Date first listed: 30-Nov-1925  Date of most recent amendment: 01-Aug-1996</p>
<p><b>Heritage Category:</b> Scheduled Monument</p>
<p><b>Grade:</b> N/A</p>
<p><b>Location:</b> North of junction of Holly Hill Road and Park Gate Road  National Grid Reference: SK 04434 12827  Note: Historic England's record states that the monument lies on Longdon Parish which part of it may do but the majority lies within Cannock Wood</p>
<p><b>2 Moated site and bloomery in Courtbanks Covert</b>   List Entry Number: 1003750   Date first listed: 01-Aug-1975</p>
<p><b>Heritage Category:</b> Scheduled Monument</p>
<p><b>Grade:</b> N/A</p>
<p><b>Location:</b> 360m south-west of Court Bank Farm  National Grid Reference: SK 04225 11733</p>
<p><b>3 WINDMILL TOWER</b>   List Entry Number: 1249033   Date first listed: 28-Jan-1988</p>
<p><b>Heritage Category:</b> Listing</p>
<p><b>Grade:</b> II</p>
<p><b>Location:</b> Approximately 50 yards north west of the Windmill Inn  Building lies outside but close to the Parish Boundary. Item included due to close proximity to the Parish boundary.</p>



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