

To: All Members and Officers of the Cabinet.

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Date: 15 January 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

Cabinet - Wednesday 20th January 2021

I have recently forwarded to you a copy of the agenda for the next meeting of the Cabinet.

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at next Wednesday 20th January 2021 meeting of the Cabinet, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

1. Update from COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board
2. Staffordshire Means Back to Business: Investing in our Economy
3. Protecting Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation for Future Generations

John Tradewell
Director of Corporate Services

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Local Members Interest
N/A

Cabinet - Wednesday 20 January 2021

Update from COVID-19 Member Led Local Outbreak Control Board

Introduction

1. The country is now in a third national lockdown following a rapid and substantial rise in the number of cases of Covid-19, in large part due to the emergence of a new and more infectious strain of the virus. In Staffordshire, the number of cases during the first half of January 2021 has been higher than at any point during the pandemic. In some parts of the county 1 in 20 people are infected at the moment.

Opportunities and challenges

2. Pressure on the NHS has risen accordingly. Almost half of hospital beds have been given over to care of Covid-19 patients. Sadly, we are again seeing an increase in the number of Covid-19 deaths. Meanwhile the ongoing restrictions continue to have a detrimental impact on physical and mental well-being and the economy.
3. It is more important than ever that people follow the rules. Whilst we are in lockdown this means that people should stay at home. People should only leave home for a small number of essential reasons which include essential shopping and to go to work if they cannot work from home. This remains the best chance we have of reducing the number of cases, relieving pressure on the NHS and getting back more of the freedoms that we used to take for granted.
4. The NHS has made a good start to rolling out of Covid-19 vaccination. Under government policy the priority groups for vaccination are people over 70, care home residents and staff; all other health and care workers, and people deemed 'clinically extremely vulnerable'. There is sufficient capacity to vaccinate everyone in these groups by mid-February as long as vaccine is available, and we are lobbying government to ensure that we receive adequate supplies of the vaccine.
5. The Council continues other efforts to prevent and control the spread of the virus. We are managing around 700 incidents on a day to day basis - these are cases and outbreaks of Covid-19 in a range of settings including care homes, schools and businesses. Testing for people without symptoms is now available to all residents with at least one site in each district and borough.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

[COVID-19 Local Outbreak Control Plan](#)

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Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 20 January 2021

Staffordshire Means Back to Business: Investing in our Economy



Cllr Philip White, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills said,

“It is critical that as a county council we continue to prioritise support for small businesses and people whose jobs or employment prospects have been impacted by the pandemic.

In an area like Staffordshire that has a county council plus district and borough councils with their own COVID-19 funding this support is far more effectively delivered by close collaborative working between councils and a range of other partners to make our respective funding go further. We hope that our three new programmes will enable the Additional Restrictions Grant to reach more people affected by the pandemic. We owe it to businesses and communities to direct all available funding where it is needed most, and vitally to make it accessible as soon as possible.

The new programmes are designed to complement existing support schemes and cover gaps in the assistance already available. We look forward to working with colleagues across our district and boroughs to get them off the ground imminently.”

Report Summary:

Following the report considered by Cabinet in December 2020 where a commitment was made to bring monthly reports, this is the first to meet that commitment. The monthly reports will be a combination of broad updates, assessments and importantly how the County Council can continue to develop and support new and existing programmes. This report primarily falls into the latter category.

This report seeks to deliver further investment in our economy, by the County Council and its partners, most notably through enhanced two tier working. It is a clear demonstration of our ongoing commitment to the businesses and communities of our County, at what are challenging economic times.

This report sets out how £862,000 investment by Staffordshire County Council could potentially be enhanced through other sources of funding from partners to maximise the impact on the economy across the whole of Staffordshire.

Government’s support for the economy has been unprecedented, and this is very much welcomed. As part of that support package government has made available to District and Borough Councils a source of funding known as Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). This funding was made available to support business that are not covered by other grant schemes or where additional funding is needed.

Local councils have the freedom to determine the eligibility criteria for these grants. However, there is an expectation that the funds are nonetheless used to support those severely impacted by Covid-19 restrictions.

This report considers how the County Council investment in our economy of £862,000 could be enhanced by investment of ARG by each of our Districts and Boroughs if they so wish, building on our strong partnerships. If successful it could help to address the issues faced by businesses most impacted, to work at pace and scale, reinforcing and yet localising programmes currently run by a number of organisations.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Agree that £862,000 of Staffordshire County Councils resources are made available to support the following activities:
 - a. Staffordshire 500, Apprentices Wage Support (£500,000)
 - b. Nil Cost Training for Employers Top Up Project (£104,000)
 - c. Small Business "To Thrive" Financial Support (£150,000)
 - d. Additional Capacity (up to £108,000)
- b. Delegated authority be given to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills, in consultation with the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills and the Director for Corporate Services to amend the proposed allocations and capacity, in light of ongoing discussions with Staffordshire's Districts and Boroughs within the envelope of resources allocated in recommendation A.

Local Members Interest
N/A

Cabinet – Wednesday 20 January 2021

Staffordshire Means Back to Business: Investing in our Economy

Recommendations of the Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Agree that £862,000 of Staffordshire County Councils resources are made available to support the following activities:
 - a. Staffordshire 500, Apprentices Wage Support (£500,000)
 - b. Nil Cost Training for Employers Top Up Project (£104,000)
 - c. Small Business “To Thrive” Financial Support (£150,000)
 - d. Additional Capacity (up to £108,000)
- b. Delegated authority be given to the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills, in consultation with the Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills and the Director for Corporate Services to amend the proposed allocations and capacity, in light of ongoing discussions with Staffordshire’s Districts and Boroughs within the envelope of resources allocated in recommendation A.

Report of the Director of Economy, Infrastructure and Skills

Reasons for Recommendations:

Background

1. This report sets out a programme of activity for the County Council to further invest in supporting the economy, this is on top of the already extensive support made by Staffordshire County Council, both through economic development interventions and its own spending throughout the pandemic.
2. The programme has been designed in discussion with District and Borough Councils and allows for the pooling of the ARG they recently received if they so wish. Discussions to date have been very positive with the Districts and Boroughs and there is an opportunity to pool ARG, matched with SCC investment, to enable some complementary countywide offers to be developed, yet which are also bespoke to a particular locality. This report sets out a programme of activity that is deliberately designed to allow a number of authorities to pool funding as required. The programme is a combination of opportunities to top-up existing Countywide programmes, therefore working to guarantee outputs in certain localities and, delivering new schemes that support skills development and businesses to “thrive” as we transition between lockdown and the Tier System, and face the ongoing challenges presented by Covid-19.

3. Through working together and combining an element of ARG with Staffordshire County Council and other external funding, we are presented with a unique opportunity to develop a broad-based support package that is locally delivered yet has scale and is deliverable at pace. It is not intended to duplicate local activity but to compliment. The total amount of ARG provided to the Staffordshire Districts and Boroughs by government is £17.6m. This money can be spent in 20/21 and 21/22 Financial Years. There has been a real focus on getting the money to businesses that need it the most, at pace. Whilst it seems a significant sum, the challenges that the businesses in their respective areas face cannot be underestimated and the demand on the resources will be significant:
4. The interventions announced by government will undoubtedly have a positive impact in supporting businesses and their employees through the lockdown/Tier periods, as will the locally designed solutions delivered by each of the Districts/Boroughs. However, we still believe there is a need for an at scale, yet locally led, series of interventions, that provide consistency and enables businesses to re-start rapidly once restrictions are lifted and as the area moves between Tiers and the vaccination programme gains pace. Alternatively, targeted support could be identified to give people the opportunity to develop new businesses to drive forward the recovery and to support young people where impact has been disproportionately felt.
5. These proposals would be focussed on supporting those micro-businesses, and others, that tend to “fall between the gaps” of the national interventions to survive and invest in their business to increase trade quickly once lockdowns lift. To enable them to be prepared to move between tiers and to permanently adapt to the impact of Covid-19. It also aims to support the Skills sector to ensure that post Covid-19 we work to ensure our businesses have not only the right financial support, but the equally important skills to again start and to move quickly to thrive.
6. However, it should be noted that in the interests of pace, some of the finer detail surrounding Government funding has yet to be confirmed and should any further regulations be published, our proposals would need a further check and possibly may need to be updated to ensure continued compliance.

Proposal

7. The proposal we have presented to our Districts and Boroughs is outlined below. It has been developed following detailed discussions with the Federation of Small Business (FSB), Chambers of Commerce and other partners to ensure they meet the requirements of business. We have provided this information in totality so Members can consider the recommendations within the context of the entire comprehensive support package the County is proposing to work up. Officers are only seeking a County Council contribution to three of the initiatives, plus capacity, as Officers need to balance capacity, delivery and effectiveness. The objective is that the County Council's money secured through this report is used Countywide, but with a focus on those areas able to ramp up support through the use of ARG. The three initiatives, plus associated capacity funding, seeking support through this report are:

- a. Staffordshire 500, Apprentices Wage Support (£500,000)
- b. Nil Cost Training for Employers Top Up Project (£104,000)
- c. Small Business “To Thrive” Financial Support (£150,000)
- d. Additional Capacity (up to £108,000)

8. The proposition to the Districts and Boroughs consisted of the following:

Staffordshire 500, Apprentices Wage Support

- 9. Young people have been hardest hit by the economic challenges presented by Covid-19, and the National Kickstart scheme has the potential to displace apprenticeships with the six-month wage subsidy. In the Plan for Jobs from August 2020 to January 2021, any firm that hires a new young apprentice aged 16 to 24 will receive £2,000 – on top of the existing £1,000 incentive for 16 to 18s – while those that hire new apprentices aged 25 and over will be paid £1,500 and this was extended until the end of March 2021. The spending review also announced that the national minimum wage for apprentices will increase in April 2021 from £4.15 to £4.30 per hour.
- 10. The proposal aims to support 16-24-year olds who are unemployed to get into an apprenticeship through incentivising employers to take on apprentices by providing a grant to contribute to the cost of the apprentice wages. In addition, this will also put apprenticeships on a par with Kickstart and offer progression from Kickstart. This incentive would support small employers and those that currently do not pay the apprenticeship levy.
- 11. The minimum apprenticeship wage of £4.15 per hour would cost around £8,000 per annum for a 37-hour week excluding on costs for 12 months. Therefore, depending on the funding available a range of wage incentives could be put in place to support apprentices in addition to the Government incentives available.
- 12. A grant of £5,000 in addition to the Government grant of up to £3,000 would cover the wages of apprentices for 12 months for a 16-18-year-old. However, the enhanced grant of an additional £2,000 is only available until April 2021. The target would be to support up to 500 apprenticeships over the next 12-15 months and target non levy paying employers (employers with a wage bill of less than £3million) to recruit Staffordshire residents who are unemployed 16-24-year olds, to take up those apprenticeships.
- 13. The County Council would administer the wage grant and use Apprenticeship Levy to ensure employers can access funding for the apprenticeship training. Should all the Districts and Boroughs participate this could leave in an additional £1M of government grant based on the target of 500 apprenticeships. The County’s contribution alone, £500,000, would support up to 100 apprentices and draw in £225,000 of government grant.
- 14. Investing in young people is key, not least the importance for their wellbeing to be working towards permanent employment and to limit the potential future impacts of ‘scarring’ their longer-term prospects.

Nil Cost Training for Employers Top Up Project

15. Building on an existing European Social Fund (ESF) programme delivered through the Skills Hub across Staffordshire, we would support businesses to retrain or upskill their staff or train new staff to meet changing business operations, entering new markets or sectors, which will be important for business to continue to operate. Our proposal is to offer a grant to support the cost of the training (excluding statutory training and state funded courses) that could be used as part of the Skills Hub offer to incentivise more businesses to train. We would develop a pot that provides a grant of up to £5,000 which would match the current Skills Hub ESF grant (which pays 48% of training) and therefore would make training free to employers for almost £10,000 of training. It would also give employers access to a free Organisational Needs Analysis (ONA) and an Action Plan how to meet their workforce training and skills needs.
16. In addition, the Hub has access to a quality assured database of training providers that employers would be signposted to. If all authorities were able to participate it would be possible to support up to 400 businesses over the next 15 months, although we appreciate this is not possible in all instances. Skills Hub would deliver the training grant and offer wider workforce skills support with a potential £1million training fund.
17. To support the delivery of this activity the County Council is recommended to make a contribution of £104,000 to the programme.
18. A new scheme is also proposed:

Small Business “To Thrive” Financial Support

19. This is a new proposal which will be run county wide by Staffordshire County Council and funded through the pooling of ARG. “To thrive” would entail up front 100% grants of between £2,000 and £5,000 to cover expenditure costs essential to the business’ operation. Businesses would need to state what measures they have considered or tried to take to remain open during the restriction periods other than lockdown, including transfers between different restriction tiers, and be operational i.e. diversification, on-line trading, click and collect, developments of apps etc. The grant funding will be provided to help them implement their plans.
20. The grant will be prioritised to those companies who can demonstrate the greatest value of benefits from the grant such as employment numbers, new products or services developed or increased turnover. Companies with fixed or no property assets would be eligible to apply. They would need to be registered and trading businesses before July 2019.
21. It is recommended that the County Council contributes £150,000 towards this programme, working county wide but prioritised to those areas able to support the programme through ARG provided by the Districts and Boroughs, subject to the availability of this resource and take up.

Business Start Up Top Up Programme

22. Staffordshire County Council has already funded (£615,000 over three years) a County wide Start-up programme consisting of three elements (detailed below). The intention is to provide additional provision/outputs in contributory Districts/Boroughs through contributions from ARG. In essence topping up the existing scheme to provide more opportunity to support businesses in individual localities.
23. The three strands of the Business Start-up Programme are:
- a. **Start Up Scheme** to complement existing programmes which will help those at risk of redundancy or unemployment. In the first year of the programme the aim is to support 300 people and see 200 businesses started. It is being managed by the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce who have a track record of providing successful start-up services and have achieved a 76% three-year survivability rate in those that began trading.
 - b. **Start Up Loans Scheme**, providing loans of between £3,000 and £5,000 to people who have successfully completed the Staffordshire Start Up course at an interest free rate with no arrangement fee to be repaid until 12 months after issue. This pilot project will allow us to determine whether there is a gap in the market for low risk loans to new start-ups with the ambition that this can be scaled up in the future if successful.
 - c. **Bespoke student start-up programme**, for young entrepreneurs called Ignite. Delivered in an engaging and interactive way through an online platform, dedicated resources and with ongoing professional support. A county-wide initiative designed to encourage young people to understand the basics of entrepreneurialism and enterprise. The programme aims to engage 4,000 students through a dedicated lesson leading to 300 engaged online with 100 taking the intensive 5-day programme with a target of 20 business starts in year one.
24. No additional resources are sought for these components from Staffordshire County Council. This funding is available County wide regardless of ARG, although a contribution of ARG will ramp up opportunities in the respective localities.

Cost and Resources

25. The County Council is already delivering the existing schemes and has the processes and skills in place to deliver the new activity. Furthermore, working through the Business Hub, Chamber of Commerce and our Skills team, all the component parts are in place. However, this infrastructure is based on a much smaller programme and the proposition contained in this report will upscale the activity significantly.
26. The focus of activity would be in the ARG participating localities. It is not intended to preclude anyone from any non-participating areas from receiving support, but the

very essence of the activity, using local as well as county wide comms, does in avertedly mean there will be a localised focus.

27. The County Council would need to ramp up the resources in the teams administering the programmes. Depending on the contributions made by individual Districts and Boroughs this will translate to additional resource requirements. The skills apprenticeship work alone represents a significant increase in activity.
28. To deliver the complete package, enhancing existing capacity, Officers would request that £108,000 be made available to reinforce the existing teams as follows:
 - a. x1 FTE Grade 5 Cost £28,000 (inc. on costs)
 - b. x1 FTE Grade 7 Cost £36,000 (inc. on costs)
 - c. x1 Training & Apprenticeships Co-ordinator Grade 9 = £44,000 (inc. on-costs)
29. The amount spent on capacity will be dependent on the scale of investment by partners. It would be our intention to draw on this as necessary during the lifetime of the activity and most likely through BEST. We would also wish flexibility to move the resources between the respective posts depending on take up.

Proposed Timescale

30. Officers are currently working up the detail surrounding the schemes and are having substantive discussions with several districts, two of whom have made a commitment to participate in totality. The expectation is that should Members be minded to make the approval, detailed work would commence immediately with an anticipated go live date of April 2021, or sooner if we are able to.

Finances

31. Funding for the £862,000 SCC resources could be obtained from two main sources.
32. Firstly, any remaining Covid-19 grant monies could be allocated to the 'Small Business "to Thrive" scheme. There is c. £75k of spare Covid grant monies remaining from the £500k originally allocated to the Emergency Business Grant Fund.
33. The remaining proportion of the funding could come from the £1m MTFS pressure, that if approved by Cabinet in February 2021, would be built into the base budget for EI&S to support the economy in the Covid recovery.

Risks Identified

34. Government announced ARG on the 31st October 2020, with guidance being published in November 2020. This support can be used across Financial Years 20/21 and 21/22. Officers made a proposal to the Districts and Boroughs (subject to approval) dated 27th November 2020. This means these proposals have been put together very quickly. Speed is important bearing in mind the challenges many of our businesses and citizens face, but with pace, comes risk, as detail is considered and addressed.

35. Officers need to work through the delivery process with the Districts and Boroughs. Each area has to work at their own pace and will bring their own localised issues which need to be addressed. They also wish to use different components of the programme, a pick and mix approach. This does not bring significant risk to the County as much of this work is already being done, albeit on a county wide basis rather than bespoke local programmes. The County will need to be flexible and address matters as and when they arise.
36. As a consequence, the delegated authority requested, as per the recommendations, is key to enable the County to “flex” to meet the bespoke needs of the Districts and Boroughs, however this can only be on the basis of the approved funding envelope.
37. As we work through the detail, there is the risk that none of our Districts or Boroughs participate. Whilst every effort will be made to create an inclusive and partnership-based initiative, should this happen it is proposed that the County continues with this bespoke investment to support our businesses, drawing in as much external funding as possible. Whilst the outputs would be reduced the benefits are still considered to be significant, as well as clearly demonstrating the importance the County Council places on our citizens, their employment opportunities and supporting our business community through the pandemic.

Conclusion

38. This is a low risk proposal by the County Council to enable it to act at scale, and yet localised to support our respective Boroughs and Districts in their prompted and targets response to the Covid 19 crisis

Legal Implications

39. An internal Officers Programme Board has been developed that consists of senior representative from all Services including Legal and Finance. The rapid nature of the programme and the need to enter into detailed discussions with the Boroughs and Districts has resulted in the comprehensive assessment of legal issues still to be considered. However, through the recommendations and this Programme Board, compliance with legal requirements will be assured.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

40. Resources are being made available as detailed above. Within the context that the County’s intervention will draw in not only ARG, but also ESF, it represents excellent value for money.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Economic Recovery Plan Statement Staffordshire Means Back to Business

Contact Details

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Cabinet Meeting on Wednesday 20 January 2021

Protecting Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation for Future Generations



Cllr Victoria Wilson, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

“Not only is Cannock Chase a place of outstanding natural beauty, it is a home of national and international significance to rare plants and wildlife.

Staffordshire County Council has a legal and moral duty to protect that vulnerable flora and fauna while maintaining open access for increasing numbers of visitors.

This proposed investment of housebuilders’ money over 15 years is aimed at improving trails, way signs and interpretation boards, carrying out conservation education in schools and influencing where people park so that we reduce footfall where the landscape and wildlife are most vulnerable and increase capacity where it is more robust.

“This way we can protect the very things that people come to enjoy, the very things that make Cannock Chase so special and so loved by those who know it.”

Report Summary:

Plans have been developed for Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) to mitigate impacts of recreational pressure associated with a growing resident population. The plans include a range of on-site measures across the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to reduce pressure on the most sensitive habitats, improve infrastructure and facilities in more robust locations and raise public awareness of the sensitivity of the site.

The report outlines the implications of the plans on Staffordshire County Council’s (SCC) landholding at Cannock Chase Country Park. The proposals do link to SCC’s broad aims and will ultimately help achieve the essential balance between people’s enjoyment of the area and the protection of its special qualities. Flexibility and appropriate phasing will be required in their delivery to ensure that they are integrated with wider site management needs. Implementation of the plans will be funded by developer contributions made to the relevant district and borough councils over the next 15 years.

Recommendations

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Considers the proposed mitigation plans for Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC);

- b. Agree the recommended approach and proposed scheme of delegation as follows:
- i. Operational delivery to be overseen by the Assistant Director - Culture, Rural and Safer Communities;
 - ii. Agreement of options appraisal / feasibility study outcomes for Chase Road and Marquis Drive by delegated decision by the appropriate Cabinet Member in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities.

Local Members Interest
N/A

Cabinet – Wednesday 20 January 2021

Protecting Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation for Future Generations

Recommendations of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

I recommend that Cabinet:

- a. Considers the proposed mitigation plans for Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC);
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 - i. Operational delivery to be overseen by the Assistant Director - Culture, Rural and Safer Communities;
 - ii. Agreement of options appraisal / feasibility study outcomes for Chase Road and Marquis Drive by delegated decision by the appropriate Cabinet Member in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities.

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities

Reasons for Recommendations:

Background

1. The Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation (SAC) is designated under the Habitat Regulations 2017. This designation conveys the highest level of protection, reflecting its international significance. The area is also protected nationally as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and lies within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It supports species which are protected at a national and international level.
2. Cannock Chase is located close to several urban settlements, including Stafford, Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Walsall. In 2018 there were approximately 406,384 residential properties within 15km radius of the AONB and potentially around 1 million people. The area is popular with residents and visitors – an estimated 2.5 million visits are made to Cannock Chase AONB every year. Most visitors are local however they mostly travel to the site by car and the majority are regular site users.
3. Given the vulnerable habitats and heritage features in many parts of the AONB, there have been growing concerns about recreational pressure and the need to actively manage recreation in the area.

4. Detailed studies provide evidence of the impacts of recreational pressure on the Cannock Chase SAC (see appendix 3), including:
 - a. Fragmentation of habitats from people creating new informal paths;
 - b. Disturbance to wildlife;
 - c. Trampling, leading to path widening, vegetation wear, erosion and soil compaction impacting on the heathland habitat;
 - d. Trampling of invertebrate nest sites;
 - e. Damage to tree roots where paths pass close to veteran trees;
 - f. Wildfire;
 - g. Eutrophication – damage to habitats caused by dog fouling;
 - h. Spread of disease (e.g. *Phytophthora*).
5. Within existing local plans, over 30,000 houses are planned to be built within 15km of the SAC. Based upon current patterns of use this is likely to result in an increase of around 15-20% in the number of visits to Cannock Chase, potentially rising to three million visits per year.
6. The Habitat Regulations require that any potential impacts on the SAC must be mitigated and a mechanism for this must be in place for local plans to be approved. Since several district and borough councils' local plans have the potential to impact on the Cannock Chase SAC, the SAC Partnership was created to develop a joint approach to mitigation.
7. The SAC Partnership developed a Strategic Access Management and Monitoring Measures plan which set out how this mitigation would be achieved. The plan is funded through developer contributions made for each house built within the agreed 'zone of influence' around the SAC. As part of this strategic approach, two detailed implementation plans have now been developed focusing on:
 - a. Site User Infrastructure, Education and Engagement
 - b. Car parking
8. The implementation plans together identify an estimated £7.8 million programme of potential work that could be undertaken. This goes beyond the current funding that will be available from the current local plans, but it is anticipated that the contributions will continue as further plans develop.
9. As owners of over 90% of the SAC, these plans have management implications for Staffordshire County Council and its operation of Cannock Chase Country Park. This paper summarises the proposals and their implications for the Country Park for consideration by the Committee.

SAC Mitigation Implementation Plans

10. The SAC mitigation implementation plans have been developed by consultants with expertise in managing recreational impacts on heathlands, and in collaboration with landowners and key stakeholders. They have been informed by a robust evidence base, visitor surveys and a public consultation which took place in October / November 2019. In this online consultation, over 6000 separate IP addresses

viewed the consultation web site, with over 400 responses received representing 130 individuals / organisations.

11. The plans include the following broad proposals:

Site User Infrastructure, Education and Engagement (Appendix 1)

(representing around 80% of estimated programme costs)

- a. Studies to examine feasibility of enhancing infrastructure at key visitor locations (Birches Valley and forestry land south of the A460; Museum of Cannock Chase and Marquis Drive);
- b. Path improvements and routes;
- c. Directing visitors through improved road and path signage and rationalising the path network;
- d. Face to face engagement;
- e. Digital communication;
- f. Interpretation;
- g. Education;
- h. Targeted information and activities for dog walkers, mountain bikers and other key audiences; and
- i. Monitoring.

Car Parking (Appendix 2) (Representing around 20% estimated programme costs)

- a. Reducing the number of parking locations in the most sensitive areas, to help reduce pressure there, and increasing parking capacity in more robust areas so that there will be no overall loss of parking capacity;
 - b. Improvements to retained car parks;
 - c. Provision of additional parking in sustainable locations;
 - d. Opportunities to reduce car use;
 - e. Measures to protect the site from displacement (parking on verges etc);
 - f. Parking charges at some locations (with any surplus funds reinvested in the sites); and
 - g. Monitoring.
12. The implementation plans include measures across much of the AONB, and over multiple ownerships, as measures to protect the SAC often involve diverting visitor pressure away from the more sensitive locations to more resilient areas. This has been informed by detailed sensitivity mapping which has assessed sensitivity of habitats, species and heritage features.
13. The plans identify an ideal approach to implementation to ensure that measures are in place to address issues such as displacement (e.g. parking on verges), and that the long-term car parks are improved ahead of any others being closed to minimise disruption and maintain adequate access for all users.

Implications of the proposals on SCC land

14. As previously stated, Staffordshire County Council owns a significant area of land and facilities within the AONB and owns over 90% of the Special Area of Conservation and therefore much of the most sensitive and highly protected habitat which is of key interest to the mitigation plans. Several actions are proposed on SCC land at Cannock Chase Country Park and these are set out below.
15. Direct proposals affecting SCC land and the suggested approaches / responses are:

In relation to Site User Infrastructure, Education and Engagement:

Proposal	Suggested SCC approach
<p>Special Project – Marquis Drive Master Plan – a plan to identify how undesignated land at Marquis Drive could be enhanced to upgrade and redesign visitor facilities including parking and recreational trails as well as visitor centre, toilets, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marquis Drive is an important visitor hub for the Chase however its current facilities are dated and unable to cope with visitor demand. There is a significant area of land that is not designated (although parts do have ecological and heritage interest) which could be used more effectively. • A master plan would identify how this area could be used to best effect and enable opportunities for funding to be better utilised to enhance facilities. • Funds are not currently available in the SAC programme for this study; however, it may be beneficial to consider bringing it forward in the programme as it may influence other decisions in this zone and enable other potential funding to be utilised.
<p>Promoted routes from key car parks and hubs targeted to different users</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer routes aimed at different users may help prevent people getting lost or using unsuitable routes that can create conflicts between users. • Funding for path improvements will be available however there will be ongoing maintenance costs. Identifying key routes would help prioritise maintenance efforts.
<p>Managing informal paths by reducing desire lines and unrequired routes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many unofficial paths on the Chase which cause fragmentation of the heathland. Reducing these allows habitat to recover and enables us to focus maintenance efforts on promoted / key routes.
<p>Raising awareness through face to face engagement, digital communication, targeted engagement with key user groups, interpretation and education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence suggests many people are unaware of the importance and fragility of the habitats on the country park, so these measures are important to empower site users to play an active role in its conservation. • It is however important that SAC messages are linked into wider messages about the site and delivered in an integrated way, including through

	<p>digital technology, to avoid duplication of effort and confusion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted engagement and communication for key groups, e.g. mountain bikers, dog walkers, etc, is important and SCC rangers should be fully involved.
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In relation to Car Parking:

Proposal	Suggested SCC approach
<p>Rationalising car parking locations and options for Chase Road:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measures to prevent parking along roadsides Closure of some small lay-bys in sensitive areas Options appraisal to explore future management of Chase Road bridleway and 22 parking areas along its route Closure of some smaller car parks in sensitive areas Retention and improvement of key car parks Additional parking provision at sustainable locations Reducing car use Introducing car parking charges at key locations to support management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are many parking areas around the country park which currently provide largely free parking in a wide range of locations. However, many of these take people into the most sensitive areas of the SAC and are contributing to negative impacts on habitats. There are also impacts on management resources, since they require regular litter collection, dealing with fly tipping and other anti-social behaviour. Rationalisation, particularly of small informal laybys, would therefore deliver ecological benefits and enable us to better manage resources. Around 50 sites are proposed for closure, however 33 of these are laybys with parking for four or fewer cars. The proposals retain in excess of 70 parking areas around the AONB in a range of locations, so there would still be a mix of busier and quieter areas accessible across the area. Chase Road is a tarmacked bridleway across the site which currently provides permissive vehicular access and has 22 parking locations along it, including laybys. There are various options which require careful consideration, given the sensitive nature of this part of the site, the potential to create enhanced access for people with limited mobility, and the needs of bridleway users (pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists). It is suggested that the options for Chase Road should be discussed with user groups and should be subject to further public consultation. Car park charges (pay & display) are proposed at 17 locations, although five of these will be further considered as part of the Chase Road options appraisal. The proposed locations would need to be considered in terms of whether charging is operationally feasible and before charges came into place the car parks would need to be improved and measures put in place to prevent displacement e.g. parking along verges etc. Around 50 free to park locations would remain around the AONB. SCC currently operates pay & display at Marquis Drive and Milford Common on the Chase and at

	<p>Chasewater. It is recommended that as pay & display is extended to other SCC locations, charges are rationalised to be the same at all locations and mirroring the Chasewater rates (max £3 per day). Annual permits should be available (currently at £36) and these could be used at any SCC countryside site (costing less than 10p per day). A 6-month permit at £20 should also be considered to ensure affordability for users. Blue badge holders would continue to park for free.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementation of these measures would need to consider wider operational needs. Engagement with users would also be important to ensure that car park designs are fit for purpose, e.g. horse box provision and measures for horse riders discussed with the current users, inclusive access discussed with relevant groups, etc. • Improvements to car parks are proposed and this is much needed however it should be in keeping with landscape character. • We note that some changes to the proposals may be required. For example, we will be improving the Toc H trail, a disabled access trail on Brindley Heath which requires significant repair. The location of suitable parking for the trail is currently being considered but we may need to retain Campfield car park as a blue badge only parking area. Access to Brindley Village is also proposed to be retained, while formalising access to Oldacre Lane is not considered appropriate due to the unsuitability of this location.
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16. The proposals align well with SCC’s aspirations for the site. We recognise the need to enhance the visitor offer through improved facilities, and to raise awareness and understanding of the significance of the site and meet our legal obligations to protect it. There are several factors that would need to be taken into account in implementing the plans on SCC land, including:

- a. The implementation of the plans must be integrated, and appropriately phased, into the wider work on the country park and cannot be considered in isolation. SCC has legal obligations to manage the ecological condition of the SAC and wider legal requirements for the site as a whole. Implementation of these plans will therefore need to be flexible to link in with wider operational and strategic needs.
- b. Work to raise awareness and engage the public must also be integrated with wider site management messages in a coordinated way and not in isolation; this must be carefully considered in implementation models going forward.
- c. There will be a need to ensure ongoing engagement with site users and key stakeholders as the plans are implemented to ensure people are aware of

changes and are able to input to design to ensure the infrastructure is fit for purpose.

Community Impact Assessment

17. A Community Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the proposals – see appendix 6 for details. The CIA indicates that there are many benefits to the community from the proposals and highlights the mitigation that will be required for potential negative impacts, which has been built into the suggested approach outlined above.

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Recommendations

18. The proposals were considered by the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee on 12th November 2020. As part of its consideration, the Committee heard a statement from the Save Cannock Chase group outlining its concerns about the proposals. The Committee supported the need to mitigate recreational impacts on the protected habitats in order to enable new housing development through Local Plans, including the need to reduce visitor spread and pressure on the most sensitive areas. It was resolved that:

- (a) the Select Committee accept the need for mitigating action to protect the SAC but mindful of the frustration of some user groups, asked the Cabinet Member to look again at the consultation which has taken place (by the SAC) and consider whether it was sufficiently inclusive and whether additional work is required so that SCC can move forward with confidence.
- (b) The Cabinet Member report back to the Select Committee in the New Year.

19. The consultation process undertaken by the SAC Partnership in the development of these proposals is outlined in section 10 of this report. As requested by Select Committee, the process was reviewed, and the findings reported to Select Committee on 15th January 2021. Key findings were as follows:

- a. The plans are supported by a robust evidence base developed over many years;
- b. In 2018 a visitor survey asked over 1000 people for their views on potential mitigation measures, including charges and closures;
- c. In 2019 a public consultation was held on the proposals as outlined in section 10 of this report;
- d. The findings of these processes influenced the proposals, with suggestions of how concerns regarding less supported measures might be addressed where the conservation requirement meant they were considered essential components of the plans;
- e. Through Community Impact Assessment, the county council has considered how impacts on communities can be addressed through implementation on SCC land, resulting in proposals to keep charges at modest levels with annual permits to reduce costs for regular users, free parking for blue badge holders, protecting access for disabled people, retaining over 70 varied parking locations offering a range of types suited to different users..

- f. There will be further public consultation on proposals for Chase Road and Marquis Drive; and
 - g. There will be further engagement on the detail of proposals for each phase of implementation over the 15-year period and the plans will be reviewed every 5 years against progress and monitoring data.
 - h. Alongside letters of concern, there have also been a significant number of letters of support received for the proposals, plus public statements of support from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Cannock Chase AONB Partnership, North Staffordshire Green Party and West Midlands Bird Club.
20. Select Committee agreed that the proposals, with further consultation on Chase Road and Marquis Drive, plus further engagement on the detail of wider aspects as the programme is implemented, presented a logical way forward, given the need to actively conserve and protect the Chase. The committee asked that efforts be made to engage people through volunteering to actively support the conservation of the site. Also that consideration be given to the needs of people with sensory conditions as well as mobility issues. This has been considered through the Community Impact Assessment and will be built into the more detailed design at the implementation stages.

Conclusion and Recommendation

21. The plans set out a range of measures to mitigate potential impacts from increased recreational pressure from a growing resident population in the vicinity of the area. They are based on detailed evidence gathered over many years.
22. The plans offer the opportunity to balance the needs of people and environment, ensuring that more visitors can enjoy Cannock Chase without impacting on its special qualities. Mindful of the significant public interest and to ensure people can help shape solutions, it is recommended that the detail of each phase of work should include public engagement prior to detailed implementation. Given the long-term and phased nature of the programme, which will extend over the next 10-15 years, this will enable responses on project details to be considered and ensure awareness of works to be undertaken in a meaningful time frame.
23. It is therefore recommended that the plans are endorsed, and their implementation supported, in order to protect the SAC and reduce visitor pressure in the most sensitive areas. This should include further public engagement on the detail of implementation on the proposals at the appropriate time. Implementation should also be flexible, phasing delivery to integrate with other site management activities.

Scheme of Delegation

24. Subject to Cabinet approval of the proposals, it is proposed that final decisions to implement these proposals should be through delegated authority on the following basis:
- a. Operational delivery to be overseen by the Assistant Director - Culture, Rural and Safer Communities;

- b. Agreement of options appraisal / feasibility study outcomes for Chase Road and Marquis Drive by delegated decision by the appropriate Cabinet Member in consultation with the Deputy CXO & Director of Families and Communities.

Legal Implications

25. The proposals support delivery of requirements of the Habitat Regulations 2017. There are no legal implications to the proposals at this stage. The service is aware of the relevant legislation affecting the Park and appropriate checks against this will be built into project plans at implementation stage and appropriate consents applied for.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

26. The programme is to be funded through developer contributions collected by district and borough councils.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

[Appendix 1 – The Cannock Chase SAC Strategic Access Management & Monitoring Measures Detailed Implementation Plan: Site User Infrastructure, Education and Engagement](#)

[Appendix 2 - The Cannock Chase SAC Strategic Access Management & Monitoring Measures Detailed Implementation Plan: Car Parking](#)

[Appendix 3 – Evidence Base / Evidence Base Annex](#)

[Appendix 4 – Visitor Survey Part 1 / Part 2](#)

[Appendix 5 – Consultation Report](#)

Appendix 6 – Community Impact Assessment (a) and Summary Checklist (b)

Contact Details

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Staffordshire
County Council

Community Impact Assessment Checklist and Executive Summary

Name of Proposal:

Protecting Cannock Chase Special Area of Conservation for future generations

Project Sponsor:

Janene Cox, Assistant Director – Culture, Rural and Safer Communities

Project Manager:

Sarah Bentley, Environmental Advice Manager

Date Completed:

16/10/20

Final Checklist

Prior to submitting your Community Impact Assessment (CIA), please ensure that the actions on the checklist below have been completed, to reassure yourself / SLT / Cabinet that the CIA process has been undertaken appropriately.

Checklist	Action Completed	Comments/Actions
The project supports the Council's Business Plan, priorities and MTFS.	Yes	Delivers legal responsibilities to protect the designated features on SCC land at Cannock Chase
It is clear what the decision is or what decision is being requested.	Yes	Implementation of proposals to protect Cannock Chase following the recommended approach.
For decisions going to Cabinet, the CIA findings are reflected in the Cabinet Report and potential impacts are clearly identified and mitigated for (where possible).	Yes	The recommended approach incorporates mitigation measures identified in the CIA
The aims, objectives and outcomes of the policy, service or project have been clearly identified.	Yes	These are set out in the Cabinet paper
The groups who will be affected by the policy, service or project have been clearly identified.	Yes	Identified in the CIA
The communities that are likely to be more adversely impacted than others have been clearly identified.	Yes	Identified in the CIA
Engagement / consultation has been undertaken and is representative of the residents most likely to be affected.	Yes	Covered within the Cabinet report. There will be further consultation on specific projects / options within the plan and engagement on the detail of wider delivery for each phase of implementation of the wider proposals.
A range of people with the appropriate knowledge and expertise have contributed to the CIA.	Yes	Range of staff provided input including public health.
Appropriate evidence has been provided and used to inform the development and design of the policy, service or project. This includes data, research, engagement/consultation, case studies and local knowledge.	Yes	There is a detailed evidence base including research studies and visitor surveys. The proposals were also informed by stakeholder input and best practice from elsewhere in the UK.
The CIA evidences how the Council has considered its statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010 and how it has considered the impacts of any change on people with protected characteristics.	Yes	Identified in CIA
The next steps to deliver the project have been identified.	Yes	Development of phased implementation projects with the SAC Partnership

Executive Summary

The Executive Summary is intended to be a collation of the key issues and findings from the CIA and other research undertaken. This should be completed after the CIA and research has been completed. Please structure the summary using the headings on the left that relate to the sections in the CIA template. Where no major impacts have been identified, please state N/A.

	Which groups will be affected?	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
<p>PSED</p> <p>What are the impacts on residents with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010? Highlight any concerns that have emerged as a result of the equality analysis on any of the protected groups and how these will be mitigated. It is important that Elected Members are fully aware of the equality duties so that they can make an informed decision, and this can be supported with robust evidence.</p>	<p>People from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups; women; people with disabilities, and those with more limited mobility.</p> <p>These groups are often under-represented as users of countryside sites and it is important to ensure proposals reduce barriers rather than add to them.</p>	<p>The proposals include measures to enhance access such as car park improvements, better paths, signs / waymarking and interpretation which will make the area more welcoming and usable for all visitors. Car park design will include measures to reduce risks of crime and anti-social behaviour which may help people feel safer and more confident.</p>	<p>Car park closures and introduction of additional pay & display may impact on ease of access to the site however impacts can be mitigated within the proposals – see next column</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall net increase in parking capacity; • Some free parking provision will still be available; • Modest charges on SCC sites with annual lower cost permit available for regular users; • Free parking for Blue Badge holders at SCC sites; • Over 70 parking areas will remain offering a choice from large car parks to small laybys; • Retention of parking access and improvements to all ability trail; • Engagement in detailed design of solutions to maximise benefits to protected groups.
<p>Health and Care</p> <p>How will the proposal impact on residents' health? How will the proposal impact on demand for or access to social care or health services?</p>	<p>All – countryside access contributes to physical and mental health, and healthy lifestyles.</p>	<p>The proposals will improve access through better paths, better surfacing, better signs / way markers and interpretation – this will</p>	<p>Car park closures and parking charges may impact on ease of access and discourage some users.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall net increase in parking capacity; • Some free parking provision will still be available; • Modest charges on SCC sites with annual lower cost

	Which groups will be affected?	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
		make it easier and more welcoming for people to exercise. Better paths, car parks etc can reduce the risk of falls and accidents.	Concerns for some users re social distancing requirements for COVID-19 if people are required to use fewer larger car parks	<p>permit available for regular users;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free parking for Blue Badge holders at SCC sites; • Varied parking at over 70 locations; • It will be some time before closures or charges occur therefore likely that the COVID vaccine will have been rolled out; outdoor environments are low risk.
<p>Economy</p> <p>How will the proposal impact on the economy of Staffordshire or impact on the income of Staffordshire's residents?</p>	Local businesses; people on lower incomes	Cannock Chase is a high-profile area within Staffordshire and there are businesses that benefit directly from it, or indirectly through proximity etc. The careful management and conservation of the site, with better infrastructure for visitors, will improve people's experience of the area and ensure it is sustainable.	Car parking charges may impact on low income groups or discourage visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall net increase in parking capacity; • Some free parking provision will still be available; • Modest charges on SCC sites with annual lower cost permit available for regular users; • Free parking for Blue Badge holders at SCC sites;
<p>Environment</p> <p>How will the proposal impact on the physical environment of Staffordshire? Does</p>	Housing development; land at Cannock Chase	Proposals support sustainable development	Failure to deliver mitigation measures	The proposals are designed to mitigate environmental impacts. The

	Which groups will be affected?	Benefits	Risks	Mitigations / Recommendations
<p>this proposal have any Climate Change implications?</p>		<p>of local housing by mitigating potential impacts; significant investment in visitor infrastructure and measures to reduce the negative impacts of recreational pressure to protect wildlife and landscape for future generations; assists with climate change adaptation</p>	<p>could impact on housing or could result in significant damage to protected habitats; changes to public access arrangements</p>	<p>proposals include measures to mitigate the effects of changing access arrangements in some areas.</p>
<p>Localities / Communities</p> <p>How will the proposal impact on Staffordshire's communities?</p>	<p>Communities around the AONB</p>	<p>Improved infrastructure for visiting the Chase; potential reductions in crime and ASB through fewer and better designed parking areas</p>	<p>Car park closures and charges may impact on people's access to the area but can be mitigated – see next column</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall net increase in parking capacity; • Some free parking provision will still be available; • Modest charges on SCC sites with annual lower cost permit available for regular users; • Free parking for Blue Badge holders at SCC sites.

