

CANNOCK CHASE AONB

ASSESSMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES

**Monitoring the Landscape
through an assessment
of the current condition
of agricultural landscapes
within the AONB**

**A study by Ashmead Price
Final report March 2006**

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1. Aim of the Project

- 1.1 The study aims to establish the condition of agricultural landscapes within the AONB. These landscapes often contain a mosaic of woodlands within pastoral or arable farmland and are often under a variety of pressures from surrounding urban areas and from changing agricultural practices. The purpose of the project is therefore:
- To provide baseline data for the condition of agricultural land and woodland within the AONB
 - To identify the pressures for change that are now acting on these landscapes and therefore identify the possible future impacts on these landscapes as a result of these pressures.
 - To present recommendations for management options for these landscapes to improve the visual setting of the AONB

2. Introduction and methodology

- 2.1 Six of the seven landscape character areas identified by the County Council include agricultural land, and the management plan describes the typical elements of the agricultural landscape in the following areas.
Clay Estatelands
Farmed Sandstone Hills and Heaths
Historic Parkland
Sandstone Estatelands
Settled Plateau Farmlands
Trent Valley Floodplain
- 2.2 A baseline field survey was undertaken in January 2006, using areas determined by the existing County Council Landscape Description Unit (LDU) map. The County Council numbering and references for the LDU's were used in the field survey and transferred to the tables.
- 2.3 The field survey was carried out by driving, cycling and walking along public roads, bridleways and footpaths. Key viewpoints were identified and locations of field assessment points were noted for reference. The County Council Landscape Units map was used to determine the boundaries of each area to be considered.
- 2.4 The field survey identified the condition of the agricultural land, field boundaries and associated woodland where present, with reference to the typical descriptions in the management plan. Individual LDU's were recorded by their County Council map number and data on condition and pressures to change recorded in the field from a variety of viewpoints. Categories of condition were derived from the field notes descriptions of each LDU, and a qualitative value was assigned as Good, Medium or Poor. Pressures to change were assessed under the headings of field boundaries; trees and woodland; horse grazing and other issues. Data was recorded in a table form.
- 2.5 Recommendations for practical management options by character area emerged from the fieldwork and were grouped under the headings of horse grazing; hedgerows; woodland and urban elements.
- 2.6 At an initial meeting on January 5th 2006 the categories of pressures to change were discussed and agreed, and the field data from the County Council landscape assessment was passed to the consultant, together with boundary maps showing boundaries of LDU's and character areas. The scale of recording condition was agreed and the group had a detailed debate on the impact of horse grazing.

- 2.7 A second meeting was held on January 27th to review the initial findings and present the draft tables for discussion. A sample of the LDU's was discussed in some detail, and the working group were able to add their own knowledge of current site conditions and the planning context of specific sites. The meeting generally approved the methodology, and gave some guidance on the presentation of the draft report.
- 2.8 The report is organised by landscape character area, so that it can relate to existing documentation such as the Supplementary Planning Guidance (Planning for Landscape Change) and the AONB Management Plan.
- 2.9 Each landscape type is briefly described, followed by a further description of each landscape description unit. The detailed findings are presented in table form, with a column for landscape condition, and a further column summarising recommendations for action.
- 2.10 The final part of the report summarises the pressures to change in the study area, and then sets out guidance or pointers for appropriate management options to address the changes in a positive way.

3 CLAY ESTATELANDS

- 3.1 These areas are fragments of larger estate landscapes at Beaudesert, Chestall, Teddesley and Hatherton. The presence of significant estate woodlands and the visual backdrop of the forest fringe is a recurring feature of the areas. The conversion of land to horse pasture is common, particularly around Hatherton and Teddesley. There are both good and bad examples of management for horse pastures.
- 3.2 **Beaudesert/ Chestall:**
The land use is predominantly arable, and the farmer has recently qualified for Higher Level Scheme support from DEFRA. The scheme encourages management practices to enhance environmental benefits, and the landscape has many attractive features. At Chestall, some of the woodlands are managed by the Wildlife Trust, and these are in need of positive management to conserve their character, particularly at visible edges.
- 3.3 **Bednall Head (Teddesley):**
The rising land to the east of the A34 has a backdrop of the forest fringe. Land use is a mix of arable and horse pasture. Hedgerows are in decline, and wire fencing subdivision is increasing. A pony trekking school is a result of farm diversification, and a roadside sign advertises the facility. The landscape would benefit from new plantation style woodlands to link to the forest fringe, and to enclose the horse pastures. The roadside hedgerow to the A34 has been allowed to grow very tall, obscuring views up towards the Chase. Planned hedgerow management would enhance the visual experience for motorists on the busy A34.
- 3.3 **Hatherton:**
The core of the historic estate appears intact. However the peripheral landscapes are under pressure for conversion to horse pastures. Unit 27B is a good example of well managed simple subdivision by good quality post and rail fencing, whereas 27C exhibits many of the negative aspects of the land use including tape fences, clutter and poaching due to overgrazing of small paddocks. Woodland edges are an important feature in this landscape acting as a buffer to housing and roads.

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Clay Estatelands				C G N P	
	Field pattern/hedgerows/fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
22a Beaudesert	Enlarged fields, few hedgerows, some wire fencing	Dominant backdrop of managed mixed plantation woodlands	Localised; only adjacent to silos	Grain silos, views to village edge development. Improved dwellings.	C	
22c Chestall	Enlarged arable fields, few field boundaries. Roadside hedgerows important. Parkland character	Darling Hayes woodland dominant; Piggots Bottom nature reserve variable management.	None evident	Historic lodge, Chestall Estate signs. Improved properties	N	
09 Bednall Head	Mixed arable/pasture. Weak field pattern of hedgerows in variable condition. Timber and wire fencing subdivision increasing. Roadside hedgerow to A34 overgrown.	Strong backdrop of woodland edge to high ground. Some recent felling is weakening edge. Remnant woodland belts in decline. Mixed species including conifers.	Pony Trekking school; significant concentration of horses in subdivided paddocks. Localised impact elsewhere. Up to 50% of area affected	Roadside signage. Busy road.	N	

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Clay Estatelands				C G N P	
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
27a Hatherton	Straight hedgerows, variable condition. Subdivision by mixed quality fencing to horse pastures	Woodland edges to higher ground form an attractive backdrop	Increasing sub division for horse pastures; inappropriate materials	Development edge is obvious and in sharp contrast with agricultural land. Road pressures evident.	N	
27b Hatherton	Intact field pattern. Some wooden fencing subdivision. NB Holly is a significant species.	Enclosure by woodland edges is important and an attractive feature.	Horse grazing dominant but well managed	Few apparent pressures. Glimpses of estate landscape at Hatherton.	C	
27c Hatherton	Small scale field pattern, much subdivision by wire and tape fencing. Hedgerows poor.	Few semi natural features remaining	Horse grazing dominant, and with many inappropriate materials	Individual dwellings improvement and enlargement.	P	

4 FARMED SANDSTONE HILLS AND HEATHS

4.1 These landscapes have been historically improved from the heathland, and remnant heathy vegetation survives in places. The farmland varies from a small scale regular hedged landscape with wooded valleys, to a more open arable landscape of large fields defined by straight hawthorn hedges. Horse grazing is an increasingly common land use, and some land is used for horse gallops as at Stile Cop. The landscape is a collection of fragments, with little overall unity.

4.2 **Shooting Butts:**

The land use is dominated by horse grazing, although some sheep grazing is evident. The hedgerows are in decline and often overgrown. Subdivision of pastures is increasingly by wire or tape fences. Elsewhere the planned landscape is well managed for horses, and includes semi permanent horse jumps. The valley woodland appears neglected. Better management of hedgerows and woodlands, particularly those in view of roads would enhance this landscape.

4.3 **Stile Cop:**

This large scale landscape is viewed mainly from the Hednesford Road, and views beyond to the plantation woodlands of the Chase dominates the scene. Recreational use of the land by horses is significant, although the landscape absorbs the pressure at present. Arable land use on the lower area of 24a has resulted in a fragmented hedgerow pattern, and occasional field trees are in decline. The farmsteads are visible, and may benefit from some screen planting. In unit 37, the pressures from the urban edges are more evident, and the presence of the Crematorium has modified the appearance of the landscape. Horse pastures are less well managed with a mix of hedges and wire fencing.

4.4 **Upper Longdon:**

This intimate landscape of small hedged fields on the edge of the commuter village of Upper Longdon is dominated by horse paddocks. Generally the use is well organised and maintained, with few incongruous elements. The sunken lanes are under pressure from increasing traffic, and these features are important to conserve intact, as well as the often neglected valley woodlands.

4.5 **West Cannock Farm:**

A large scale open landscape which has been extensively subdivided for horse grazing on a commercial scale. Woodland edges and plantation woodlands enclose the landscape and make it difficult to see from the outside. Where the urban edge abuts the farmland, a metal palisade fence protects the area from trespass. The unit would benefit from a comprehensive restoration plan with objectives including landscape, biodiversity, recreation and farming.

4.6 **Huntington:**

Former arable land lying fallow as unmanaged grassland with neglected gappy hedgerow boundaries. Horse grazing is intensive in places, and the pressure from the urban edges is evident in informal access, fly tipping and neglect. A comprehensive management and restoration plan is needed to resolve the conflicts.

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Clay Estatelands				C G N	
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
31a Shooting Butts	Hedgerows and hedgerow trees, generally small scale. Variable condition and often overgrown. Holly important. Increasing wire and timber fencing in pastures.	Impression of well treed landscape and unmanaged wooded valleys.	Well established and dominant land use. Some areas well managed, newer users appear less well organised with inappropriate materials.	Generally a well established landscape but with pressures from the urban edges.	N	
31b Shooting Butts	Apparently intact well maintained hedgerow field pattern. Some timber fences in a well planned pattern. Sheep grazing in places	Small managed corner plantations and individual field trees.	A planned landscape for horse grazing and riding. Some incongruous features in a controlled landscape	Fixed timber horse jumps dominant in places	C	
24a Stile Cop	Enlarged arable fields with fragmented hedgerow pattern.	Occasional hedgerow trees. Views to plantation woodlands dominate.	Horse tracks; recreational use.	Enlarged farmstead; caravan parking	N	

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Clay Estatelands				C G N	
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
24b Stile Cop	Appears intact, although open character.	Patches of gorse are visually significant and attractive.	None in evidence	Few apparent pressures	G	
37 Stile Cop	Regular, but variable condition hedgerows, sometimes grown out to individual thorns. Some subdivision poor fencing. Metal palisade fence around Crematorium	Rough unmanaged scrub and bracken on field banks. Small unmanaged copses.	Horse pasture throughout the area; well established.	Impact of Crematorium, and housing edges. Public footpaths/ tracks evident.	N	
23 Upper Longdon	; Small, hedged fields on edge of village. Increasing subdivision by fences. Generally well managed	Wooded stream corridor. Sunken lane banks are visually significant	Well organised horse paddocks dominate, with locked field gates and stabling. Some areas of overgrazing.	Improved dwellings and smart properties in Longdon with views out over the pastures.	N	
64 Hednesford Quarry	Disturbed landscape; no field pattern	Boundary vegetation is significant	Non evident	Mineral workings have disturbed the landscape	P	

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Clay Estatelands				C G N	
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
18 West Cannock Farm	Open landscape with some areas recently sub divided by fencing. Set aside character of farmland	Woodland edges and plantation woodlands enclose the landscape	Trekking centre via Brindley Heath road access. Inappropriate structures and fencing	Urban edges of housing are dominant; Steel palisade fence modifies character.	P	
25 Huntington	Field pattern in decline; overgrown gappy hedgerows with hedgerow trees. Set aside or unused land. Subdivision by wire fences in places	Unmanaged hedgerow and field trees. Skyline woodland edge is visually important, but unprotected	High impact of horse grazing in places eg north western area.	Urban edges are prominent. Informal motorcycle tracks in unmanaged grassland give derelict agricultural appearance. Pressures from urban population.	P	

5 HISTORIC PARKLAND

- 5.1 The historic parklands of Beaudesert, Tixall, Wolseley and Hatherton are within the AONB. Shugborough has been excluded from the study as the estate already has a management plan in place for the agricultural landscape. The parkland landscapes survive, although only Hatherton still has the Hall as the central feature of the park.
- 5.3 **Tixall:**
The setting of the parkland landscape in and around the village of Tixall makes this an attractive farmed landscape with many intact features such as woodlands, parkland trees, roadside hedgerows and hedgerow trees. There is some evidence of recent attempts to restore and conserve these key features, although woodlands appear unmanaged at present. Where horse pastures are present, they are well managed with wooden fencing, and often in close proximity to large houses.
- 5.4 **Oakedge Park**
At Oakedge park the open parkland landscape includes clumps of veteran parkland trees, and views towards the wooded edge of the Chase. The popular Seven Springs access is adjacent to the area, and the parkland is visible from the busy A513. A restoration plan for parkland trees would ensure the continuity of the landscape.
- 5.5 **Beaudesert:**
This landscape is in predominantly arable use, with woodland edges visible. Some of the woodlands are managed by the Wildlife Trust, and woodland edges are in need of improvement in particular. The farmland has qualified for the Higher Level Scheme payments, and this will ensure that landscape and biodiversity interests are maintained in the landscape. The adjacent landscape associated with the historic house is the subject of a Heritage Lottery Fund bid at present.
- 5.6 **Hatherton:**
The parkland and its immediate boundaries appear intact, although some features are in slow decline such as parkland trees, woodlands, boundary walls and pools. A restoration plan for the historic parkland would arrest the decline and put in place a programme of landscape restoration.

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Historic Parkland (excluding Shugborough)					
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
30 Tixall Parkland	Parkland with some small pastoral fields. Subdivision close to dwellings.	Parkland trees, unmanaged woodland belts close to village edges.	Well maintained and localised adjacent to dwellings	Historic parkland estate features. Attractive village setting		
41 Tixall Parkland	Evidence of hedgerow restoration adjacent to roads	Evidence of protection of parkland trees	None evident	Historic parkland estate features. Attractive village setting. Busy roads disturb the landscape		
45 Oakedge Park	Open landscape, some fence subdivision.	Parkland trees, clumps on prominent knolls Bracken edges. Views to wooded edge of the Chase	Small scale horse paddocks at eastern end	Shooting, public access to Seven springs. Road verges eroding at bridleway access		
22b Beaudesert	Large open arable fields with few internal hedgerows.	Wooded edges dominant; Georges Hayes and Piggots Bottom nature reserves adjacent.	None evident	Adjacent to Beaudesert Camping ground but no visual impact.		

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Historic Parkland (excluding Shugborough)					
28 Hatherton	Intact parkland with boundary hedgerows.	Parkland trees stag headed, in decline. Central wooded belt appears unmanaged.	Some discreet paddocks out of main views	Historic estate features, walls etc. Wetlands and pools recreation pressure.		

6 SANDSTONE ESTATELANDS

6.1 These important landscapes support mixed arable and pastoral farming, often in the context of historic farmed estates. Landscape units in this type include Haywood, and parts of Wolseley, Teddesley, Brocton, Milford and Tixall. Arable intensification has been a pressure to change, although this is giving way to more urban pressures from residential development and horse grazing in places. Woodland management has traditionally been part of the estate culture, but increasingly the woodlands are being neglected due to financial pressures or other factors.

6.2 **Haywood Park:**

This intensively grazed landscape is visible from the busy A513, and has a backdrop of the woodland fringe of the Chase. Hedgerows are poorly managed and are increasingly being replaced by wire fencing in variable condition. To date the grazing appears to be mainly sheep, although the unit 46 has been converted to horse pastures. Tape fences, and the presence of old containers are inappropriate in the AONB setting. Internal mature conifer belts for example around the pumping station appear unmanaged.

6.3 **Wolseley Park:**

This extensive area of mainly arable land use is visually enclosed by managed plantation woodlands. Arable intensification has resulted in enlarged open fields with few internal semi natural features. In places, horse grazing has become the dominant land use, and fields have been subdivided with wire fencing. Gappy roadside hedgerows detract from the scene, and well used public footpaths cross the open landscape. Remnant parkland trees are in decline, and a restoration plan should include parkland and hedgerow trees, as well as field boundary hedgerow restoration.

6.4 **Shooting Butts:**

This unit (31c) on the edge of Etchinghill has a neglected appearance, although many semi natural features survive in the form of hedgerows and woodland. The private sports club land use is dominant, however the landscape beyond the sports facilities appears unmanaged. A comprehensive programme of restoration of woodlands and hedgerows would ensure the long term survival of this important landscape.

6.5 **Slitting Mill:**

This landscape is dominated by the presence of horse pastures in variable condition. Fencing is generally timber in poor condition, and the low lying wet grassland is subject to poaching in places. Unit 06 is a more organised area of horse grazing, often with associated stabling and ménages. The woodland encloses the area. Residential development is visible and adds to a suburban character. Guidelines for horse grazing may help to achieve a more consistent appearance throughout this area.

6.6 **Bednall Head:**

An area of mixed arable and pasture farming, but with signs of increasing subdivision of large fields to provide horse grazing. The visual impact of grazing is variable; some places are well managed with good quality fencing, and elsewhere wire fences divide fields. Internal plantation woodlands appear unmanaged. New planting of small woodlands in scale with the landscape would help to assimilate the grazing into the landscape.

6.7 **Brocton:**

This is an intensively grazed landscape visible from the busy A34 and the edges of Brocton village. Residential development overlooks the area, and a network of well used footpaths is an important feature. Enclosures are variable in materials, condition and quality. Hedgerows are generally neglected. The landscape unit is an important entrance to the AONB for motorists and residents, and guidelines for more consistent management for horse grazing may improve the scene. The golf course is a highly modified but well managed landscape with many remnant woodlands and roadside hedgerows.

6.8 **Milford:**

An enclosed and self contained estate landscape with many traditional estate features such as plantation woodlands, hedgerows, and a well used footpath network. Localised horse grazing is generally well managed, however the estate should be monitored closely to conserve the character of the landscape.

6.9 **Tixall Farm:**

This disturbed landscape includes a number of incongruous elements, in close proximity to the intact parkland of Tixall itself. Horse pastures and associated clutter detract from the scene, and the remaining semi natural features including fringing trees to the canal are in decline. A programme of restoration of trees and hedgerows would help to restore landscape character.

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Sandstone Estatelands					
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
15 Haywood Park	Poorly managed hedgerows ; wire fencing increasing subdivisions of large fields. Weak pattern.	Wooded fringe to the Chase is prominent. Some conifer plantations, unmanaged appearance. Bracken edges to fields.	No apparent impact. Sheep grazing.	Pumping station well established landmark feature from roadside views.		
46 Haywood Park	Gappy, poor hedgerows, with extensive subdivision by tape fences	Unmanaged woodland edges and roadside woodland. Scrubby patches with bracken ground cover. Field trees in decline.	Horse grazing is the dominant land use; stables, lorry container, inappropriate materials throughout.	Busy A513 road.		
11 Wolseley Park	Enlarged arable fields enclosed by woodland. Wire fences to woodland boundaries	valley woodland, and plantation woodlands; appear managed. Parkland trees evident.	No evidence; sheep grazing in places.	Country house gives setting to parkland style landscape		

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Sandstone Estatelands					
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
33 Etching Hill	Enlarged arable fields, creating an open landscape. Subdivision by wire fencing. Gappy roadside hedgerows.	Wooded edges prominent. Few internal semi natural features	Horse paddocks are the dominant land use. Inappropriate materials	Public footpath access is significant from Etchinghill		
31c Shooting Butts	Fragmented field pattern and pasture, neglected hedgerows, variable condition	Parkland trees in decline. Unmanaged semi natural woodland. Tree cover significant but in decline	Localised impact only	Sports fields to school. Historic Stone house		
32 Slitting Mill	Intact small fields with hedgerows and timber fences. Poor condition	Rough grassland and wet grassland; variable condition	Predominant land use is horse grazing. Variable condition but mainly poor.	Edges of development are visible and intrusive		

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Sandstone Estatelands					
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
06 Slitting Mill	Pattern of horse pastures superimposed on remnant hedgerows.	Area enclosed by woodland. Some mixed broadleaved trees.	Horse grazing and associated infrastructure of stabling and ménage dominates the area	Unsurfaced tracks used by graziers. Some residential properties. Suburban character		
09a Bednall Head	Large scale geometric field pattern; hedgerows in decline and in variable condition. Some evidence of field enlargement, and subdivision by fences.	Small unmanaged plantation significant. Scattered oak trees. Bracken strips to field edges.	Horse grazing is a significant land use. Impact is variable and some areas managed better than others.	Localised impact of new farm buildings and vehicle storage		
34 Brocton	Small regular enclosed fields with variable condition, often overgrown hedgerows. Wire fences subdividing fields. Concrete post and mesh fences incongruous.	Backdrop of mixed woodland is important. Some small internal plantations	Grazing for horses, sheep and cattle throughout the area; horses dominate. Some inappropriate features associated with horse pastures.	20 th century development visible to edges of area. Footpath network is important and requires management		

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Sandstone Estatelands					
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
43 Brocton Golf Course	A modified landscape with remnant hedgerows to suit course layout.	Well treed landscape retaining some veteran trees. Woodlands and woodland edges appear well managed.	None evident	Recreation pressure and presence of car parks, signage; a suburban landscape.		
08 Milford Covert	Medium scale pattern of hedgerows in variable condition. Timber fencing is increasing, hedgerows in decline in arable landscape.	Well treed landscape enclosed by estate style managed mixed plantation woodlands.	Localised impact around residential properties. Well managed.	Localised impact of residential enlargement. Public footpaths are a significant element.		
42 Tixall Farm	Hedgerow pattern in decline. Replaced by wire fences	Trees fringing canal; unmanaged and in decline. Field trees in decline.	Horse pastures dominant land use, with some sheep grazing. Poly tunnel feed store and associated development.	Busy road detracts from rural scene. Farm track significant element.		

7 SETTLED PLATEAU FARMLANDS

7.1 This intimate settled landscape around Cannock Wood and Gentleshaw has a strong rural character, despite its proximity to the urban edge. The typical pattern is of clustered farmsteads and roadside cottages, often with associated horse paddocks. The scale of the farmland has been ideal for conversion to horse pasture, and this has become the dominant land use in both units considered below.

7.2 Cannock Wood:

Horse pasture is the dominant land use throughout the area; the management of horses and paddocks is variable, but the trend is for extensive subdivision of fields using wire fences and post and rail fences. In places the associated stabling and stores are very run down, giving a poor appearance in the landscape. Woodlands such as Nuns Well have benefited from recent improvement by the Forest of Mercia Community Woodland team.

7.3 Gentleshaw:

Horse grazing is typically more established in traditional smallholdings, and is generally better managed than at Cannock Wood. Fencing subdivision is however increasing, and guidelines for management of horses should be promoted. The landscape is well treed, although there are few signs of active tree and hedgerow management. There is an opportunity to promote traditional land management practices to the new population, in order to conserve the attractive landscape.

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Settled Plateau Farmlands					
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
21a Cannock Wood	Small scale fields enclosed by treed hedgerows. A mix of straight planned roads and narrow winding lanes. Post and wire and post and rail fences increasing as subdivisions for horse pastures.	Hedgerow trees significant. Valley bottom trees eg Forest of Mercia woodlands.	Horse pasture is the dominant land use. Variable condition; some well kept and others overgrazed and unsightly.	A populated landscape; many examples of improved residential properties, and modern development		
21b Gentleshaw	Small scale fields enclosed by variable condition hedgerows. Increasing fencing subdivisions for horse pastures.	A well treed landscape including some heathy woodland on west side. Hollies are a feature of the species mix. Variable management.	Horse pasture is the dominant land use. Generally well managed in traditional small holdings	Many improved properties. Plant nurseries are a feature. Enlarged farm buildings. Visual impact of Utilities infrastructure. Old bridleways are significant.		

8 TRENT VALLEY FLOODPLAIN

- 8.1 This flat alluvial meadowland landscape to the northern edge of the AONB is a distinctive landscape, in sharp contrast to the rising ground of the wooded Chase. Land use is traditionally pastoral, and the lack of habitation is an important feature. The presence of the Trent and Mersey and Staffordshire and Worcestershire canals in the landscape makes it important to conserve as views are seen by many visitors to the area. The west coast railway, and the busy A51 and A513 are often in view, however the farmland has a quiet, even remote character adjacent to the riverside.
- 8.2 **Colwich:**
The outer boundary hedgerow is generally in good condition and represents an historic feature. The internal hedgerows are often gappy and wire fences are evident for example around Navigation Farm. Fringing belts of willow, alder and poplar alongside the river and canal are typical, but appear unmanaged. Where horse pastures are appearing in this landscape they are visible, and require close monitoring in order to conserve the traditional grazing character.
- 8.3 **Tixall Broads:**
Some arable land use has encroached on to the floodplain at the Haywood end of the area. Outer boundary hedgerows are largely intact but the internal field pattern is in decline and being replaced by wire fencing in places. Lines of poplars are a feature of the landscape. No evidence of horse grazing at present, but the landscape is under some pressure to change. The views from the canal are important to maintain.

LDU Ref.	Issues/ Pressures to change Trent Valley Floodplain					
	Field pattern/ hedgerows/ fencing	Woodland/ trees/ semi natural vegetation	Horsiculture impact	Others		
14 Colwich	Outer boundary hedgerows generally good. Internal hedgerows sometimes gappy and unmanaged eg Navigation Farm. Wire fences evident.	Fringing willow, alder and poplar belts in decline, particularly alongside canal and river. Hedgerow trees ivy clad.	Encroaching from edges of Haywood and Colwich and adjacent to A51. Wire fences used as subdivision.	Edges of built development visible. Canal is an important feature.		
40 Tixall Broads	Outer boundary hedgerows mainly intact; internal field boundaries in decline. Wire fences mainly, or enlarged arable fields at Haywood end. Sheep grazing. Some pasture in decline.	Lines of Poplars are a feature. Views to woodland belts at Shugborough. Fringing willow, alders adjacent to canal.	Not evident.	Old hill bridge farm sheds significant element. Shugborough railway portal visible from canal. Canal is a significant element.		

9 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT OPTIONS

9.1 Summary of Pressures to change in the agricultural landscapes of the AONB:

Pressures common to all the landscape types described above are identified in the Management Plan 2004- 9 document, and these have been confirmed by the study:

- Inappropriate elements and land management introduced as a result of a recent and significant trend of converting land to horse grazing. The demand for grazing land for horses reflects the increased demand for recreational horse riding on and around the Chase by the urban population.
- A decline in traditional field boundary hedgerow management, leading to deterioration in the visual quality of the features. This trend is due to increasing numbers of new land managers present who do not have regard for traditional agricultural good practice, and instead use modern methods of stock control fencing.
- Neglect of semi natural woodland, and plantation woodlands, due to the decline in economic value of the features and a lack of expertise amongst land managers. Traditional estate management practices of woodland management have declined as the numbers of people engaged in forestry and agriculture have declined.
- Increased pressures of urbanisation and suburbanisation in the agricultural landscape, leading to a change in the visual character of properties in the fringe landscapes.
- Increased traffic using the roads and lanes in the fringe landscapes, leading to physical decline and damage of roadside landscape features.
- Increased pedestrian and recreational cycling and riding pressure in the fringe landscapes, from the urban population. This pressure has led to the increased use of footpaths, bridleways and forest tracks throughout the Chase as well as pressure on land uses such as golf courses and sports fields.

9.2 Horse grazing management options:

Cannock Chase Council are in the process of producing guidelines for horse grazing, as they have recognised the significant increase in the activity over recent years. At present, the keeping of horses for grazing does not constitute a change of use, however commercial livery yards, riding schools, trekking centres, stud farms and racing yards all require planning consent.

- The effects of the increased horse and rider population is not confined to the grazing land itself; there is great pressure from horses being ridden into the AONB, on bridleways and in open countryside.
- Good practice guidelines for private individuals and for commercial enterprises could be published and issued by the planning authorities or even sponsored by the AONB Unit. Guidelines should cover a wide range of issues and topics including:
 - Siting of horse shelters and stabling, and appropriate materials.
 - Arrangement of hay and feed stores in relation to stabling.
 - Access from adjacent roads and lanes and consideration of gateways, hard standing and vehicle standing.

- Materials and types of fencing to be used in sub division of fields, avoiding where possible the use of tape or electric barriers, and favouring permanent timber post and rail details.
- Guidance on the numbers of horses grazed on the acreage available, and information on resting the pastures etc.
- Storage, management and disposal of waste materials including used straw and manure. New legislation from July 2005 addresses this issue in some depth for all commercial enterprises.
- Information on siting, sizing and planning requirements for menages, gallops and other elements which will require planning permission.
- Notes on permitted development, and clarification of items requiring planning consent.
- Best practice notes for animal welfare issues, and repair and replacement of timber structures.

Photographs and examples of different practices in horse grazing in the AONB (see examples below)



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Field boundary hedgerow management;



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9.3 Hedgerow Management

Traditional hedgerow management has declined over many years in commercial farming, as farm incomes have been under pressure, and tractor mounted mechanical flail cutting has replaced hedge layering in most areas. The trend towards small scale hobby farming to provide horse grazing on the Chase fringe landscapes may provide the opportunity for educating a new generation of landowners in more traditional and effective methods of hedgerow management.

- Hedge layering is not only visually attractive, it is beneficial for the long term survival of the hedges, and provides an effective stock proof barrier.
- In many cases, the study noted that hedges have been allowed to grow tall, and this creates ideal conditions for layering to bring the hedge back into shape.
- The AONB unit could promote hedge layering courses in association with the Forest of Mercia Education Team, and could offer grants or incentives to landowners to restore visible boundaries using this method.
- The promotion of hedge layering will raise awareness throughout the Chase and the local distinctive landscape features will be restored.

9.4 Woodland management:

The trend towards neglecting small woodlands, semi natural features, and plantation woodlands, has followed the decline in agriculture throughout the fringe landscapes. There is little economic return available for actively managing woodlands, however to the population living in and around the Chase the tree and woodland cover is highly valued.

- There are examples of initiatives to provide advice to owners of woodlands in farmed landscapes such as the Marches Woodland Initiative. The local Forest of Mercia team may be able to advise on grants, incentives and joint working with the AONB Unit on a similar scheme for the Chase.
- On a small scale, there may be cross benefits in being able to extract poles for horse jumps locally, as well as hedging stakes, heathering hazel for hedge layering, and other local woodland products.
- The AONB unit could commission The Forest of Mercia Education Team to organise and run woodland management courses.
- New planting and hedgerow restoration would also fall within the scope of this initiative, and the AONB Unit could issue best practice guidelines. All new planting should have due regard for the recommendations included in the Supplementary Planning Guidance (Planning for Landscape Change) published by the County Council.
- The Forest of Mercia team have a wealth of experience in promoting and implementing woodland management and appropriate planting, and their remit now covers the Chase fringe agricultural landscapes.

9.5 **Urbanisation pressures:**

- Many of the issues surrounding urbanisation in the fringe agricultural landscapes are covered by other agencies, and are beyond the scope of this study. The AONB unit should however promote good practice and could for example influence the scope of planning conditions to ensure that new planting in relation to development is appropriate to the landscape character.
- A highways design report has been commissioned by the AONB Unit to recommend appropriate treatments for highways in the AONB. Highways improvements have an incremental impact on the landscape character, and care should be taken to mitigate the impact where possible.
- Improvements to access to agricultural land from highways and country lanes should therefore avoid excessive removal of hedgerows to improve visibility splays; minimise hardstanding outside and inside the field boundaries, and avoid engineered kerbs or alien construction materials.