

THE FUTURE - THE WAY FORWARD

Involvement

24% of people want to know more about heathland management methods, while 36% said they don't understand the reasons for management.

"I now understand the reasons for managing heathland, but many do not".

83% of people want to be informed or consulted about the Country Park, compared with 54% who feel they are not involved or informed at present. 25% of comments say better communication and involvement is needed.

"We must be far better at communicating".



Staffordshire County Council says;

"We welcome the overall support for current heathland management practice, but acknowledge the impact this sometimes has and the need therefore, for better information and communication with local people. We will endeavour to address concerns about heathland management as they arise and engage local people in further debate on the possibility of re-introducing grazing animals to the Country Park. Re-introducing grazing animals would over time, help to make heathland management more sustainable."



D. Grundy

Want to know more?

For the full report, contact:
Jane Middleton (Officer Manager),
Environment and Countryside Unit,
Development Services Department,
Staffordshire County Council,
Riverway, Stafford. ST16 3TJ
Tel: (01785) 277284
E-mail: jane.middleton@staffordshire.gov.uk

Consultation carried out August to December 2006
Resources for Change
1, New Street, Welshpool
Powys, SY21 7SF
Tel: (01938) 555759



The Future of Cannock Chase Country Park

The County Council has been asking what you think about heathland restoration and maintenance on the Country Park.

People today use Cannock Chase to escape the bustle of life, for peace and tranquillity and as a playground - a place to ride their bikes, go horse riding or to walk their dogs. However, the Chase is fragile; its plants are easily damaged and its wildlife easily disturbed. If it is to remain a special place, it must be treated with care.



WHAT YOU SAID

Free access for all, with conservation as a priority.
There is a high level of support for grazing.
'Grazing is low impact and traditional'.
'It is well managed...It is sensitively done'.
'Access to wilderness is extremely important'.

THE STORY

The Country Park landscape has a long history of change, telling a human story. People and their livestock shaped Cannock Chase. Their day to day living maintained it as heathland, but these practices ended just over 100 years ago.

Why Heathland?

It is a rarer wildlife habitat than tropical rainforest, supporting some of our rarest plants and animals and Staffordshire has lost over 90% of it in just two centuries. There is 10 times more woodland than heathland in the County.



The Challenge

By law, the County Council must protect, restore and improve its heathland. Natural England (who advises the Government on conserving the natural environment) says more restoration is needed.



The Response

The County Council is managing the heathland to restore and protect it through selective tree felling, bracken control and managing the heather - without this management, it will be lost. Trees and scrub are still valued - it's a question of balance. By using grazing animals, we could also rely less on machinery and herbicides.

FINDING OUT WHAT YOU THINK

Who has an interest? How did we contact you? We consulted organisations and individuals through direct mailing, on websites, with postcards and questionnaires in Visitor Centres, shops and cafés and an on-line questionnaire. We interviewed people by phone, in the Country Park and the streets nearby, and through consultation stalls in residential areas.

You responded:

560 people responded from all age groups, backgrounds and interests.



WHAT YOU SAID

People value the Country Park for both recreation (86%) and conservation (83%). Many comments emphasised the importance of tranquillity, the quality of the landscape, open access and accessibility.

Overall, most people support the methods used to restore and maintain the heathland (82%).

A majority agree with:

- selective felling and clearing trees (63%)
- managing heather by mowing (56%) and burning (54%)
- spraying bracken to control its spread (59%).

Some issues about Country Park management stand out

Many people wanted to protect sensitive species by reviewing firebreaks and paths (70%) and re-directing recreation activities (63%). Some however, disagreed with controlling bracken by spraying from helicopters (45%).

Lower numbers, but strong feelings

Of additional comments made:

27% said tree felling is excessive.

9% said heathland should be allowed to go, in favour of woodland.

9% said woodland and its wildlife are very important.

GRAZING ANIMALS such as cattle, sheep & ponies

A majority favoured re-introducing grazing animals (65%), but 17% of comments said access should not be restricted.



How might this be done?

74% favoured reducing road speeds
50% preferred controlling livestock by herding instead of fencing.

54% favoured ponies, compared to 44% for cattle and 46% sheep.

On fencing to control livestock, 45% approved of temporary fencing, 35% favoured fencing round the whole Country Park, while only 23% supported fenced enclosures.