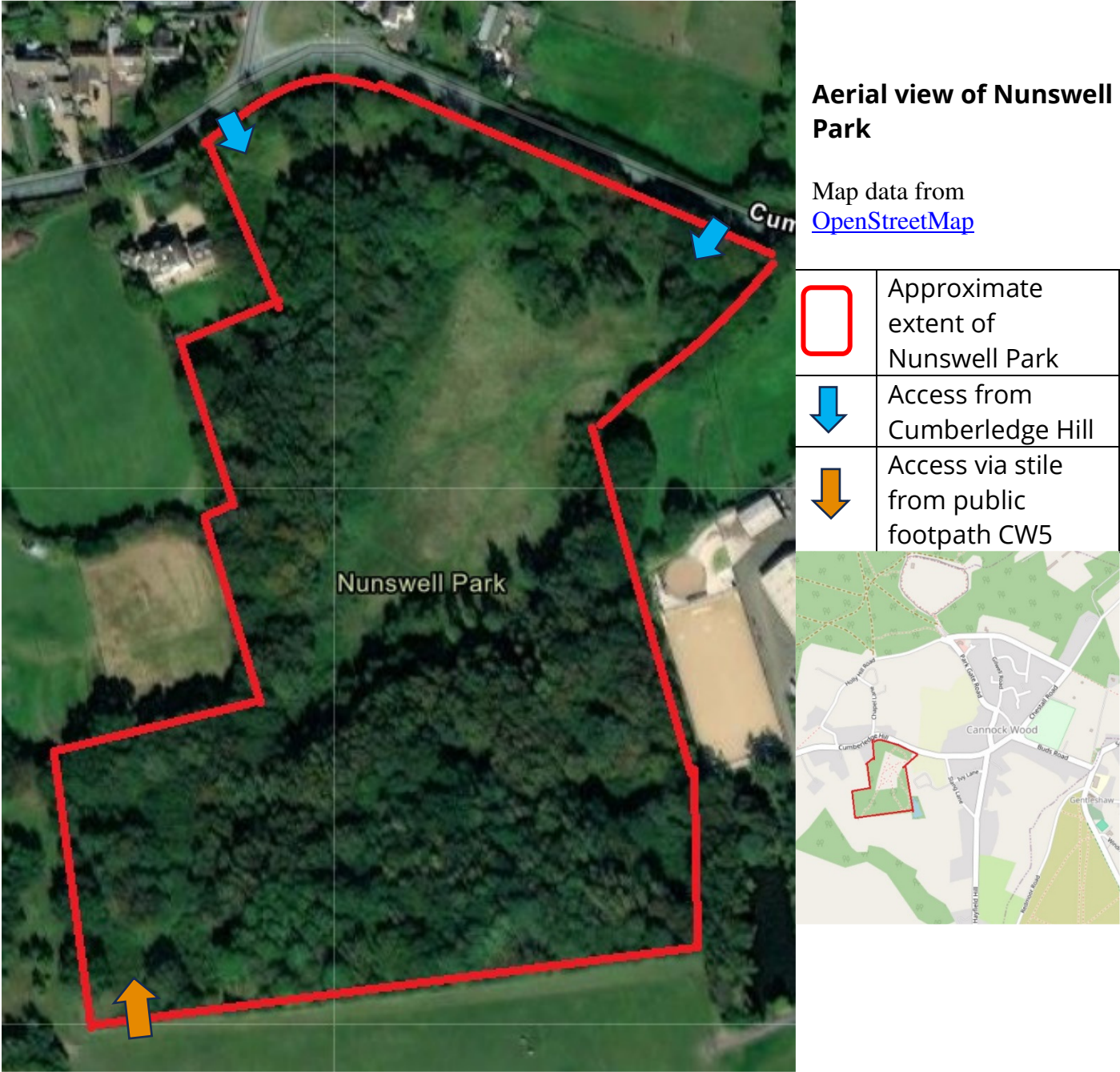


NUNSWELL PARK



The purpose of this document is to assist Cannock Wood Parish Council in deciding whether, as part of its duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity, to request that Cannock Chase District Council declare Nunswell Park as a Local Nature Reserve. A secondary purpose is to provide ready-made material, subject to obtaining necessary permissions, for the management plan which must accompany a declaration as a Local Nature Reserve.

Nunswell Park is the site of a former sand and gravel pit which is now a peaceful haven for people and wildlife. There is a central broad grassy area screened on all sides by woodland at the height of the former natural landscape level. Nunswell Park now is the result of five decades of re-colonisation by nature and some limited tree planting and coppicing.



Nunswell Park lies within the Cannock Chase National Landscape (formerly AONB) and the land is designated as Green Belt. Cannock Chase District Council manage and maintain the site for its conservation value and public access.

Ownership of the land

Nunswell Park is owned by Cannock Chase District Council.

The site was acquired in two parts, firstly on 25 Jan 1972 from the Gentleshaw Sand Ltd at a cost of £1200.00. Secondly on 3 Nov 1976 from Mr Dennis Jones of 5 Bridge Street, Clayhanger, Brownhills for a sum of £650.00.

History

Until the early 1920s the site of the present Nunswell Park was owned by the Marquesses of Anglesey and it was in agricultural use. The field names on the 1841 tithe maps give an indication of some of the land use at that time: Corn Hill Field, Near Hill, Far Hill, and Upper Hill Foxbanks. The field boundaries on the map below were still the same in 1915 as in 1841.



Figure 1:

The site before the sand/gravel pit was developed

Ordnance Survey
Revised 1915,
published 1918.
Reproduced with the
permission of the
National Library of
Scotland.
Field names from 1841
tithe map added.

In the 1920s the Marquess of Anglesey stopped living at nearby Beaudesert Hall when the family retrenched to Plas Newydd, Anglesey and sold off many of their landholdings in Cannock Wood. It is likely that the site of Nunswell Park was included in that sale.

Sand and gravel were extracted from the site over almost five decades, and some, at least, was sold for use in building local homes.



Figure 2:
Exploitation of sand and gravel

Black and white
Ordnance Survey map
revised 1938, published
1947.

Reproduced with the
permission of the
National Library of
Scotland.

Red dotted line
shows the full extent
of excavation by late
1960s.

The extraction site was to some extent screened from the road. It is behind and set below the trees on the right in the image below.



Reproduced with permission of Roy Lewis, through Staffordshire Past Track
Date:1910 - 1921 (c.)

However, by the mid-1950s the workings were much more extensive, creating a much greater impact on the landscape.



Reproduced with permission of the Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photography
(c) Copyright reserved.

6th April 1956, oblique view of Hill fort, Castle Ring, Cannock Chase, showing the sand and gravel workings top left.

In the 1960s parts of the workings were used as a landfill site, including by Armitage Shanks.

Geology

Sand and gravel have been extracted in several parts of South Staffordshire, still continuing today in some places. Nunswell Park provides an important link to part of the industrial heritage of the village.

The location of the Cannock Wood deposits is shown in yellow on the geological map below; the elliptical yellow area is now part of Nunswell Park.

The bedrock indicated by the yellow colour is the Chester Formation of alternating layers of sandstone rock and conglomerate. This sedimentary bedrock formed around 250 million years ago during the Triassic period and can be found right across England from Devon in the south to Cumbria in the north. It forms the red cliffs at Budleigh Salterton in south Devon and Castle Rock in Nottingham, upon which Nottingham Castle sits.

A conglomerate is rock composed of pebbles more or less closely cemented together. In the Chester Formation it is thought the pebbles and some channel sands were deposited in a large north flowing braided river. In some parts of Cannock Chase there is very little cementation of the conglomerate so it retains original character of gravel and sand and could be dug out with pickaxes and shovels in sand and gravel pits. At the present Nunswell Park site the sand was golden in colour.

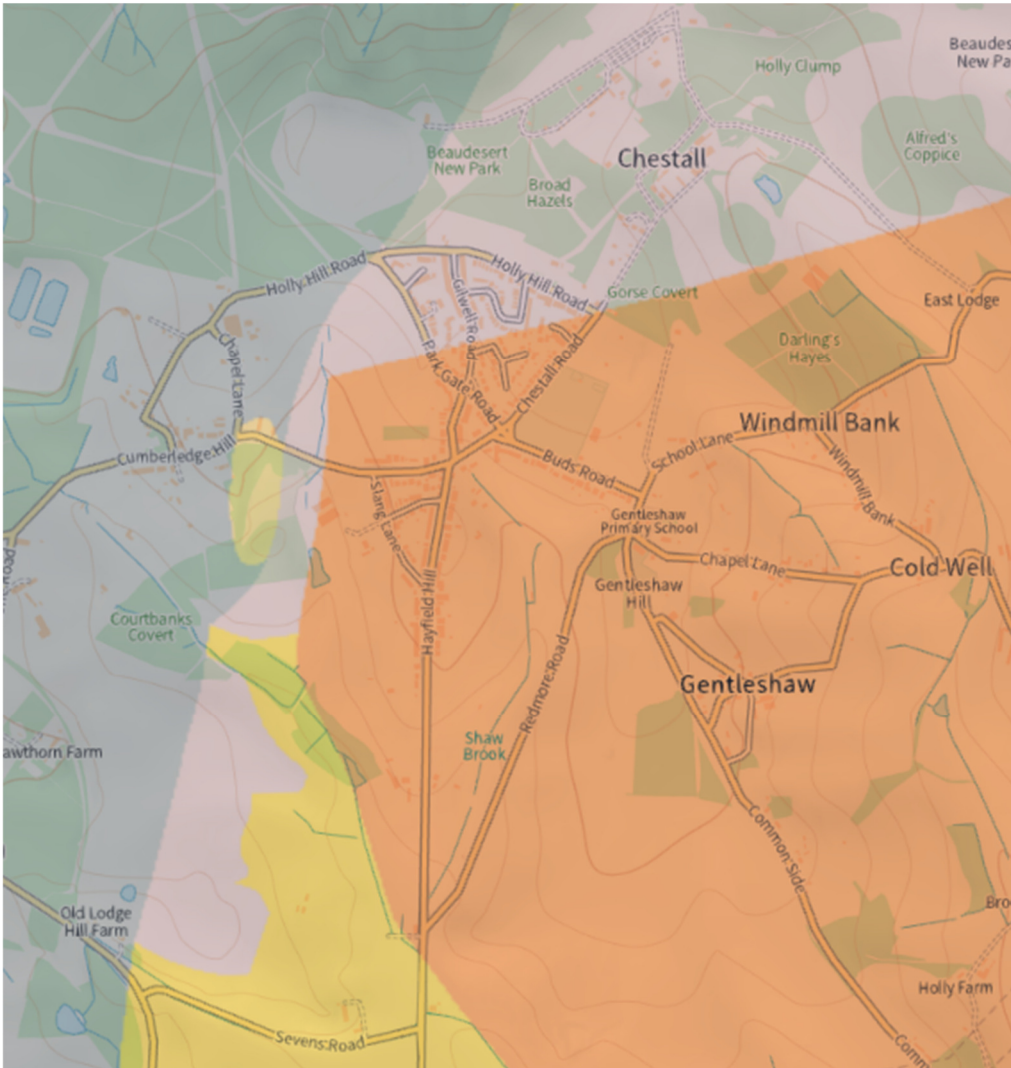






Figure 3: **Geological map of Cannock Wood**

Contains British Geological Survey materials © UKRI 2024

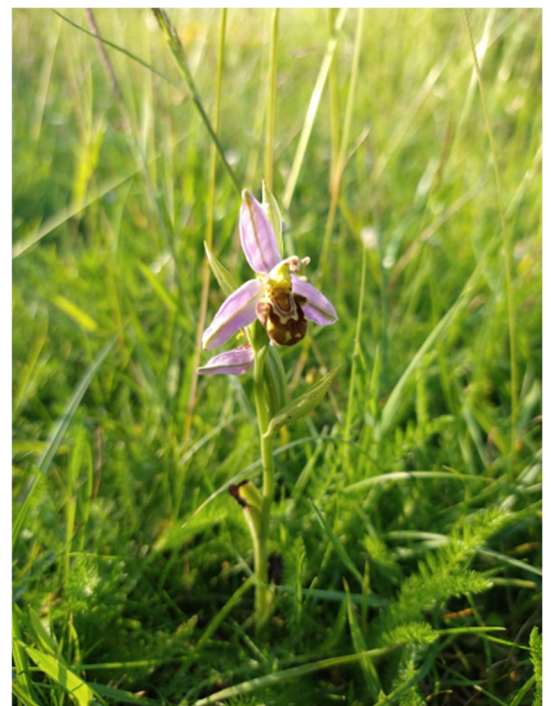
Bedrock geology	
	Sandstone and conglomerate interbedded
	Mudstone
	Conglomerate
	Coal measures

Wildlife

A snapshot survey carried out by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust in 2022 for Cannock Wood Parish Council's Neighbourhood Plan reported a mix of habitats in Nunswell Park:

- semi-natural broadleaved woodland
- scrub
- acid grassland
- poor semi-improved grassland
- heathland fragments.

Species found include orchids in the grassland; rushes, common sorrel and knapweed; heather and gorse present in small amounts on open banks; bluebells, pignut, wood speedwell, tufted hair grass and wild raspberry along with more common woodland flora and it is likely common lizard is present due to a previous translocation scheme.





Staffordshire Wildlife Trust reported of Nunswell Park that:

- it has potential to meet the Staffordshire Local Wildlife Sites criteria and would warrant further detailed assessment
- The southern part of site is recorded on Staffordshire Ecological Record as an historic Grade 2 SBI.
- it would benefit from grazing and/or cutting and woodland management to increase plant diversity, create glades and more dead wood.
- It has good potential as a Biodiversity Net Gain site:
 - opportunities to enhance woodland through thinning
 - increase woodland flora
 - grassland cut annually
 - create invertebrate features
 - heathland creation.

There is a watercourse along the eastern boundary of Nunswell Park which may give scope for creating additional habitat within the same site.



Access and community participation



There is open public access, except for those on horseback.

Access is available from three points:

- through the car park as shown above (the car park is unfortunately no longer open);
- through a pedestrian entrance opposite Alma Cottage, 22 Cumberledge Hill;
- over a stile from the permissive footpath linking Nunswell Park with the public footpath (CW5) which runs from Hayfield Hill across farmland and alongside Courtbank Covert with its Scheduled Monument and Ancient Woodland.

There is a bus stop on Cumberledge Hill immediately adjacent to Nunswell Park.

Benches have been placed in four places around the site, three around the central grassy area and one near the entrance from public footpath CW5.



Nunswell Park is used by local people for recreational purposes including walking, appreciating nature and the landscape setting, and exercising dogs. This furthers the social well-being and interests of the local community. The benefits to physical and mental health of being in green open spaces are well-recognised and increasingly encouraged, indicating that these uses of Nunswell Park are likely to be sustained and may increase. This has been recognised by the inclusion of Nunswell Park on Cannock Chase District Council's list of Assets of Community Value.