

NCA 1. North Northumberland Coastal Plain

Overview

The character of the area is one of dramatic coastline, with cliffs, sand dunes, intertidal mudflats and coastal salt marsh. Inland, the landscape is dominated by arable farming with large, regular fields, but only sparse woodland, and is included under the Eastern Arable Agricultural Landscape Type. The whole of the coastline is covered by natural environment designations, and lies within the Northumberland Coast AONB, which comprises 24% of the NCA. The settlement is a largely rural one of small villages and hamlets and some individual farmsteads, with the border town of Berwick at the northern end and the town and port of Alnmouth at the southern. The NCA is a communications corridor, with the A1 and East Coast main railway line running along its entire length. Currently there is very low woodland cover, at 5%, just under 10% of which is ancient woodland. Distribution is sparse, and mainly comprises coniferous shelterbelts and clumps adjacent to farmsteads and settlements. Ancient woodland is restricted largely to river valleys. There is remnant ancient semi-natural woodland along the banks of the lower reaches of the Coquet, and broadleaved woodland is found in the Aln and Coquet Valley, around the Howick Estate and along the Waren Burn valley. Coniferous shelterbelts and mixed plantations are a feature of the 19th century farming landscape. Some of the coniferous plantations are associated with hunting and most were established as shelter-belts around 18th-19th century farmsteads.

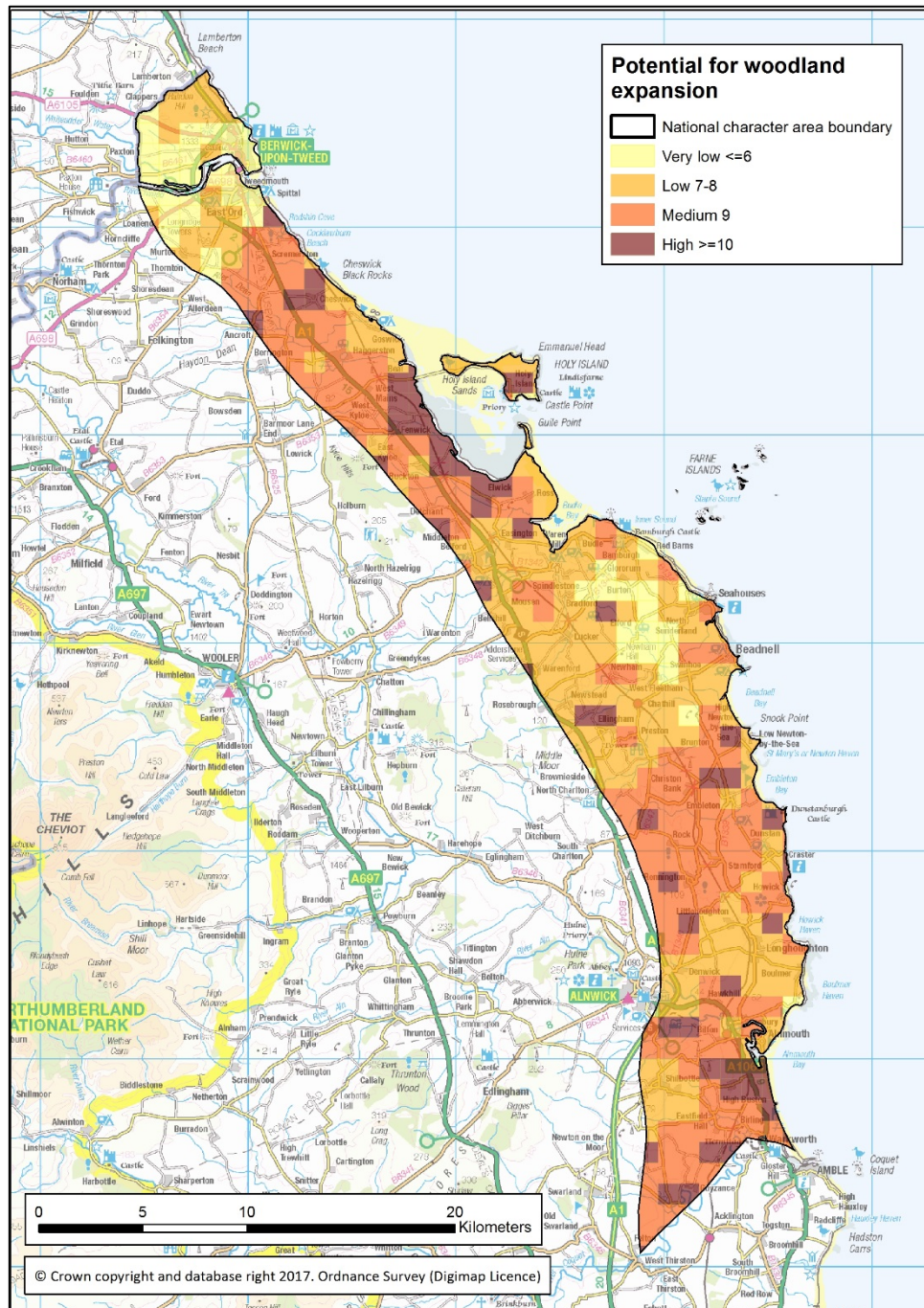
The Historic Environment Character

The NCA has rich evidence for human occupation from late Mesolithic Period and there are archaeological remains dating from prehistory through to the 20th century. The visible historic character has been shaped by its coastal location and its northern boundary, which forms part of the Anglo-Scottish border. Fishing, farming and mineral extraction combined with the need for defence of the coast and the border, along with strong ecclesiastical influences have all shaped the landscape. The historic fishing villages and fortified town of Berwick-upon-Tweed have retained much of their character, and castles, ecclesiastical buildings, large farmsteads, lime kilns, quarries and Second World War defences are all prominent in the landscape. Inland, the settlement pattern reflects the large-scale re-organisation of the landscape in the late 18th and 19th centuries driven by the large estates. Large estates have been a major influence on the landscape from the 16th century, including extensive tree planting on the Howick Hall estate that has altered the previously open landscape of the southern end of the coastal plain.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of natural and historic environment attributes demonstrates that there is a medium level of potential for woodland expansion even though there are high level of natural environment designations which do not support woodland cover. The areas with the potential to absorb woodland expansion tend to be small and dotted across the NCA, many around the fringes of settlements. There are some larger areas with potential for woodland expansion, for example along the coastline opposite Holy Island and between Alnmouth and

Warkworth. The NCA profile identifies the opportunity to expand and link woodland fragments, particularly along watercourses, including enhancing the wooded character of the AIn and Coquet river valleys, and within the area around Howick. The area inland of Holy Island has been identified as a priority area in the Woodland for Water Opportunity Mapping where woodland planting should significantly benefit water quality.



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