

## NCA 3 CHEVIOT FRINGE

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### *Overview*

The Cheviot Fringe NCA is a lowland landscape of valleys and plains, and is included under the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type, with 3% falling within the Northumberland National Park. It is characterised by an underlying geology of mudstones, sandstones and limestones, between the Cheviot Hills to the west and the Northumberland Sandstone Hills to the east. It is dissected by three major river systems, all radiating from the Cheviot Hills: the Coquet, Aln and Breamish/Till Rivers. Glacial processes have helped to shape the landscape, with extensive clay and sand moraine deposits within the gently undulating vales. Extensive gravel deposits are an important resource for quarrying. It is a predominantly rural landscape of mixed farmland, combining pasture and meadows for livestock with arable, the whole interspersed with designed parkland landscapes. There is a strong pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees in the vales, with flatter, more open, arable farmland to the north. The settlement pattern is dominated by nucleated villages, the town of Wooler being the largest settlement, with small hamlets and isolated farmsteads. The NCA is dissected by the A697, one of the main road routes into southern Scotland, but overall, the communications system is one of local roads and lanes. Woodland cover is low, at only 7.5% of the NCA, around half of which is deciduous, and less than 1% is ancient woodland. There is a strong rectilinear pattern of small, coniferous woodland blocks and shelterbelts with deciduous woodland lining many of the river courses. Much of the ancient woodland is found along river banks, whilst coniferous plantations were planted on large estates as shelter belts. There is less tree cover in the more arable northern part of the NCA, where shelter belts dominate.

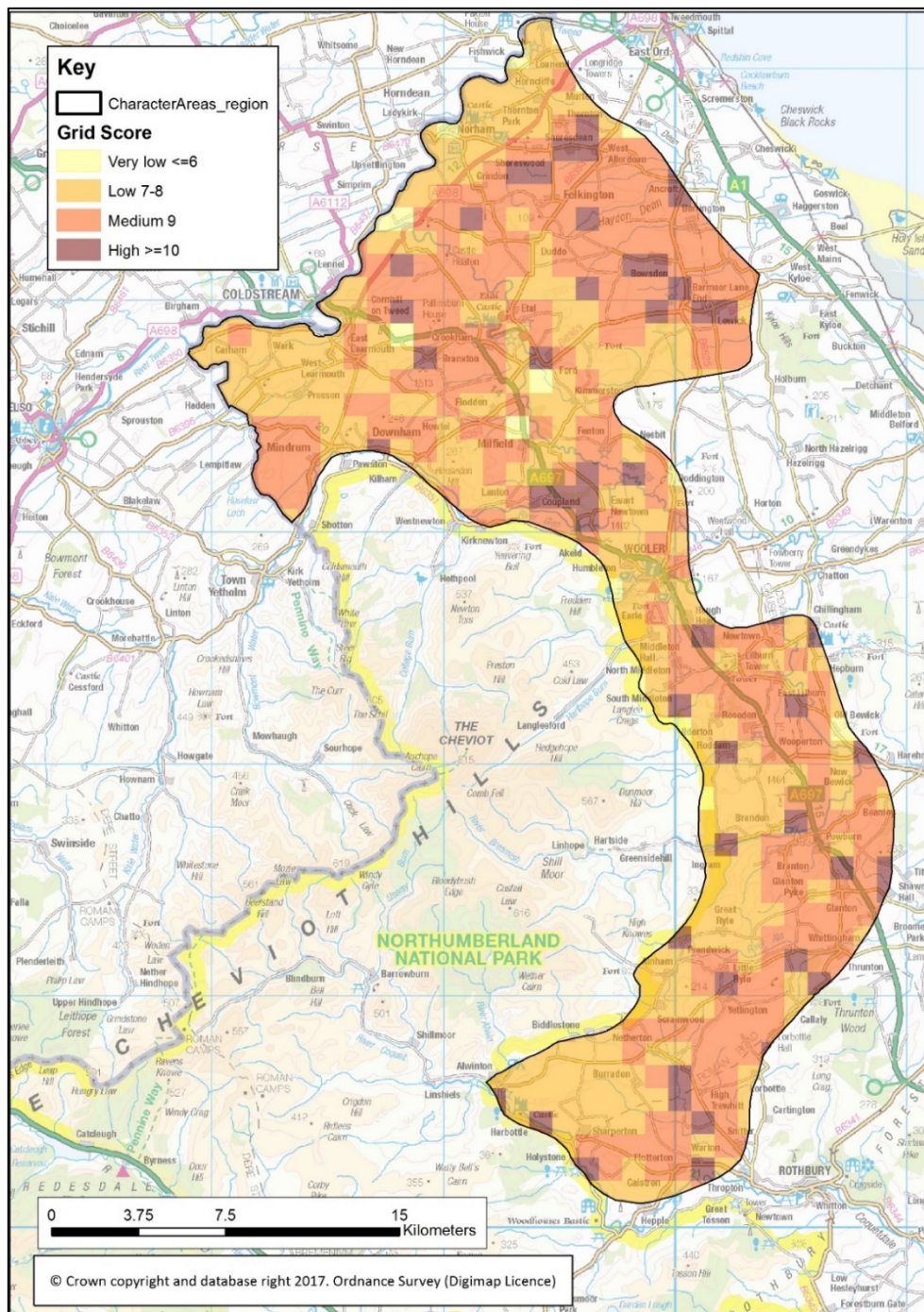
### *The Historic Environment Character*

The NCA has a rich archaeological record, particularly on the Milfield Plain where there are extensive Neolithic ritual landscapes and Anglo-Saxon estate centres, and the low hills became the focus of hill forts originating from the Iron Age. From the later medieval period a chain of castles developed, forming part of the Anglo-Scottish border defences. On the banks of the River Tweed, which forms the Scottish border and northern edge of the NCA, is the site of the strategically important Norham Castle, whilst further south are castles such as Ford and Etal, as well as smaller defensive structures such as West Lilburn Tower. The Anglo-Scottish wars resulted in many battles in the area, including the battle of Flodden Field in 1513. The present-day settlement and field pattern has been strongly influenced by agricultural improvements and landscape-scale reorganisation in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, leaving a regular field pattern of hedged and stone-walled fields with blocks of conifer plantation, planted as shelter belts. Older field systems are still legible in the landscape as ridge and furrow earthworks.

### *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates low potential for woodland expansion within the NCA. There are small clusters of higher potential south of the Milfield area, where new woodland could be planted around settlements, particularly where settlement clusters in the river valleys and at river crossings. There are larger areas of higher potential in the northern end of the NCA, but this may underestimate the archaeological potential of non-designated sites. The NCA profile recognises the importance

of conserving known archaeological remains, as well as the potential for discovering new sites, and this needs to be taken into account for areas of proposed new planting. The NCA profile also highlights opportunities to replace coniferous plantations with broadleaved planting, and re-planting woodlands on former woodland sites, as well as expanding existing ancient woodland sites, particularly along rivers and streams. There is also the potential to strengthen historic field patterns through hedgerow restoration and management. Such opportunities would enhance habitat connectivity, improve carbon sequestration, enhance biodiversity, and potentially provide sources of wood fuel, as well as contributing to the perception of tranquillity and providing new access opportunities where appropriate.



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