

NCA 12 Mid Northumberland

Overview

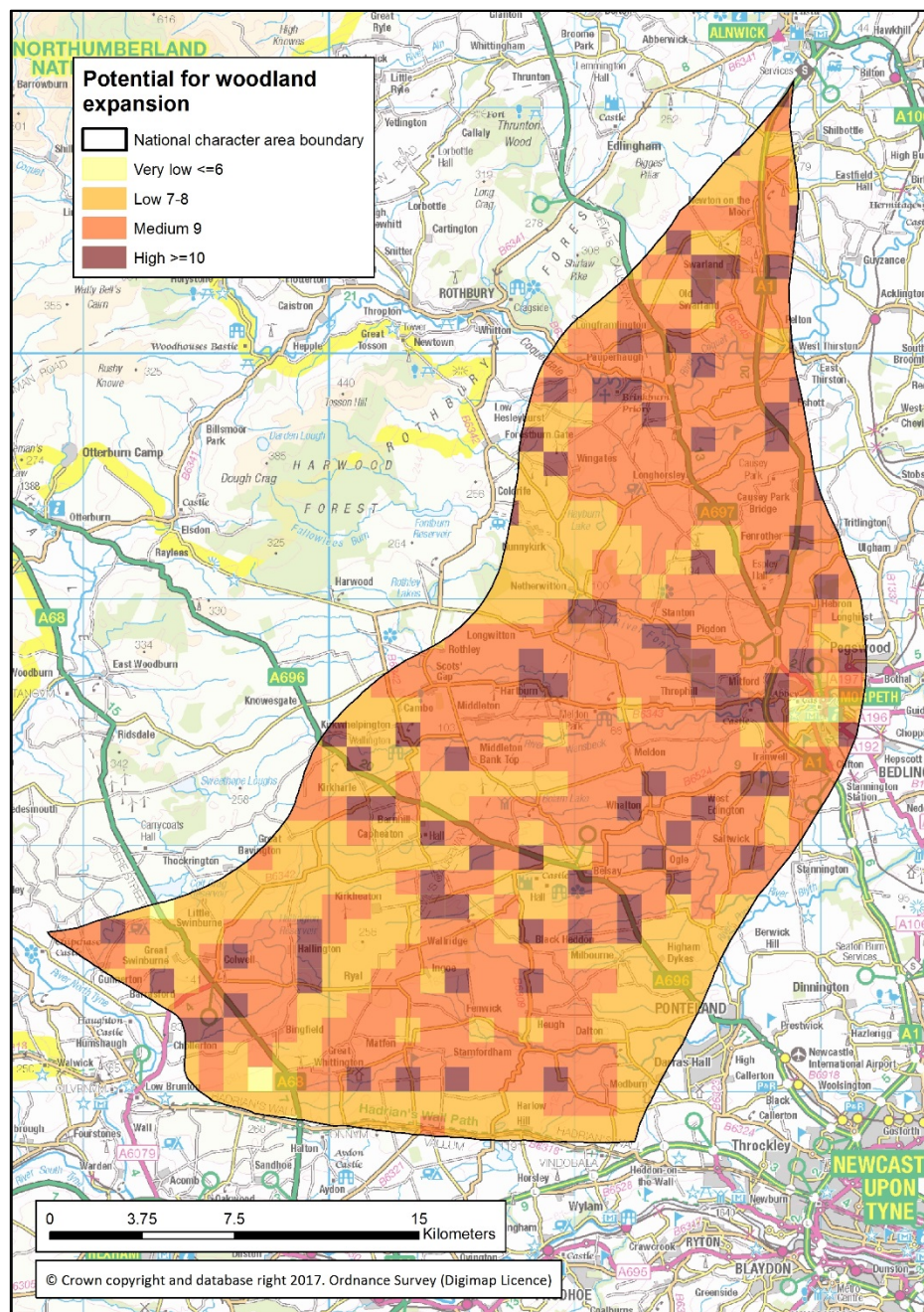
The NCA is a quiet, rural area, and is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. The southern edge lies within the transnational Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site (Hadrian's Wall), which also includes the German Limes and the Antonine Wall. It is a gently undulating landscape, with occasional outcrops of Sandstone and Whin Sill. Farmland is characterised by large, rectilinear fields, enclosed by stone walls at higher altitude, and hedgerows with hedgerow trees on lower-lying land. There is arable and cattle farming the lower land with sheep rearing and fodder crops at higher altitudes. It is dominated by villages and hamlets, with the market town of Morpeth being the largest settlement. Country houses and associated designed parklands are a feature, and the area is known for its association with Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, who was born at Kirkharle. The road network mainly comprises local routes, although there are several major roads that pass through the NCA, including the A1, A68 and the A696, all of which are cross-border routes between England and Scotland. A total of 8.5% of the NCA is woodland, but only 2% is considered to be ancient woodland, of which half has been replanted. The river valleys are well-wooded, semi-natural and ancient woodland, mixed woodlands and small coniferous blocks and shelter belts of trees on the more open farmland to the south.

The Historic Environment Character

Within the area of the NCA, there are many earthwork and buried prehistoric remains, including standing stones, rock art, tumuli, farmsteads, Iron-Age defended settlements, cairns and beacons. Dere Street Roman road runs through the area, its line followed by the A68, and there are numerous settlements of Romano-British date, though many are only visible as cropmarks as a result of ploughing. Hadrian's Wall forms the southern boundary to the NCA. Many of the villages have medieval origins, with evidence of planning in their layout, often laid out around greens. The proximity of the area to the Anglo-Scottish border led to the development of defended buildings, including small castles, tower houses and bastles. In the post medieval period, there was widespread landscape reorganisation and agricultural improvement, when many new country houses and model farms were developed. Many of these improvements were carried out in areas of former medieval field systems, or within newly enclosed and improved former common grazing, leaving a legacy of well-preserved settlement and field system earthworks. Many of the new country houses were accompanied by designed parklands, such as Wallington Hall, Belsay Castle and Kirkharle. Agricultural improvements, and the establishment of new field systems began in the 17th century, creating strong patterns of large, regular rectilinear fields bounded by hedges or, at higher altitudes, drystone walls.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of natural and historic environment attributes indicates that there is a low to medium potential for new woodland across much of the NCA area. The areas of highest potential for new woodland, are concentrated around the main river valleys and their tributaries. The NCA profile identified secure sustainable management of the woodland as a key opportunity, with increased woodland cover to form a coherent habitat network. The area has strongholds for the red squirrel population, and new woodland needs to support them. It is suggested that areas of new woodland can be placed on steep slopes and in valleys, to regulate water flow and reduce run-off. The valleys of the Coquet, Font, Blyth and Wansbeck are named specifically, as here new woodland would help to link and buffer habitats.



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