

NCA 13 South East Northumberland Coastal Plain

Overview

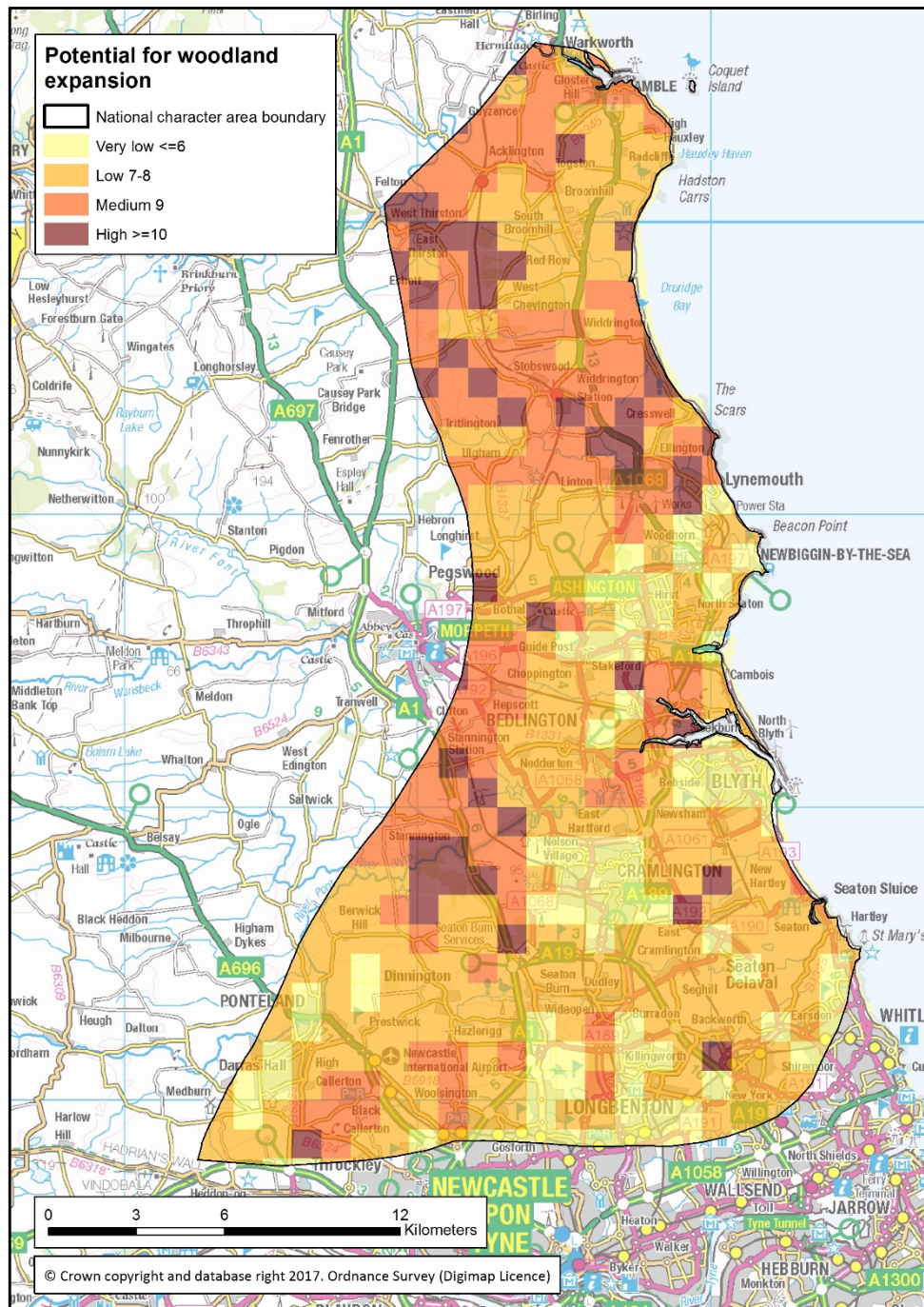
The NCA covers the low-lying and relatively flat coastal plain of Northumberland, with a coast of rocky headlands and sandy beaches, extending from the northern edge of Newcastle northwards to Amble. It is included within the Eastern Arable Agricultural Landscape Type. The eastern edge of the transnational Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site (Hadrian's Wall), which also includes the German Limes and the Antonine Wall, lies just within the southern boundary of the NCA. The more rural northern part is characterised by large, regular fields of mixed farming, whilst around the urban fringes in the south there are smaller, more irregular fields managed as part of small holdings. The large regular fields, bounded by post and wire fences or hedges, is partly the result of mining restoration. Restoration has led to a simplified rural landscape where historic character is difficult to read. Much of the area is developed and has an urban character, or is urban fringe and industrial. A large proportion of urban settlement originated as rapid industrial expansion in the 19th and 20th centuries, but also includes the new town of Cramlington. The main settlements include the northern suburbs of Newcastle, Ashington, Blyth, Cramlington, and Ponteland. Communications are dominated by a network of major roads linking the settlements, but also includes the A1 as well as the East Coast main railway line. Woodland coverage is fairly low, at around 8% of the NCA. Most woodland is made up of blocks and shelter belts of coniferous plantation, formed particularly as part of landscape restoration. Broadleaved woodland is found in the valleys and in designed parklands but only 1% of the NCA is ancient woodland.

The Historic Environment Character

The area has evidence of early human activity, including Mesolithic sites along the coast at Hauxley and Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, but the character of the landscape has been shaped mainly by medieval and industrial settlement. Medieval settlement was mostly nucleated, surrounded by large, open fields. As elsewhere across the far north of England, the proximity to the Anglo-Scottish border led to the construction of defended buildings in the medieval period, including Warkworth Castle and Cresswell Tower. Whilst the historic settlement pattern is still legible particularly across the more rural northern part of the NCA, the field pattern has been altered greatly by post medieval and modern industrial activity. From the 17th century onwards, there was large-scale landscape reorganisation and agricultural improvements, resulting in large, regular fields around model farmsteads, many linked to coal-enriched country estates. Along the coast, settlements developed around fishing, salt working and coastal trade. From the medieval period, coal was mined on a small scale in shallow bell pits which survive as earthwork features. From the 18th and 19th centuries, coal production increased and coastal ports, such as Blyth, grew to handle coal exports. The industry stimulated urban development and heavy industry. By the mid-20th century, there was a landscape of widespread urban and industrial development. Following the demise of the coal industry, most of the mining buildings and landscapes have been cleared away and the landscapes restored. Defensive features in the coastal landscape of the NCA has left a significant legacy of the First and Second World Wars, including pillboxes, searchlight bases, gun emplacements and long lines of anti-tank blocks.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that there is low potential for new woodland across much of the NCA area. This is a result of the extensively urbanised nature of much of the area. There are clusters of higher potential, however, in the more rural northern area, and in the river valleys of the Wansbeck and Coquet. Restored coal mining sites, in particular, provide an ideal opportunity for new woodland, as any impact on the historic environment would be minimal. Care should be taken, however, in the more rural landscape of the north of the NCA, to avoid areas with surviving medieval settlement remains.



NCA 13 South East Northumberland Coastal Plain