

## NCA 14 Tyne and Wear Lowlands

---

### *Overview*

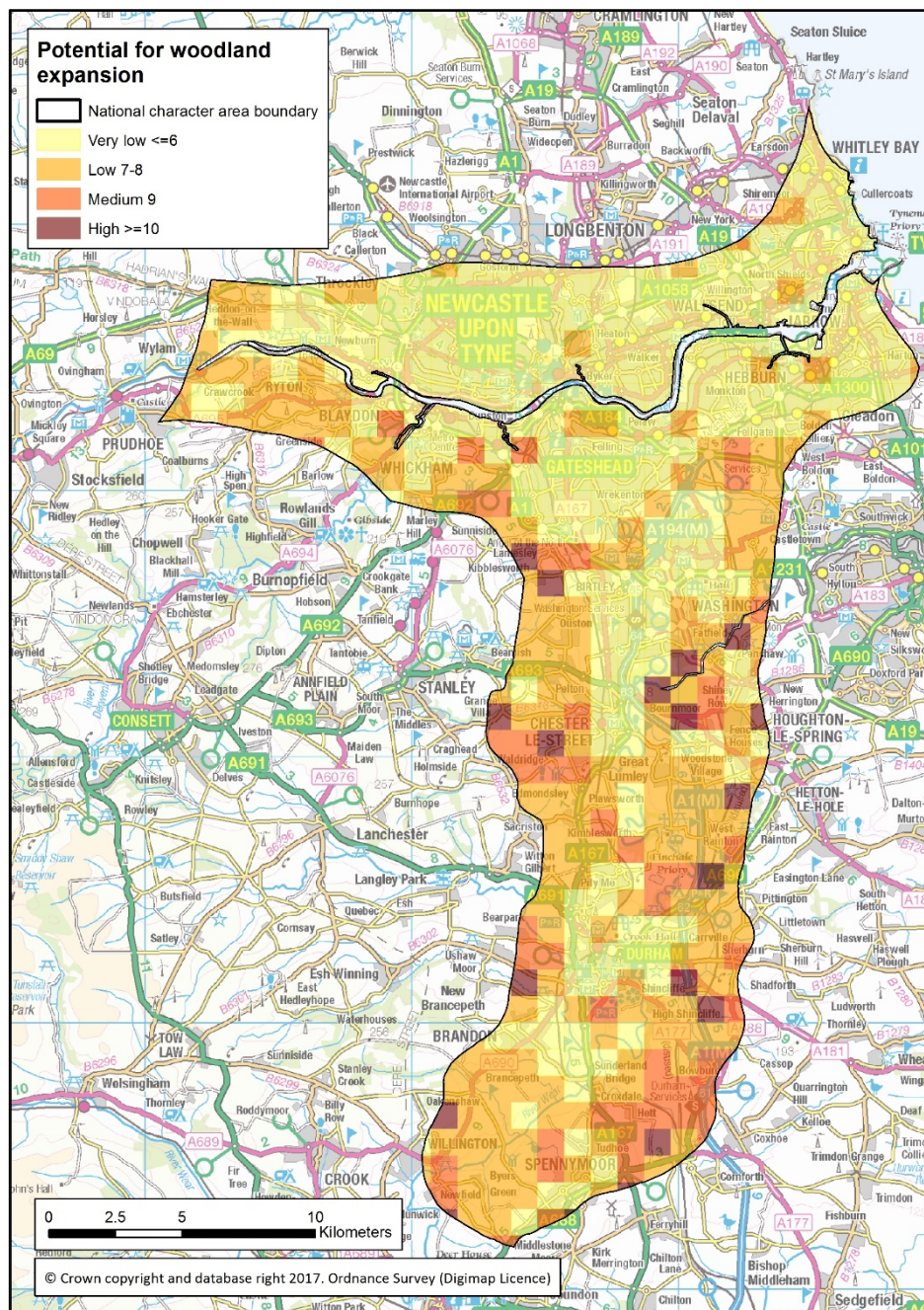
The NCA covers a gently undulating landscape cut through by the major rivers of the Tyne and Wear, creating deeply incised and dramatic valleys. There are two World Heritage Sites within the NCA: the eastern end of transnational Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site (Hadrian's Wall), which also includes the German Limes and the Antonine Wall, and Durham Castle and Cathedral. The NCA is included within the Eastern Arable Agricultural Landscape Type, although the area is heavily urbanised and industrialised, and includes the conurbations of Newcastle-Gateshead, the modern town of Washington, Chester-le-Street and the historic town of Durham. The NCA covers a major transport corridor, with arterial roads such as the A1M, A1 and A167, as well as the East Coast main railway line. The rural landscape is greatly fragmented by urban development in the north of the area, with more agricultural land to the south. Agricultural land is characterised by arable farming in large, regular fields enclosed by hedgerows, with more pasture land on the urban fringe. Where former mining sites have been reclaimed and restored, these have been developed for industry and housing, while others are now country parks, forestry or returned to agriculture. Around 9% of the NCA is covered by woodland, though much of the agricultural landscape has sparse cover. Woodland is concentrated in specific areas, with plantations on restored mining sites and broadleaved woodland on the steep sides of the river valleys. Ancient woodland accounts for around 2% of the NCA, although half of this has been replanted.

### *The Historic Environment Character*

There is some evidence for prehistoric settlement in the area from the Bronze Age, but there is more extensive archaeological evidence from the Roman period onwards. Newcastle was significant in the Roman period, lying at the eastern end of Hadrian's Wall and at a strategic crossing point of the Tyne. There were forts at Wallsend and South Shields, linked by roads to a fort at Chester-le-Street. In the early medieval period, the area was an important centre of early Christianity, particularly the twin monastic sites of Jarrow and Wearmouth (the latter in the neighbouring NCA), and at Durham. In the later medieval period, the area fell within the powerful Palatinate of Durham, under the control of the Bishop. At Durham, as the centre of the Palatinate, a castle and cathedral were established on the high bluff within a loop of the River Wear. The rural, later medieval landscape was one of planned villages and towns, with large areas of arable production in open fields. From the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was a process of enclosure of both open fields, and common wastes and pastures. Enclosure and agricultural improvement was accompanied by the building of model farms. Coal has been exploited since Roman times, but in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, technological innovations led to a massive expansion that transformed the landscape. Alongside new pit villages and urban expansion, extensive networks of infrastructure, particularly railways and tramroads. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Newcastle and Gateshead became major centres of engineering and ship-building.

## Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that there is low potential for woodland expansion, reflecting the largely urban character of the NCA. Where the mapping does indicate areas for new woodland, it is in the urban fringe and on the valley sides. The clusters of higher potential identified by the mapping is reflected by the environmental potential set out in the NCA profile, which emphasises the need to reverse fragmented habitats in the urban fringe areas, including re-connecting fragmented woodlands and hedgerows. Woodlands in the steep-sided valleys are also a priority for conservation, alongside new woodlands for connectivity. There is potential for planting in areas of former industry, particularly where there are country parks and alongside many of the former railways and tramroads that are now public rights of way.



NCA 14 Tyne and Wear Lowlands