

NCA 23 Tees Lowlands

Overview

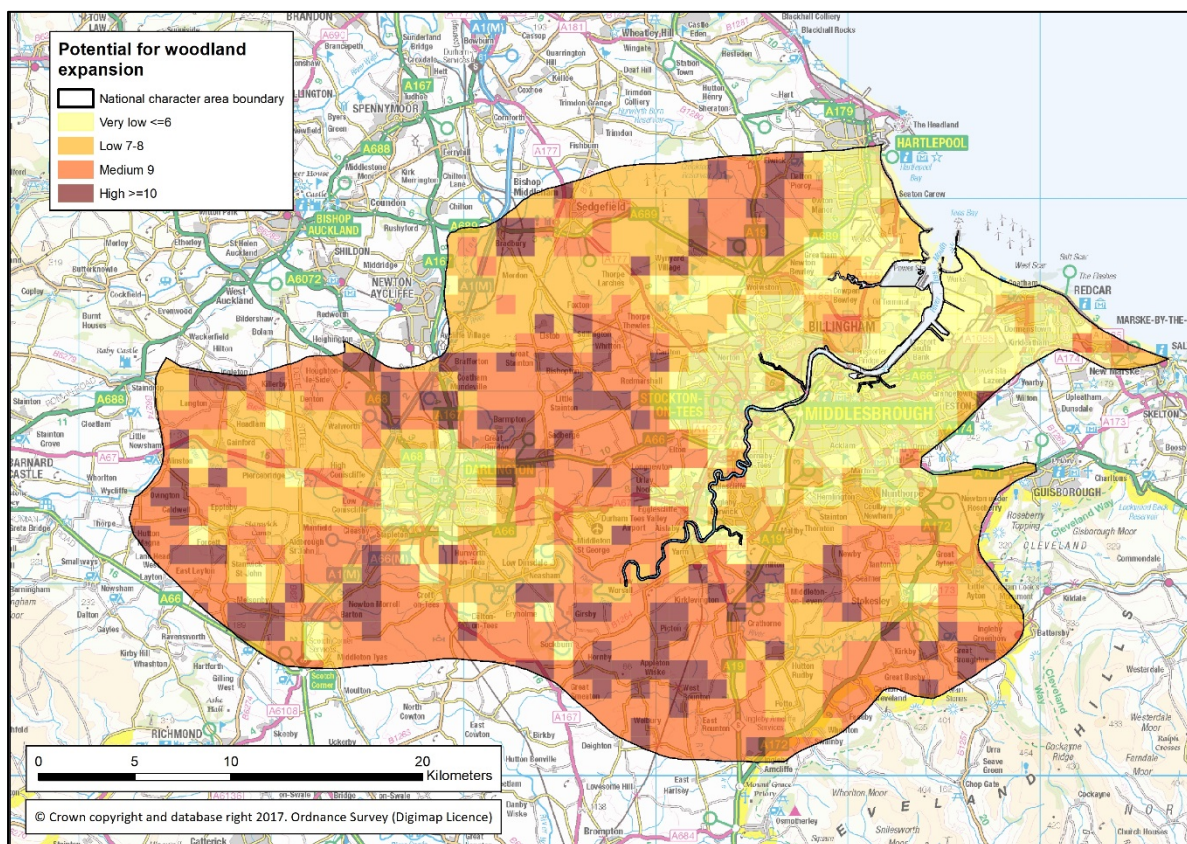
The NCA is a broad plain around the mouth and lower reaches of the River Tees, with land rising gradually to the west. The landscape is mostly undesignated, though the southern boundary lies just within the North York Moors National Park. The NCA lies within the Eastern Arable Agricultural Landscape Type, though it is a heavily developed and industrialised area, based around the Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees and Billingham conurbation. There is a more rural hinterland, with a landscape of high-quality agricultural land, predominantly arable, with scattered trees and hedgerows. Within this rural hinterland are smaller market towns and villages, such as Yarm and Stokesley, as well as the industrial town of Darlington. Separated from Billingham by agricultural land and salt marsh are the coastal settlements of Seaton Carew and Hartlepool to the north. The landscape north and west of Billingham is more undulating, with some pasture and wooded areas. The low-lying farmland in the flood plain of the River Skerne has been reclaimed from extensive areas of fenland and carr habitat. The field pattern is mixed, with some irregular fields, though the main enclosures are regular and bounded by hedgerows, or by ditches in the flood plains. The area is crossed by major transport links, including the A1(M) and A19 and East Coast main railway line railway. Woodland cover is very low at 5% of the NCA, of which ancient woodland accounts for only 1%. There is some deciduous woodland on the steep riverbanks, such as the River Leven, but the main concentration of woodland is to the north of Billingham, particularly around the parkland estate of Wynyard Park.

The Historic Environment Character

There is significant evidence of Roman activity in the area, particularly focused on Dere Street, the Roman road that runs north-south through the western section of the NCA, along with the fortified crossing of the River Tees at Piercebridge. There is also evidence of Roman activity at Ingleby Barwick, Linthorpe and Warrenby. Arable farming seems to have been widespread in the later medieval period, with a subsequent change to pastoral farming, which has helped to preserve former arable field systems as earthworks. The medieval settlement pattern was dominated by planned villages around a village green, and those in the north of the area came under the ownership of the Bishop of Durham. Market towns that originated in the later medieval period, such as Darlington, Yarm and Stokesley, grew in the 18th and 19th centuries, stimulated by the growing agricultural markets and the intensification of farming in the area, and the establishment of model farms. From the 19th century, there was massive urban expansion around the Tees Estuary as steel-making and shipbuilding industries grew, supplied by coal from the Durham Coalfield and ironstone from the Cleveland Hills. The need to transport coal from the Durham Coalfield to the estuary led to the development of a rail network, including the world's first steam-hauled passenger railway that opened in 1825 between Stockton-on-Tees and Darlington. A chemical industry developed from the exploitation of underground salt deposits. These industries, with the later addition of oil refining, continued on a large scale through the 19th and 20th centuries.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates only a low level of opportunity to expand woodland across the NCA, but the score is skewed by the large areas of urban development. Outside the conurbation, the mapping shows a medium level of opportunity for new woodland, with a few small areas of higher opportunity. The raised level of opportunity for potential new woodland across much of the rural western part of the NCA relates to the dominance of grade 3 agricultural land. The mapping, however, does not include data on historic landscape character and non-designated archaeological features. Any new planting in these areas, therefore, should ensure that the historic field boundaries and relict field systems are respected, and that it should avoid impact on archaeological sites and their settings. New woodland could also be planted along the river valleys, an opportunity highlighted by the NCA profile.



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