

## NCA 26 Vale of Pickering

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### *Overview*

The Vale of Pickering NCA is a low-lying but gently undulating landscape covering the lower reaches of the River Derwent and its tributaries. It is included within the Eastern Arable Agricultural Landscape Type. The NCA lies between the dramatic uplands of the North York Moors to the north and the Yorkshire Wolds to the south, and the western edge of the NCA includes part of the Howardian Hills AONB. The rural landscape is dominated by reclaimed and drained wetlands and canalised river courses. The result is fertile land suitable for cultivation, and around two thirds of the NCA is under arable, whilst the remainder is pasture. The fields in the eastern part of the NCA are medium to large and rectilinear in form, reflecting their origin as reclaimed and drained wetlands. In the western part of the NCA, fields are small to medium, fairly regular in shape reflecting the origin of many as enclosed strip fields, though having undergone much rationalisation and reorganisation. Settlement is largely nucleated, in the form of planned villages laid out on the springline around the fringes of the vale, or on the slight rises within the valley. There are some individual farms, built following the drainage and enclosure of the wetlands. The communications network is largely one of local roads and lanes, though the northern and southern boundaries of the NCA follow the line of the main road to Scarborough and Filey on the coast, and the coastal settlements are linked by the A165. Woodland cover is very low, at only 3% of the NCA, although nearly half of the total is ancient woodland mainly restricted to the western end where the land is higher. There is also a small amount of carr woodland at the eastern end of the vale. The remainder of the woodland takes the form of shelter belts and game coverts, mostly small in size.

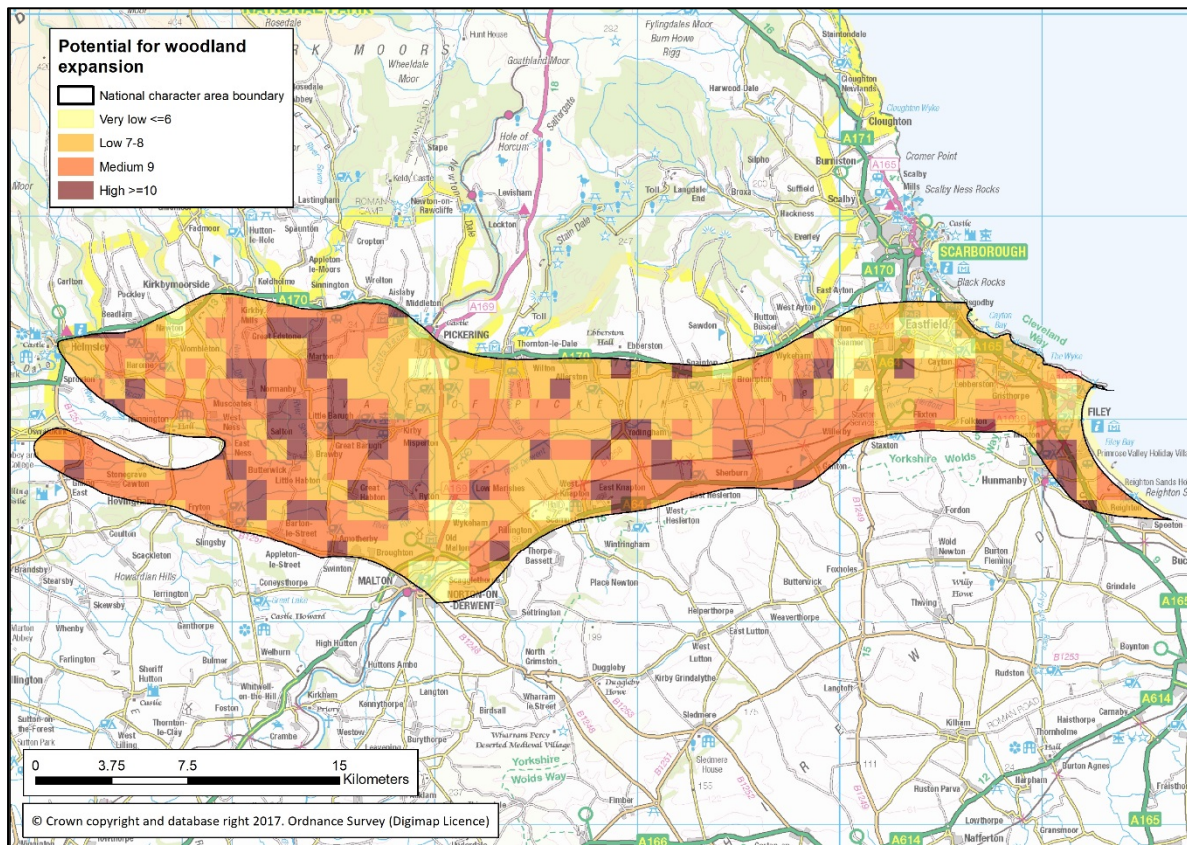
### *The Historic Environment Character*

The Vale of Pickering has a remarkable and complete sequence of archaeological and palaeo-environmental evidence for human activity, beginning in the late Palaeolithic with the flint assemblages discovered at Star Carr. Star Carr is significant for remarkable organic preservation, particularly of wood and bone objects, within waterlogged peat. The earliest evidence for activity in the Mesolithic period comes from the peat at the eastern end of the Vale. From the Neolithic and early Bronze Age there is evidence that islands within the peat fen were used for settlement and burial. Survey has identified extensive settlements of enclosed and unenclosed farmsteads with round houses and distinctive 'ladder settlement' on the Vale slopes, date from the Iron Age into the Roman period, particularly under the wind-blown sands along the south of the Vale. In the Roman period, there was a town on the banks of the Derwent associated with a fort in Malton, and the Vale became the centre of a major pottery industry in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. There is archaeological evidence of extensive early medieval settlement in the Vale, and it appears to have become the focus of several very early Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical establishments, and the centre of the Kingdom of Deira. The medieval settlement pattern was one of nucleated villages established on the spring line around the edge of the Vale, or on areas of slightly higher land within the Vale itself, with associated common field systems. Many of the common fields of the eastern Vale remained open into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when large parts were enclosed and drained, accompanied by the establishment of new farms as well as the enlargement of existing farmsteads. At the west end of the Vale, there is more anciently enclosed land with well-

wooded hedgerows and areas of woodland. The settlement pattern here is more mixed with dispersed settlement, including moated sites and the former medieval grange farms.

### Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that opportunities for woodland expansion are limited within the NCA because of the importance of the wetlands, and particularly because of the sensitive archaeological and palaeo-environmental deposits. The NCA profile, however, highlights the possibility of creating and enhancing small woodlands around farmsteads, and strengthening the network of hedgerows, particularly in the western part of the Vale. The profile recommendations are reflected by the mapping, which has some clusters of higher potential in the west, though the overall potential for new woodland is low. The mapping indicates that new woodland could be absorbed in the Vale to the west of Malton, and on the wetlands of the southern Vale, though this area is archaeologically very sensitive.



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