

NCA 27 Yorkshire Wolds

Overview

The Yorkshire Wolds NCA is a chalk landscape, very rural in character, rising in an escarpment from the Vales of York and Pickering. It is included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and the underlying chalk creates a characteristic gently rolling landscape with deeply incised dry valleys. Soils are thin and unimproved chalk grassland was once widespread, but is now confined to some of the steepest slopes of the dry valleys and on some cliff tops by the coast. The chalk escarpment facing west to the Vale of York and north to the Vale of Pickering is intensively farmed in places. Fields across the NCA are rectilinear in form, medium to large in size on the Wolds plateau, but necessarily smaller and less regular in form on valley sides. The NCA is sparsely populated with small, planned villages in the valleys and scattered farms across the plateau. The road system, too, is rural in character, comprising mostly local roads and lanes. The few main roads that cross the NCA link larger settlements outside the area, such as Bridlington, Driffield, York and Hull. Woodland cover is very low, at only 6% of the NCA, of which only 3% is ancient woodland. Woodland is generally restricted to the steep valley sides, where cultivation is not possible. Woodland is an obvious feature of the valley sides of the northern and western scarps, but it is also found on the deeply incised valleys that cut the Wolds plateau.

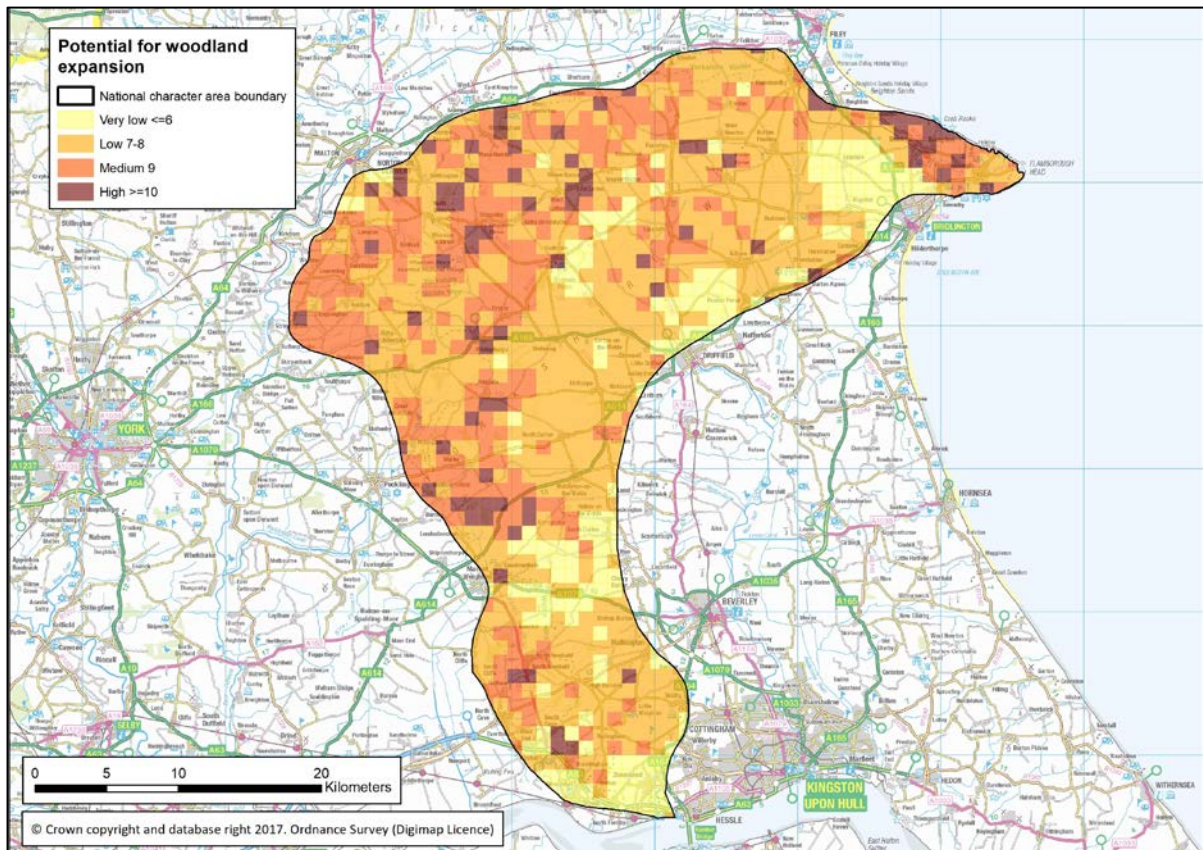
The Historic Environment Character

There is widespread evidence of human activity from the early Neolithic period onwards, in the form of well-preserved earthworks, including burial mounds, defensive enclosures and boundary features. There are numerous Bronze Age barrows, Iron Age square barrow cemeteries and ladder settlements, and settlement remains dating to the Roman and early medieval periods. The Wolds are also known for many deserted and shrunken later medieval settlements, particularly Wharram Percy, which was the subject of a long-term research project. Cultivation on the Wolds in the medieval period was largely confined to the areas around the valleys, preserved as earthwork terraces. The Wold plateau was largely unenclosed pasture, grazed as common. The plateau was enclosed mostly from the late 18th century onwards, creating a landscape dominated by regular fields bounded by hedges, with wide and straight enclosure roads. Alongside this large-scale enclosure and improvement, new model farmsteads were built, scattered across the open farmland and away from traditional villages and roads. There are also estate villages, many with prominent churches, associated with the parkland and estate landscapes of the country houses, which often include deer parks and estate woodlands developed in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that there is only a low level of potential opportunities for woodland expansion. The low potential is at least partly the result of the good quality soils and the importance of the area for arable farming. It also reflects the numerous nature conservation designations and the importance of the archaeological resource. Where opportunities are indicated by the mapping, these are biased towards the western and northern scarps. New woodland in these areas would most likely take the form of expansion of existing woodland, and linking patches of woodland.

This is the most wooded area of the NCA, and new woodland here would enhance and strengthen existing landscape character. These recommendations are reflected in the opportunities set out in the NCA profile, alongside the recommendation to create riparian woodland along watercourses and on the lower eastern slopes of the NCA, to help reduce water pollution and sediment run-off. Care should be taken with any new planting, however, to avoid the numerous archaeological monuments, especially on the valley sides where there are the remains of cultivation terraces.



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