

NCA 29 Howardian Hills

Overview

The Howardian Hills NCA comprises a range of sandstone and limestone low hills, separated from the higher North York Moors to the north by a shallow valley. It is included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type. The eastern and western edges are defined by sharp scarp slopes, and the southern edge is marked by the valley of the River Derwent. The majority of the area is within the Howardian Hills AONB, and a small part along the northern edge is within the North York Moors National Park. The landscape is varied, with open ridges and plateaux under arable cultivation or large-scale coniferous plantations, where fields are large and regular in form. The sheltered valleys are well-wooded with limestone pastures. Settlement is a mixture of farmsteads and villages, with village locations mainly, though not exclusively, focused around the edges of the hills in the sheltered valleys. Other than the A64 road between York and Malton, the road network is one of local routes. Designed parklands are a particular feature of the NCA, with several small examples, though the extensive parkland of Castle Howard dominates. The NCA is well-wooded, with 15% of the total area under woodland cover. There is also a high proportion of ancient woodland, though most of this has been replanted, covering 7% of the NCA. Large proportions of the broadleaved woodland are in the sheltered valleys, whilst the coniferous plantations are on the plateaux. Designed landscapes account for a significant proportion of woodland, much of which has been replanted as conifers.

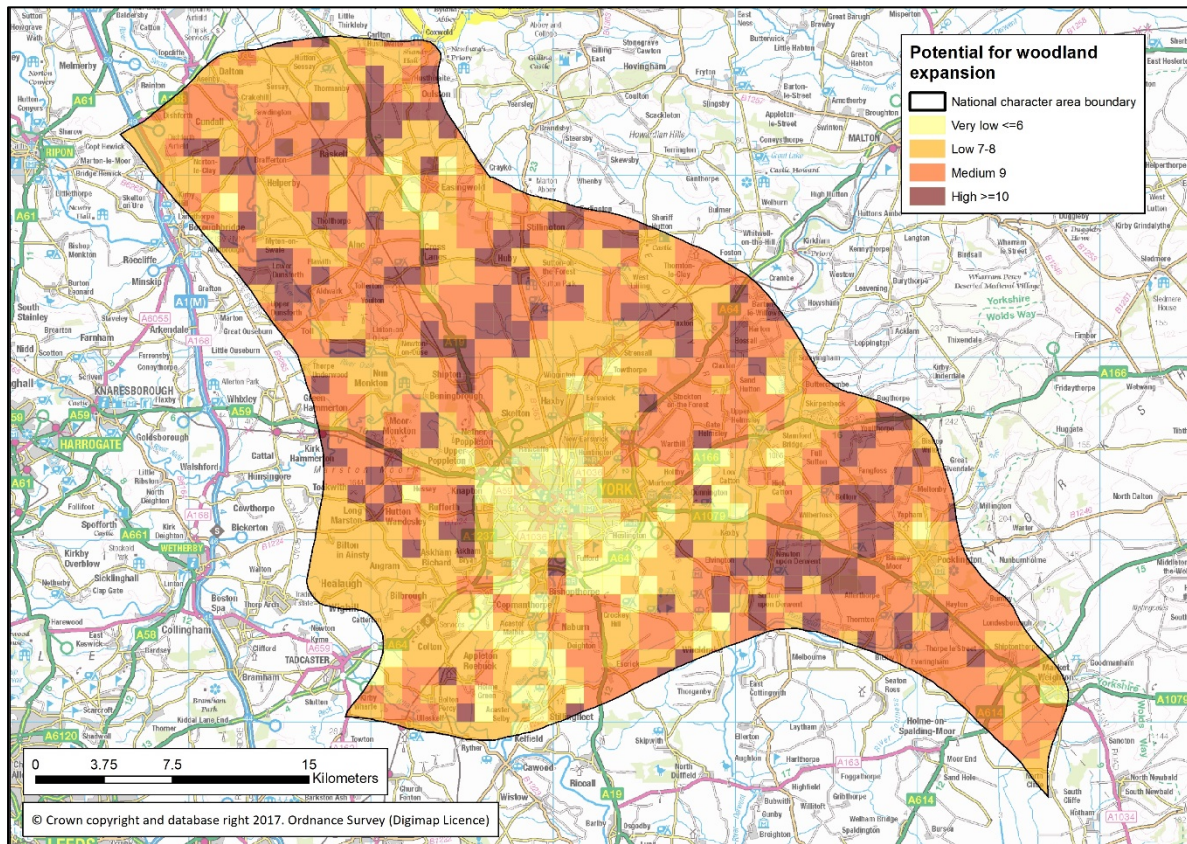
The Historic Environment Character

The NCA contains well-preserved evidence for prehistoric activity, in the form of Neolithic and Bronze Age burial mounds, and systems of banks and ditches that run along the edges of prominent hills. There is extensive and well-preserved evidence of both enclosed and unenclosed farmsteads dating to the Iron Age, and in the Roman period a pottery industry was established at Crambeck, which supplied grey tablewares across northern England. The present-day settlement pattern of planned villages with surrounding common field systems dates from the medieval period, though there was a process of settlement shrinkage and desertion in the late medieval and post medieval periods. Medieval field systems have become less legible, as enclosed strip fields have been consolidated and rationalised into larger enclosures. There are significant country houses and estates, with designed parklands within the NCA, many established from medieval castles or former monastic establishments. The wealth of the gentry and aristocratic landowners has left its mark on the extensive areas of parkland, in particular Castle Howard. Extensive blocks of woodland are part of this legacy, though many of the original broadleaved or mixed planting schemes were converted to coniferous plantation in the 20th century.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a medium level of potential for expanding woodland within the NCA, particularly in valleys and around existing wooded areas. The importance of woodland cover is picked up as an opportunity by the NCA profile, as a means of linking habitats, for example on valley sides and around settlements. The restoration of woodland within historic estates and parklands, and the reinstatement of wood pasture is also highlighted. These opportunities would complement the historic landscape, but must be accompanied by landscape assessment in order to

protect archaeological features and the surviving grain of the medieval farming landscape. Historic designed landscapes could be a particular target for restoration, alongside assessment to ensure original parkland designs were respected and being enhanced.



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