

NCA 31 Morecambe Coast and Lune Estuary

Overview

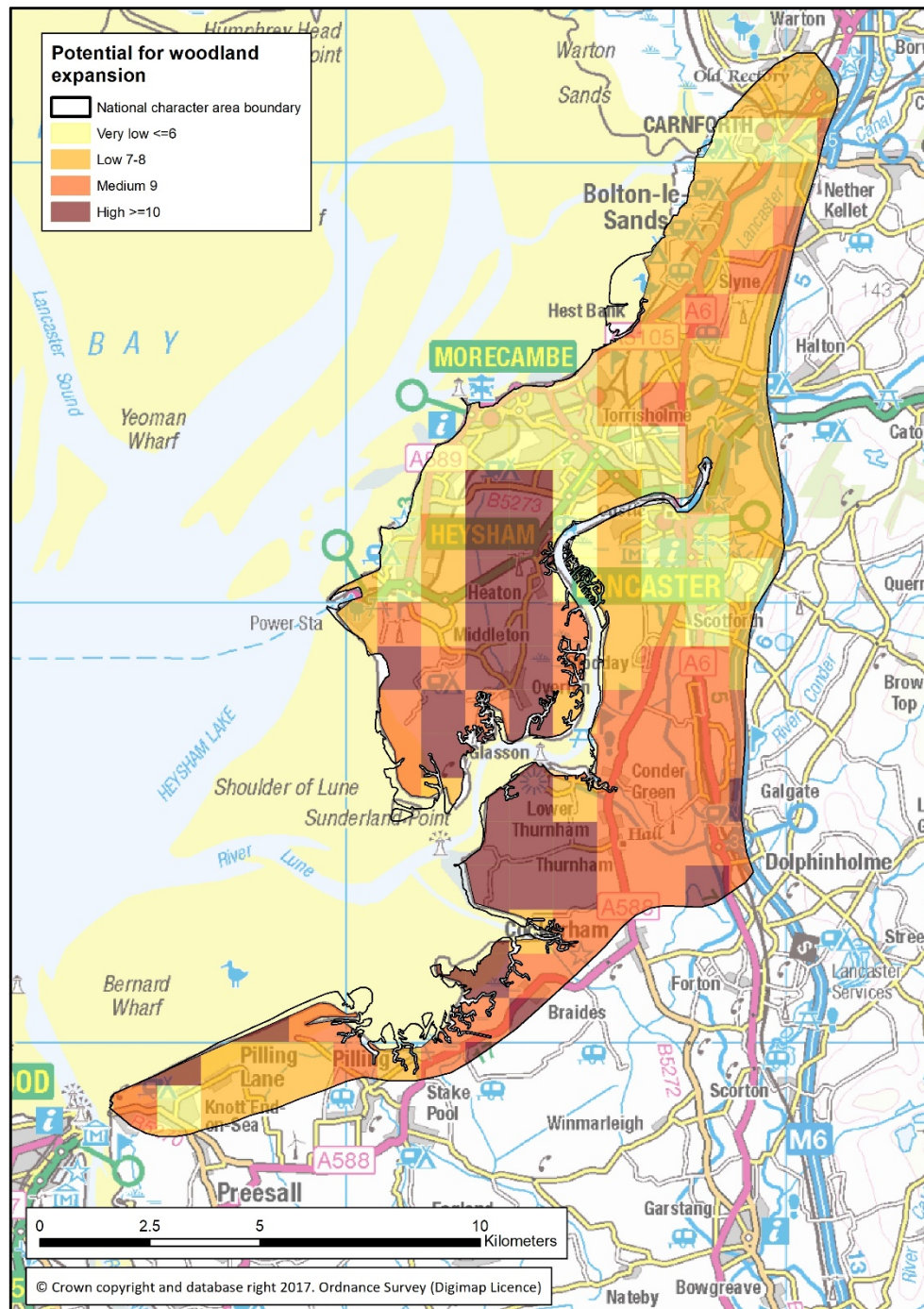
This small NCA covers a coastal strip around the eastern and southern parts of Morecambe Bay. It overlooks the extensive salt marshes, sands and mudflats of the Bay, and is made up of drained coastal mosses, and a gently undulating landscape of drumlin fields. It is included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type. There are limited rock outcrops on the beach and the low cliffs of Heysham Head and Sunderland Point. Agriculture is mainly pastoral, though soils are fairly fertile. The NCA is characterised by river estuaries, including the Lune, the Cocker and the Wyre, and behind many of the coastal salt marshes are areas of reclaimed salt marshes and mosses, drained through networks of ditches and defended by sea walls. Here, fields are large and open. The low-lying and flat landscape, combined with the open views over Morecambe Bay and an upland backdrop, gives a strong sense of isolation. Gently rolling farmland is concentrated north of the River Cocker estuary, where there is a pattern of smaller fields, anciently enclosed by hedges, often with standard trees. Much of the NCA is urban in character, particularly the Morecambe-Lancaster area, between Bolton-le-Sands in the north to Heysham in the south. Heysham is the main port with a nuclear power plant on Heysham Point. Outside of the historic centres, there is a suburban feel to many of the settlements, with large areas of bungalow development, and caravan sites and golf courses are a distinctive element of the rural coastal landscape. The NCA also covers the important west coast transport corridor, which developed between the coastal marshes and the uplands to the east. Within this narrow corridor is the Lancaster Canal, the West Coast main railway line, the A6 and the M6. Woodland cover is very low, at only 3% of the NCA. Ancient woodland accounts for only 7% of all woodland. There are occasional copses and hedgerow trees, mostly on the hillside slopes flanking the River Lune.

The Historic Environment Character

The narrow coastal strip was an important transport corridor in the Roman period, and there was a fort and town at Lancaster. Heysham, to the south of Lancaster, developed as an early Christian centre, with the chapel of St Patrick established possibly as early as the 8th century. Soon after the Norman Conquest, Lancaster became the centre of the major lordship or Honour of Lancaster. A castle was built and the town established as a borough. Lancaster also developed as a port, and all around the coast, fishing was an important industry. Lancaster became a key port in the transatlantic trade in the 18th century, though with the silting of the River Lune, port facilities developed on Sunderland Point at the mouth of the estuary. The construction of the Lancaster Canal in the 1790s also helped Lancaster's trade, and to transport products from the growing textile industry in the city. Access to new port facilities at Glasson Dock were enabled by a canal link from the Lancaster Canal in the early 1800s. It was the advent of the railways in the later 19th century that led to major phase of urban expansion, and the founding of Morecambe as a seaside resort.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that this area has a high potential for the creation of new woodland. The NCA profile highlights woodland expansion within opportunities to enhance rural land management practices. In particular, the profile suggests connecting existing ancient woodland habitats to enhance biodiversity and to create stepping stones for woodland expansion. It also suggests the management of new woodland away from the coast through the encouragement of wood fuel as a local energy source. New planting should be focused on the low drumlins hills away from the coast, where the open salt marshes and reclaimed wetlands are important habitats.



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