

NCA 32 Lancashire and Amounderness Plain

Overview

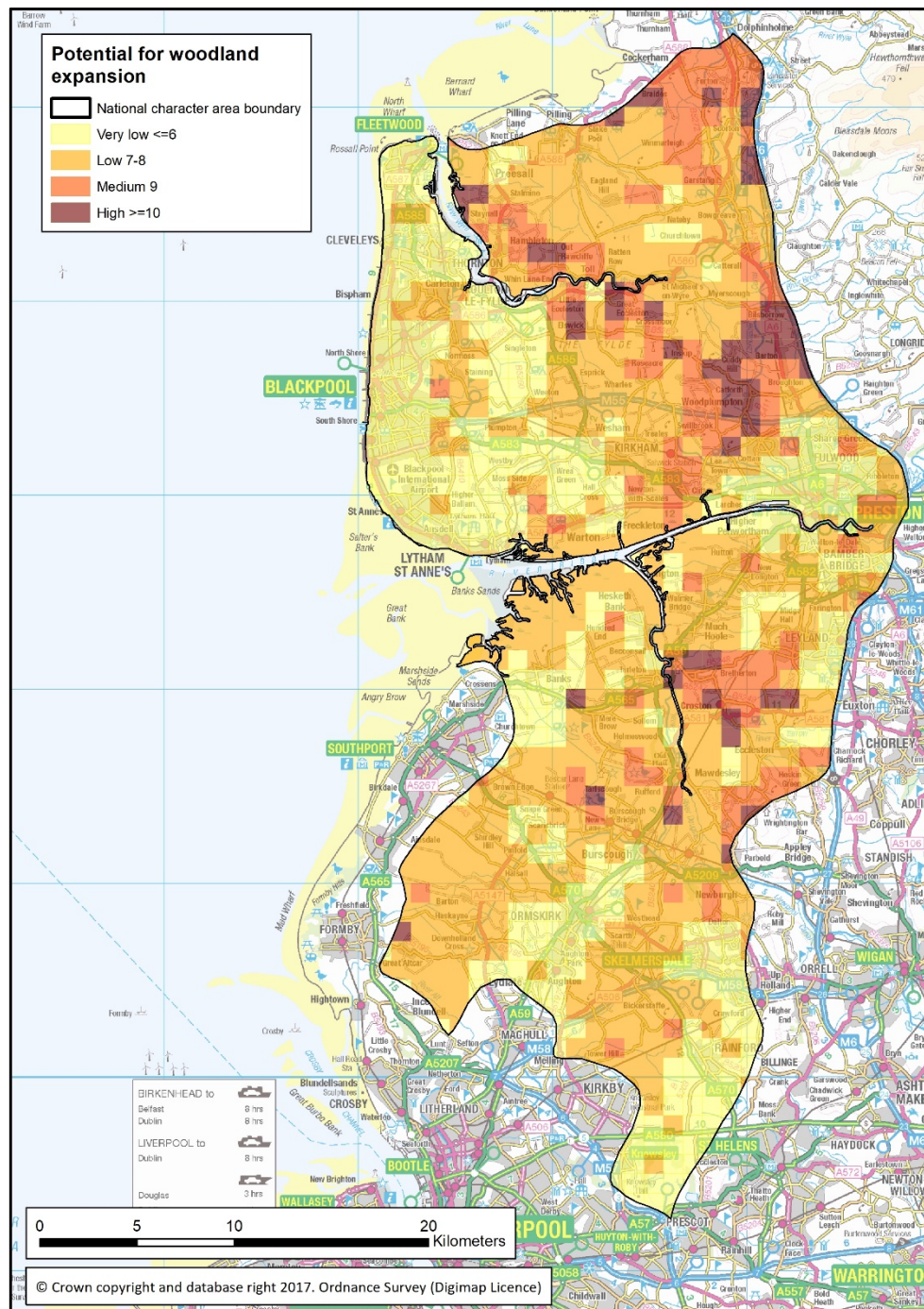
The NCA comprises an open, relatively flat to gently undulating coastal landscape, bisected by the River Ribble and its estuary. It is included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type. On the Fylde, north of the Ribble, the plain is predominantly improved pasture with isolated areas of arable, with medium-sized regular fields bounded by hedgerows and drainage ditches, and numerous field ponds. South of the Ribble Estuary is predominantly highly productive arable, with large, rectilinear fields bounded by ditches. The lack of hedgerows and hedgerow trees, combined with the flat topography and large arable fields, creates a large-scale and sweeping landscape. Settlement is highly urbanised throughout the NCA. Along the Fylde coast the Victorian and Edwardian seaside resorts of Lytham St Anne's, Blackpool, Bispham, Thornton Cleveleys and Fleetwood form a continuous band of development. The flat landscape means that Blackpool Tower is visible throughout the Fylde and beyond, and is symbolic of the seaside resort character of the coast. Inland on the Fylde are scattered farmsteads, but the settlement pattern is dominated by villages and small towns such as Poulton-le-Fylde, Kirkham and Walton. The largest single population centre is the city of Preston and suburbs, which sits across the River Ribble. South of the Ribble, Ormskirk and Skelmersdale are large urban centres, but the overall settlement character is a rural one of individual farmsteads and small villages, with numerous manor houses. Major road and rail routes, including the M55 motorway, connect the urban areas, though away from these key arteries, the road network comprises mainly local roads and lanes. Woodland is sparse outside historic estates such as Knowsley Park, accounting for only 4% of the total area. Of this, only 4% is ancient woodland. Where there is woodland, it tends to be in large blocks of mixed species, which accentuate the regular field pattern. There is some ancient wood pasture in the east on the clay soils.

The Historic Environment Character

Until the late 17th century, the area had vast areas of mossland, which underwent large-scale change with the introduction of wind-powered drainage, succeeded by steam-powered pumps in the 19th century. The resultant fertile land was much in demand for arable and horticultural production. The process of drainage uncovered evidence of human activity in prehistory, mainly in the form of flint scatters and stone tools from the Mesolithic period onwards. In the Roman period, there was a Roman fort and settlement at Kirkham. Areas of ancient enclosure on the Fylde and between the Rivers Ribble and Douglas, indicate that medieval settlement was established on areas of slightly higher ground, with small common fields that now survive as enclosed strip fields. Cultivated land was extended through piecemeal enclosure and the drainage of the mossland edges, but the area remained sparsely populated. Large-scale drainage and enclosure created high-grade pasture and arable land, thus the area became known for grain production and small-scale dairying, followed by market produce from the late 19th century. Evidence for large-scale drainage can be seen in a few isolated windmills, built to power drainage pumps and for grinding corn. Large numbers of ponds and small marl pits were excavated for fertiliser on the coastal plain in the 19th century. Blackpool grew from a hamlet in the late 18th century, expanding hugely following the opening of the railways in the mid-19th century, when it became the first mass tourism resort for Lancashire's industrial workers.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates only a low level of potential for woodland expansion. Opportunities are highlighted away from the coastal lowland, particularly along the north bank of the River Wyre, north of Preston and around the settlements on the slightly higher land south of the Ribble. Any new woodland in these areas, however, needs to take account of the high potential for archaeological remains, as the limited areas of higher land would have attracted human settlement from an early date. The NCA profile highlights opportunities for the creation of wet woodland, but this may be limited because of importance of the high-quality farmland in areas of former mosses.



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