

NCA 35 Lancashire Valleys

Overview

The NCA is a long narrow corridor, orientated south-west to north-east, encompassing the valley of the River Calder and part of the Ribble valley westward from their confluence. It is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. Agriculture is dominated by pasture, with meadows on the valley bottom. Fields are small to medium, bounded by hedgerows on the lower elevations, and drystone walls on the higher valley sides. It is a highly urbanised area, comprising a string of almost continuous industrial towns. The valley is an important transport corridor, linking Lancashire and Yorkshire through the Pennine moors. The valley carries the Leeds Liverpool Canal and the M65, as well as several main roads running east west through the towns, and north south routes linking the Lancashire towns to Manchester, including the M6 and M61. The area contains some of Lancashire's major towns, including Accrington, Blackburn, Burnley and Chorley. In the more rural areas, the settlement pattern is one of villages and hamlets, with some scattered farmsteads. Woodland cover is low, at 8% of the NCA. Of this, just under 20% is broadleaved woodland. Small woodlands are scattered throughout the farmland, often associated with river valleys and the steeper-sided cloughs. There is also some wet woodland on the flood plains. Woodland also occurs within the designed landscapes of some of the large country houses which dot the NCA, and within parkland in the urban fringe.

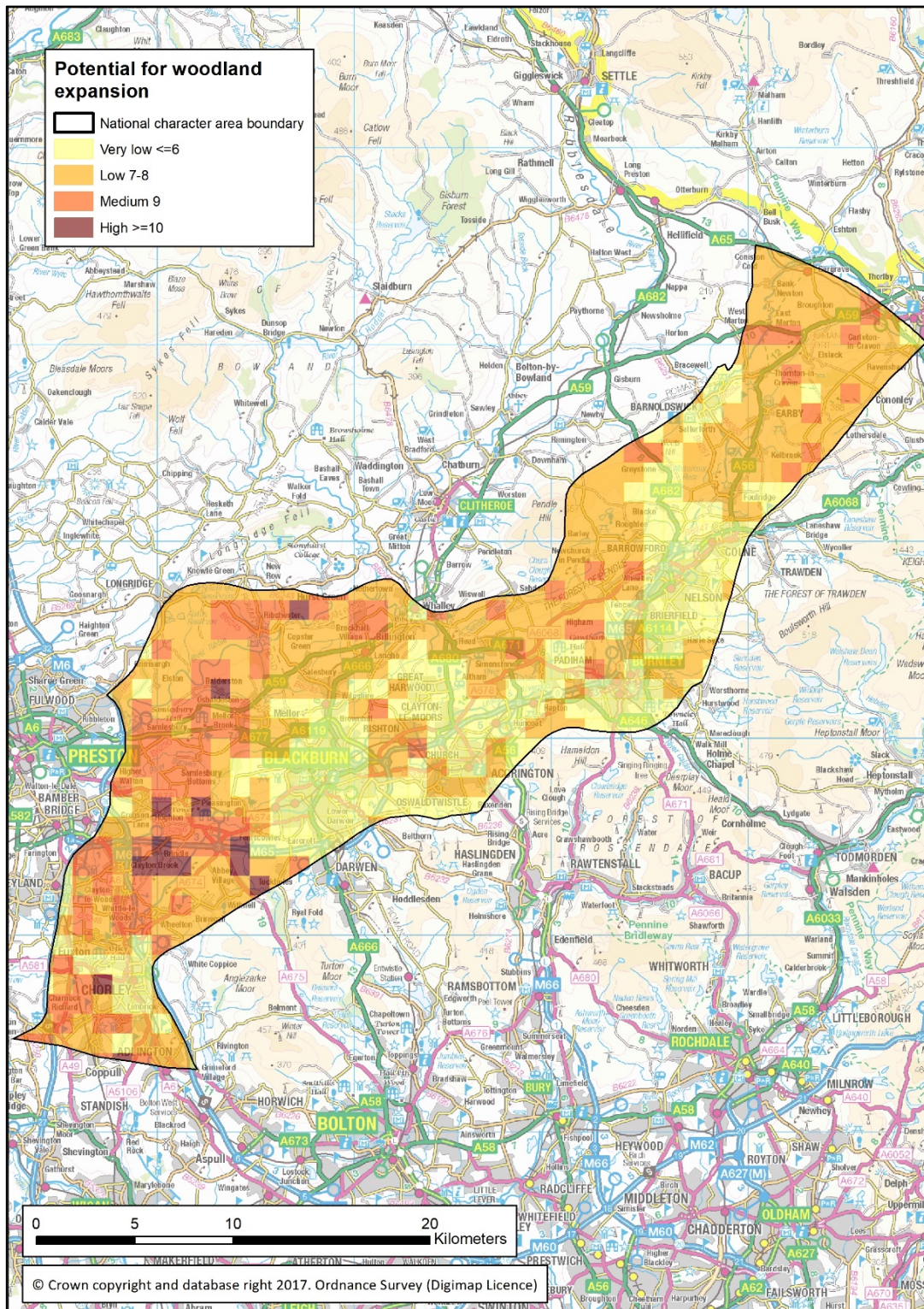
The Historic Environment Character

The developed character of the NCA means that evidence for prehistoric occupation is restricted largely to higher land outside the urban areas. There are two hillforts, one overlooking the River Hodder valley near Whalley, another overlooking the Calder near Colne, and several barrows and ring cairns. Evidence for Roman occupation is centred on the fort at Ribchester, with another fort further north west at Elslack, linked by a road which ran along the Calder Valley. In the later medieval period, the settlement pattern was a rural one with very few towns, but some manorial centres with urban functions. Whalley was an ecclesiastical centre and Chorley was a borough, but they were no larger than some of the other non-urban settlements, like Blackburn and Burnley. The area became a centre of the textile industry from the 17th century onwards, leading to the growth of many existing settlements. Many rural farms also grew in the post medieval period as a result of textile production, expanding into folds, effectively small hamlets with dedicated loom shops. The industry moved over to cotton, and the area began to specialise in the production of cotton or mixed cotton and wool cloth. With the introduction of steam power, textiles and its associated trades dominated employment, attracting immigrants from the countryside around, and then from further afield. By the mid-19th century, the industrial settlements had begun to expand greatly, leading to the highly urbanised area seen today.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that the opportunities for woodland expansion are low, restricted by the extensive areas of urban development. Areas around the urban fringe do offer some potential for woodland planting, however. Where there are clusters of higher potential, these are in the west of the area, between Blackburn, Preston and Chorley, where the valley widens out. The recommendations in the

NCA profile complement the mapping, as it recommends new woodland on degraded farmland and on derelict land in the urban fringe. Care should be taken, however, to avoid below-ground industrial remains. The profile also recommends new woodlands on clough- and ridge-sides, and this is echoed by the mapping, which shows some potential on higher land on the north side of the Calder Valley.



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