

NCA 44 Central Lincolnshire Vale

Overview

The NCA is a long narrow area, running from the Humber Estuary at South Ferriby in the north to the edge of the Fens in the south. It is marked by the edge of the Wolds to the east, and by the River Witham and the Fens to the south and west. It is included within the Eastern Arable Agricultural Landscape Type, and farming is dominated by arable, with a pattern of medium to large, regular or rectilinear fields. There has been significant hedgerow loss, and many fields are divided by ditches, creating the appearance of vast areas of cultivation. On the Wolds scarp slope and around settlements there is more pasture, and here fields tend to be smaller, less regular and bounded with hedgerows. The settlement pattern is generally a dispersed one of hamlets and individual farms, though there are some larger villages. The main settlements are Brigg, Horncastle, Market Rasen and Woodhall Spa. The road pattern is mainly a local one of minor roads and lanes, though some major routes, including the M180, cross the NCA linking urban centres outside and within the area. Woodland cover is low, at 8% of the NCA. Of this, 38% is ancient woodland. Woodland is concentrated in the southern half of the NCA, with very little on the clay soils of the north. In the south is Britain's largest concentration of small-leaved lime-dominant woodland. The principal areas of woodland are on the sandy soils, including large coniferous plantations, and there is ancient oak and alder-dominated wet woodland on the Fen Edge Gravels.

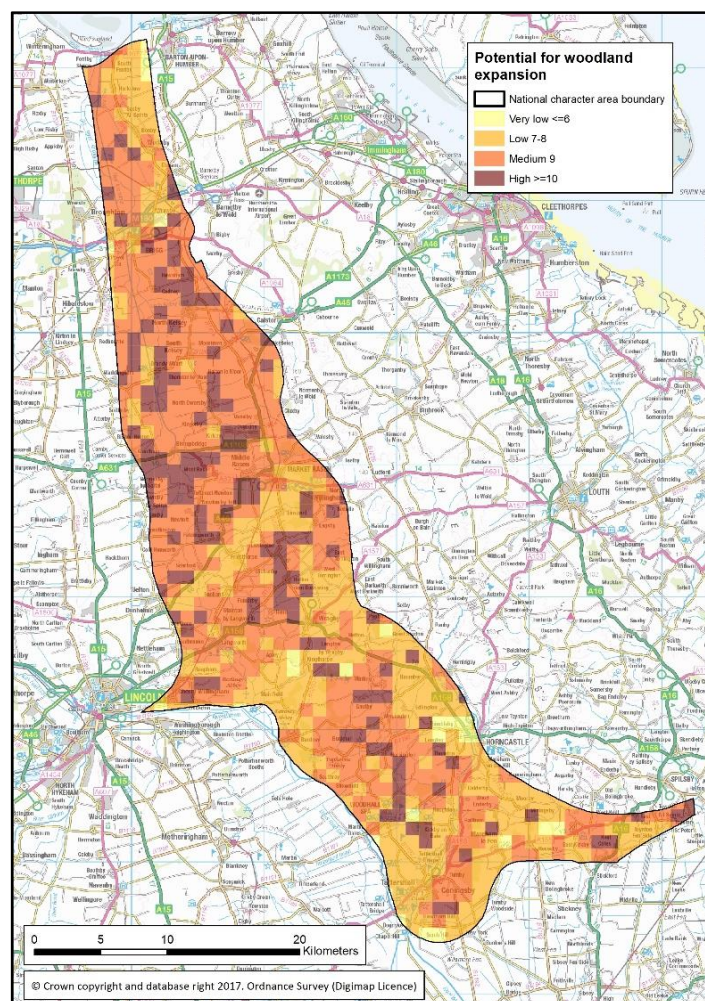
The Historic Environment Character

There is archaeological evidence for the exploitation of the fens of the Ancholme and Witham valleys from an early date. These include the Appleby longboat dating to around 13,000 BCE, and prehistoric track ways and burial monuments, submerged beneath fen peat and alluvium, are a feature of the Witham Valley. It is thought possible that the small-leaved lime woodlands are a relict survival of prehistoric forests. In the Roman period, Lincoln was a major centre, founded as a legionary fortress at the junction of Ermine Street and the Fosse Way and succeeded by a colonia. East of Lincoln, was Horncastle, a walled town, and to the north near the Humber Estuary there was a villa at Horkstow. In the early medieval period, several monasteries were founded from the 7th century, including at Topholme, Bardney and Barlings. In the later medieval period, farming was a mixture of arable and stock-rearing, but the relatively poor-quality soils in the southern half of the NCA meant it was more profitable to enclose land and convert it to sheep pastures for the production of wool, leading to the desertion of several villages and their associated field systems. The remains of deserted settlements and their field systems can be seen at several locations within the NCA, for example at Goltho. There are also well-preserved archaeological remains of several moated sites and monastic establishments, including granges. Enclosure brought significant landscape change, with regular, medium-sized fields with hedgerows. The reclamation of the Ancholme Valley fens was largely completed in the early 18th century, and continued rationalisation into the late 18th and early 19th centuries culminated in the dominance of estate farms, often with model farmsteads with cattle courts set amongst extensive regular large-scale enclosures. Woodhall Spa developed as a small inland resort set in woodland in the 19th century. It is still a resort, with hotels, caravan and camping sites and two golf courses. Large-scale change came in the 1930s, with the

establishment of large-scale commercial conifer plantations on former heathland sites as well as on the sites of many clear-felled ancient woodlands. The NCA was significant in the Second World War as the location for several airfields, providing bases for Lancaster bombers, including Squadron 617, the 'Dambusters'. Agricultural productivity levels increased hugely after the War when large areas of pasture within the NCA were ploughed up to make way for greater arable crop production and many hedgerows were removed to increase field sizes.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that there is a medium level of opportunity for woodland expansion within the NCA, particularly in the central section between Lincoln and Market Rasen, in the areas of historic Lime woodlands. Here, new planting could expand and link up surviving woodland habitats. These areas are significant for well-preserved archaeological remains of medieval settlement, however, so the location of any new woodland should be planned to avoid direct impact on archaeological remains and their settings. The mapping does highlight opportunities throughout the NCA, however, including around the drained wetlands, where wet woodland could be expanded. The NCA profile identifies opportunities to plant woodland on the fringes of settlement and to screen urban and industrial influences, and this would complement the areas highlighted by the mapping.



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