

NCA 48 Trent and Belvoir Vales

Overview

The NCA is a wide belt encompassing the Trent and Belvoir Valleys, running from Gainsborough in the north to Nottingham and Grantham in the south, with Lincoln on the eastern boundary. It is included within the Eastern Arable Agricultural Landscape Type, and is a gently undulating landscape, with low ridges between broad and shallow river valleys. It is generally productive land under arable crops, though there are also areas of livestock production. Fields in the vales are bounded by hedgerows, though further east, towards the North and South Lincolnshire Edge NCAs, fields become large and divided by dykes. The settlement pattern is mixed, with a large market centre at Newark, and cities and towns such as Lincoln, Nottingham, Grantham and Gainsborough around the edge. Within the NCA, rural settlement is a mixture of villages and scattered farmsteads. The Trent, as a major waterway, has had a powerful influence on the development of settlement and industry. The NCA is crossed by several major roads, mostly linking the urban centres within and just outside the area. The East Coast main railway line also passes through the NCA, via Newark. Woodland cover is very low, at only 4% of the NCA, of which about a quarter is ancient woodland. Ancient semi-natural woodlands of oak and ash are found on the higher land west of the Trent Valley, and on the sandy soils west of Lincoln, there are large coniferous and deciduous plantations.

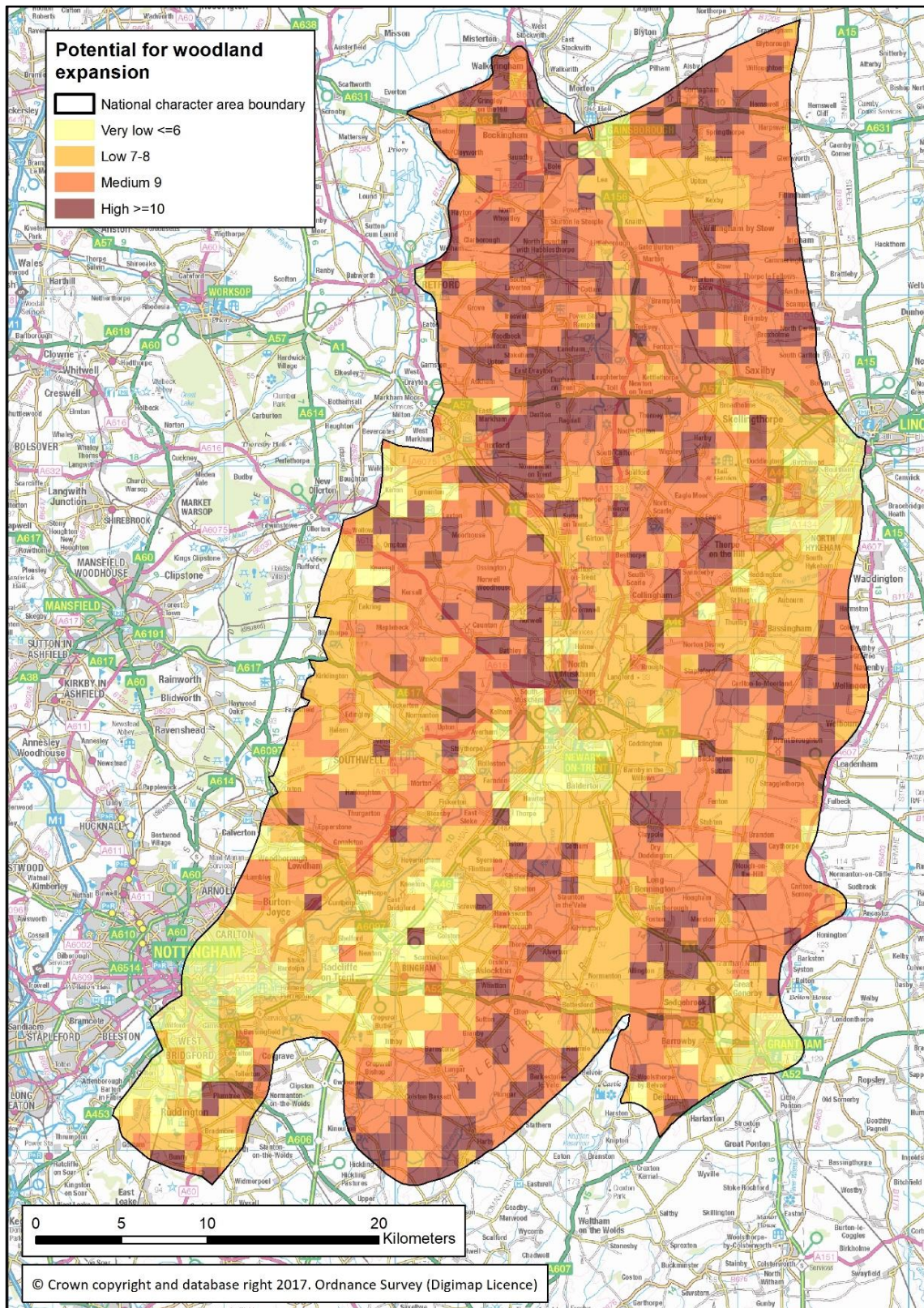
The Historic Environment Character

There is a rich record of human activity in the NCA from prehistory onwards, as the gravel terraces were easily cleared and settled. The area was well-settled in the Roman period, with major settlement at Newark, as well as at Lincoln to the west and linked by the major route of the Fosse Way. The Fossdyke navigation, linking the Rivers Witham and Trent, is thought to be Roman in origin. The area was in the heartlands of the Midland open field system, with nucleated villages surrounded by extensive common fields. A surviving remnant of this system still survives at Laxton. Dairying was also an important agricultural industry, particularly in the Vales. The large-scale desertion of villages and fields systems left a rich archaeological legacy, in the form of well-preserved settlement and ridge and furrow earthworks, and which led much of the early research into medieval settlement archaeology. Although there had been piecemeal enclosure from the late medieval period, many of the field systems were enclosed on a large-scale with parliamentary enclosures from the late 18th century. There was a major change from arable to dairying as a result, though this helped to preserve the surviving ridge and furrow as earthworks. With the intensification of farming after the Second World War, many of the fields were returned to arable, but farmed on an intensive scale. As a result, many of the well-preserved earthworks of the former common field systems have subsequently been destroyed.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that there is a medium level of potential for new woodland planting within the NCA. The areas identified as proving the best opportunities are on the sides of the vales, away from the gravels of the river terraces. As proposed in the NCA profile, new planting could take the form of hedgerow enhancement with hedgerow trees, as well as creating small woodlands, expanding areas of ancient woodland and linking woodland habitats. Any new planting schemes should take

account of the archaeological sensitivity and historic landscape character of much of the NCA, for example along the line of the Fosse Way where there is good evidence for past settlement, and in areas of deserted medieval settlement and associated common fields.



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