

NCA 51 Dark Peak

Overview

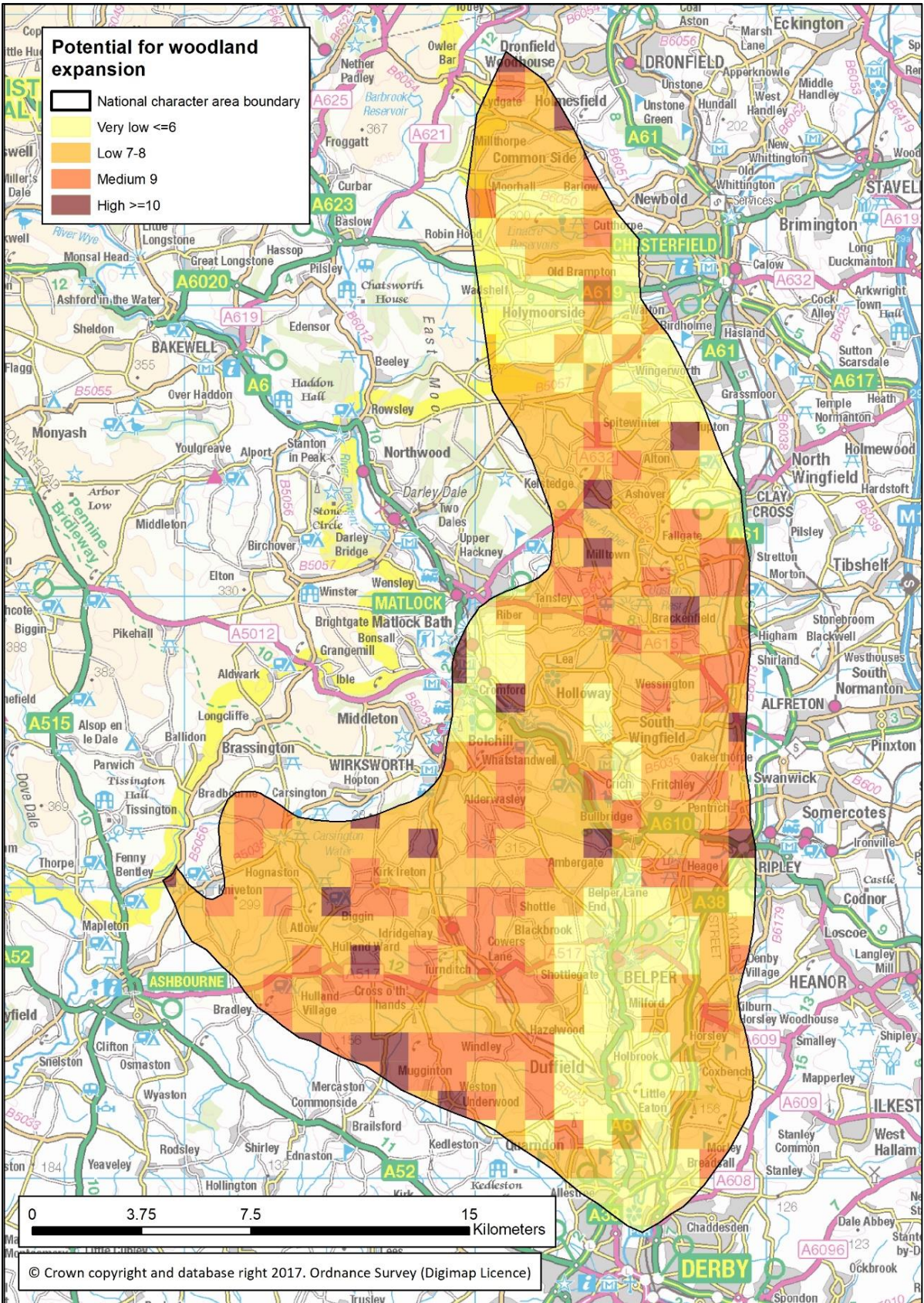
The Dark Peak NCA lies mostly within the Peak District National Park, and it is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. It is dominated by an upland plateau of grass and heather moorland, cut by steep-sided cloughs. Some of the river valleys have been dammed, creating large reservoirs. At the southern end of the NCA is a lower-lying area of enclosed pasture farmland. The uplands are used for livestock grazing, whilst there is more dairying on the lower areas. In the enclosed area, there are old, irregular fields, but in areas of improved pasture, the fields are larger and more regular. Settlement in the uplands is largely restricted to scattered farmsteads in the valleys, whilst the main populations centres are in villages and small towns in the lower valleys, particularly along the River Derwent. The upland character of the NCA, means that much of the area feels remote and roads are largely restricted to following the line of the valleys, though the A57, which follows the line of a Roman road, goes over the top of the moors through the Snake Pass and is a popular tourist route. Given the moorland nature of the NCA, woodland cover is quite good, at 10% of the total area. Of this, ancient woodland accounts for less than 14%. Semi-natural woodlands are restricted to the steep valley sides, and much of the woodland within the NCA is made up plantations around the reservoirs.

The Historic Environment Character

Some of the earliest archaeological remains are Mesolithic flint scatters, buried beneath high blanket bog. There is extensive evidence, especially on gritstone uplands to the east of the Derwent Valley, of later prehistoric settlement in the form of stone circles and ring cairns with field systems and associated cairnfields, and burial mounds. The moors were used extensively by surrounding communities in the later medieval period for grazing, and exploited for resources such as peat, heather and bracken. The medieval settlement pattern was largely dispersed, though there were villages and associated field systems in the southern part of the NCA, for example at Castleton. In the 19th century, there was a shift in the management of the moorlands, from one dominated by livestock grazing to areas being managed for grouse shooting. Industry has left its mark on the character of the NCA. East of the Derwent there are numerous industrial remains relating to coal mining and the production of millstones from the medieval period, and lead smelting. These developed in combination with the exploitation of the woodlands for charcoal and white coal (for smelting lead) and agriculture. Later industrial development was concentrated in the western industrial fringe and the Middle Derwent Valley, southwards from Froggatt to Matlock. Here, there are more villages in valley bottoms, many dating from the late-18th and 19th centuries, with cottages and terraced housing.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that the opportunities for woodland expansion are low within the NCA, which is unsurprising given the large areas of upland moorland. New woodland and the expansion of existing areas are possible within the steep-sided cloughs, and this is reflected in the NCA profile, which highlights opportunities to expand existing valley woodland as well as creating new woodlands though respecting the area's character. The few clusters of higher opportunity identified by the mapping are mainly restricted to the southern valleys.



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