

# NCA 53 South West Peak

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## *Overview*

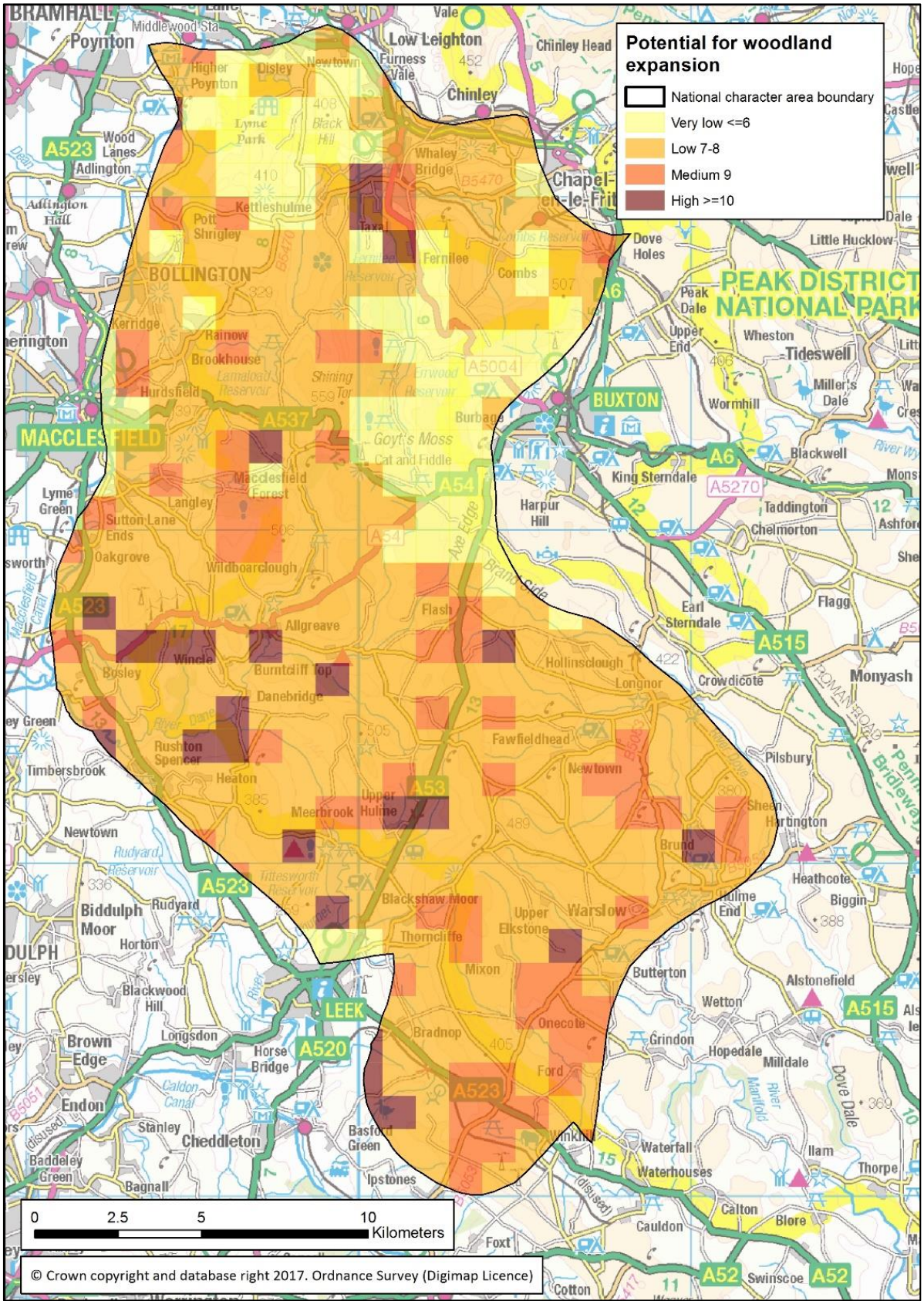
The NCA is an area of upland and associated foothills on the west side of the Pennines, and 65 per cent falls within the Peak District National Park. It stretches from just south of Stockport in the north to Leek in the south, with the towns of Buxton to the east and Macclesfield to the west. It is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type, and is a diverse landscape, with an open moorland core, falling away to gentle slopes, dissected by steep wooded cloughs. The fast-flowing streams open out to form wider upland river valleys, some of which include reservoirs, and are characterised by permanent grassland with rushy pasture, species-rich hay meadows and improved productive farmland. Agriculture is dominated by livestock farming; the fields are medium to small and bounded mostly by drystone gritstone walls, with some hedgerows at lower elevations. The settlement pattern is dispersed with small settlements, traditional farmsteads and isolated field barns predominantly built of local stone, largely confined to the valleys. The road network is restricted by the terrain, though the NCA is crossed by key routes from Buxton to Macclesfield and Stoke-on-Trent. Woodland coverage is 8% of the NCA, of which just over 13% is ancient woodland. Most broadleaved woodland is found on the valleys sides, but there are also small belts of woodland around farmsteads. There are large plantations of mixed woodland in the north of the area above Macclesfield and Whaley Bridge.

## *The Historic Environment Character*

Archaeological evidence suggests widespread occupation of the area from prehistoric times, such as the Neolithic settlement at Lismore Fields near Buxton and the numerous Bronze Age burial mounds that survive on hill tops and other high ground. In the later medieval period, there was common-field farming around the villages, the pattern of which survives as enclosed strip fields in some places. Large parts of the northern half of the NCA was managed as legal forest in the medieval period, and settlement here seems to have been sparse and largely dispersed, with a few villages on the spring lines. Following large-scale enclosure from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the traditional landscape pattern of fields with walls and hedgerows on the lower slopes was replaced with more regular fields. There was coal mining in the area, at Goyt's Moss near Flash, from the medieval period, though the coal seams were thin and of poor quality, and the mines shallow. As technology developed through the later post medieval period, deep shafts were sunk in the Duke of Devonshire's mines, and long drainage and haulage tunnels were driven from Burbage. These provided coal for the lime burning industry at Grin Low, near Buxton.

## *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that opportunities for woodland expansion are low for the NCA. The NCA profile highlights the opportunity to expand and link fragmented habitats of upland deciduous woodland, for example by increasing the proportions of native woodlands in the plantations. Woodland could also be expanded on the valley sides, expanding and linking woodland habitats, as suggested by the small areas of higher potential in the mapping.



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