

NCA 57 Sefton Coast

Overview

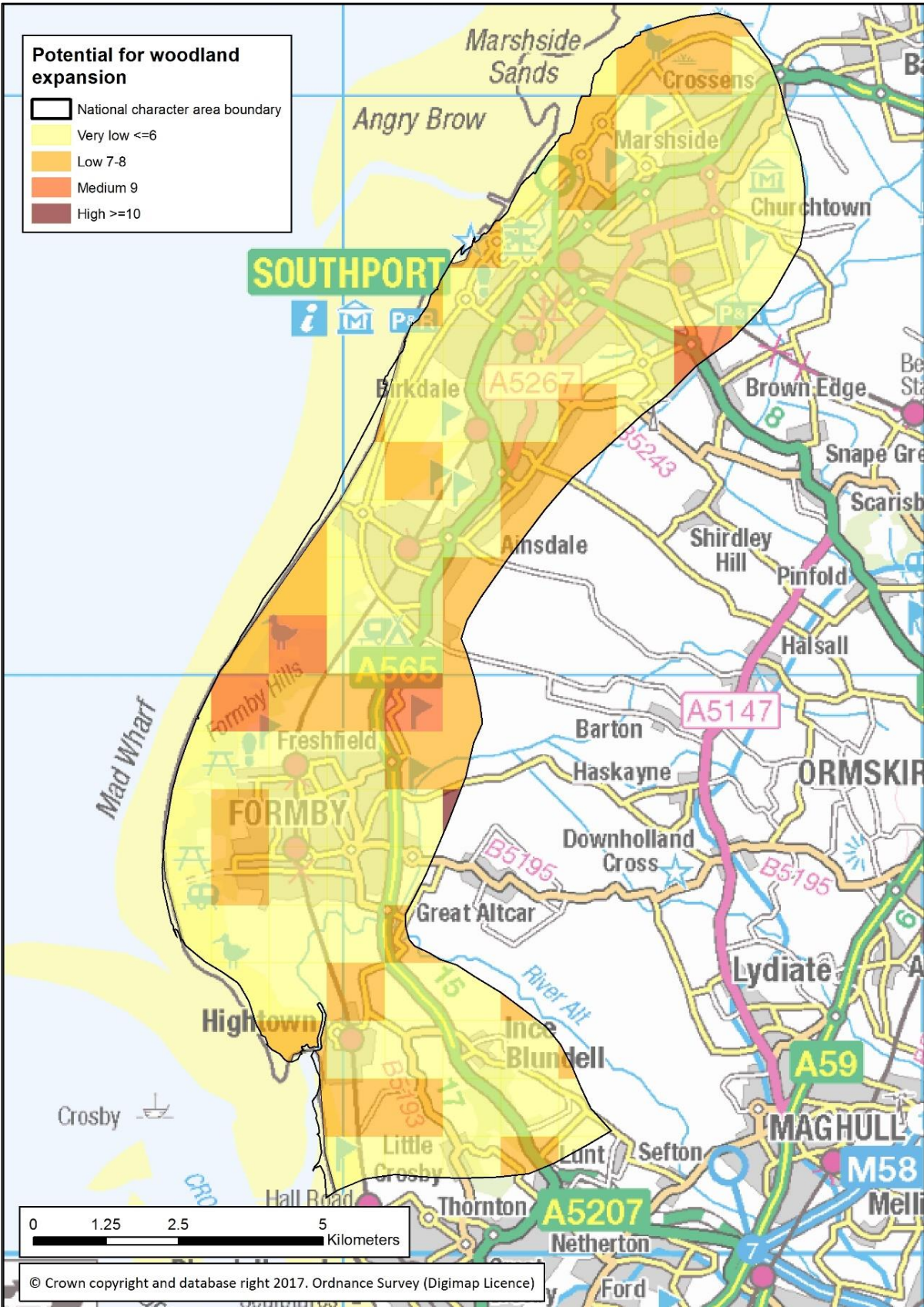
The NCA extends along the west coast of the Lancashire plain from the Ribble Estuary southwards to the northern edge of the Merseyside conurbation. It is low-lying and characterised by intertidal sands and silts, coastal sand dune systems, coastal dune heathland and conifer plantations and is backed by a hinterland of flat farmland. It is included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, though it is highly urbanised with a series of coastal settlements including Southport, Ainsdale, Formby and Hightown. Agricultural land is high-quality, with a mix of grazed open marshes, areas of reclaimed pasture and enclosed fields supporting dairy or beef cattle and some arable farming. Land near residential areas is commonly used for horses. The coastal towns developed as seaside resorts and dormitory towns for Liverpool. There are also large areas of the coastal strip that are used for recreation, including golf courses and caravan parks. Woodland accounts for 8% of the NCA, though none of it is ancient woodland. Woodland is restricted to small isolated pockets and copses, though there are large coniferous plantations at Formby and Ainsdale which form important habitats for red squirrels.

The Historic Environment Character

The earliest evidence for human activity in the NCA was found at Formby Point, where human, animal and wading bird footprints dating from the Mesolithic Period were preserved in laminated silts. The landscape was dominated by mosses and meres, limiting settlement to scattered farmsteads, though in the later medieval period, the wetlands began to be drained under the management of monastic estates. The sand dunes were used for rabbit warrens, and livestock grazing remained the dominant form of farming until the 19th century. The coastal resorts developed following the opening of the railway in the mid-19th century, particularly at Southport, followed by the expansion of places such as Formby as dormitory towns for Liverpool.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The extensive urban areas mean that there is only a very low level of opportunity for woodland expansion, as identified by the mapping of historic and natural environment attributes. As highlighted by the NCA profile, however, small areas of low-lying land could be planted up as wet woodland, and woodland could be used to minimise soil erosion.



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