

NCA 63 Oswestry Uplands

Overview

The NCA is a small discrete area on the English-Welsh border to the west of the Cheshire/Shropshire Plain. It forms the eastern edge of the Clwydian Hills and comprises flat-topped hills cut by steep-sided valleys. The northern end of the NCA lies within the southern boundaries of the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site. The undulating landscape is included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and it is one dominated by irregular fields under pasture, though with more mixed farming to the east, and more regular fields to the north-west where there was late enclosure. Fields are generally bounded by hedgerows. The main settlement is the market town of Oswestry, but there are only a few other nucleated settlements, mainly villages, and the overall settlement pattern is of dispersed farmsteads. Oswestry is a local communications hub, though most of the roads are minor, though it is also on the main north-south route through the Welsh borders. Woodland cover is quite high, at 10% of the NCA, of which 10.5% is ancient woodland. Woods and hedgerows are significant components of the landscape, helping to create the intricate pattern and small scale of the lower slopes. Mixed deciduous woodlands are abundant along the steep valley sides, with natural regeneration also occurring around the disused limestone quarries. There are some small but important alder woods at streamside locations along the valleys. There are a few conifer plantations to the north of the NCA.

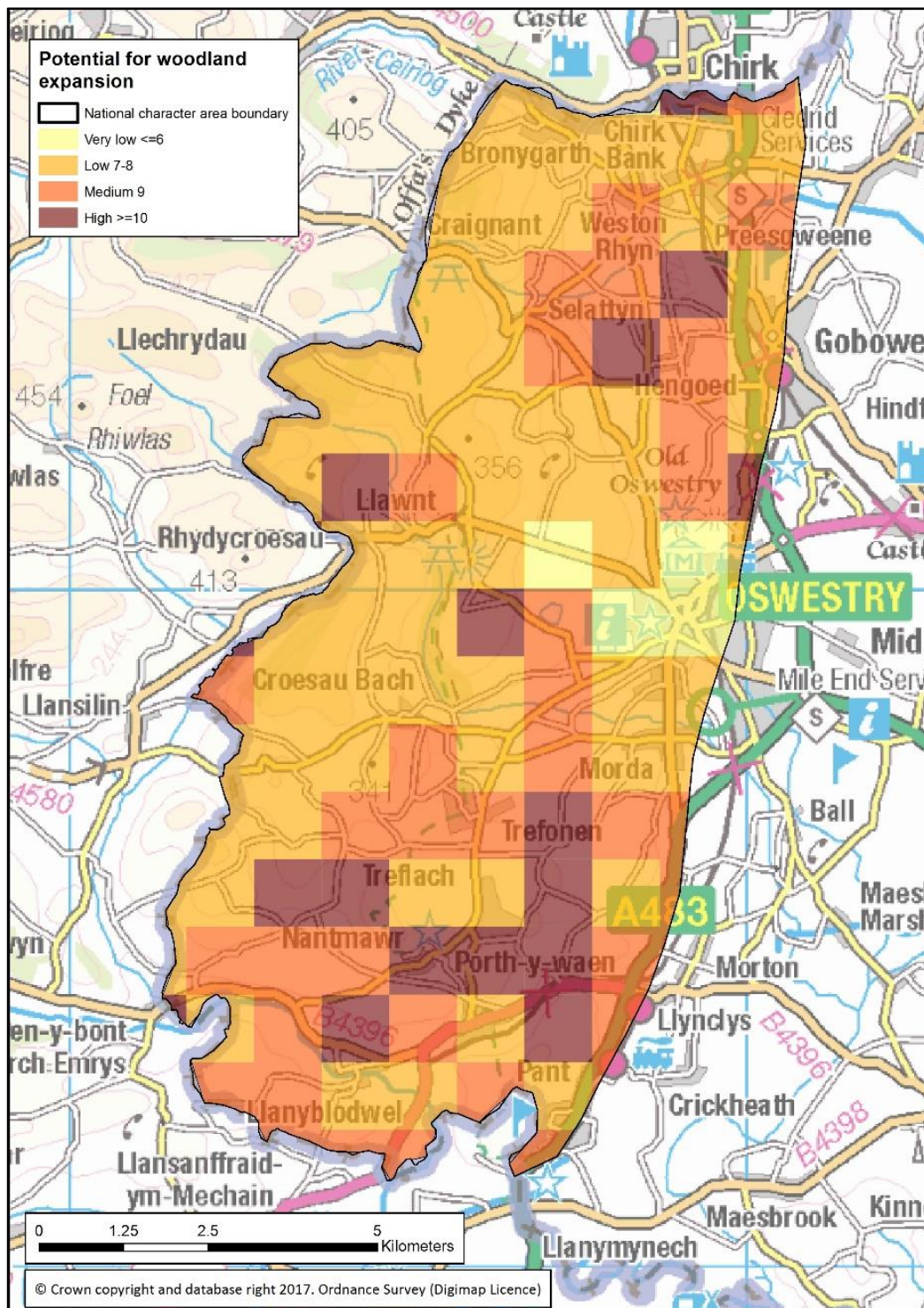
The Historic Environment Character

The early history of the area is dominated by its position at the junction of upland and lowland and its natural resources. The area's importance in the Iron Age is indicated by the large Iron Age hill forts at Llanymynech and Old Oswestry. Lead and copper were being mined in late prehistory at Llanymynech, an industry that grew in scale during the Roman period. The NCA was part of the border between English and Welsh kingdoms from the early medieval period. Notably the 8th century earthwork, Offa's Dyke, which was built between the English kingdom of Mercia and the Welsh kingdom of Powys, runs the length of the NCA. Although it has long been part of England, most of the place names in the NCA are Welsh. It remained a strategically important area after the Norman Conquest, when a castle was built at Oswestry, which was the centre of the Fitzalan lordship, and Oswestry was established as a walled town. Agriculture in the rural areas was mixed, with common pasture on Llynclly Hill. Quarrying in the southern part of the NCA developed as a major industry in the 18th and 19th centuries. The quarried limestone was transported along the Ellesmere Canal, which opened in 1796, and subsequently by the railway from the 1860s.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a medium level of potential for woodland expansion within the NCA. There are clusters of high potential to the north of Oswestry, around Hengoed and Selattyn, where there has been evident tree loss from hedgerows from the 19th century. The main cluster of high potential is in the south, however, around the large quarries of Whitehaven and Porth-y-Waen where there are already extensive plantations. The areas of potential would fit with the opportunities highlighted in the NCA profile, which recommends expanding areas of broadleaved woodland and restoring ancient woodland sites. Although altered, the historic field pattern

is still legible in this area, and new planting should be sympathetic to the historic pattern. The NCA profile also highlights opportunities to expand woodland and scrub elsewhere, and this would apply to the southern area around the quarries. This is a highly sensitive area archaeologically, however, as Offa's Dyke runs through the centre, including through existing woodland. Any new woodland would have to avoid encroaching on the dyke and its setting.



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