

NCA 67 Cannock Chase and Cank Wood

Overview

The area extends north from the Birmingham and Black Country conurbation and covers an area of sandstone and the South Staffordshire Coalfield. It is included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type. The NCA coincides largely with the historical legal forest of Cannock Chase, with major woodland remnants surviving within the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is a varied landscape, with plantations and heathlands to the north, contrasting strongly with the dense settlements of the south, interspersed with farmland. There are no major rivers within the NCA, but canals are a significant feature and this includes the supply reservoir at Chasewater. West of Cannock Chase is a gently undulating landscape characterised by a regular enclosure pattern of low-hedged fields, intensively managed plantation woodlands and coverts and numerous small watercourses. East of Cannock Chase and extending south is a landscape of villages and hamlets within intensive arable farmland that becomes more steeply undulating and wooded in the area between Tamworth and Sutton Coldfield. The more rural parts are mainly used for stock rearing, in small- to medium-sized irregular fields, with hedgerows lining sunken lanes. South of the Chase, the landscape is dominated by the settlements, tips, open-cast sites, quarries and reclaimed areas of the coalfield, and the landscape and settlement pattern of the Black Country is complex. Many towns have a strong historic core. Much of the area has an urban fringe character, and settlements such as Cannock and Burntwood extend along the straight roads and field boundaries of 19th-century enclosures. Between the dense urban areas are small farms, patches of derelict land including disused quarries, and young woodlands, in addition to parks, golf courses and public open spaces. Woodland accounts for about 10% of the NCA, of which just under 11% is ancient woodland. There are extensive coniferous plantations on Cannock Chase, interspersed with pockets of native woodland, including alder on the damper soils and beech along the edges of roads and forestry compartments. Brocton Coppice is an area of national importance. Elsewhere, there is a mixture of ancient, plantation and secondary woodlands, and there are significant areas of woodland and veteran trees within historic parks, such as Beaudesert, Teddesley, Shugborough and Wolseley. Urban areas are characterised by many small woodlands and, since 1990, there has been quite extensive new planting through the Forest of Mercia and Black Country Urban Forest initiatives.

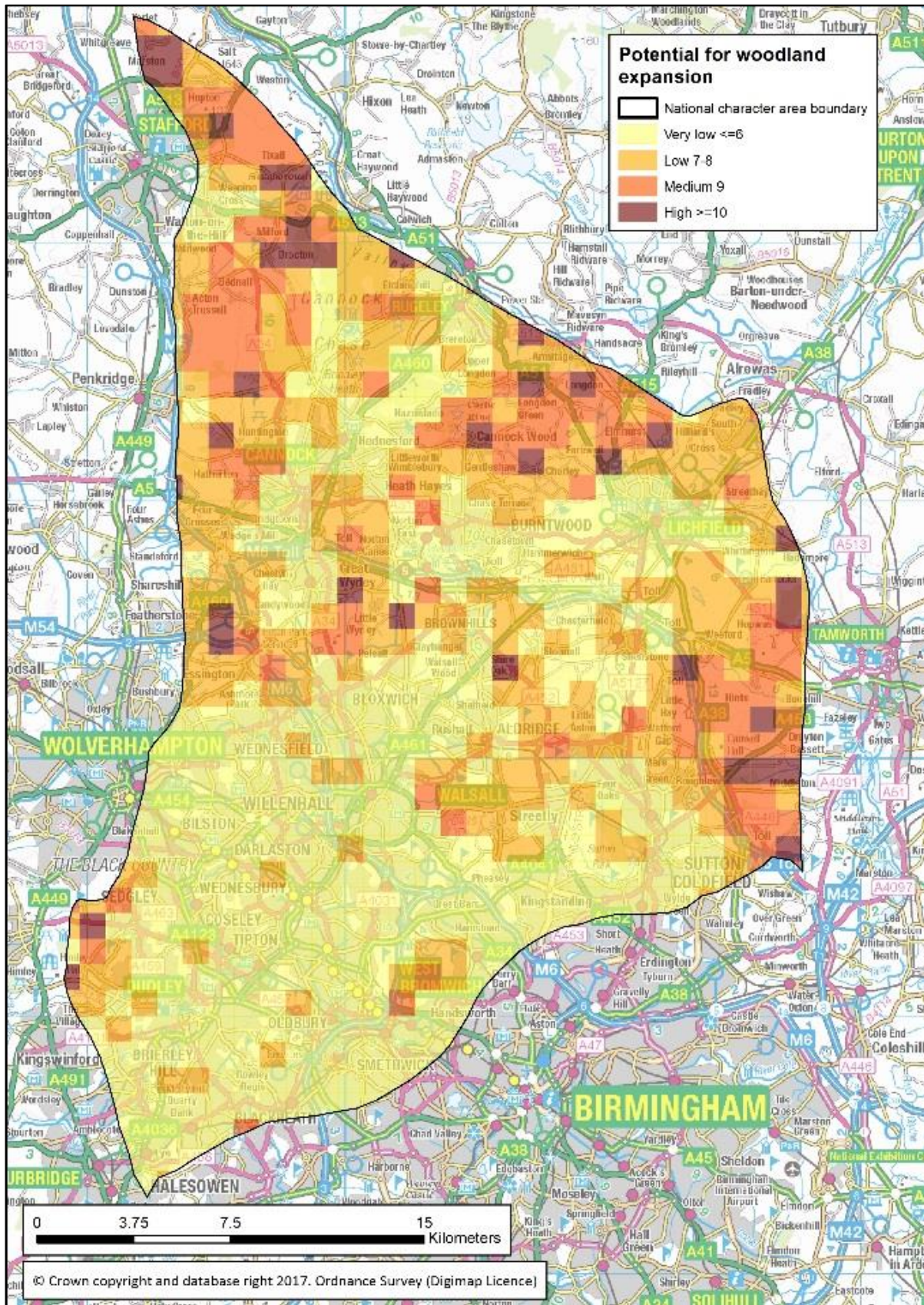
The Historic Environment Character

Evidence for prehistoric settlement includes Bronze Age barrows on Cannock Chase, the Iron Age hill fort of Castle Ring amongst other sites. In the Roman period, Wall (Letocetum), was an important military staging post and posting station near to the Roman roads of Watling Street and Ryknild (Icknield) Street. In the later medieval the period, the area became royal forest, out of which Cannock Chase was carved and granted to the Bishop of Lichfield in 1290. The city of Lichfield has its origins in the 7th century, and Cannock and Rugeley both developed as local market towns in the late 12th century. There was piecemeal clearance and colonisation throughout the medieval period, particularly around existing settlements and small hamlets and were frequently associated with industrial activities such as quarrying, mining, edge-tool manufacture and transport. By the mid-1600s the landscape had become more open, with more extensive heathland, though woodland remained within

the medieval deer parks of Beaudesert, Haywood, Teddesley, Wolseley and Sutton and on higher ground. There was a large-scale programme of enclosure from the late 18th century, although some areas remained common. The 18th and 19th centuries saw an intensification of arable farming and horticulture on sandstone-derived soils on the fringes of the growing urban areas of the Black Country, with dairying on the heavy, poorly drained soils in the northern part of the area. From the 17th century the Black Country and south Staffordshire area developed rapidly into one of the country's largest centres for mining and quarrying of coal, iron and Silurian limestone as well as for manufacturing. The arrival of the canals in the late 18th and early 19th centuries stimulated further growth. Individual towns came to specialise in the manufacture of particular goods; for example locks in Willenhall and leather goods in Walsall. By the 1850s much of the coal had been worked out, and significant areas of land were reclaimed for industrial and residential use. The mining of coal moved north to Cannock, Burntwood and Hednesford in the 19th century, where large-scale deep mining led to the rapid expansion of these settlements. Sutton Coldfield developed as a dormitory suburb for Birmingham.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes shows only a low level of potential for woodland expansion, partly because of the extent of urban areas. The mapping highlights small clusters of potential for new woodland in the rural areas, around Cannock Chase and to the east of Sutton Coldfield. There is also likely to be some potential for planting on a small scale in the urban fringe. The NCA profile recommends expansion of woodland to improve landscape, increase recreational opportunities, increase carbon storage for climate regulation and improve water filtration.



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