

NCA 68 Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands

Overview

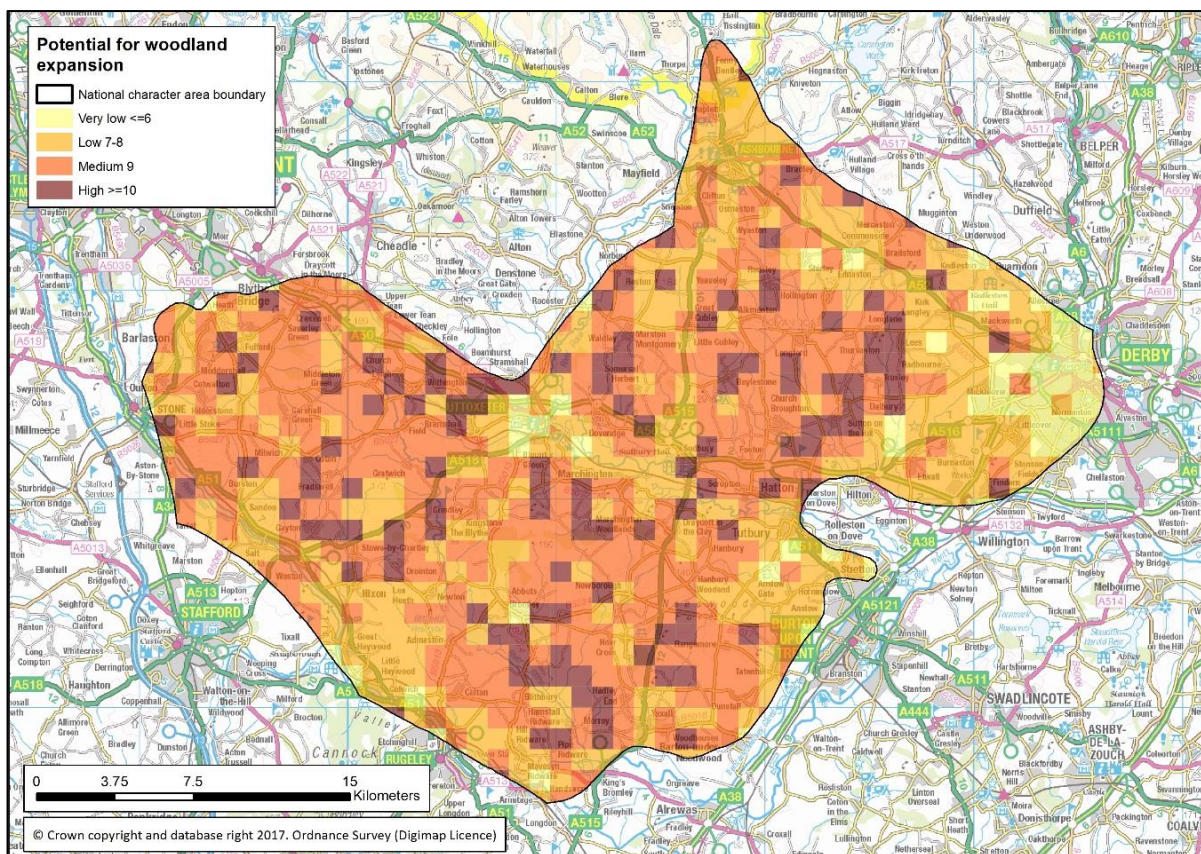
The NCA is divided by the River Dove and its valley. To the south, the area drains south into the River Trent, which forms the boundary to the south-east and south-west. North-east of the River Dove, the land rises towards the Derbyshire Peak fringe. It is included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and the character is of a rolling landscape, predominantly pastoral and wooded, though there are also significant areas of cultivation. Dairying and pasture dominate particularly north of the Dove Valley, and fields tend to be small to medium in size. The NCA is largely rural, with Uttoxeter, Ashbourne and Tutbury being the main centres of settlement. There are several towns around the borders of the NCA, including Rugeley, Stafford, Stone and Burton-on-Trent, as well as the western side of the city of Derby. The largely rural character of the area is emphasised by the settlement pattern, which is mainly a dispersed one of hamlets and farmsteads, with some small villages. Although some major roads link the main centres of population, including the A50, which runs along the line of the Dove Valley, the road network is mainly one of minor roads and lanes. The woodland coverage of the Needwood and South Derbyshire Claylands NCA is low, at only 6%, of which just over a third is ancient woodland. Areas of woodland are increasing, as part of the NCA lies within the National Forest, where there have been planting schemes. A significant amount of woodland lies within the area of the former medieval forest of Needwood, where tree cover includes coniferous plantations. There is less woodland north of the River Dove on the South Derbyshire Claylands. Where there is woodland, it tends to be on the steep valley slopes and on valley bottoms, particularly wet woodland. Hedgerow trees are an important feature throughout the NCA.

The Historic Environment Character

Evidence for prehistoric settlement can be found throughout the NCA, mainly in the form of burial mounds and defended enclosures. In the Roman period, there was a town at Little Chester, now on the outskirts of Derby, with a road leading west to Newcastle-under-Lyme. Alongside the road, a fort and associated settlement at Rocester was established. In the later medieval period, the Royal Forest of Needwood was established in the area south of the River Dove and to the west of Burton-on-Trent. The settlement pattern in this part of the NCA was largely dispersed with hamlets and farms, but with a few planned villages and associated field systems. Medieval deer parks were created within the forest, along with hunting lodges, and some of these formed the basis for later landscape parks. Further north there appears to have been a more nucleated settlement pattern, with towns at Uttoxeter, Ashbourne and Tutbury. A process of settlement shrinkage and desertion left a legacy of medieval settlement remains. North of the Dove valley, there are several medieval hamlet and village earthworks, with associated field systems, whilst there are the remains of moated sites across the NCA, but particularly from within the area of Needwood Forest. In the post medieval period, dairying was a major part of agriculture in the NCA. Probably as a response to the need for good quality grazing, extensive watermeadow systems were developed, the remains of which are well preserved.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that there is a medium level of potential for woodland expansion within the NCA. The main areas highlighted as having the greatest opportunities are away from the river valleys, in Needwood Forest to the south, and around the villages to the north of the Dove Valley. New woodland in Needwood Forest is less likely to impact upon medieval field patterns as many areas were only enclosed from the late 18th century onwards. More care would need to be taken in designing planting schemes in the north, however, as the field pattern suggests ancient enclosure and enclosed medieval common fields. There are also the remains of deserted and shrunken settlements in this area. The need to maintain field patterns is highlighted in the NCA profile, but there may be opportunities to strengthen existing field boundaries through hedgerow enhancement and the planting of hedgerow trees. There is also the potential for expanding existing areas of woodland, and linking existing habitats, particularly wood pasture.



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