

NCA 71 Leicestershire and South Derbyshire Coalfield

Overview

The NCA is a gently undulating plateau, forming the watershed between the Rivers Mease and Soar. It is included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, though its rural landscape character is greatly affected by the area's industrial past. The small- to medium-sized fields support mixed arable and stock farming, with arable fields tending to be larger and more regular in form. The settlement pattern is highly nucleated, with mining settlements dominating. The south-east of the area is more rural, where settlement takes the form of roadside hamlets of small villages. The widespread urban development in the north-west is centred on Swadlincote, Ashby-de-la-Zouch and Coalville, with a road communications hub between towns and connecting to the wider area, including the M1 and M42/A42. The area is very well-wooded, with 15% coverage of the NCA, although only 7% of it is ancient woodland. Much of the ancient woodland is found at Rough Park, Coleorton Hall. The extent of woodland cover is at least partly the result of most of the NCA lying within the National Forest. Woodland character includes locally dense areas of riparian woodland and prominent amenity trees around settlements, with woodland plantations on former colliery sites.

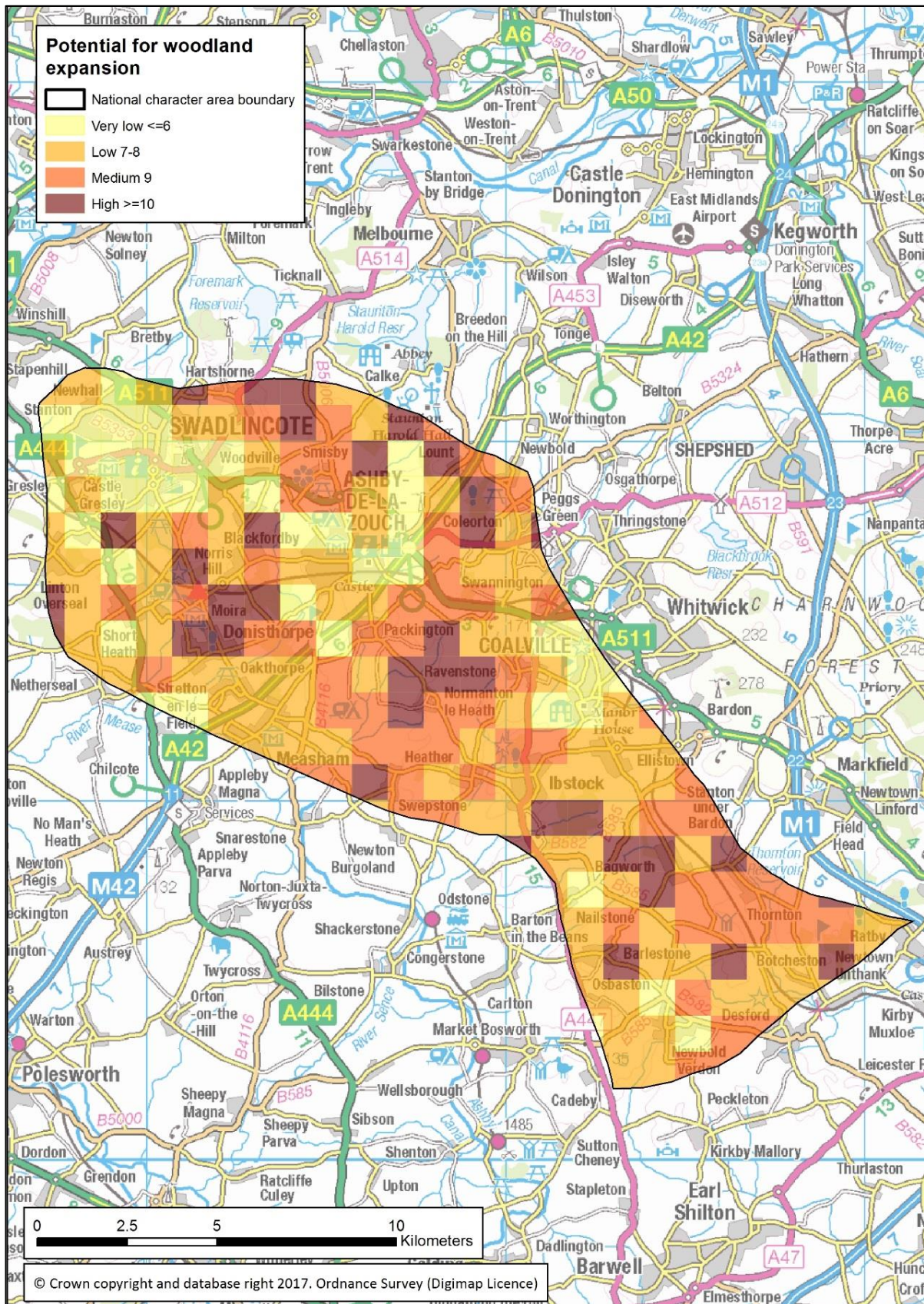
The Historic Environment Character

The historic landscape of the NCA is dominated by its more recent past as a coal mining area. In the medieval period, the settlement pattern seems to have been one dominated by villages and hamlets, though there were also several moated manor houses, and there was a motte and bailey castle at Castle Gresley. A town and market were established at Ashby-de-la-Zouch with a manor house and deer park. In the late 15th century, the manor house at Ashby was adapted and transformed into Ashby Castle with a large hunting park, intended to be the main country seat of William, Lord Hastings. Coal mining has been carried out in the area from the medieval period, and the development of the landscape around Coleorton and Swannington reflects the area's early industrial history. Coleorton and Swannington Common developed as squatter settlements, exploiting coal deposits on the common. This early mining activity has left a legacy of dispersed settlement with small enclosures, the remains of bell pits and spoil heaps and a dense network of footpaths and local roads. Coal mining from the 19th century led to the growth of sprawling mining settlements, such as Coalville and Swadlincote. Following the closure of the mining industry, many sites have been reclaimed and restored, but elsewhere there are surviving industrial archaeological remains of coal, iron and fireclay mines, plus surface workings, cottages, and tramways. Some former industrial sites have become visitor attractions, for example Moira Furnace, the Snibston Discovery Museum and the Ashby Canal.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

There is a medium level of opportunity for woodland expansion in the NCA, according to the mapping of historic and natural environment attributes. Areas of greatest potential lie around existing woodland. New woodland in these areas would support opportunities identified in the NCA profile to create links between areas of ancient woodland, and to reverse habitat fragmentation through farm diversification. Care should be taken, however, to respect historic field patterns across the NCA, and to maintain the dispersed settlement pattern and ancient fields of the Coleorton area. The greatest area for expansion are likely

to be on reclaimed industrial sites, as well as around industrial development on the urban fringe.



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