

# NCA 74 Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire Wolds

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## *Overview*

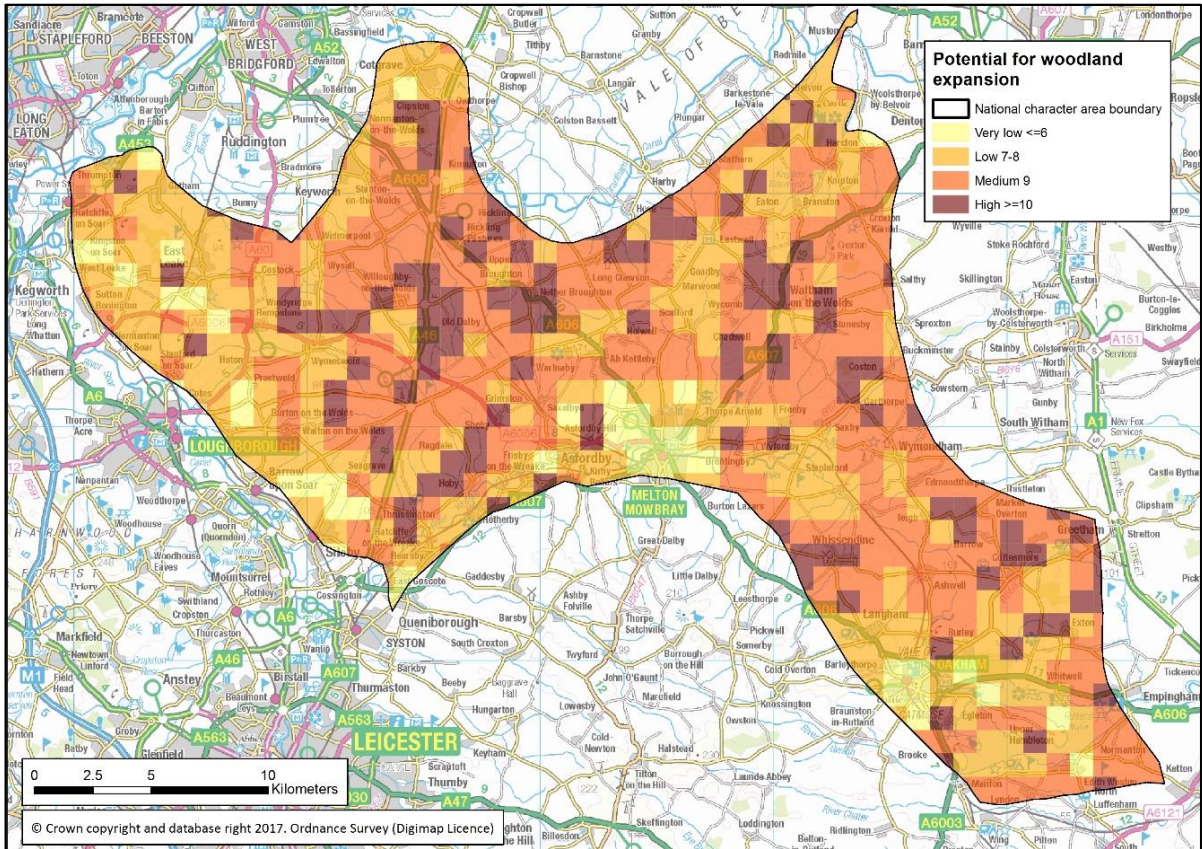
The Wolds are a range of undulating hills, dominated by Jurassic scarp and dip slopes, forming a watershed between the rivers Wreake, Soar and Trent. It is a remote and rolling rural landscape with open, empty plateaux contrasting with the more intimate sheltered valleys and lower slopes. It is included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and it is dominated by arable farming, with medium to large, regular fields, bounded by well-managed hedgerows. Although there are scattered farmsteads across the NCA, the overwhelming settlement pattern is of well-spaced nucleated villages. Settlement is denser on the western and southern edges of the NCA, where there is more industrial activity such as mining and quarrying, and there are commuter developments. There is a well-developed local road network, but the NCA is also crossed by some major road arteries connecting regionally significant urban centres such as Nottingham, Leicester and Grantham. Woodland cover is low, at 6% of the NCA, and 10% of this is ancient woodland. Woodland is found mainly on hills and scarp slopes along the northern edge of the NCA and along the Wreake Valley. The area's strong hunting tradition has left a legacy of numerous copses, coverts and spinneys.

## *The Historic Environment Character*

Evidence for prehistoric settlement is quite sparse across the area, although Iron Age and earlier occupation is known from the Knipton Valley. Roads, including the Fosse Way, opened up more of the area to settlement in the Roman period, some related to iron working, but also including villas, such as that at Glebe Farm, Barton in Fabis. By the 11<sup>th</sup> century, there was a dense settlement pattern of planned villages, with associated common fields. As a sheep-based economy took over towards the end of the medieval period, there was settlement desertion and shrinkage, leaving a pattern of sparsely distributed villages along the river valleys and below the wold tops. Many of the deserted and shrunken villages have left visible evidence in the form of settlement and ridge and furrow earthworks. Desertion affected high-status sites, too, as there are the earthwork remains of several moated farmsteads. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, agricultural enclosure and improvement led to an increase in arable cultivation and the rebuilding or creating of farmsteads, increasing the density of dispersed settlement.

## *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a medium level of potential for woodland expansion, although this is not highlighted as a major opportunity in the NCA profile. Areas of potential include the slopes above the valley of the River Wreake, and more generally across the smaller valleys of the Wolds. The potential opportunities include areas which are archaeologically sensitive, such as around the Fosse Way Roman road, and any new planting should avoid known archaeological sites. Planting should also avoid more ancient field systems, such as former medieval common fields.



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