

NCA 76 North West Norfolk

Overview

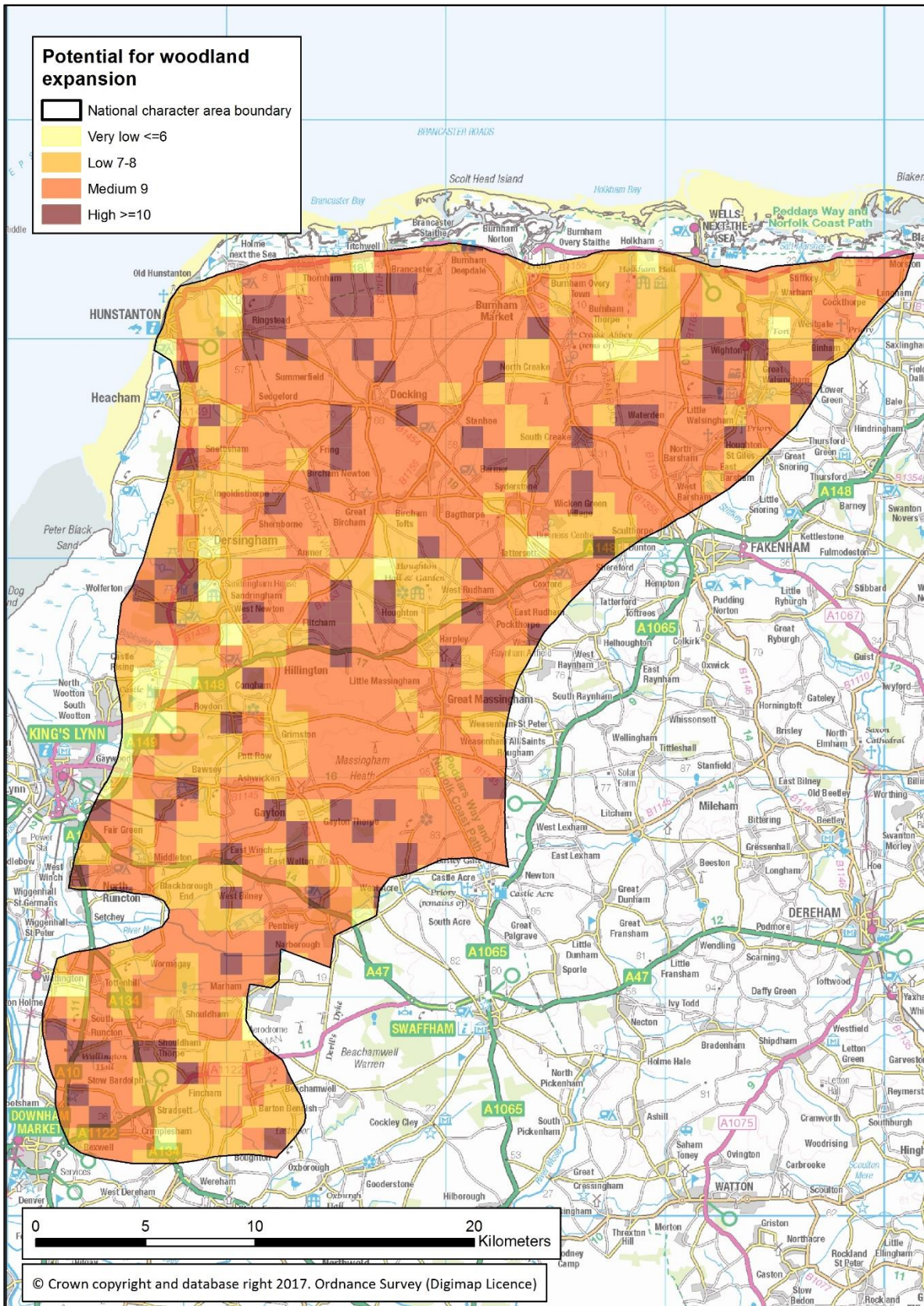
The NCA is included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type and is a very open, gently rolling, rural landscape, with large-scale arable and pastoral areas in large regular fields bounded by trimmed hedgerows. There is extensive arable cropping with some mixed farming, primarily pigs. A strip along the northern and western boundary of the NCA lies within the Norfolk Coast AONB. The settlement pattern is overwhelmingly rural, with the largest population centre being Hunstanton on the north-west coast. The settlement pattern is one of well-spaced nucleated villages, many quite small but often laid out around a green. There are also occasional isolated farms. Villages on the west side of the NCA, close to the coast, have expanded through housing developments in the latter half of the 20th century. The NCA has several large country estates and extensive designed parklands, including Sandringham. The road system mostly comprises minor roads, with only three A roads: two linking Kings Lynn to Fakenham and Swaffham, and the third running around the coast north from Kings Lynn. Woodland cover is 10% of the NCA, but less than 1% of this is ancient woodland. Much of the woodland cover across the NCA is in the form of shelter belts and blocks of mixed woodland within farmland. The biggest concentration of woodland is in the south and west, particularly associated with large estates such as Holkham and Sandringham. There is a lack of hedgerow trees and copses, especially in the northern part of the area.

The Historic Environment Character

The light and comparatively fertile chalk soils have long supported settlement, with extensive evidence for Romano-British and earlier settlement and cultivation patterns. Anglo-Saxon settlement is also well attested from archaeological evidence such as the major cemetery at Walsingham. The medieval settlement pattern was mixed, with isolated farmsteads, hamlets and some irregular villages spaced widely across the landscape. There were also planned settlements that were associated with secular and ecclesiastical centres, such as Castle Rising, or the Augustinian priory at Walsingham. The NCA has evidence of settlement desertion, at least partly as a consequence of the move to sheep farming in the late medieval period. Post medieval agricultural improvement has had a significant impact on the landscape, through the enclosure of common waste, driven by the principal landowners, based at Holkham, Raynham, Houghton and Sandringham, who developed vast estates. Associated with the large-scale enclosures and improvement was the planting of shelter belts and blocks of woodland, with the highest concentration around the large estates in the south and west of the NCA.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates only a low potential for woodland expansion. There are discrete areas of high potential scattered across the area, suggesting there may be small-scale opportunities across the agricultural areas, perhaps in the expansion of small woodland blocks and extension of shelter belts. The NCA profile suggests there may also be opportunities for new woodland lies in wetland areas and amenity woodland, though it also recommends the removal of some woodland for heathland restoration.



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