

NCA 77 North Norfolk Coast

Overview

The North Norfolk NCA is a narrow strip of flat, open and remote coastal landscape running from the north-eastern edge of the Wash to Sheringham in the east. Inland it is bounded by the A149 coast road. It is included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and is overwhelmingly rural in character, though agriculture is limited and comprises less than half of the total area. More elevated land is under arable production, whilst on the coast there are reclaimed freshwater grazing marshes fringed by reedbeds, which are cut for thatch. The area is characterised by extensive areas of sandy beaches, sand dunes, salt marsh and mud flats, and almost the entire area is within the Norfolk Coast AONB. The settlement is mainly one of villages, set back from the sea and strung out along the A149, with Wells-next-the-Sea the only town and small port. There are few farmsteads within the NCA. Many of the settlements were fishing villages, but are now tourist destinations. Woodland cover stands at just 3% of the total area, of which less than 2% is ancient woodland. Areas of woodland are largely restricted to shelter belts and small blocks of woodland around settlements. The largest area of woodland is at Holkham, where a wide belt of mixed woodland marks the inland boundary of the NCA, and an extensive belt of coniferous woodland was planted to stabilise Holkham Dunes, though deciduous woodland is now colonising the eastern end.

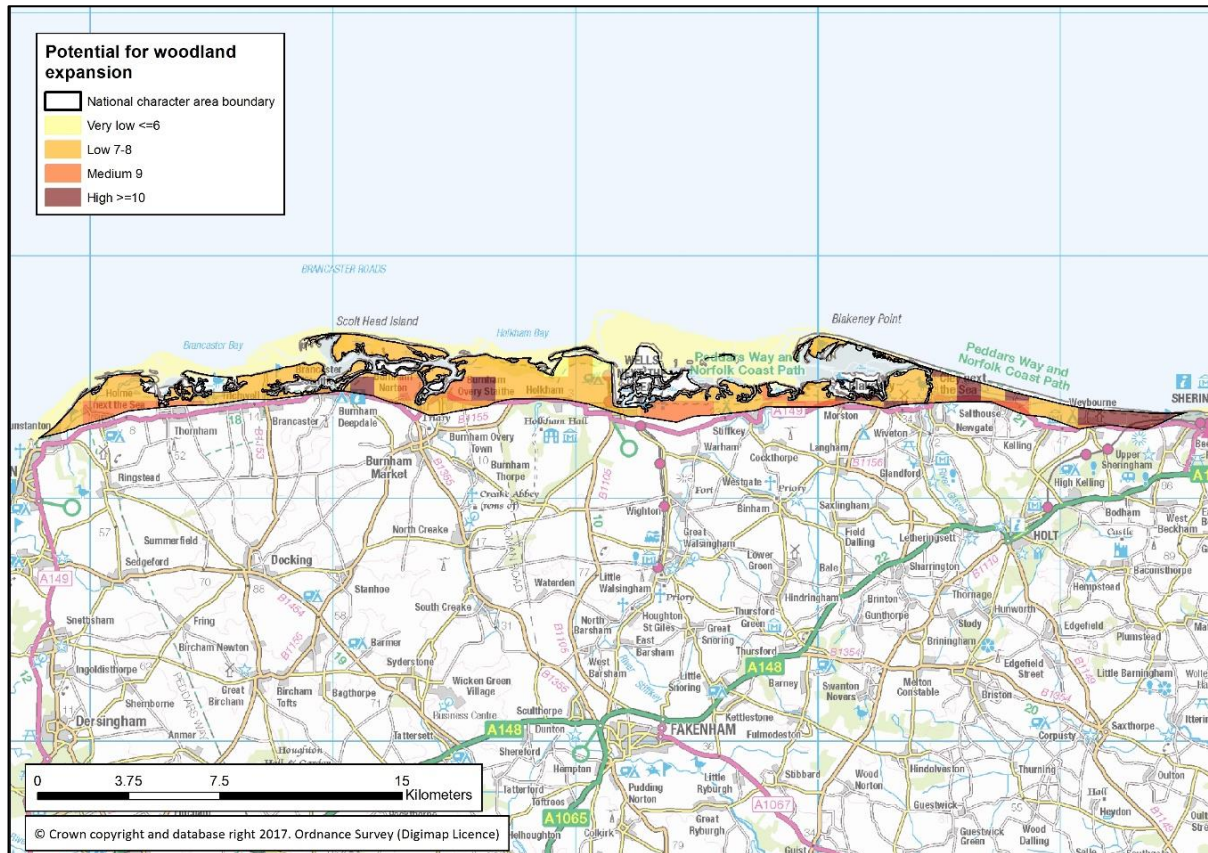
The Historic Environment Character

There is evidence for human influence on the coastline from the Palaeolithic, particularly between Holme and Brancaster. At Holme, the early Bronze Age timber circle, known as Seahenge, was found in the intertidal zone. Further east, within the former intertidal salt marshes at Holkham is a univallate Iron Age fort. In the Roman period, there was a fort at Brancaster, around which a vicus developed, known as Branodunum. In the 3rd century, a Saxon Shore Fort was built here. In the medieval period, nucleated settlements were established along the coast at Holme-next-the-Sea, Thornham, Brancaster, Wells-next-the-Sea, Blakeney, Wiveton and Cley next the Sea, with many of them having small harbours. Over time, coastal accretion of silts created mud flats and salt marshes, isolating the harbour facilities. Today, only Wells-next-the-Sea remains a working harbour. Significant salt marsh reclamation began in the post medieval period, providing more land for grazing. Reclaimed land is characterised by drainage ditches and boundaries. The area has attracted visitors since the 18th century, with some coastal settlements, such as Wells-next-the-Sea, developing as resorts. The coastal settlements are still popular tourist destinations and are attractive as second homes or retirement villages.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The NCA profile identifies that almost all the woodland has been planted as modern shelter belts and plantations and considers that they have a detrimental effect on the landscape. Rather than planting woodland, the NCA profile recommends removing existing woodland to restore landscape character, particularly of the sand dunes at Holkham. Conversely, the mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that there are opportunities for new woodland planting within the NCA, though mainly away from the salt marshes and dune systems, and focused around settlements. Even with additional

woodland around settlements, the overall woodland cover in the NCA is likely to reduce if coniferous plantations are removed from the coast.



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