

NCA 78 Central North Norfolk

Overview

Central North Norfolk has a gently undulating rural landscape, stretching from Norwich in the south to the coast in the north. It is included within the Eastern Arable Agricultural Landscape Type and there are extensive areas of arable, particularly cereal with sugar beet and oilseed rape. Along the wide, shallow valley floors are areas of pasture. The field pattern has areas of smaller, irregular fields, but recent agricultural improvement has led to rationalisation and enlargement of fields, creating areas of larger, more regular enclosures. The settlement pattern is a mixed one of villages and farmsteads, interspersed with market towns. Along the coast are the seaside resorts of Cromer and Sheringham and, here, development has spread through bungalow developments as well as holiday accommodation and camping and caravan sites. Continual coastal erosion in these areas has had an impact on the landscape character, with the installation of coastal defences and the loss of farmland and habitation. The few main roads link Cromer to Norwich and Fakenham, but the overwhelming nature of the road network is one of minor roads and lanes linking local settlements. There is good woodland cover in the NCA, at 13% of the total area, of which around 8.5% is ancient woodland. There is a variety of woodland planting, including deciduous woodland on the heavier clay soils and coniferous woodland on the lighter, sandier soils to the north and west. There are extensive areas of woodland north of Norwich and along the Cromer ridge. Elsewhere, woodland is found on valley slopes. Areas of ancient woodland, managed as coppice with standards, is found in small areas in the west of the NCA.

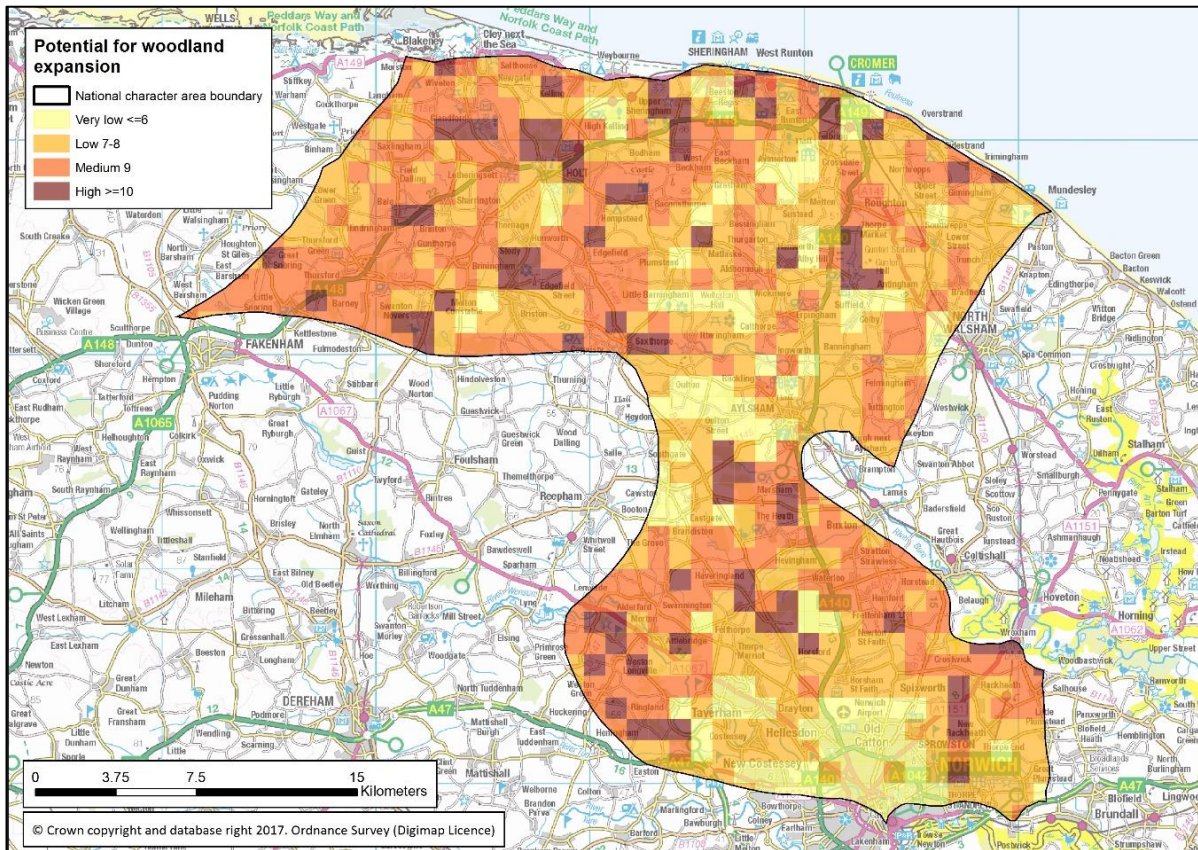
The Historic Environment Character

The historic settlement pattern appears to have been mainly dispersed, with common edge settlements and straggling hamlets and small villages, with nucleated settlements well-spaced across the NCA. Common arable fields and arable farming predominated in the more fertile areas, many of which remained open until the 18th century. There was piecemeal enclosure of the heaths and wood pasture from the medieval period, however, leading to a pattern of small irregular fields. Access to increasing areas of pasture led to the growth of cattle and dairy farming. The sandier, more acid soils on the plateau were more likely to be managed as heath, and the enclosure of much of the heath took place around 1800. Medieval manorial centres and their deer parks formed the basis of post medieval country estates with country houses and associated designed parkland. The main urban centre within the NCA is Norwich, which was an important centre from the Middle Saxon period, with the Danes probably playing a role in its early growth. It was an important urban centre by the 10th century, with its own mint. In the later medieval period, Norwich was one of the largest cities in England, with much of its wealth based on the wool trade.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that there is only a low potential for the expansion of woodland, and areas shown as presenting opportunities are generally around the edges of existing woodland cover. This would fit with the recommendations put forward in the NCA profile, which highlights the importance of maintaining and enhancing existing woodland, as well as planting new areas to address

habitat fragmentation. The NCA is an area where coppice management and wood pasture were practiced traditionally, and new areas could also be managed in this way.



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