

NCA 81 Greater Thames Estuary

Overview

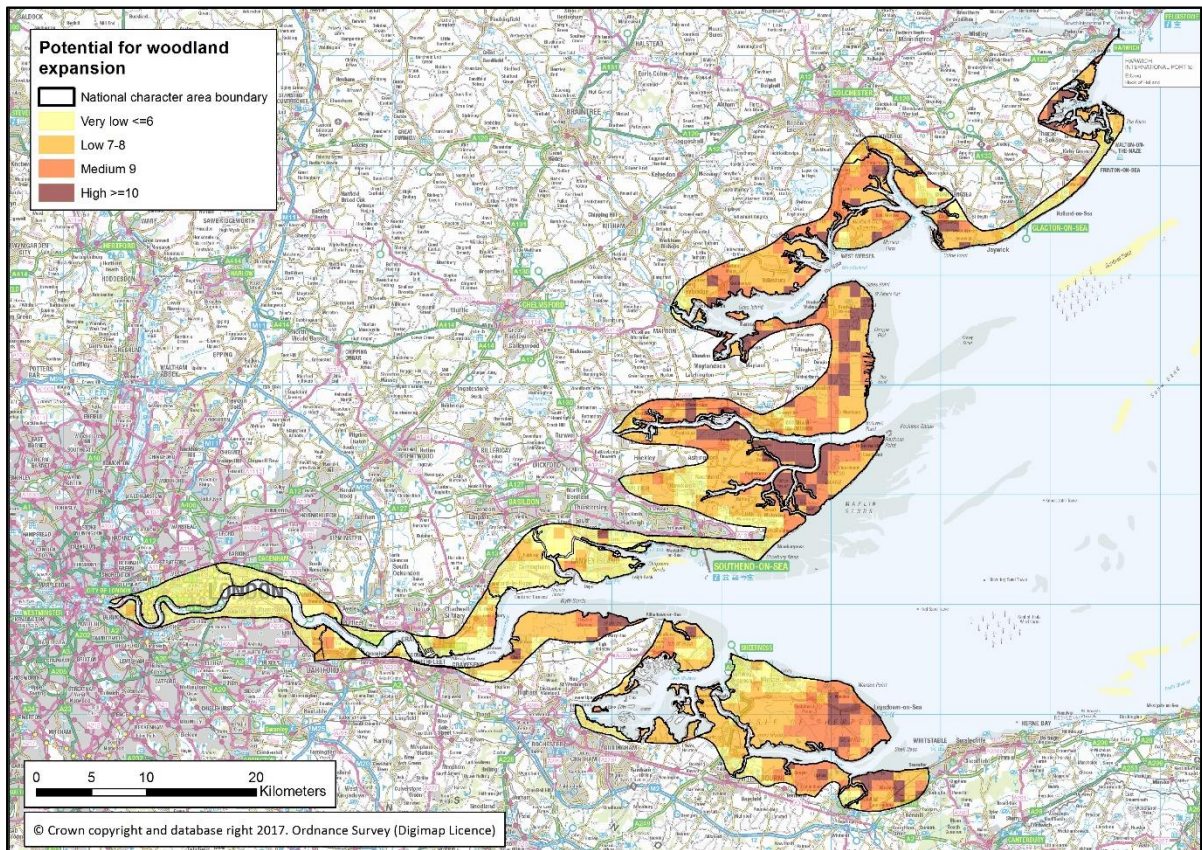
The NCA lies within the South East Mixed (Woodland) Agricultural Landscape Type, and is a predominantly remote and tranquil landscape of shallow creeks, drowned estuaries, low-lying islands, mudflats and tidal salt marsh and reclaimed grazing marsh. It forms the eastern edge of the London Basin and extends from the coast of South Essex to North Kent, but also extends along the River Thames into East London. Although there are areas of intense urban development, in the east end of London and along the Essex shoreline, there are some of the least settled areas of the English coast, with few major settlements and small villages and hamlets on higher ground and around the marsh edges. Outside the urban areas, roads are generally few and are mostly minor roads and lanes, apart from the A2500 which is the main access route onto the Isle of Sheppey. Sea defences protect large areas of reclaimed grazing marsh, where intensive arable cultivation dominates in large, rectilinear fields bounded by ditches. There are also ancient fleet and ditch systems. Woodland cover is extremely low, at only 2% of the NCA, though nearly 14% of this is ancient woodland. Trees are restricted to small clumps on higher ground, particularly around villages, farms and churches.

The Historic Environment Character

There is extensive evidence of prehistoric settlement, including causewayed enclosures, particularly in the intertidal zone on submerged land surfaces of the Blackwater Estuary. Evidence for Bronze Age settlement, field systems and funerary monuments is widespread. There are particular monument types found in this area, such as salt-making sites dating to the Iron Age, Roman and medieval periods. Iron Age salt-making sites are found on the Essex marshes, whilst medieval sites are found particularly on the Kent marshes and the Isle of Sheppey. The coastline also has numerous defensive sites, from the Saxon Shore Fort, later an early medieval monastery, at Bradwell-on-Sea, to the Martello towers built as coastal defences during the Napoleonic wars in the early 19th century, and the coastal defences of the World War II.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

Although the level of woodland cover is extremely low, the mapping of historic and natural environment attributes suggests there is a medium level of potential for new woodland. The attribute scores relate mostly to areas of grade 3 agricultural land, though these are generally under intense arable cultivation. The NCA profile identifies very few targets for woodland expansion, mainly relating to screen planting around industrial and other developments.



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