

NCA 83 South Norfolk and High Suffolk Claylands

Overview

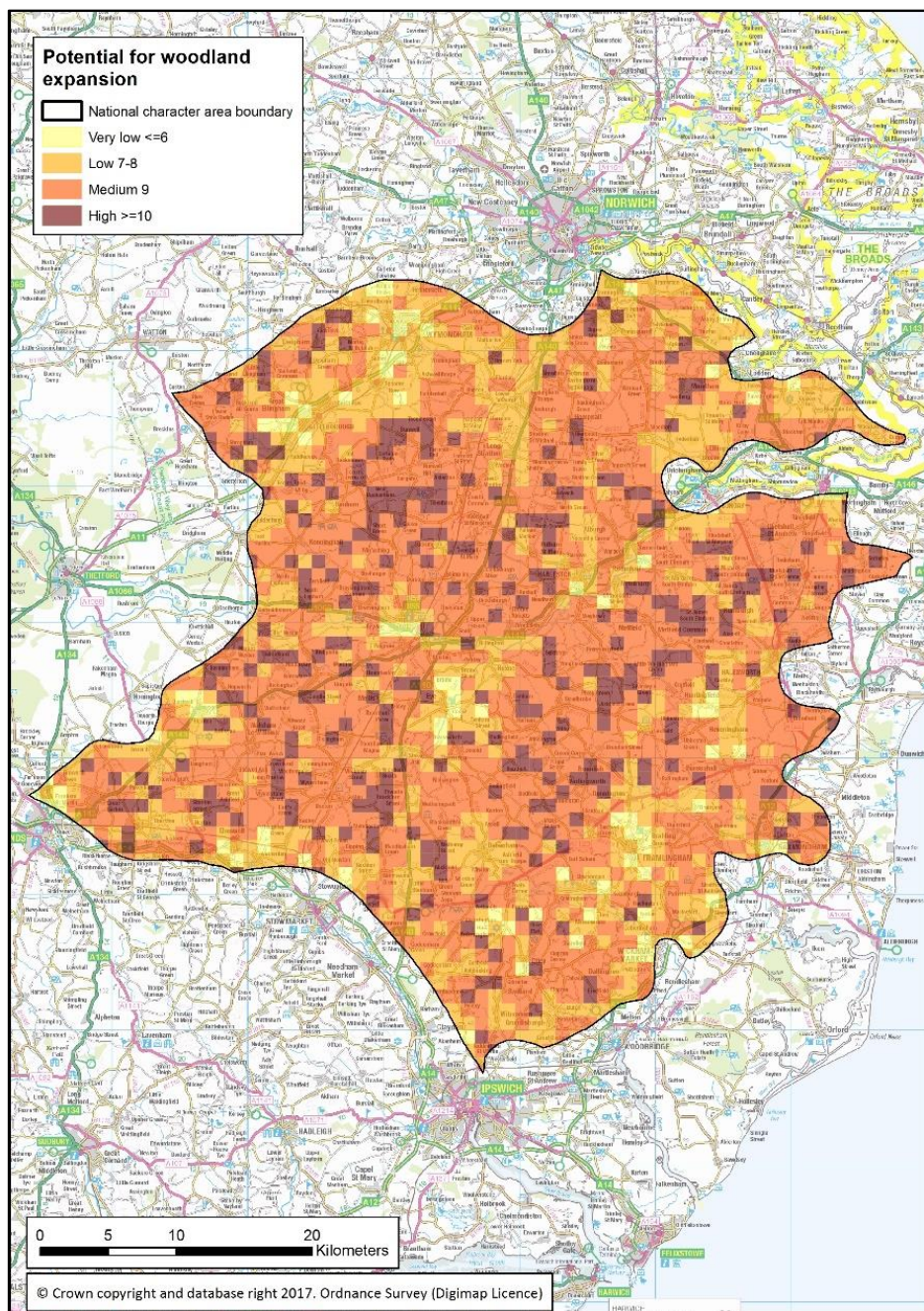
The NCA covers a large part of central East Anglia, stretching from the southern edge of Norwich in the north to the River Gipping and Ipswich in the south. It is a gently undulating, clay plateau landscape, largely under intense arable cultivation, and it is included within the Eastern Arable Agricultural Landscape Type. There are areas of ancient irregular fields with species-rich hedgerows and hedgerow trees, though there has been considerable rationalisation and amalgamation to create very large, rectilinear fields bounded by ditches. Within the river valleys there are small-scale pastures and meadows. There is also evidence in some areas for surviving co-axial fields, partly preserved in the medieval and post-medieval enclosure patterns. Intensive pig and poultry rearing takes place in large units, especially in the areas of lighter soils around the edges of the plateau and sometimes on redundant airfields. The settlement pattern is a mixture of villages, mainly in the west and in the river valleys, with numerous scattered farmsteads and hamlets set around greens in the hinterland. Green edge settlements indicate a process of encroachment onto commons from the late medieval period. There are several small market towns, such as Diss, Wymondham, Eye, Harleston and Framlingham, but overall this is a highly rural area. The roads network, too, is a largely rural one, though several arterial routes cross the NCA, converging near Diss, forming a communications hub. Only 5% of the NCA is woodland, of which just under 12% is ancient woodland. There are no extensive areas of woodland, and it is mostly found in small patches, particularly along river valleys. There are some surviving areas of ancient woodland where coppicing is still practised, and there are stands of poplar and willow along the Rivers Waveney, Little Ouse and Dove, and carr woodland to the west of Diss. Despite the low level of woodland, trees make a notable contribution to landscape character, in landscape parks, shelter belts and coverts and around farmsteads.

The Historic Environment Character

There is evidence of extensive settlement in later prehistory, particularly on the fringes of the plateau and around the river valleys. The area still has surviving evidence for co-axial field systems, which are thought to have late prehistoric origins. Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlement was widespread, and there are several surviving churches with Anglo-Saxon fabric. The medieval landscape was one of small market towns with villages and individual small farms with small enclosures. Settlement spread as encroachment onto the edges of common land. The prosperous economy was based on mixed farming with dairying, creating a class of gentry and yeoman farmers who displayed their status through their farm buildings, often on moated sites and surrounded by large pastures. From the 18th century, agricultural improvement led to the expansion of arable, leading to the rationalising and straightening of irregular field boundaries. Most boundary loss happened after the Second World War.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates good opportunities for woodland expansion within the NCA. The locations indicated as having higher opportunities relate mainly to the plateau within areas of arable cultivation. The NCA profile places an emphasis on better management of existing woodland, and reintroducing traditional management techniques such as coppicing and pollarding. It does also, however, state that new woodland could be planted on areas known to have been wooded in the past, and around farmsteads and new developments for screening. Reinstating areas where woodland has disappeared would mostly be on the plateau or on its fringes, and these are also the areas of higher potential as suggested by the mapping.



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