

NCA 84 Mid Norfolk

Overview

The NCA occupies the northern section of the East Anglian plain, and is a flat, rural landscape included within the Eastern Arable Agricultural Landscape Type. It extends from Fakenham in the north to Norwich in the south-east and Swaffham in the west. The underlying chalk is covered by sands, gravels and glacial tills, creating complex soils which are farmed mainly as intensive arable, particularly cereal, beet and oilseed rape. The field pattern is variable, but intensive arable regimes have led to amalgamation and rationalisation of enclosures creating larger, more regular fields and loss of hedgerows. Where older enclosures survive, the fields are irregular and bounded by mixed hedgerows and hedgerow oaks. The settlement pattern is a nucleated one, with mostly small villages well-spaced across the NCA, and some scattered farmsteads. Dereham and Fakenham are the urban centres, though the area also extends to include the western half of Norwich. The area is crossed by major roads, linking Norwich to local market towns both within and outside the NCA. The intensive character of arable farming mean that woodland cover is low, at only 6% of the NCA, of which around 12.5% is ancient woodland. It is generally scattered throughout the NCA, though there are larger blocks of woodland to the north of Dereham. Woodland is varied in character, with mixed deciduous oak and beech woods on heavier soils and coniferous plantations on the sandier soils. Although coverage is low, the NCA does contain what is considered to be the oldest stand of ancient woodland in Norfolk, Foxley Wood.

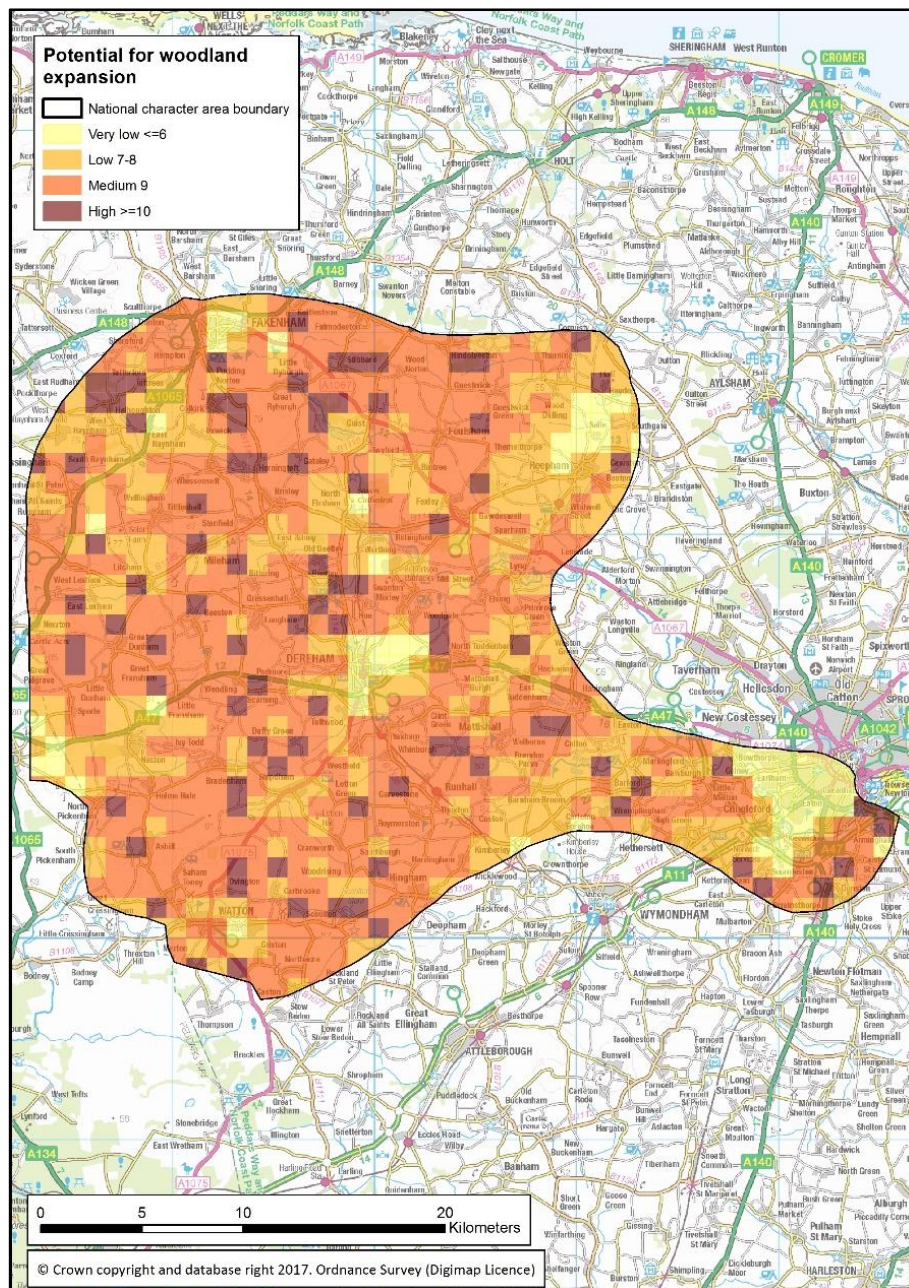
The Historic Environment Character

There is evidence for prehistoric and Roman settlement across the NCA, with good survival of monuments as earthworks and cropmarks. In the south-east corner of the NCA, to the south of Norwich, are the remains of the Roman town of Venta Icenorum at Caistor St Edmonds. The site survives remarkably well as it has not been developed or damaged in later periods. There is particularly rich archaeological evidence of the Anglo-Saxon period, including cemeteries and settlement sites. One of the most significant is the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Spong Hill, which is the largest pagan cemetery of the period to have been fully excavated. The area was well-settled by the late Anglo-Saxon period, as evidenced by the number of churches with pre-Conquest fabric. Norwich was an urban 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. There was an emphasis on sheep farming by the Norman period, and the wool and cloth trade brought great wealth in the later medieval period. Medieval settlement was mixed, with market towns including East Dereham and Fakenham, and large villages such as Reepham and Hingham. Between was a pattern of hamlets, farmsteads and manorial complexes. Much of the landscape of heaths and wood pasture was enclosed piecemeal from the late medieval period, creating a pattern of small-scale, irregular fields with areas of open field and common land. There was a significant level of settlement desertion and shrinkage at the end of the medieval period, both villages and hamlets, and moated sites. In the post medieval period, many of the manorial houses and associated deer parks became the focus of country houses and parkland estates. Agricultural improvements

from the end of the 17th century led to the enclosures of the heaths, and there was a rationalisation of some older fields, a process that accelerated from the late 18th century.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that there is low potential for new woodland creation, though clusters of higher potential suggests that small-scale planting would be suitable across much of the NCA. This would fit with the opportunities identified by the NCA profile, which recommends the extension of existing woodlands and new planting to link up fragmented habitats. New woodland could be planted around new development as screening, as around villages and other settlements as buffers.



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