

## NCA 91 Yardley-Whittlewood Ridge

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### *Overview*

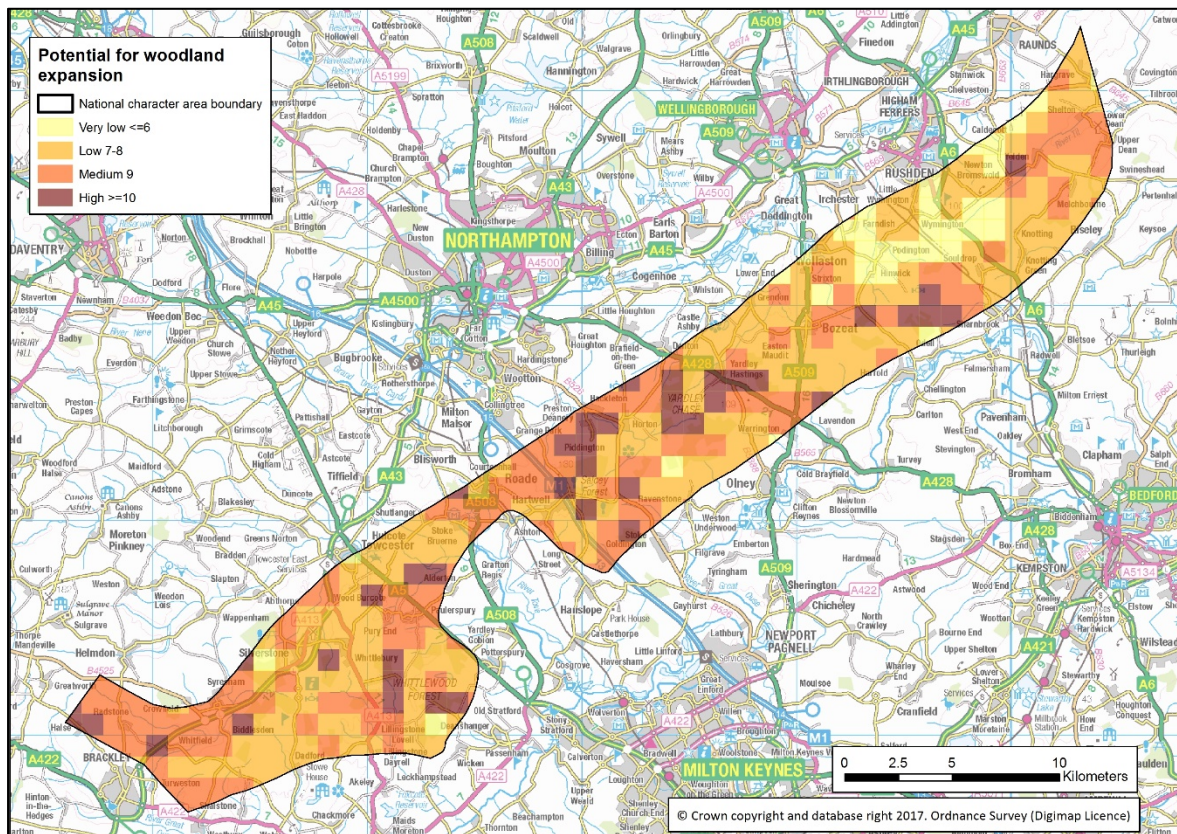
The NCA is a long, narrow Limestone ridge, with a gently undulating landscape that lies between the catchments of the River Nene to the north and the River Great Ouse to the south. It is predominantly rural in character, though there are major urban areas around it, such as Milton Keynes, Northampton and Bedford. It is included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and agriculture varies, with pasture and mixed farming in the west, giving way to an increasingly arable landscape further east. Fields are medium-sized with mature, species-rich hedgerows and many hedgerow trees. Settlement is sparse, comprising largely small to medium-sized villages with occasional farmsteads. The NCA is crossed by several major communication corridors, including the A5, A6 and M1, the West Coast and Midlands main railway lines and the Grand Union Canal. The NCA has numerous recreational assets include Salcey Forest and its Tree Top Way, Castle Ashby, the Silverstone Circuit, the Santa Pod Raceway, Stoke Bruerne Canal Museum and nearby Towcester Racecourse. The area is well-wooded, with a 13% coverage, of which nearly 70% is ancient woodland. The high proportion of ancient woodland is largely related to the extensive areas of former medieval hunting forests and chases, although oak and ash woodland has been added to with conifer plantations. Landscape parks in the NCA also have nationally important areas of ancient woodland, including elm avenues at Stowe.

### *The Historic Environment Character*

The NCA is significant for the extensive areas that used to be within the royal hunting forests of Whittlewood and Salcey, and Yardley Chase, which has had a lasting impact on the historic character of the area. Parts of the forests were taken into the estates of the Dukes of Grafton in the post medieval period, and were added to up until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when the last of Whittlewood Forest was disafforested and enclosed. Piecemeal enclosure had been ongoing in the forest from the end of the medieval period, and settlement has encroached on woodland edges. Even so, the well-wooded character of the area, and the high proportion of ancient woodland is a legacy of the former hunting forests.

### *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a low potential for woodland expansion, though there are greater opportunities around the periphery of existing woodland. The areas of potential indicated by the mapping fits with the recommendations of the NCA profile, which highlights the opportunities of extending existing woodland and connecting habitats. The NCA profile, however, also emphasises the importance of maintaining the open areas of forest rides and lawns, in order to both maintain varied habitats and to provide recreational use.



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