

NCA 93 High Leicestershire

Overview

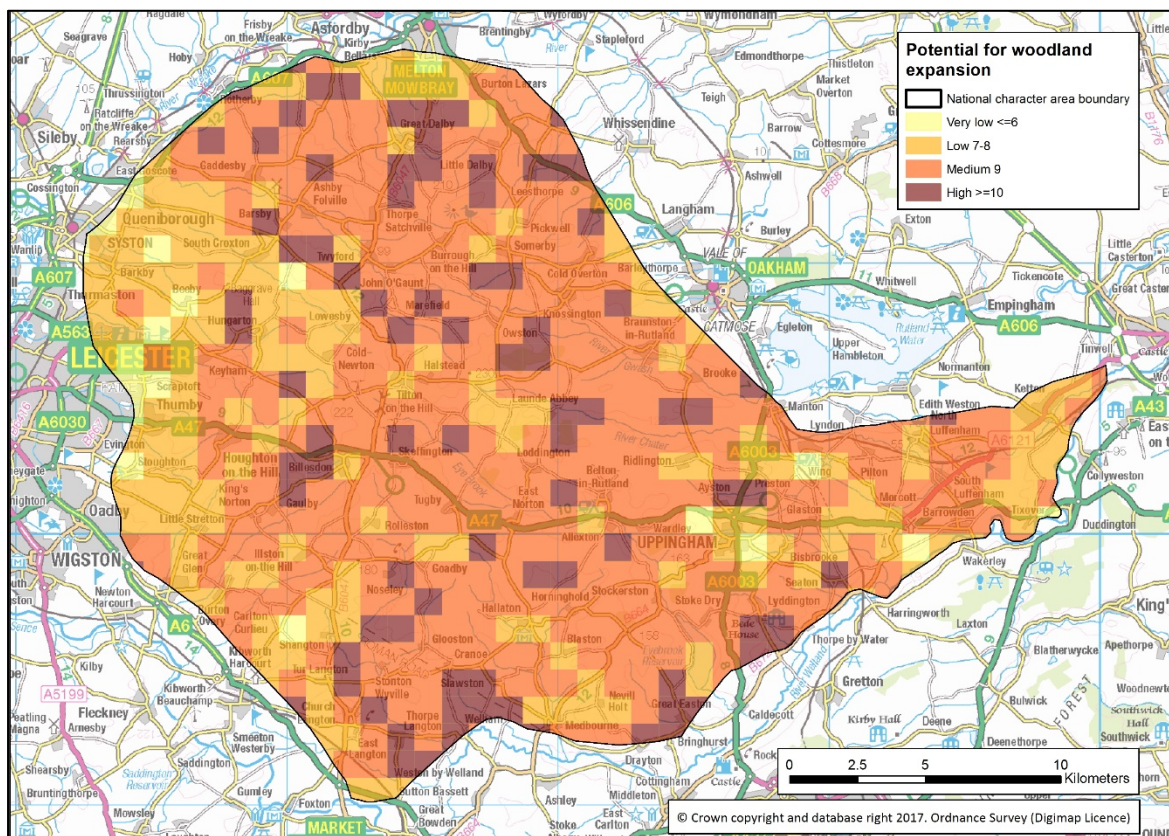
High Leicestershire is a landscape of broad rolling ridges and secluded valleys with a quiet rural character. It extends from Leicester in the west, to Market Harborough to the south, Melton Mowbray to the north, and narrowing to Stamford to the east. It is included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type. The field pattern is of medium-sized, mixed regular and irregular enclosures. Older fields have clearly undergone a process of rationalisation and enlargement. Agriculture comprises mixed farming, with arable in the lowlands and grazing pastures on higher ground. The settlement pattern is one of nucleated villages, with some scattered farmsteads. There are few major roads in the NCA, and the road network is predominantly made up of minor roads and lanes. Woodland cover is very low, at only 5% of the NCA, of which less than a quarter is ancient woodland. As well as areas of woodland, however, there are numerous hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Many of the woodlands comprise copses, spinneys and coverts, though there are larger areas of ancient woodland in the centre of the NCA, around Owston and Launde. There are several country houses within the NCA, with associated parkland and parkland trees.

The Historic Environment Character

Evidence for prehistoric and Roman settlement is fairly slight in the area, though this does include Borough Hill Iron Age hillfort. The settlement pattern of villages has its origins in the medieval period, and many exhibit evidence of planning in their layout. Their associated common field systems can be traced in surviving field boundaries and in many areas as ridge and furrow earthworks. The area underwent significant settlement shrinkage and desertion in the late medieval and post medieval periods, and the NCA is notable for settlement earthworks, sometimes found within later designed parklands. In some cases, villages shrank to the extent that only a single farm still remains. This process went hand-in-hand with conversion to a pastoral economy, and the development of substantial estates with country houses and parkland. The importance of field sports, such as fox hunting, led to the planting of numerous coverts.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes suggests a low level of potential for new woodland. The lack of potential opportunities for woodland expansion is reflected in the NCA profile, which identifies opportunities for management of existing woodland rather than creating new areas. The mapping does indicate, however, a general spread of higher opportunities, mostly on higher ground and around existing woodland, but any planting should be on a small scale and take account of historic field patterns and medieval settlement remains.



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