

NCA 95 Northamptonshire Uplands

Overview

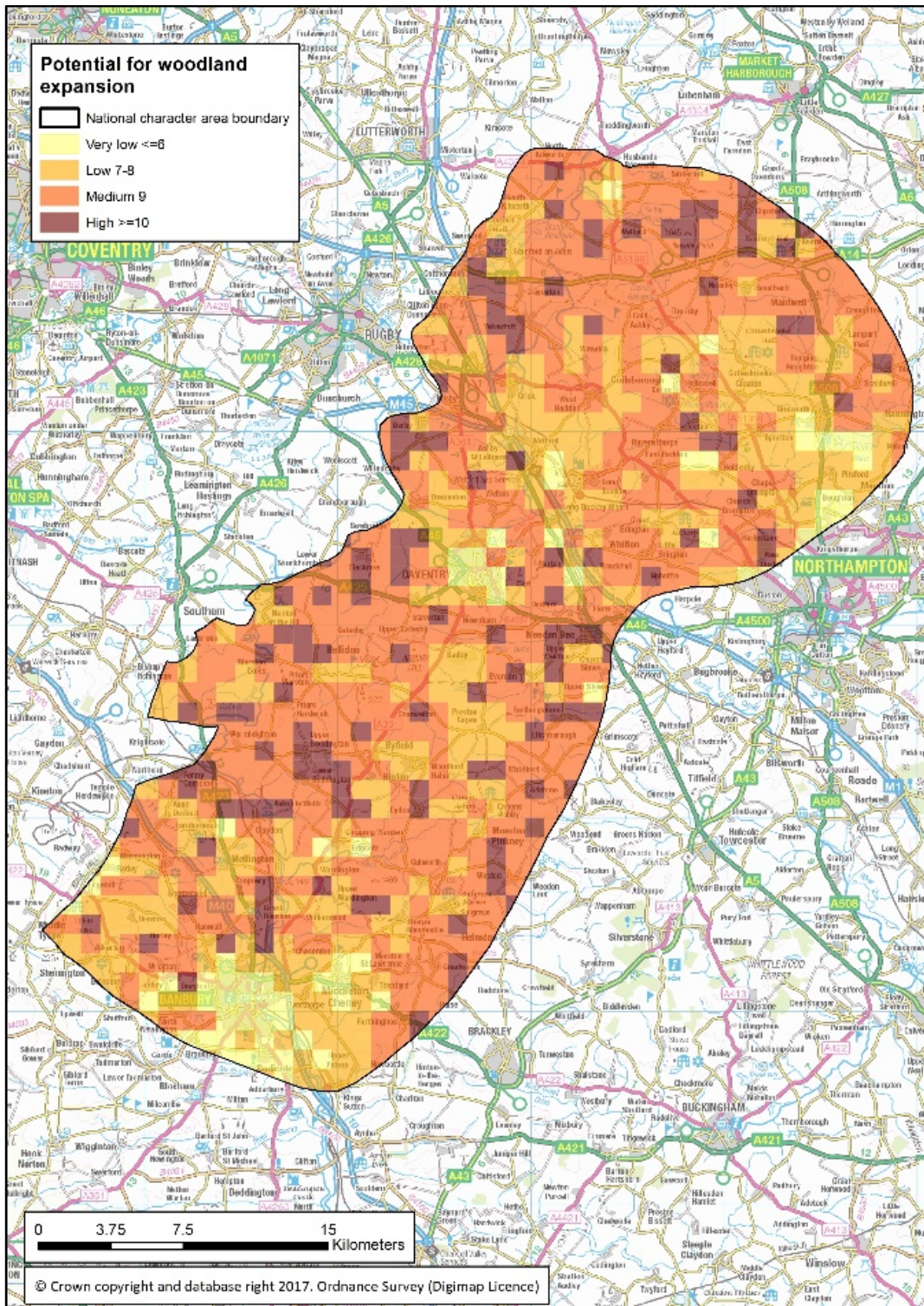
The Northamptonshire Uplands is an area of gently rolling, limestone hills and valleys capped by ironstone-bearing sandstone and clay, with many long, low ridgelines. Rivers flow out from the NCA in all directions, including several major rivers: the Cherwell, Avon, Welland, Tove, Ouse, Nene and Ise. It is a relatively open, rural landscape with a mixture of arable and pasture, and is included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type. Although there are areas of older, ancient enclosure, the field pattern is dominated by regular, medium-sized enclosures with thorn hedgerows and hedgerow trees. There has been significant boundary loss in some areas. The main urban settlements are the historic market towns of Daventry and Banbury, but between is a pattern of well-spaced villages and hamlets. Both the towns and some of the villages have grown in recent years as commuter settlements for the Birmingham conurbation. The area is crossed by several major strategic communication routes, including the A5, the A14, the M1 and M40, as well as the West Coast Main Line and Great Western Railway. Woodland cover is very low, at only 4% of the NCA, of which nearly 11% is ancient woodland. Apart from a few prominent woodlands south of Daventry, most tree cover is in the form of the spinneys dotted across the landscape, often on higher ground. Woodlands are also concentrated along streams and steeper slopes. Small broadleaf woodlands, copses and shelterbelts, combined with hedgerow trees create an impression of a well-treed landscape, despite the overall low percentage of woodland.

The Historic Environment Character

In the Roman period, there were several villas in the Nene Valley, and the same area appears to have been a focus of early Anglo-Saxon settlement, spreading more widely onto the higher lands through the early medieval period. One important Anglo-Saxon settlement within the NCA is Brixworth, to the north of Northampton. Here, excavations have revealed Iron Age and Roman settlement, Anglo-Saxon burials and settlement. Brixworth was a centre of early Christianity and the medieval church contains 7th century fabric. The later medieval settlement pattern was one of nucleated villages with associated common fields, areas of which were enclosed piecemeal from the end of the medieval period. Settlement shrinkage and desertion has left a legacy of ridge and furrow, and settlement earthworks. Settlement desertion was associated with a move to large-scale sheep farming for wool production towards the end of the medieval period, which also saw the development of large estates and country houses. There are also areas of large-scale enclosure from the late 18th and 19th centuries, which are associated with isolated planned farmsteads.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes suggests a low level of potential for new woodland. Where there are clusters of higher potential for new planting, these are scattered across the southern half of the NCA, between the Nene Valley and Banbury, with a small band along the northern edge of the area. Where schemes for woodland expansion are proposed, these should be carried out on a small scale, in accordance with the NCA profile, which recommends connecting habitats and extending existing woodland.



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