

NCA 96 Dunsmore and Feldon

Overview

Dunsmore and Feldon is a predominantly rural, agricultural landscape, crossed by numerous small rivers and tributaries, and is included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type. It covers most of the eastern part of Warwickshire, bordered by the urban areas of Leamington Spa, Coventry and Rugby to the north west. Dunsmore, to the north, is a primarily agricultural landscape with extensive arable and improved pasture, although retaining some heath characteristics. It is an important food-producing area with an agricultural expanse of large, rectilinear arable fields, improved pasture and small villages. Feldon is characterised by an open landscape of pastoral farmland on heavy clay soils, with a nucleated settlement pattern. It has medium to large regular fields, with pockets of smaller and more irregular enclosures. As the NCA lies to the south-west of the Birmingham conurbation, it is crossed by several major communications routes, including the M40 and A45/M45, and the Grand Union, Oxford and Coventry canals run through the area. Woodland cover is low, at 5.4% of the NCA, of which around a third is ancient woodland. Woodlands are frequent in the north of the area, mostly oak and birch on the acid sandy soils, becoming more diverse on the more neutral clay soils. Ancient woodlands have survived extensively, especially in the western part, where they are dominated by oak and birch. Ash, holly, hazel and aspen are locally abundant, as is alder on wetter sites. Small-leaved lime and wild service can also be found. The southern Feldon area is predominantly an open landscape and is sparsely wooded, although woodland is more frequent especially on the western flank and occasional steep scarps.

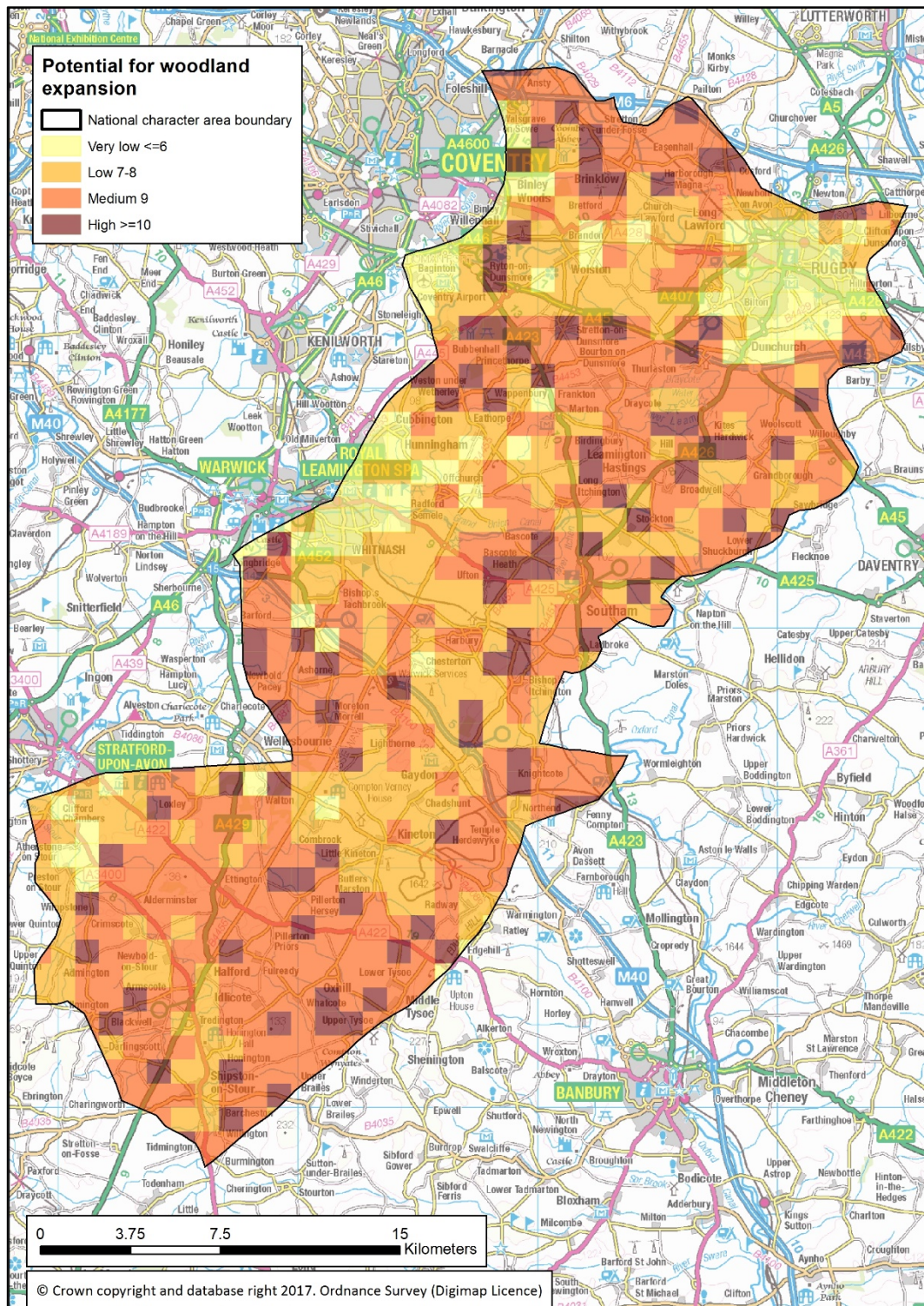
The Historic Environment Character

One of the most distinctive historic features of the NCA is the Fosse Way Roman Road, which bisects the area from north to south. Its route is preserved very clearly in the line of the B4455 and A429. The road was a focus of Roman settlement, such as the rural settlement next to the Fosse Way at Windmill Hill Farm. The fertile area of the Feldon appears to have been settled extensively by the Iron Age, and by the later medieval period a well-established farming economy of villages and extensive common fields. The whole of the NCA was subject to piecemeal enclosure in the late medieval period, with a move to sheep grazing to supply wool for the clothing industry. The area of former arable fields has left a legacy of ridge and furrow earthworks, reflecting the former dominance of common field arable cultivation. It survives in numerous places and is especially important in areas such as Lower Tysoe and Radwell, below Edge Hill, and further to the north-east around Napton on the Hill. In the post medieval period, agricultural improvements saw arable production combined with the fattening of cattle and sheep for meat, with some dairying. Smaller farms were amalgamated, and new, planned farmsteads were built. In Dunsmore, the remaining commons were enclosed in the late 18th and 19th century and converted to arable.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates only a low potential for new woodland. The NCA profile emphasises the need to manage existing areas of woodland, extending and linking habitats through new planting, particularly in Dunsmore. It also identifies the urban fringes of Coventry and other towns as areas where new woodland

might be planted. The distribution of small clusters of higher potential in the mapping does confirm that most opportunities are around existing woodland, particularly in the north, though opportunities on urban fringes are less distinct.



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