

# NCA 97 Arden

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## *Overview*

Arden NCA lies within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type and covers large urban areas, including parts of the Birmingham conurbation and the city of Coventry, as well as smaller urban areas such as Redditch, Bromsgrove and Nuneaton. Agriculture varies, with pasture and arable. The field pattern also varies from a rectilinear pattern of larger fields, with straight roads and hedges, to extensive areas of farmland, characterised by small, irregular fields, dense, thick hedges, winding lanes and trackways. There are villages in the river valleys, but much of the rural settlement pattern is highly dispersed. The area is a major transport corridor, including mainline railways and several motorways such as the M5, M6, M6 toll, M40 and M42, as well as more regional main roads. Woodland coverage is 8% of the NCA, of which just under a third is ancient woodland. Although this figure seems low, the large urban areas mean that the countryside is quite well-wooded. The ancient woodland resource is found in significant pockets across the whole NCA, such as at the scarp south of Atherstone, west of Redditch. Mature hedgerow oaks scatter the area along with small ancient and plantation woodland sites. Former manorial deer parks, such as Stoneleigh Abbey, Packington Hall and Maxstoke Park contain significant areas of wood pasture.

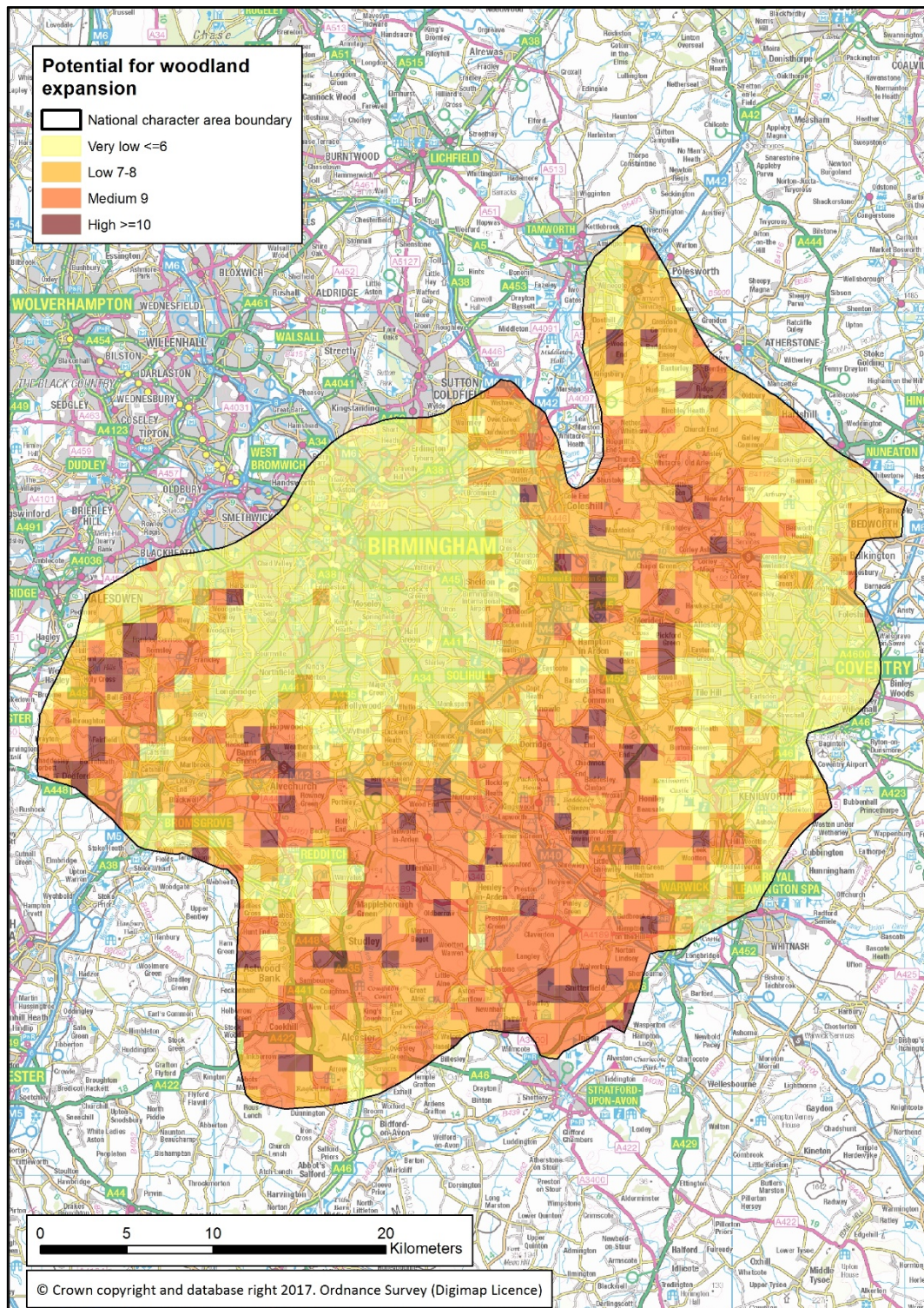
## *The Historic Environment Character*

Historically, Arden was a wood-pasture region of woodland on the loam and clay-based soils, with heaths on light soils, where dairying and stock farming has been more important than grain production. Pastoral farming combined with dispersed settlement fostered the development of a prosperous and independent class of freeholders in the medieval period, reflected in high numbers of high-status moated sites of the 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, pre-18<sup>th</sup>-century farmstead architecture and gentry houses. The heathlands were used for common grazing, and from the late medieval period, they were subject to encroachment by common-edge smallholdings. Manorial deer parks also developed largely on the heaths in the medieval period, for example at Paddington and Stoneleigh. From the late 17<sup>th</sup> century the expanding urban population of the coalfields and Birmingham stimulated an increase in barley production, and strengthening of the dairy industry, including the export of cheese to London and Birmingham via the canal network. Significant areas of orchard were planted to provide produce to the Birmingham conurbation. Industry also developed in the countryside, for example the Arrow Valley and Redditch in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were focused on the needle industry, making use of existing water-powered corn mills. The development of the coalfield in the north-east was linked to the coking and smelting industries.

## *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a very low potential for new woodland planting, though this is at least partly the result of the extensive areas of urban development. There are small areas of higher potential scattered across the NCA, larger in the southern half, mainly around existing woodland. This would accord with the NCA profile, which recommends the extension of woodland networks in order to link blocks of existing planting and create habitat networks. New planting should also include

hedgerow trees, particularly in the north of the area, and the NCA profile emphasises the importance of choosing the correct species for different areas.



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