

## 98 Clun and North West Herefordshire Hills

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### *Background*

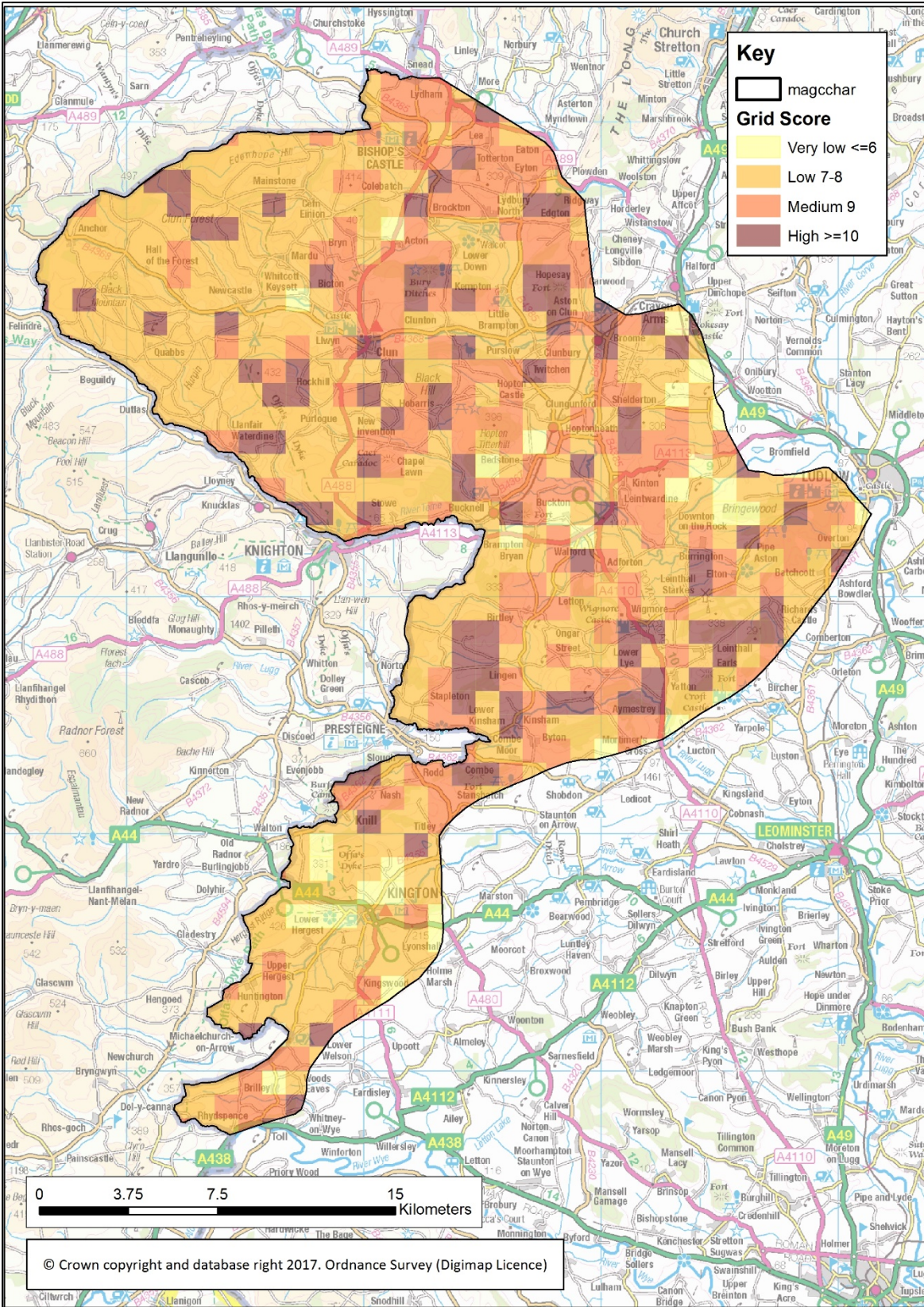
The NCA lies covers part of the counties of Herefordshire and Shropshire and its western boundary is the border between England and Wales. It is a predominantly rural landscape covering undulating hills along the Welsh border, divided by the valleys of the Rivers Arrow, Lugg, Clun and Teme, all tributaries of the River Severn. Agriculture is predominantly pastoral in regular, medium-sized enclosures, with rough grazing on moorland on the hill tops. Arable cultivation is carried out on the lower slopes, and in the valleys and around settlements, irregular enclosures form the field pattern. The settlement pattern is one of sparsel villages and hamlets on the west side of the NCA, concentrated in upper valleys linked by narrow lanes and tracks. To the east, settlements become more frequent, located on lower ground and often sited close to river crossings. The road network is one of mainly local routes, though the few main roads are well used, connecting some of the larger settlements along the border. The A4113, which bisects the NCA, is one of the key routes into mid Wales. The area is very well-wooded, with a coverage of 17%, of which nearly a half is ancient woodland. The heads and steep slopes of the valleys are wooded, usually with deciduous trees. East of Clun there are substantial coniferous woodlands, particularly on the hill tops.

### *Historical Background*

There is good evidence for prehistoric settlement, particularly in Herefordshire, where a prehistoric co-axial field system is still legible in the landscape. In the uplands, in permanent pasture and moorland, there is good preservation of prehistoric monuments such as burial mounds and hillforts. There is a concentration of Roman forts and camps to the west of Ludlow, along the Teme Valley, which would have provided easy access into central Wales. The area's long history as a frontier landscape is evidence in the early medieval period. Offa's Dyke runs through the Clun Hills in the north of the NCA, and the pre-Conquest motte and bailey castle at Richard's Castle is a remnant of Edwards the Confessor's settlement of Norman knights on the border. Several castles dating from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century are found in the central dales and hills, including Ludlow, just on the eastern edge of the NCA, which developed as the centre of the marcher lordship. These castles became the focus of smaller manorial estates, many of which developed into country houses with landscaped parks. Medieval settlement normally took the form of planned villages and towns, many sited on strategic river crossings. The settlements range from planned boroughs, such as Bishop's Castle and Clun, to linear villages with church and/or castle. Cattle rearing was the main form of agriculture, with crops grown on a subsistence basis, apart from the broad valleys where arable could be carried out on a larger scale. The Wigmore Basin, in particular, has seen more intensive arable.

### *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes suggests there is are good opportunities in the NCA for woodland expansion. Even so, the areas of highest potential are quite defined, mainly around areas of existing woodland. This would allow planting on steep valley slopes, as highlighted by the NCA profile, to expand and connect native woodland habitats. Some woodland removal may also be required within existing woodlands, particularly around some of the area's prehistoric hillforts.



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