

NCA 100 Herefordshire Lowlands

Overview

Most of the NCA is within the county of Herefordshire, with small areas to the north and east crossing into neighbouring counties. The undulating landscape is one of steep-sided hills, particularly in the centre of the NCA, around the wide valleys of the River Wye and its tributaries, such as the Rivers Lugg, Frome and Leadon. It lies within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, with arable cultivation concentrated in the wide river valleys, and mixed farming elsewhere. Agriculture is fairly intensive and, in addition to arable, includes soft fruit production, potatoes, hops and orchard fruits. Cultivated fields are large, and there has been significant boundary loss. Smaller, regular pasture fields are found on the higher ground, and the NCA is notable for Lammas (or common) meadows near Hereford. The orchard and hop fields tends to be small and regular. The largest settlement within the NCA is the city of Hereford, with other local urban centres at Leominster and Ledbury. Most of the NCA is rural in character, with a settlement pattern dominated by small villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads. Many of the scattered farmsteads and hamlets originated as squatter settlements around greens and commons. Hereford is a communications hub, where several major roads converge on the city, including the A49, the main route along the English-Welsh border, as well as routes into mid- and South Wales. The NCA has woodland cover of around 7%, of which 42% is ancient woodland. Most of the woodland is found on and around the steep slopes of the hills and is dominated by deciduous trees of oak and ash. Many of the woodlands were traditionally managed as coppice, though this has now declined. Orchards are a common feature, though now their distribution is more restricted to areas around settlements. There are remnants of wet woodland in the valleys, and historic parklands are important for ancient and veteran trees.

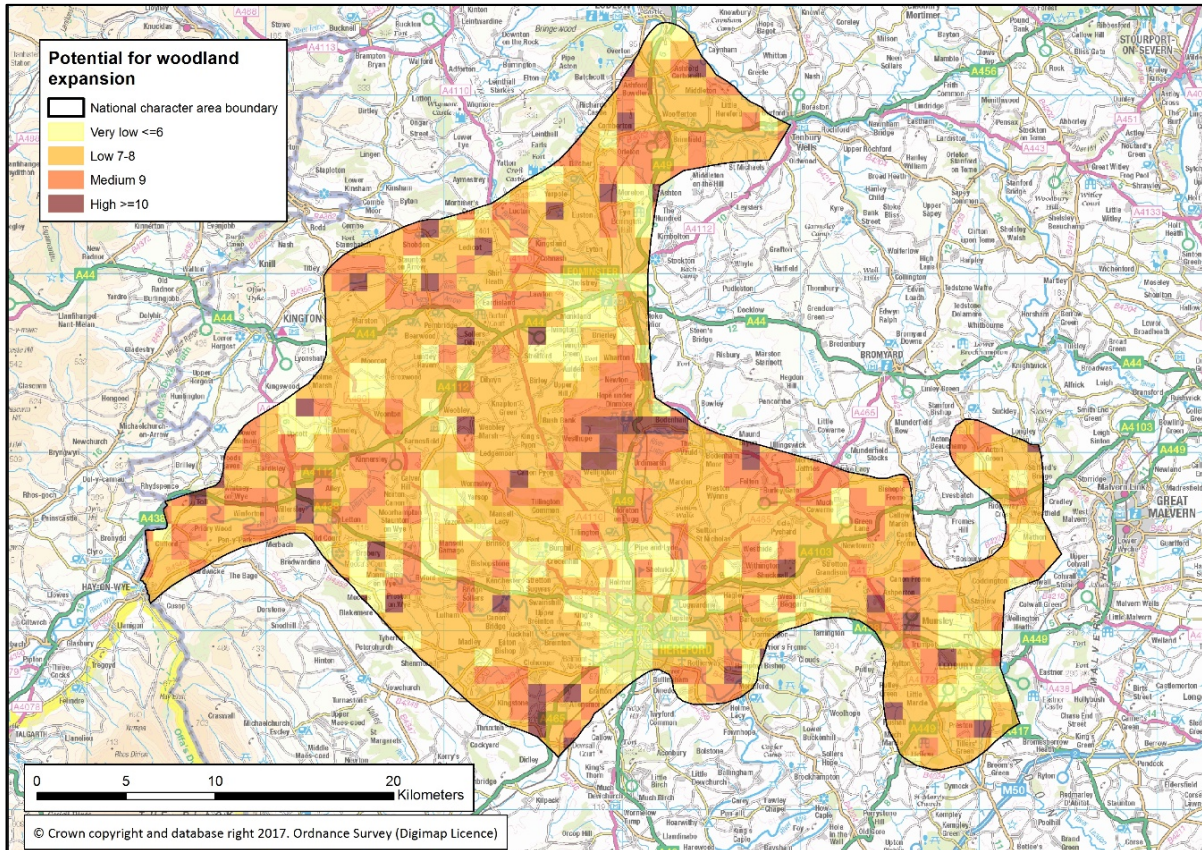
The Historic Environment Character

Defensive monuments of various periods are a particular feature of the NCA, both from its position as a border county between England and Wales and from the opportunities offered by the many steep-sided hills. Such monuments include several prehistoric hill forts, the early medieval Offa's Dyke, and later medieval earthwork castles. Moated sites are a feature of the valleys. The area also has many non-defensive sites, including prehistoric and Romano-British settlements surviving as cropmarks in the valleys, there are several Roman roads including Watling Street, a large Roman settlement at Kenchester (Magna), a Roman villa at Bishopstone and a crossing of the Wye at The Weir. The area's agricultural wealth helped contribute to the development of country houses and parklands in the post medieval period, many developing from existing manorial and gentry houses. A distinctive feature of the area is orcharding, which is recorded as early as the 14th century, and formed part of a mixed farming economy. In the post medieval period orcharding remained important, though agriculture was dominated by corn-livestock farming. With the introduction of the railways in the late 19th century, the cider- and fruit-producing industries expanded onto a commercial scale, transforming the character of the orchards.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment habitats suggests that there is a very low potential for new woodland. Even so, woodland creation is identified as an opportunity within the NCA profile, particularly for improved connectivity between fragmented

woodland. Wet woodland is also seen as a priority. Where the mapping does identify clusters of higher potential, new planting is likely to take the form of small woodlands and hedgerows, and extension of existing woodland. The only significant cluster of opportunity identified by the mapping is on the Dinmore hills, above the River Lugg. Any other opportunities are very localised.



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