

# NCA 101 Herefordshire Plateau

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## *Overview*

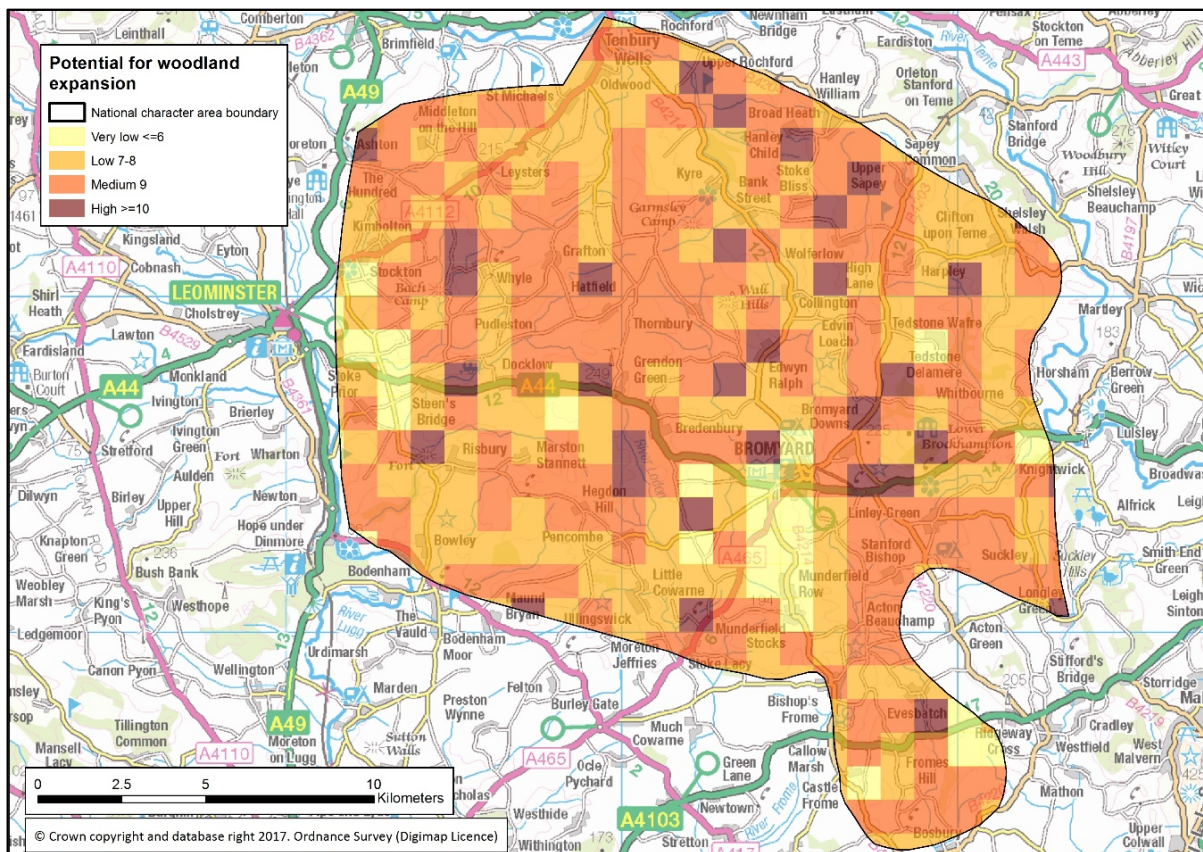
This small NCA occupies an undulating plateau, surrounded on three sides by the Herefordshire Lowlands NCA, and divided by small, steep-sided valleys. It is a predominantly rural area, within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, with a settlement pattern dominated by small villages, hamlets and scattered farmsteads. Many of the scattered farmsteads and hamlets originated as squatter settlements around greens and commons. Bromyard and Tenbury Wells are the two urban centres, both small historic market towns. The field pattern is one of medium- to large-scale arable enclosures on the open, flatter plateau and river flood plains, with smaller and more irregular areas of pasture and mixed farming elsewhere. Apart from a few main roads that cross the area, linking the regional urban centres, the road pattern is one of minor roads and lanes. Woodland cover is 9% of the NCA, of which just over 28% is ancient woodland. Away from the arable areas, it has a wooded landscape character, particularly along the valley of the River Teme. There are farm and woodland copses, game plantations and riparian trees. Occasional groups of conifers represent designed landscape planting of exotics, including small groups of Wellingtonias, cedars and similar species around manor houses and rectories. Orchards are an important aspect of the wooded landscape character, scattered throughout the NCA particularly in the west. Scattered damson trees are a distinctive feature along many of the hedgerows. The Brockhampton estate and commons, particularly on its steeper slopes, are generally well-wooded.

## *The Historic Environment Character*

There is extensive evidence for prehistoric and Romano-British settlement, with the highest points of the NCA occupied by Iron Age hill forts, such as Wall Hills Camp, Thornbury. In the later medieval period, the area developed as a corn-livestock region primarily. Cattle, many of which were bought in for fattening, and pigs were an important part of the system, often living in the orchards. The orchards were used for cider-making from at least the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and hop fields were brought in from 18<sup>th</sup> century, typically planted on the valley floors and intermixed with arable. As part of the pasturing system, extensive water meadows were established along the wide river valleys from 17<sup>th</sup> century. The dispersed settlement pattern was established in the medieval period, with some nucleated settlement along the valleys, but often the manorial and religious centres comprised groupings of a motte, church and later manor house.

## *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates only a low potential for woodland expansion. The mapping shows few clusters highlighting opportunities for new woodland, and where there are areas of higher potential, these are around existing woodland cover, such as to the west of Brockhampton. There is a wider spread of clusters considered to have a medium level of opportunity for new woodland, though this implies that the size of new planting would need to be limited. New woodland in these areas would meet the opportunities identified in the NCA for joining up existing areas of ancient woodland and connecting habitats, including through hedgerow establishment and management.



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