

NCA 103 Malvern Hills

Overview

This small NCA comprises a narrow ridge of hills lying across the county boundary between Worcestershire and Herefordshire, with the River Teme forming the northern boundary. Just over 86% of the NCA lies within the Malvern Hills AONB. The Malverns are included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type, and the main ridge is unenclosed common land, used for sheep grazing, and open access land. On the lower slopes, agriculture is dominated by a pastoral landscape of irregular fields, resulting from piecemeal enclosure, but interspersed with larger fields, enclosed or reorganised in the late 18th and 19th centuries. At the south end of the NCA is the extensive designed parkland of the Eastnor estate. The settlement pattern is a largely dispersed one, many originating as common-edge settlements. Larger nucleated settlements have grown through the spread of Victorian and Edwardian housing in the towns of Great and Little Malvern which lie on the eastern edge of the NCA, and through the spread of modern housing at Colwell Stone and Colwell Green. Communication routes are restricted by the Malvern Hills, with main routes running through Great and Little Malvern on the west side, and through low points in the hills. The NCA is very well-wooded, with coverage of 27% of the area. Over half of this is ancient woodland, although 35% of this has been replanted. Much of the woodland is on the steep hillsides, and has been managed through coppicing in the past or clear felled, so there are few veteran specimens. Mature and veteran trees are found in the south, within landscape parks.

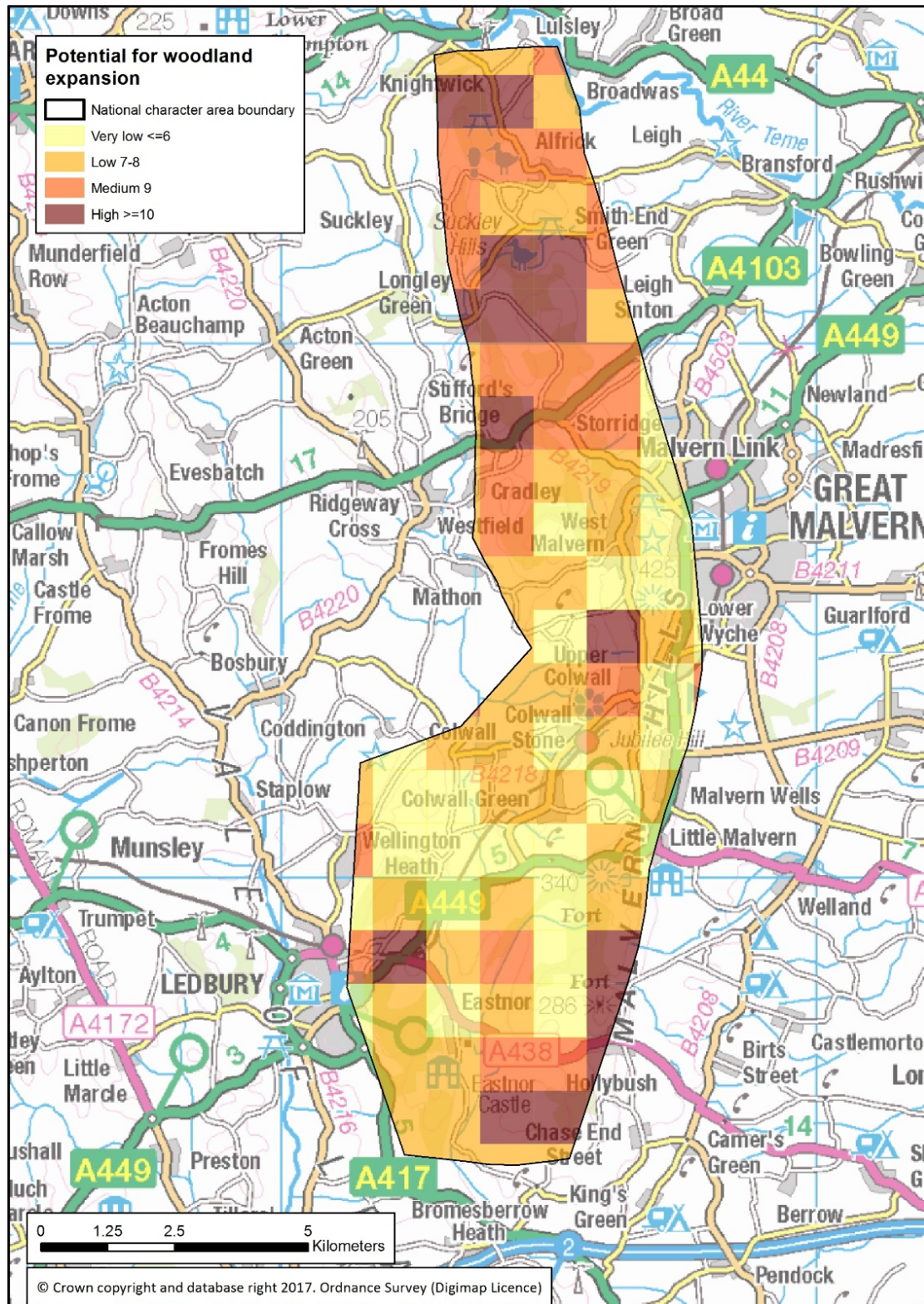
The Historic Environment Character

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the NCA is the range of prehistoric earthworks along the heights of the Malvern Hills. The monuments include two Iron Age hill forts on Herefordshire Beacon (also known as British Camp) and Midsummer Hill. Midsummer Hill Camp also has evidence of Bronze Age occupation, and a short distance to the north are two Bronze Age round barrows. British Camp was reused as a fortification in the 11th century. Running the length of the hills is the Shire Ditch, marking the county boundary between Herefordshire and Worcestershire, but which also has evidence for prehistoric origins. The whole area was under forest law in the medieval period. The part within Herefordshire was known as Ledbury Chase, and had been part of the Bishop of Hereford's estates from before the Conquest. To the east was Malvern Chase, a royal forest. The two were combined as Malvern Forest in the mid-16th century and which was disafforested in the 17th century. The area's status as forest has resulted in a dispersed settlement pattern, with piecemeal enclosure on the lower slopes of the hills. Arable farming appears to have been in small closes, as evidenced by cultivation earthworks, though a pastoral economy dominated. Orcharding was a key part of the agricultural economy, reaching a peak in the 17th century, with hops also cultivated from the 18th century, particularly on the northern valley sides.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a medium level of potential for woodland expansion, particularly at the northern and southern ends of the NCA, at Eastnor and around the Suckley Hills. Woodland already contributes significantly to the historic landscape character of the NCA, and the management of existing areas of woodland is an opportunity identified in the NCA profile. It also highlights the need to

maintain a mosaic of habitats and species near the ridge and to control scrub and secondary woodland. There are areas on the hill sides suitable for woodland planting, but any new woodland would need to take into account the nationally significant archaeological and historical monuments within the NCA, and their setting.



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