

NCA 109 Midvale Ridge

Overview

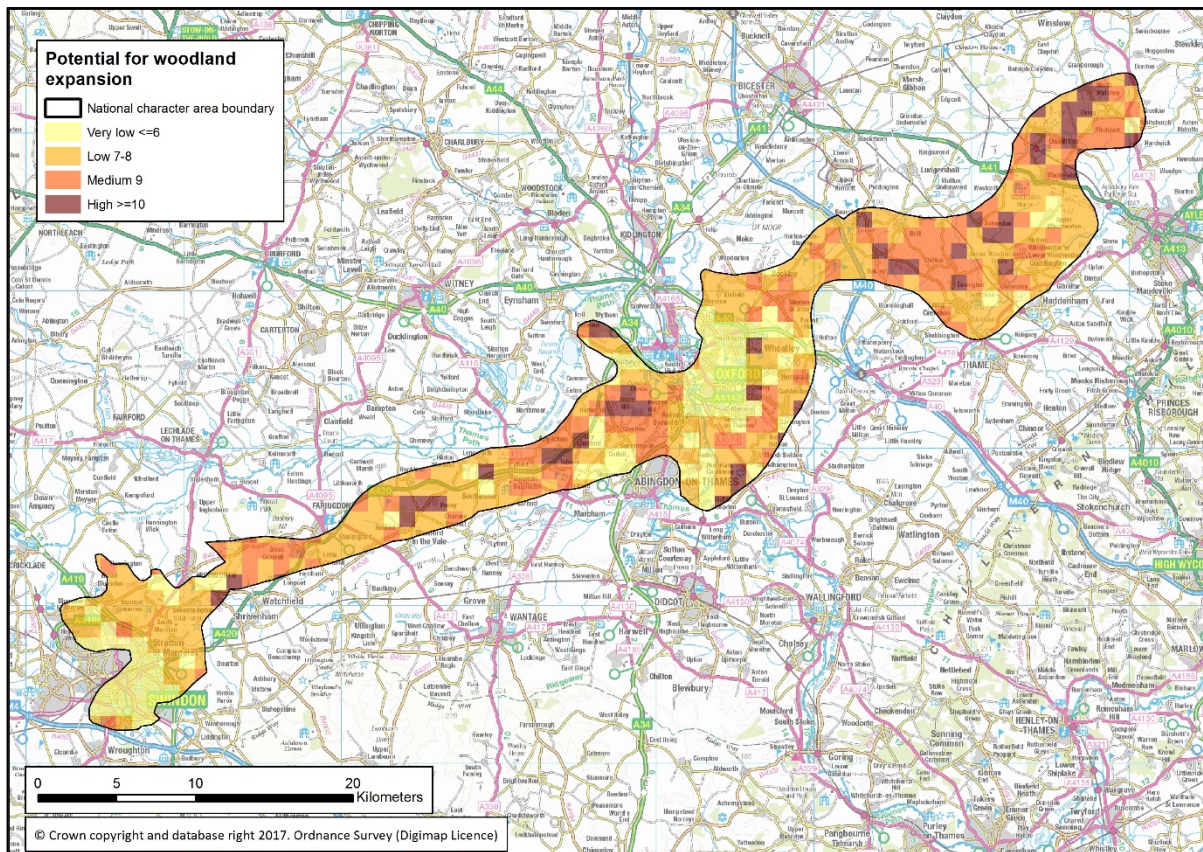
The NCA is a long, narrow, low-lying ridge of limestone, which is surrounded by the Upper Thames Clay Vales. It is a predominantly rural area, included within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, with a mixed agriculture of arable and pasture. Fields are generally large and rectilinear, representing Parliamentary enclosure or the reorganisation and rationalisation of earlier enclosures. Field boundaries are mainly hedgerows with well-spaced hedgerow trees. The settlement pattern is one of nucleated villages, interspersed with occasional farmsteads. The area also contains the large town of Swindon and the city of Oxford, which lies across the valley of the River Thames where it cuts through the ridge. The area is the main communication route between Swindon and Oxford, with the A420 running along the ridge. The area is also crossed by the A40 and M40. The area is relatively well-wooded, with a coverage of 9%, of which a third is ancient woodland. Around a fifth of the area lies within the Great Western Community Forest. There are larger areas of woodland to the west of Oxford, whereas further east small woodlands and individual trees are more common. There are significant areas of coniferous woodland along the ridge, in some areas representing the replanting of native woodlands. To the west, there are coppice woods with standards, though elsewhere the practice has ceased. Woodland has expanded in some areas, to colonise former heaths, where grazing has been abandoned.

The Historic Environment Character

The ridge has extensive evidence for settlement from prehistoric times, including barrows, settlements, hillforts, and Roman settlement including villas and religious complexes. Oxford was an important settlement from the Anglo-Saxon period, forming part of the burghal system of Wessex, and in the later medieval period becoming a centre of learning with the establishment of the University. Industry has played a key part in the character of the NCA from the medieval period, with pottery, brick and tile-making, limestone quarrying, and wool production. From the introduction of the railways in the 19th century, Swindon grew as an important railway centre and locomotive manufacture.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The opportunities for woodland expansion are low according to the mapping of historic and natural environment attributes. Even so, the mapping does suggest that there is some capacity for expansion to the east of Oxford, where woodland is found in smaller blocks and is more fragmentary. This would fit with the opportunities identified by the NCA profile, which suggests new planting to link up fragmented habitats and extending and linking existing areas. The restoration of coppiced woodland is also highlighted by the profile document.



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