

NCA 113 North Kent Plain

Overview

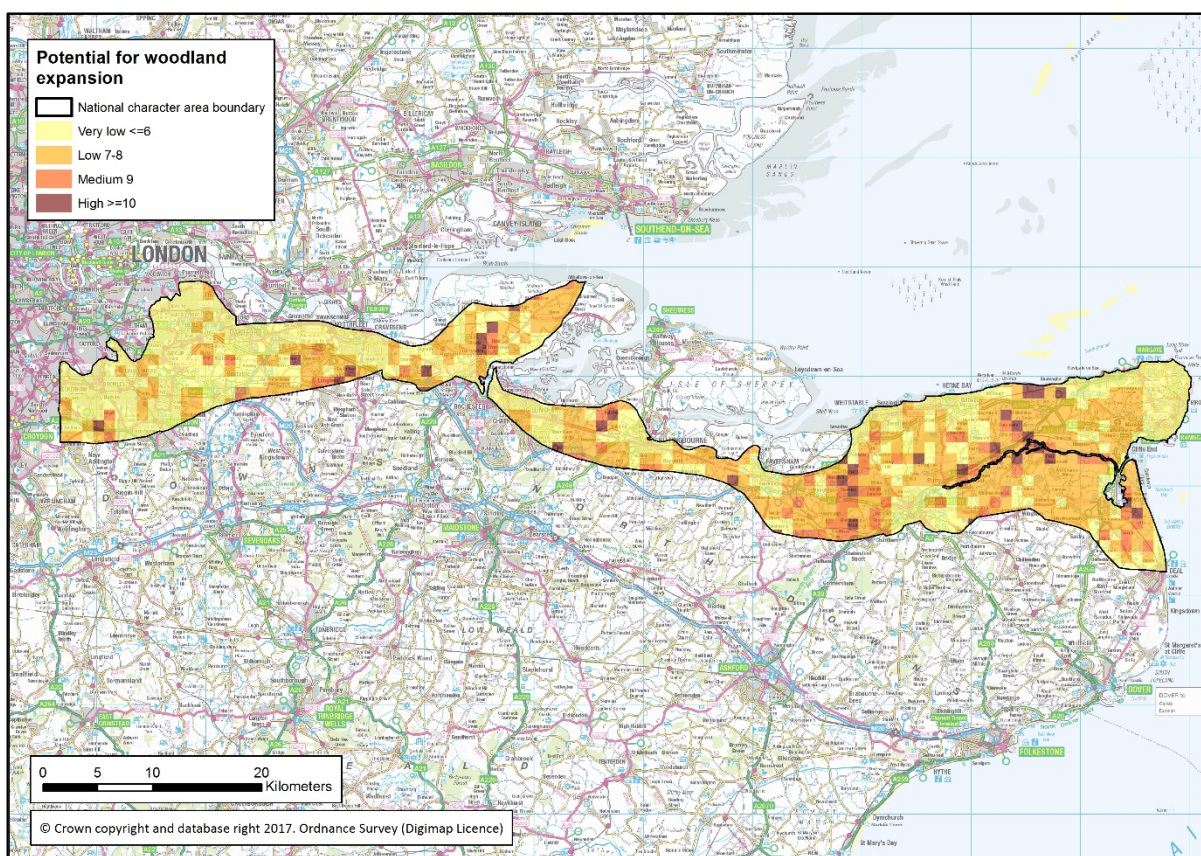
The NCA is a long and narrow strip to the south of the Greater Thames Estuary NCA, comprising an open, low-lying and gently undulating landscape, with the North Downs to the south. Small parts of the Kent Downs AONB fall within the NCA. The area extends east-west, from the seaside resorts of Ramsgate, Broadstairs and Margate in the east to the outer suburbs of south London in the west. From Whitstable eastwards, the NCA is bounded by the coast to the north. It is included within the South East Mixed (woodland) Agricultural Landscape Type, and is a productive arable area mixed with horticultural production, particularly orchard and soft fruit growing. Arable production is generally in large, rectilinear fields with few boundaries. Fields tend to be demarcated by ditches. There is a significant urban element to the NCA, with a large part of the western portion made up of outer London suburbs and commuter settlements such as Orpington and Dartford. Further east, there are substantial urban settlements such as Gravesend, Gillingham, Sittingbourne and Faversham, as well as the county town of Canterbury and the coastal towns and resorts of the north Kent coast. Canterbury Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church are designated as a World Heritage site. Rural settlement is dominated by villages, with occasional farmsteads between, apart from The Blean, to the north and west of Canterbury, where the settlement pattern is more dispersed and includes moated sites. The NCA is a transport corridor, with major roads linking the urban areas, and links to the M25, M2 and M20, which cross through the area. The NCA has reasonable woodland coverage, at 10% of the total area, over half of which is ancient woodland. Woodland is not evenly distributed across the NCA, however, and in some areas woodland does not really form part of the landscape character. The largest continuous area of woodland within Kent, however, is found to the north of Canterbury around Blean, and is designated as an SAC. Over much of the NCA, woodland is found mainly as shelterbelts of poplar and alder, particularly in the fruit-growing areas.

The Historic Environment Character

The NCA is notable for the Lower Palaeolithic skull pieces found at Swanscombe, and for the many Roman remains that survive above ground. Rochester is amongst the earliest Roman remains in Britain, but there are also Saxon Shore forts at Richborough and Reculver. Watling Street Roman road still influences road patterns, whilst the north-south pattern of minor roads reflects the historic settlement pattern. Many of these minor roads are thought to have origins as Saxon drove roads, for the movement of pigs. The historic field systems include co-axial systems which may originate in late prehistory. There is also archaeological evidence for settlement from Iron Age, Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods. The city of Canterbury is within the NCA, and the Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey and St Martin's Church are designated as a World Heritage site for its continued significance in the development of Christianity in England, as well as for the architectural value of its buildings. The NCA is also important for maritime defences from the Roman Saxon Shore forts, through medieval castles and post medieval forts, to the 20th century defences of World War II. Chatham naval dockyard and its related defences are of national significance.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The historic and natural environment attributes indicate a very low level of opportunity for woodland expansion. The reason for such a low level of opportunity is at least partly explained by the extensive areas of urban development. The NCA profile suggests there are opportunities for new woodland to screen areas of development, which could also be used to link existing habitats. The mapping also indicates some possibilities for woodland planting in the east of the NCA, particularly in the Blean, expanding existing woodland to connect nature reserves. Any woodland expansion in The Blean would, however, must take account of other important habitats such as grassland and wetland. Small woodlands could also be created elsewhere, and the mapping indicates that there may be some scope for this in the coastal strip to the east of The Blean.



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