

NCA 114 Thames Basin Lowlands

Overview

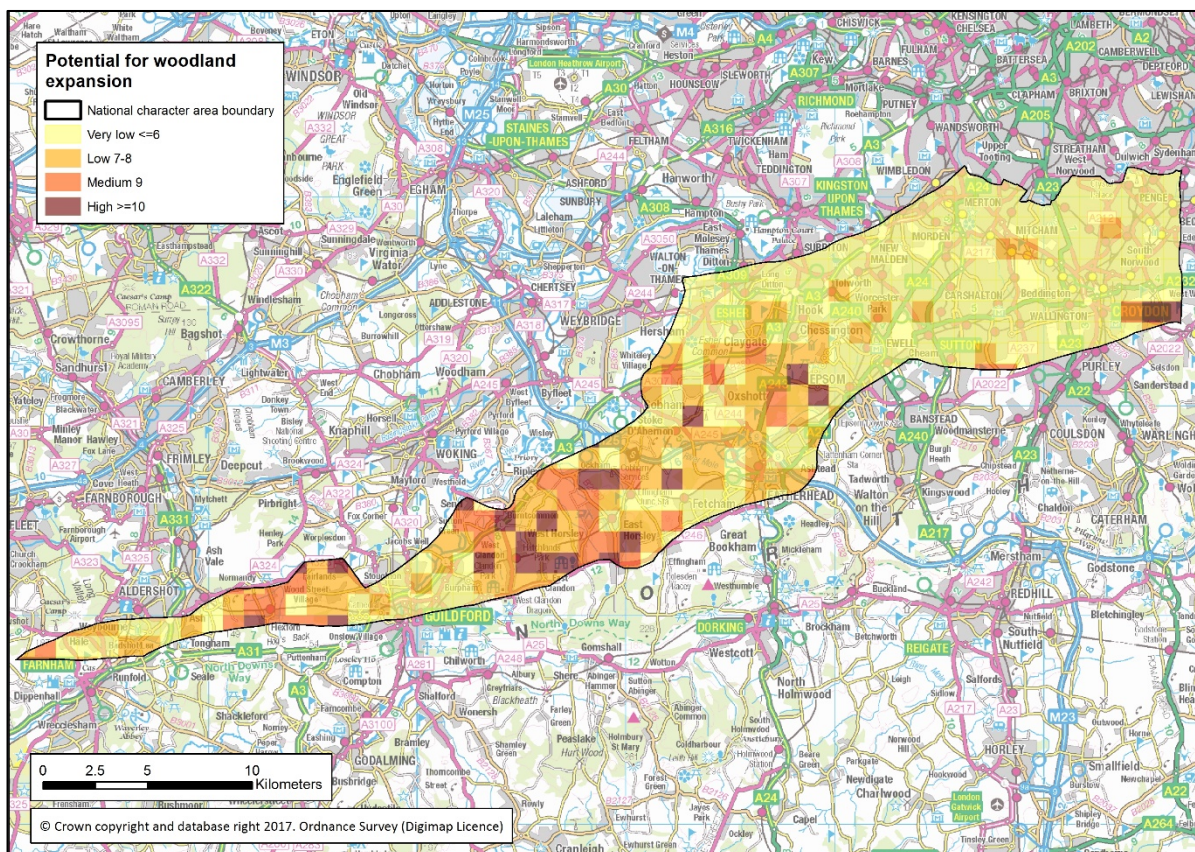
The NCA is a narrow, east-west band running along the southern edge of the Thames Basin and is included within the South East Mixed (woodland) Agricultural Landscape Type. Croydon marks the eastern end, and the area runs westward, tapering to a narrow corridor as far as Aldershot in the west. It is a gently undulating area, just over a third of which is open countryside, dominated by cereal cultivation, but with predominantly pastoral farmland in the west, where the irregular fields are small- to medium-sized. Nearly two thirds of the NCA is urban, particularly in the east, which is made up of outer London suburbs, but also includes the substantial urban areas of Croydon, Sutton, Guildford, Epsom and Esher. Between the urban areas, the underlying settlement pattern was traditionally dispersed. There are major road and rail transport links running through the area, including the M25 and A3. The area is well-wooded, with a coverage of 13% of the NCA, of which around a fifth is ancient woodland. The woodland is dominated by broadleaved species, mainly oak/ash or oak/birch. The western part of the NCA is more sparsely covered, but where there is woodland, it tends to be semi-natural ancient woodland.

The Historic Environment Character

The NCA had a largely dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and hamlets in the medieval period. Individual farmsteads, including several moated sites, were established with their own enclosures, many surviving in patterns of irregular fields. The origins of many were as assarts from woodland or the edges of common land. Land use was a mosaic of enclosures, common arable fields, heathland and woodland. The woollen industry was a key source of wealth from the later medieval period, particularly the finishing of cloth, with many fulling mills established on the river network that forms part of the Thames watershed. Woodlands were also a key resource from the medieval period, and they were coppiced to supply fuel for metal processing. Settlement expanded in the post medieval period, because of the NCA's proximity to London and particularly along the coach roads. Urban expansion was further stimulated by the copper and iron industries that were concentrated on riversides in towns. Major urban expansion came with the introduction of the railways, which encouraged the development of extensive commuter towns.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a low level of opportunity for woodland expansion, reflecting the urban character of a large proportion of the NCA. There are opportunities highlighted by the mapping to the east and west of Guildford, generally as a means of expanding existing areas of woodland. The NCA profile emphasises the need to manage existing areas of ancient woodland, but does also highlight the opportunity to link habitats through the extension of existing woodland and the creation of new native woodland. The NCA profile does, however, also recognise the need to remove existing secondary woodland, in order to restore areas of open heath and commons.



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