

# NCA 117 Avon Vale

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## *Overview*

The Avon Vale runs in a north-south band covering the valleys of the River Avon and its tributaries, the Rivers Frome and Biss. It extends from Malmesbury in the north to Frome in the south. The NCA lies within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and covers a low-lying, open clay land landscape with mixed farming, mainly pastoral, though with arable cultivation forming a significant proportion. Field size varies considerably, with smaller, less regular enclosures in areas of pasture, where there is also better hedgerow preservation. The settlement pattern, too, is mixed, with villages and towns interspersed with hamlets and individual farms. There are several historic towns within the NCA, including Malmesbury, Calne, Melksham, Trowbridge, Westbury and Frome, all located within the main river valleys. The NCA is a transport corridor, with main roads and rail lines linking the towns, as well as the M4, which crosses the northern section of the area. The Kennet and Avon Canal also crosses the NCA, between Devizes and Bradford-on-Avon, and includes the Caen Hill Locks, the longest flight of locks in the country. The NCA contains very small portions of the Cotswolds, North Wessex Downs, and Cranbourne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONBs. The area does not have good woodland coverage, at only 6% of the NCA, though nearly 43% of this is ancient woodland. The distribution of woodland is uneven, with concentrations to the south west of Calne, where the more wooded landscape reflects the landscape parks of Bowood House and Spye Park, and their surrounding areas. There is also more woodland in the far south of the area, between Frome and Warminster, and along the south-eastern boundary of the NCA, on the steeper slopes that mark the edge of the chalk downs of Salisbury Plain.

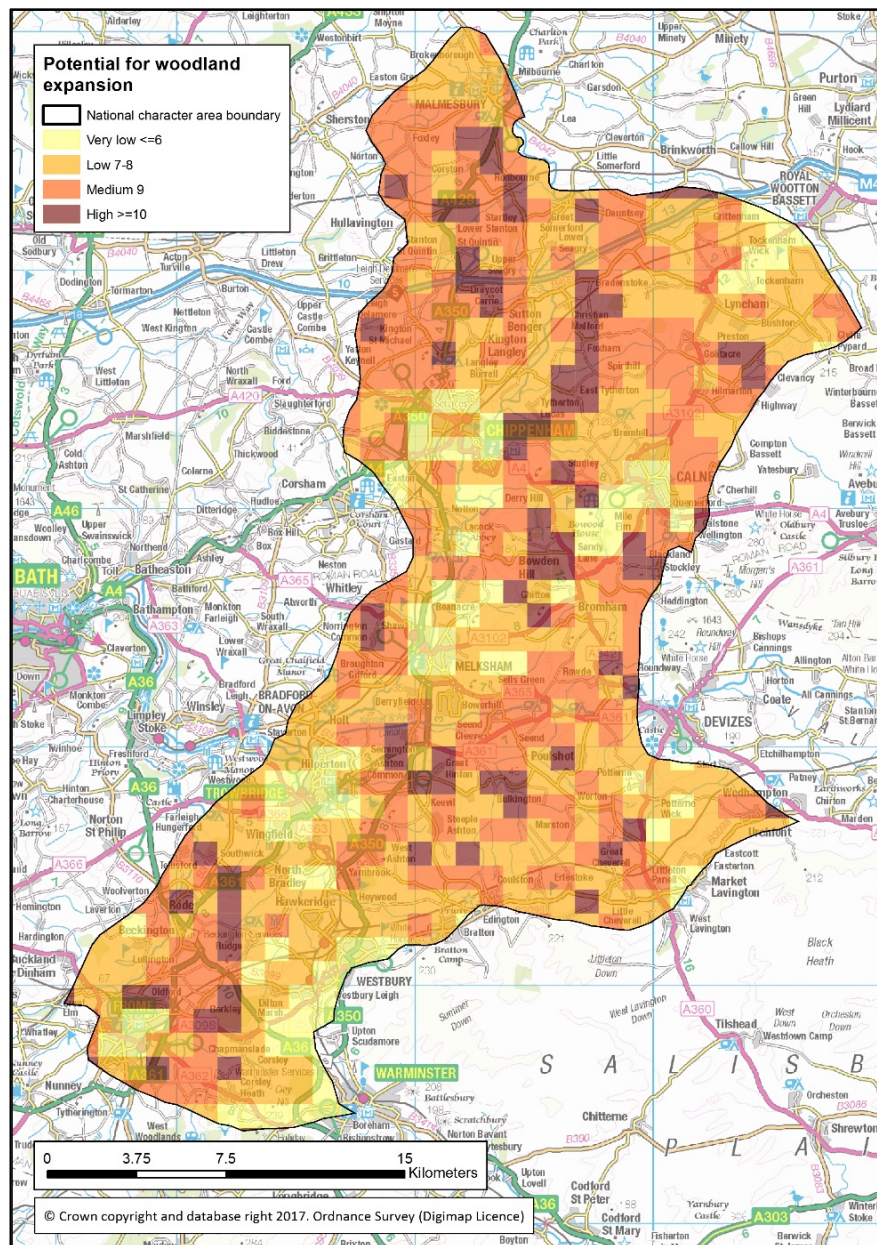
## *The Historic Environment Character*

The NCA is significant for its early and later medieval settlement, including the important early Christian centre and burh at Malmesbury, where some of the town defences survive. Calne, too, was an Anglo-Saxon settlement and centre of a royal estate, and there was Anglo-Saxon settlement at Melksham, Towbridge and Chippenham, the last of which may, too, have been a royal estate. At Market Lavington, there is evidence for continuous settlement in the area from the Roman period, including an early Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery and a mid to late Saxon settlement, and at Cowage Farm, Norton, near Malmesbury, a 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century high status settlement was excavated. Part of the Wansdyke, the boundary between Wessex and Mercia lies to the south of Chippenham. In the later medieval period, the area became a centre of the wool trade and broadcloth industry, based around the rivers that supplied the power for the fulling mills. The wealth from the industry can be seen in the churches and merchants' houses of the towns, from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In the post medieval period, the industry was concentrated much more in towns such as Frome and Trowbridge. Landed estates developed in the post medieval period, particularly from the former monastic holdings following the Dissolution of

the Monasteries, such as Lacock, Spye and Bowood. Lacock Abbey and village is now in the ownership of the National Trust and is a major tourist attraction.

### Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a low potential for woodland expansion across the NCA, though with some opportunities for new woodland in the north of the area and around areas of existing woodland. This would fit with the opportunities highlighted by the NCA profile, to extend and link up areas of existing woodland to enhance biodiversity networks. The profile also highlights the opportunity to create new woodland around areas of development for both recreation and to aid water management. The areas of greatest opportunity indicated by the mapping are generally close to existing towns and villages, which will be subject to settlement expansion. The NCA profile, however, also highlights the need to protect the archaeological resource, including the removal of scrub.



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