

NCA 118 Bristol, Avon Valleys and Ridges

Overview

The NCA is a roughly triangular area, stretching from a narrow point in the north, near Wotton-under-Edge, southwards to the area south-east of Midsomer Norton and Radstock, and extending south-west to the northern edge of the Mendip Hills near Weston-super-Mare. The northern boundary lies along the edge of the Vale of Berkeley, whilst much of the eastern boundary is marked by the Cotswold AONB, though a small portion falls with the NCA. On the southern edge, the Mendip Hills AONB lies partly within the NCA. The NCA lies within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type and its landscape character is mixed, with the large urban area of Bristol at its centre. It has a complex geology, resulting in a varying landscape of broad valleys, rolling hills, ridges and steep slopes. It includes the dramatic Avon Gorge. Farming is dominated by livestock grazing, including dairy, though there are also areas of arable cultivation. Fields are generally small and irregular with hedgerows, but becoming larger, more regular with intermittent hedgerows on the flatter, more open land. Outside the City of Bristol, the settlement pattern is a nucleated one of villages and towns, though with some hamlets and scattered farmsteads in areas of former coal mining. Bristol is a major transport hub, with an international airport to the south of the city, major rail lines, the M4 and M5 motorways, and roads such as the A4, A37 and A38 running into the city, along with the M32 link motorway from the M4. The NCA is not well-wooded, with a total coverage of only 8%, which reflects the large urban area of Bristol and surrounding towns. Around a quarter of the woodland is ancient woodland. The most extensively wooded part of the NCA is dominated by ash and maple, and lies between Congresbury and the Avon Gorge, and on the Failand Ridge, and where the woods are considered to be of international significance. The largest single extent of ancient woodland is Lower Woods, at Wickwar in the north of the NCA. Elsewhere, woodlands are much smaller and fragmentary, often on steeper land.

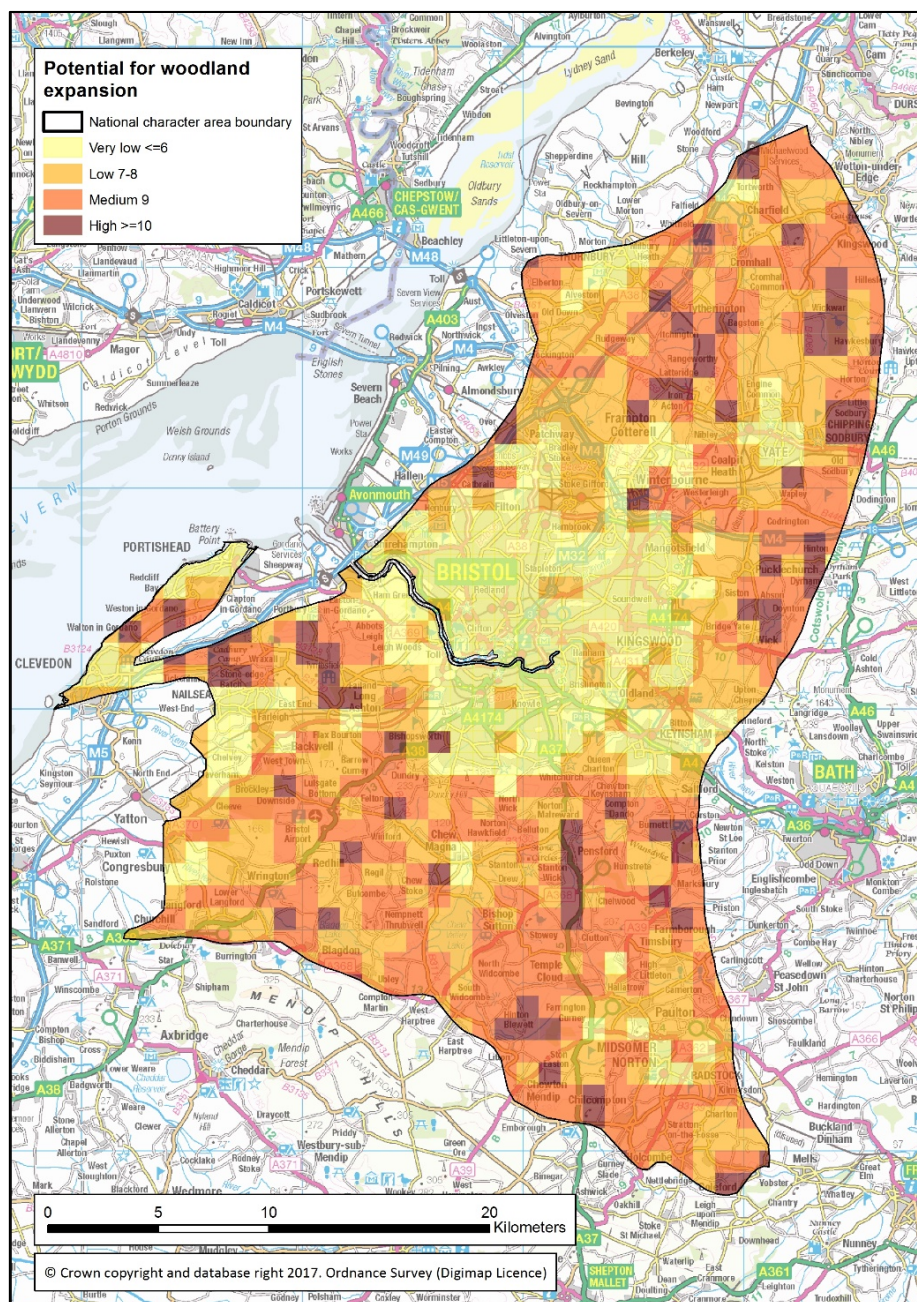
The Historic Environment Character

The area was extensively settled in the prehistoric and Roman periods, including important sites such as Cadbury Camp, an Iron Age hill fort to the south-west of Bristol, and many sites identified through cropmark evidence and excavation on the more open lands around the M5 corridor. In the Roman period, there was a farming system of villas and farmsteads, many of which are thought to have been supplying food to the lead mining areas in the Mendip Hills. In the medieval period, Bristol was an important regional walled town and port, exporting corn, wool and woollen cloth. Bristol's wealth was reflected in the large and elaborate merchant's houses which were built, elements of which have survived later rebuilding. From the 17th century, international trade grew in tobacco and sugar and other commodities, as Bristol became the country's second largest port with a major involvement in the slave trade. To the east of Bristol was Kingswood Forest which, in the late 13th century, was disafforested with part retained as Kingswood Chase and used as a royal hunting preserve. Coal working began here on a small scale in the medieval period, supplying local industries and stimulating common edge settlement. Coal mining developed on a larger scale from the late 18th century, supplying Bristol and leading to the development of towns such as Radstock, Paulton and Midsomer Norton. The wealth of

Bristol, and its role as a major regional centre in the post medieval period, led to the growth of gentry houses, parks and mansions around the city.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates only a low level of opportunity for woodland expansion, partly because of the extensive urban development in Bristol and surrounding towns. Where there are more opportunities for new woodland, these tend to be small and scattered across the rural areas, with some concentrations around existing woodland. The NCA profile identifies opportunities for new woodland in similar areas, where this would fit within existing land management strategies. The creation of wet woodland is also an opportunity identified by the NCA profile, and this would also fit within the potential areas identified by the mapping.



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