

NCA 120 Wealden Greensand

Overview

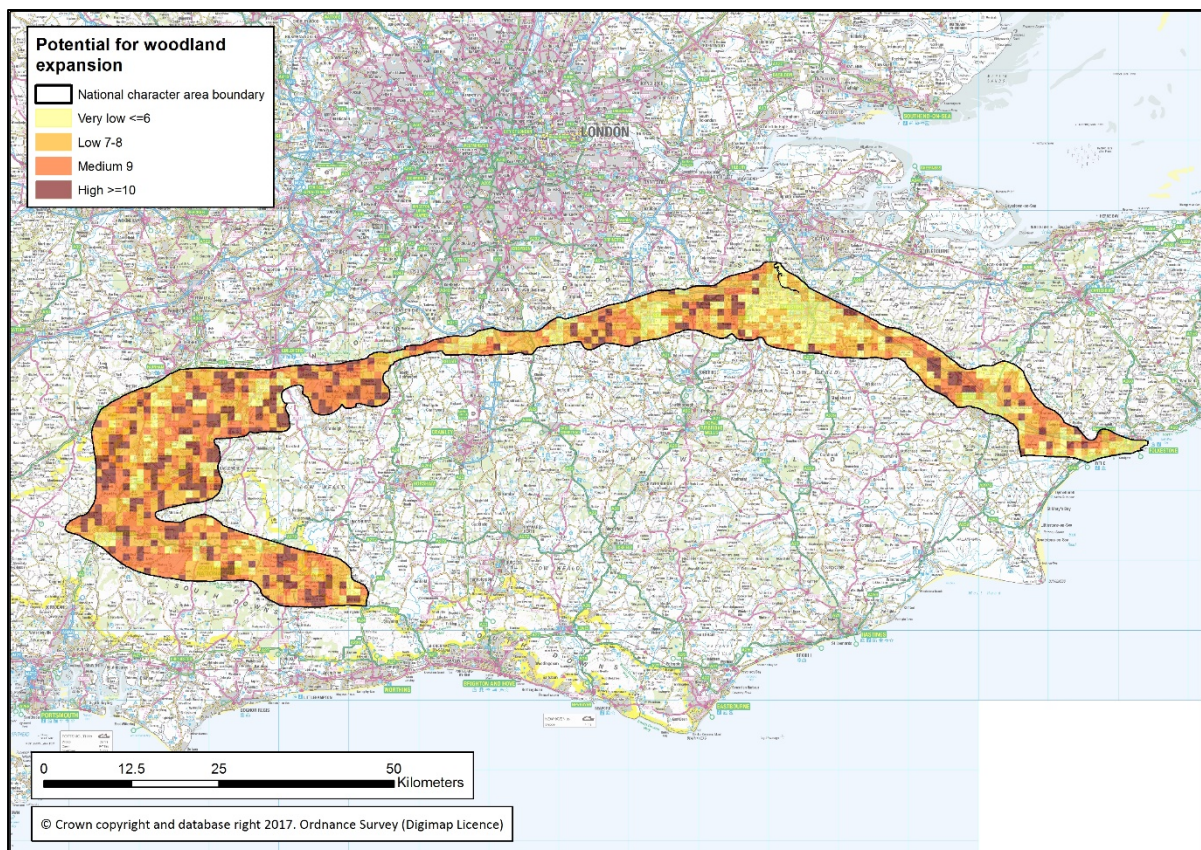
The Wealden Greensand NCA is a very long, narrow, curving belt extending along the north and west of the Low Weald. The NCA lies within the South East Mixed (Woodland) Agricultural Landscape Type. It varies in topography, soils and land-use, but is unified by the underlying geology of Greensand. It extends from Hythe and Folkestone on the Kent coast in the east, to the South Downs north of Worthing in the west. The southern section, south of Farnham, lies within the South Downs National Park, whilst large parts of the northern section lies within either the Surrey Hills or Kent Downs AONBs. The dominant field pattern is one of small, irregular enclosures, with hedgerow boundaries and narrow bands of woodland, known as shaws, though there are more regular and medium-sized fields in the south west of the NCA. Agriculture is mixed between livestock, arable and horticulture, with fruit-growing in Kent and east Hampshire. The settlement pattern is mixed, with hamlets and farmsteads interspersed amongst villages. There is a more rural feel to the western side of the NCA, with small market towns, becoming more urbanised from Dorking eastwards. Here, the NCA is narrow and includes several larger towns, such as Folkestone, Ashford, Maidstone and Sevenoaks. This part of the NCA is also a communications corridor, with the M20, M25 and M26. Ashford, in particular, is a communications hub, where five railways meet and there is a link to the M20, it is also the international passenger station for the Channel Tunnel. Further west, the A3 trunk road passes through the area, linking Petersfield and Guildford. The NCA is very well-wooded, with a coverage of 25%, most of which is broadleaved, and 28% of which is ancient woodland. Ancient woodland is found throughout, though often on steeper slopes and in fragmented patches and in different forms. In Hampshire, there are hangers on the steep chalk and Upper Greensand escarpment, on the acid, sandy soils of Surrey, West Sussex and Kent there are sessile oak woods, the heavy Gault Clay supports pedunculate oak woods with hazel coppice, and the lime-rich Kentish Ragstone outcrops support ash woodland. In East Surrey and west Kent are distinctive wooded commons and in the river valleys there is alder woodland. Together, they provide a heavily wooded character to the landscape.

The Historic Environment Character

The NCA contains numerous prehistoric and Roman monuments, preserved as both earthworks and as below-ground remains, including burials mounds, hillforts, villas, roads and temples and bath houses. Woodland played a major part in shaping the medieval and later landscape character. Woodland industries, particularly utilising coppicing, produced materials for domestic, agricultural and industrial use. Products included fencing materials, firewood, thatching spars, hop poles and charcoal for the iron industry in the western part of the area. The farming landscape was a prosperous one of mixed agriculture, with dairying in the west, hop growing around Maidstone, and livestock-rearing taking advantage of common wood pastures. The legacy of the historic farming patterns can be seen in surviving wood commons and oast houses, and the Wealden farmhouse.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates that there is a medium level of potential for woodland expansion. The mapping suggests that there are greater opportunities for new woodland in the western part of the NCA where woodland is more extensive. The NCA profile emphasises the need to retain the historic landscape character, tranquillity and sense of place, as well as the conservation and expansion of existing woodland, particularly on steep slopes to reduce soil erosion. The mapping indicates that there are significant areas where new woodland can be created, both as an expansion of existing woodland and as new plantations. Care should be taken, however, to maintain a mosaic of habitats, to preserve archaeological remains and their settings, to maintain landscape views, and to avoid encroaching on heathland habitats. There should also be a priority for the improved management of woodland and wooded commons, through coppicing and grazing wood pasture, for example.



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