

NCA 125 South Downs

Overview

The South Downs is a long, narrow, east-west orientated area encompassing a spine of chalk stretching between the Hampshire Downs to Beachy Head in East Sussex. Most of the NCA is within the South Downs National Park, and it is included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type. It is cut by the broad river valleys of the Arun, Adur, Cuckmere and Ouse in the east, and the narrower valley of the River Meon in the west, with flat floodplains and water meadows. Much of the area is rural in character, with medium to large fields bounded by hedgerows with hedgerow trees. There is some irregularity in the field pattern though it becomes more regular in East Sussex. Farming is a mix of cereal cultivation with livestock grazing, particularly sheep. Cattle and pigs are also reared in the area. The settlement pattern is a nucleated one of widely spaced villages, with scattered farmsteads with large holdings. There is some urban development in east Hampshire, where continuous development along the A3 includes Waterlooville and Horndean. The eastern end of the NCA meets the coast at the largest urban area of Brighton and Hove, beyond which is further coastal development such as Newhaven, Peacehaven and Seaford. Main communication routes generally cross the NCA between north and south, linking the coastal settlements ultimately with London. The most major road is the A3/A3M from Portsmouth. Some rail routes, too, cross the area to connect to the coastal towns. The majority of routes in the area, however, are minor roads. The NCA is well-wooded, with a coverage of 18%, most of which is broadleaved trees, and which includes nearly 40% ancient woodland. Ancient woodland is concentrated in the western half of the NCA and includes some relict large leaved lime woodland. The western escarpment is notable for ash or beech hangers, for example at Selborne Common, and there is ancient yew woodland at Kingley Down, Butser Hill and West Harting. The Downs between the Rivers Adur and Ouse supports the largest remaining population of English elm.

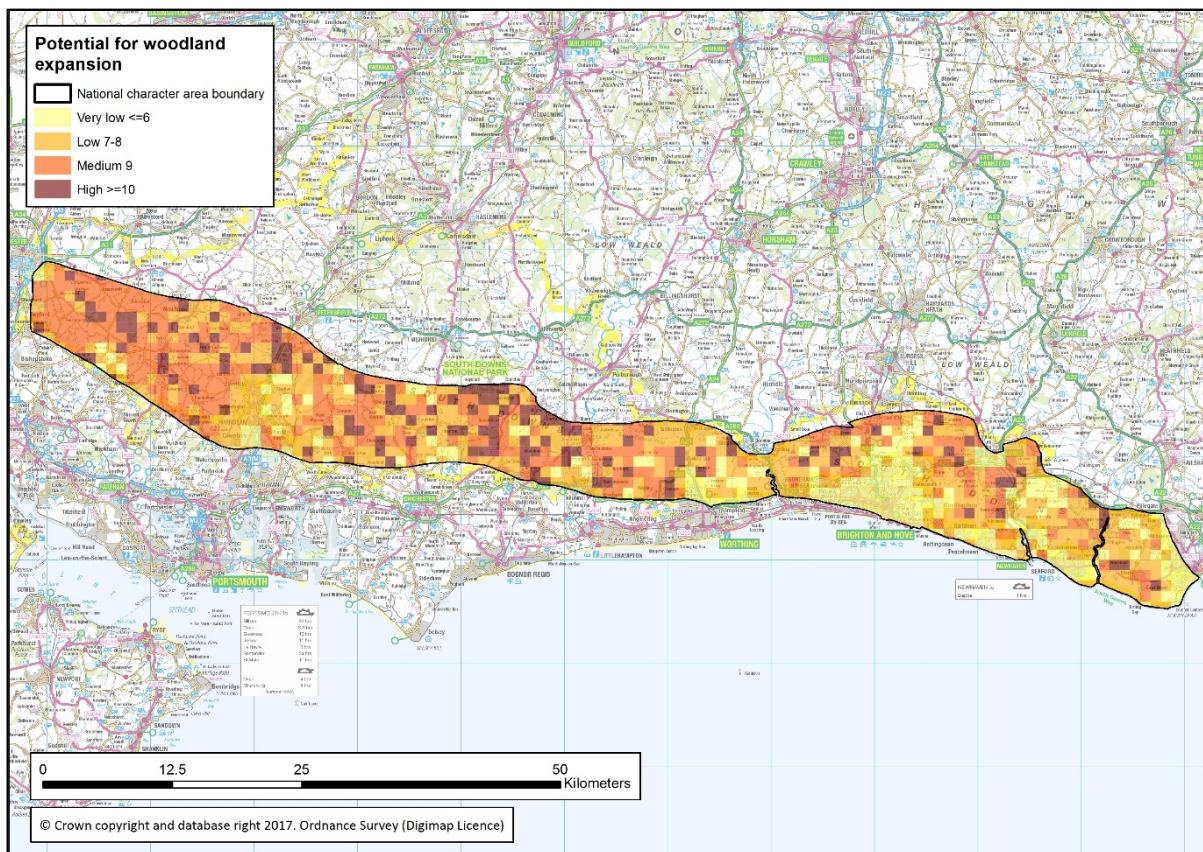
The Historic Environment Character

There is a rich resource of archaeological remains within the NCA, many of which are of national significance. The area was cleared and settled from early prehistory, and there are remains of Neolithic flint mines across the NCA, including Cissbury, Wilmington and Old Winchester Hill. The Trundle, a causewayed camp prominently sited on the dip slope, is one of the best examples of a Neolithic enclosure in the country. Barrows dating from the Bronze Age are a common feature on the downs, and from the Iron Age there are prominently sited hill forts such as Mount Caburn, Cissbury Ring and Old Winchester Hill, as well as cross dykes. The area was well-settled and cultivated by the Bronze Age, a situation that continued through the Iron Age and Roman periods when the landscape was intensively farmed over wide areas with scattered farmsteads and villages. In the Roman period, villas administered large estates. Large estates covered much of the area in the later medieval period, too, many of which were owned by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishops of Winchester and Chichester. Medieval agriculture can be seen in the lynchets that survive on many of the steeper pasture slopes, though sheep came to dominate the grazing lands of the downs, particularly kept for their wool. In the post medieval period, large country houses and parkland estates were a distinctive feature of the central downs, many with medieval origins and some developing out of the former monastic estates. Uppark

originated as a medieval estate, first landscaped in the 16th century, and then laid out by Humphrey Repton in the early 19th century. Other important estates include Stansted, West Dean, Goodwood and Arundel.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a low potential for new woodland, though that score is probably slightly skewed by the large urban areas in the east. The mapping indicates higher potential for new woodland in the west of the NCA, the largest block lying north of Chichester and Bognor Regis, but with scattered areas of potential throughout the western half of the area. The NCA profile highlights the opportunities through the linking up of woodland habitats through hedgerow restoration and the planting of new woodland and wood pasture. It also emphasises the need to manage existing woodland, for example through the reintroduction of coppicing.



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