

NCA 126 South Coast Plain

Overview

The South Coast Plain occupies a narrow coastal strip between Southampton, and Brighton and Hove, to the south of the South Downs. Small sections of the South Downs National Park extend into the NCA, but this accounts for only 5% of the total area, and the coast and waters of Chichester Harbour are designated as an AONB. It lies within the South East Mixed (Woodland) Agricultural Landscape Type, though less than half of the NCA is agricultural. There is a difference in the field patterns between the lower and upper coastal plains. On the lower coastal plain, fields are large, regular and divided by ditches or fences; whilst in the upper coastal plain, fields are smaller and less regular and bounded by hedgerows. There is some livestock-grazing of mainly cattle and pigs, but cereal and vegetable cultivation dominates. The settlement pattern is highly urbanised, though away from the towns, the pattern is one of small villages and hamlets. Urban development is largely along the coast, though suburban areas are extensive and extend inland, particularly around the Southampton suburbs, through Hamble, Fareham and Portsmouth, where smallholdings and bungalows merge with the suburban outreaches of Fareham towards the Solent. East of Chichester, villages form a fairly continuous sprawl, having absorbed farm buildings and hamlets. The NCA is also a communications hub, as the M27/A27 forms the main road linking urban areas along the coast, alongside the south coast rail line. Portsmouth is also a major ferry port, linking the UK to France and Spain. Woodland cover is very low, at only 5% of the NCA, though much of this is broadleaved woodland and nearly 30% is ancient woodland. Although there are some small areas of coastal woodland, most is found in the upper coastal plain. Here, it forms a patchwork of small- and medium-sized woodlands.

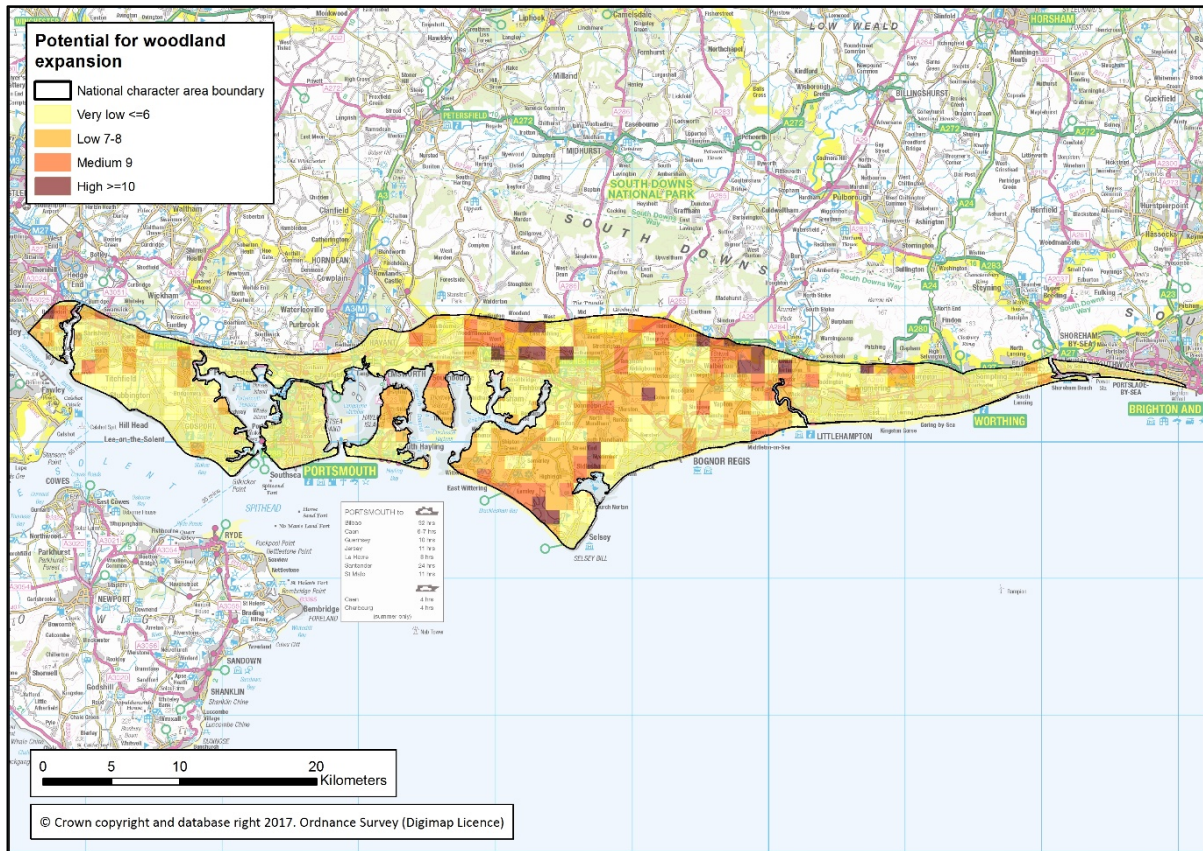
The Historic Environment Character

There are nationally significant Roman remains across the NCA, including an early Roman town established at Chichester, the Roman Palace at Fishbourne, a temple on Hayling Island and a Saxon Shore fort at Porchester. The coastal plain was densely settled in the Anglo-Saxon and later medieval periods. Settlement in the eastern part of the area was predominantly nucleated with relatively low levels of dispersed farmsteads and hamlets. In the western part of the NCA, isolated farmsteads were intermixed with nucleated settlements that had developed urban characteristics by the 13th century. Medieval new towns include Portsmouth, Gosport, Fareham and Emsworth. Portsmouth was a major port from the medieval period, and was granted a royal charter in the 12th century. It became a royal dock in the early 16th century, and has continued to be a naval base, alongside its development as a civilian port. The NCA's location on the south coast means that it has been the focus of coastal defences throughout the post medieval and modern period, particularly around the ports and harbours. Further east, the coastal towns of Sussex developed mainly in the 19th century as seaside resorts.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The opportunities for new woodland are low, according to the mapping of historic and natural attributes. That is largely the result of the extensive areas of urban development, though there are some small areas of potential along the northern boundary of the area, where it abuts the South Downs. These highlighted areas fit with the opportunities

highlighted in the NCA profile, which suggests new areas of woodland on the steeper valley slopes and river sides, where it would reduce water run-off and soil erosion.



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