

NCA 127 Isle of Wight

Overview

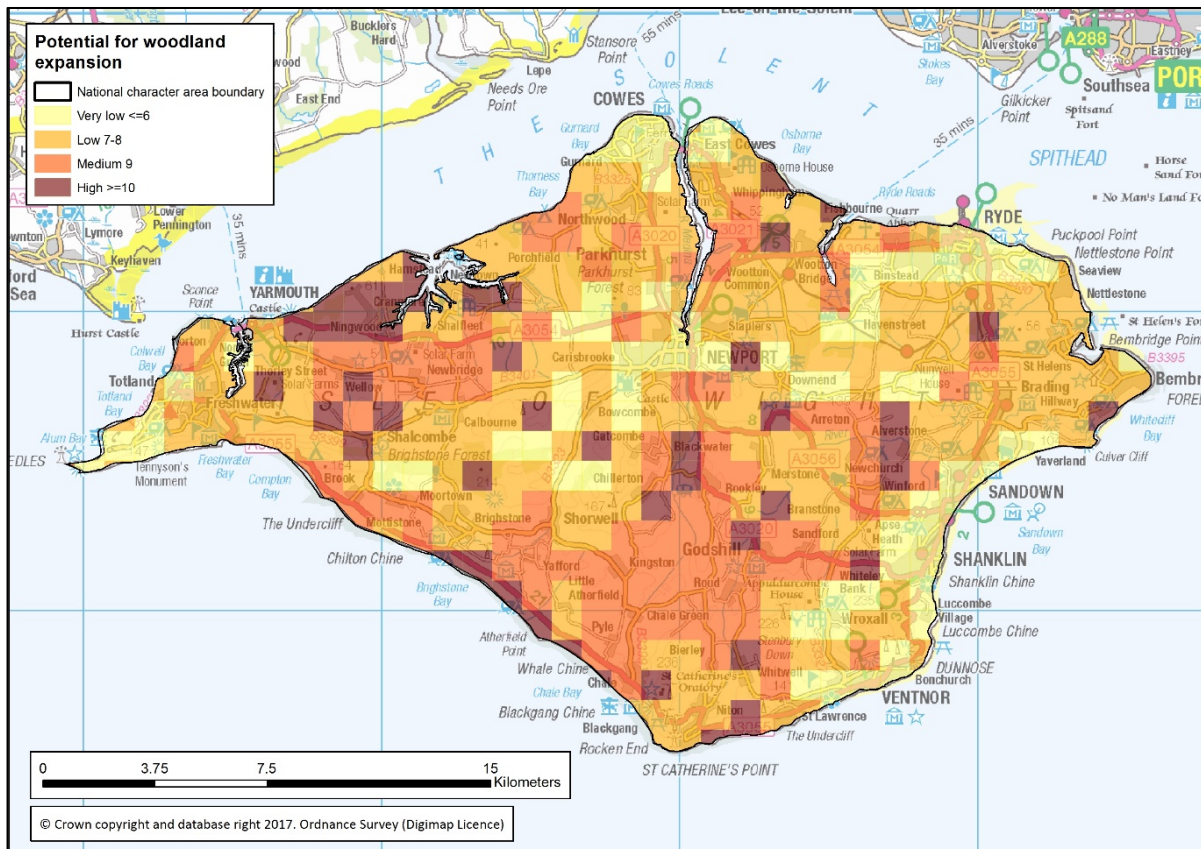
The Isle of Wight NCA comprises the whole island that is separated from the south coast of England by the Solent. Around half of the area is designated as the Isle of Wight AONB, and half the coastline is Heritage Coast. It lies within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and is a largely rural landscape, though diverse in its character. More than half of agricultural land is used for stock grazing, though there are arable coastal plains, and steep chalk downs. Fields are generally small and irregular, though to the south the pattern is one of more regular, larger fields. There is also a significant element of equestrian use, resulting in field division and sand schools. The settlement pattern is mixed, with a low density of villages and farms on the chalk downs, but a higher settlement density on the northern claylands and south coastal plain. Newport is the administrative centre, located inland at the head of the Medina estuary. The remaining urban centres are coastal, several of which developed as seaside resorts in the 19th century, particularly after the development of the railway made access to the mainland coast and ferries to the island more accessible. Urban settlement is spreading, both inland and along coast, with holiday accommodation, caravan parks and industrial estates. Its popularity also increased after Queen Victoria made Osborne House one of the royal residences. Newport is the focal point of many of the island's roads, with direct routes to the main coastal settlements. There is also a coast road connecting the resort towns. The island has a good woodland coverage, at 13% of the total area. Nearly a third of woodland is ancient woodland, but there are also some large commercial forestry plantations. The distribution and character of woodland varies from north to south. In the north, woodland comprises small copses, relict wood pastures and large plantations; while in the south there are ancient, hanger woodlands and smaller plantations. There has been widespread creation of forestry plantations on former heathland.

The Historic Environment Character

The island has a rich archaeological record from early prehistory, with finds of Palaeolithic hand axes, burial mounds and Iron Age settlement. The presence of several Roman villas suggests that much of the island was divided into large estates, alongside other rural settlement. There were also major Anglo-Saxon estates here; in the 11th century, both Harold Godwinson (King Harold) and his brother, Earl Tostig, had manors on the island, and there was a fort and minster at Carisbrooke. Following the Conquest, the Normans built a castle at Carisbrooke, and it became the secular administrative centre of the island. Newport, Newtown and Yarmouth were established as towns, though Newtown failed as a borough. Newtown survives as a small village, although the burgage plots are still legible in the field pattern. The island became popular as a tourist destination in the 19th century, particularly following the establishment of Osbourne House as a royal residence.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The opportunities for new woodland are low, according to the mapping of historic and natural attributes. Where there are opportunities, these are mainly in the west and south of the island. The mapping suggests there is a significant block to the east and south-east of Yarmouth, and also along the south coast, away from the built-up areas. There are smaller areas of opportunity inland, to the south and south-east of Newport. The NCA profile highlights woodland as an additional environmental opportunity, though mainly through sustainable management, the introduction of coppicing and pollarding and other traditional management techniques, and through the replacement of forestry plantation by native species. Woodland expansion must take account of the historic field patterns, and new woodland could be included in hedgerow restoration. Any new areas of woodland should be to an appropriate scale, however, and should take account of the many archaeological remains, as well as other important habitats such as heathland and species-rich grassland.



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