

NCA 128 South Hampshire Lowlands

Overview

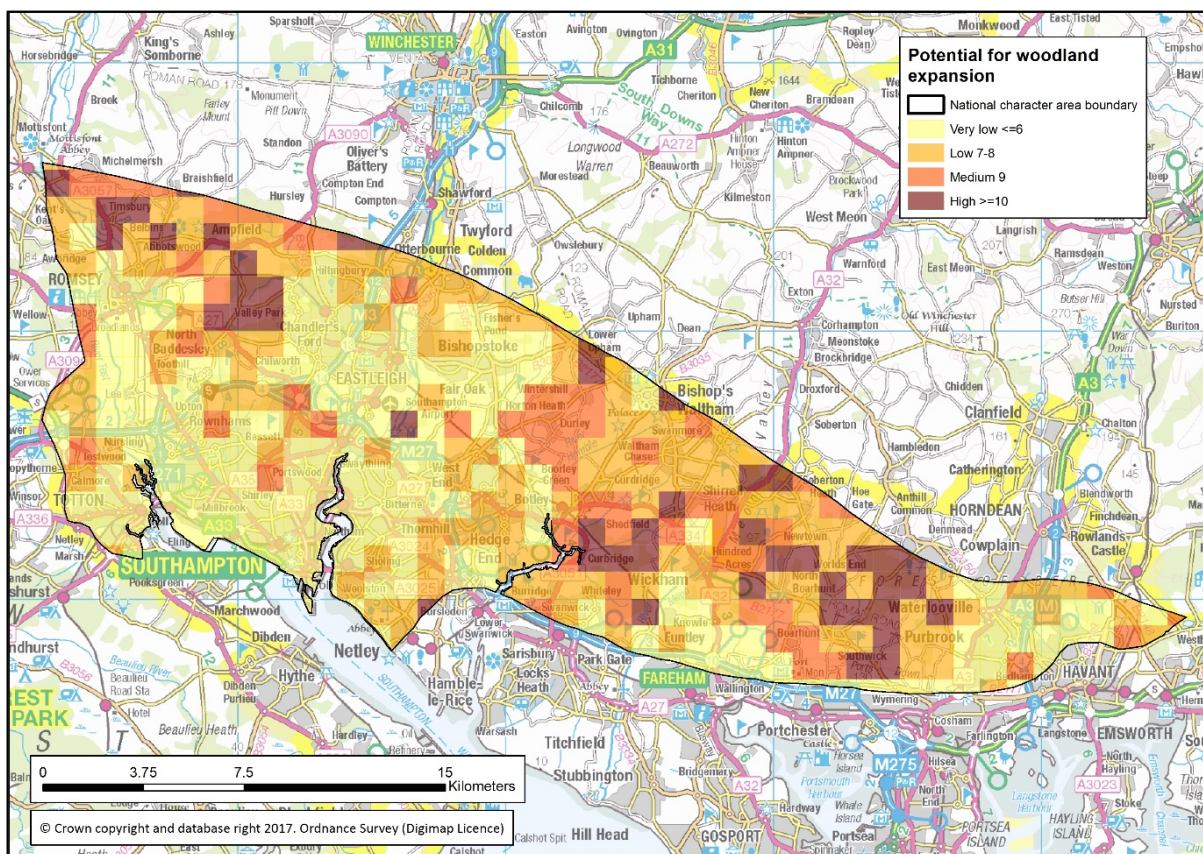
The South Hampshire Lowlands NCA is a wide band of land lying to the north of Portsmouth, east of Southampton Water and south of the Hampshire Downs. A small part of the South Downs National Park extends into the northern boundaries of the NCA, around West Walk Woods in the Meon Valley. It is a low-lying, gently undulating landscape, extending from the Test Valley to the west to Havant in the east. It lies within the South East Mixed (Woodland) Agricultural Landscape Type, and is a mixed farming landscape, covering the valleys of the Rivers Test, Itchen and Meon. There is a patchwork of small, irregular fields, but intensive arable agriculture has led to significant loss of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Most agricultural land-use is grazing mainly by cattle, though there has been a decrease in dairying, and by sheep and pigs. Horticulture is important, with intensive market cropping, associated with garden centres, nurseries and smallholdings, particularly in the Meon Valley. The small chalk ridge of Portsdown has larger, more regular fields, suggesting some modern reorganisation. The main urban areas are concentrated around the head of Southampton Water and along the valleys of the Rivers Itchen and Test. The largest settlement is the city of Southampton, but the urban areas also include Eastleigh, Romsey, Waterlooville and Havant. Many of the satellite places around Southampton have developed and spread as commuter settlements. Rural settlement is a mixture of villages with individual farmsteads, though the pattern is more generally dispersed to the west. The NCA is a communications hub, centred on Southampton. The M27 motorway is the main east-west route that links the coastal towns and cities, and the M3 crosses into the NCA from the north. Main rail routes run into Southampton from the north-west and north-east, and there is a small international airport at Eastleigh. The area has good woodland coverage, at 18% of the NCA, of which almost 47% is ancient woodland. Broadleaved woodland dominates, and is intermixed with the farmed landscape, giving the impression of a well-wooded landscape.

The Historic Environment Character

The Southampton area was a focus of settlement in the Roman period. There was a town and Saxon Shore fort at Bitterne. The site has long been identified as Clausentum, though the remains of a Roman settlement at Wickham, to the east, has also been put forward as a possible location. There were several villas and other settlements in the area, particularly around Havant. In the Anglo-Saxon period, Hamwic developed on the banks of the Itchen as an entrepôt in the 7th century, though the later burh was founded on a different site. In the later medieval period, much of the NCA was designated royal forest, including Bere Forest and Waltham Chase. Southampton developed as an important port and trading centre, particularly in relation to the cloth trade. Romsey, Bishop's Waltham and Wickham also developed as urban centres in the later medieval period, and had significant ecclesiastical estates. Romsey grew as a result of its involvement with the wool trade, and from its position on one of the major routes from the wool and woollen cloth producing areas to Southampton, from where the goods were exported. In the post medieval period, Southampton's importance re-emerged as a naval centre and port.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The opportunities for new woodland are low, according to the mapping of historic and natural attributes, largely because of the extensive urban areas within the NCA. There are clusters of higher opportunity for new woodland to the north of the urban areas of Southampton and of Gosport and Portsmouth. The NCA profile indicates that new woodland could be created around the fringes of the urban areas, particularly around new development and around the motorways. It also highlights the need to link fragmented habitats, for example through restoring the network of hedgerow boundaries and boundary trees.



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