

NCA 131 New Forest

Overview

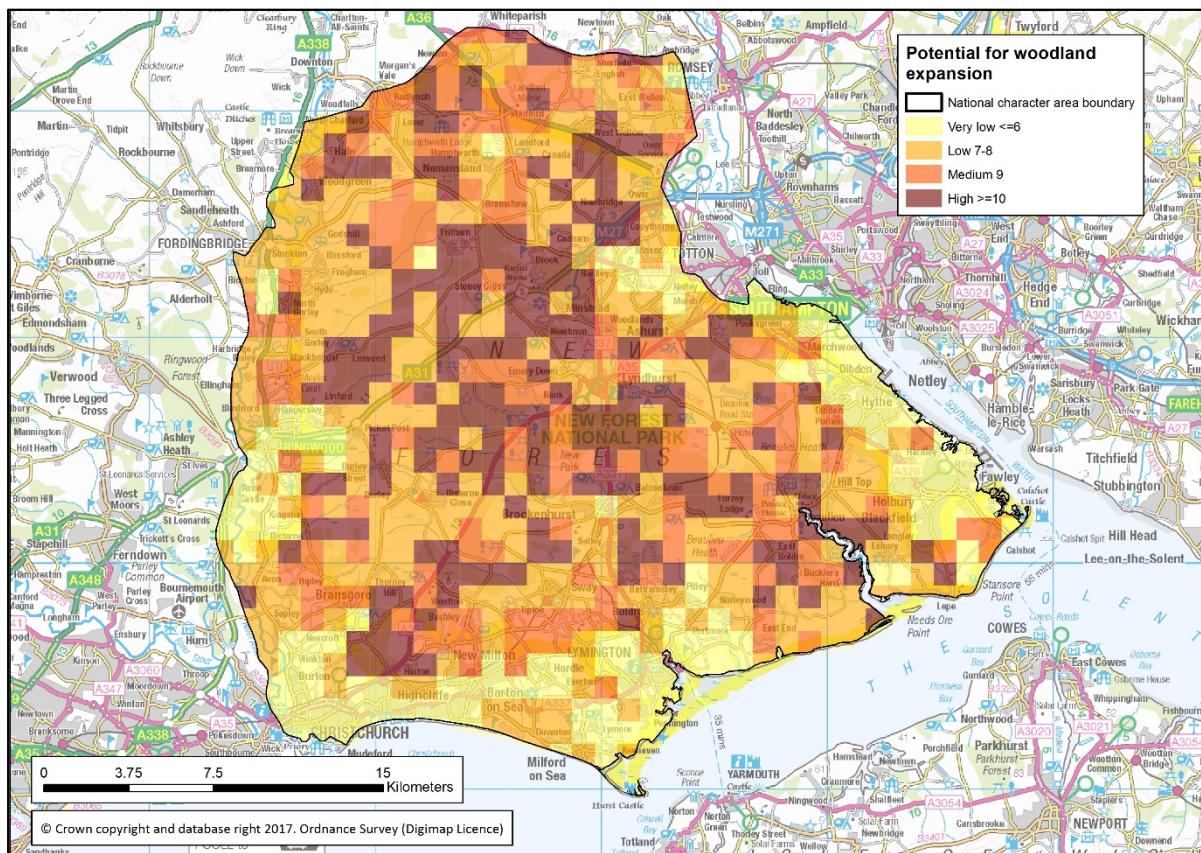
The New Forest NCA comprises an elevated plateau, bounded to the south by the coast and the Solent, by Southampton Water to the east, and the Avon valley to the west. The NCA contains almost 86% of the total area of the New Forest National Park. It is included within the South East Mixed (Woodland) Agricultural Landscape Type. The rural landscape is a mosaic of ancient woodland, wood pasture, heath, grassland, pasture and arable farmland, though the NCA also has a considerable area of built development, including 9.5% urban landscape. There are extensive areas of open lawns, commons, heaths and wood pasture, with areas of small pasture enclosures and smallholdings to the north and west. On the south side of the NCA, the area is dominated by large, regular arable fields. Within the National Park, the settlement pattern is largely dispersed with individual farms and hamlets, and some small villages, but with population centres in Ashurst, Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Sway. Around the National Park, however, the landscape is more urbanised, particularly along the side of Southampton Water where development forms part of the Southampton conurbation. Along the south-western edge, settlements have grown along the coast, particularly in the form of the expansion of existing villages such as Lymington. The area is crossed by some major transport corridors, such as the M27/A31 roads, and the rail line leading south west out of Southampton, which connect Southampton to both commuter settlements in the NCA as well as to the urban coastal centres of Bournemouth and Poole. Its proximity to centres of population and ease of access mean that it is a popular area for recreation, including walking, cycling and horse riding. The area is extremely well-wooded considering the extensive urban areas, with a coverage of 31%, of which 42% is ancient woodland. The ancient pasture woodlands have one of the highest densities of ancient and veteran trees in North West Europe, and one of the largest tracts of semi-natural woodland in southern England.

The Historic Environment Character

The extensive areas of heath and permanent pasture have left a legacy of well-preserved archaeological remains, including numerous Bronze Age burial mounds, as well as Iron Age hill forts and relict field systems. In the Roman period, the area was an important centre of pottery production, from the late 3rd century in to the 5th century AD. The New Forest was afforested by William I around 1079. Its long history as a royal forest can be seen in the remains of several hunting lodges, as well as in various surviving rights for commoners administered by the verderers. In the post medieval period, particularly with the growth of the naval ship yards, the New Forest became an important source of oak timbers for ship building, resulting in some enclosure for timber production. The coastal portion of the NCA was drained and improved in the medieval period, particularly by Beaulieu Abbey, situated on the Beaulieu River estuary, and which became the focus of large estates and arable production after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Salt-making and ship building became important coastal industries. The New Forest has long attracted visitors, but particularly from the 19th century, and in the 20th century with the expansion of the urban conurbations of Southampton and Bournemouth.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping indicates a high level of opportunity for woodland expansion within the NCA. The opportunities for woodland expansion reflect the existing high percentage of woodland cover within the NCA, and the mapping suggests that most new planting should comprise expansion of existing woodland. New planting, however, needs to take account of the importance of the landscape mosaic, and the NCA profile emphasises the maintenance and enhancement of ancient woodland, wood pastures, enclosures, heaths and mires, along with the maintenance of traditional common grazing. Indeed, the profile highlights the expansion of wood pasture alongside natural regeneration. Encouraging open access and the management of archaeological remains is also emphasised within the NCA profile.



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