

NCA 136 South Purbeck

Overview

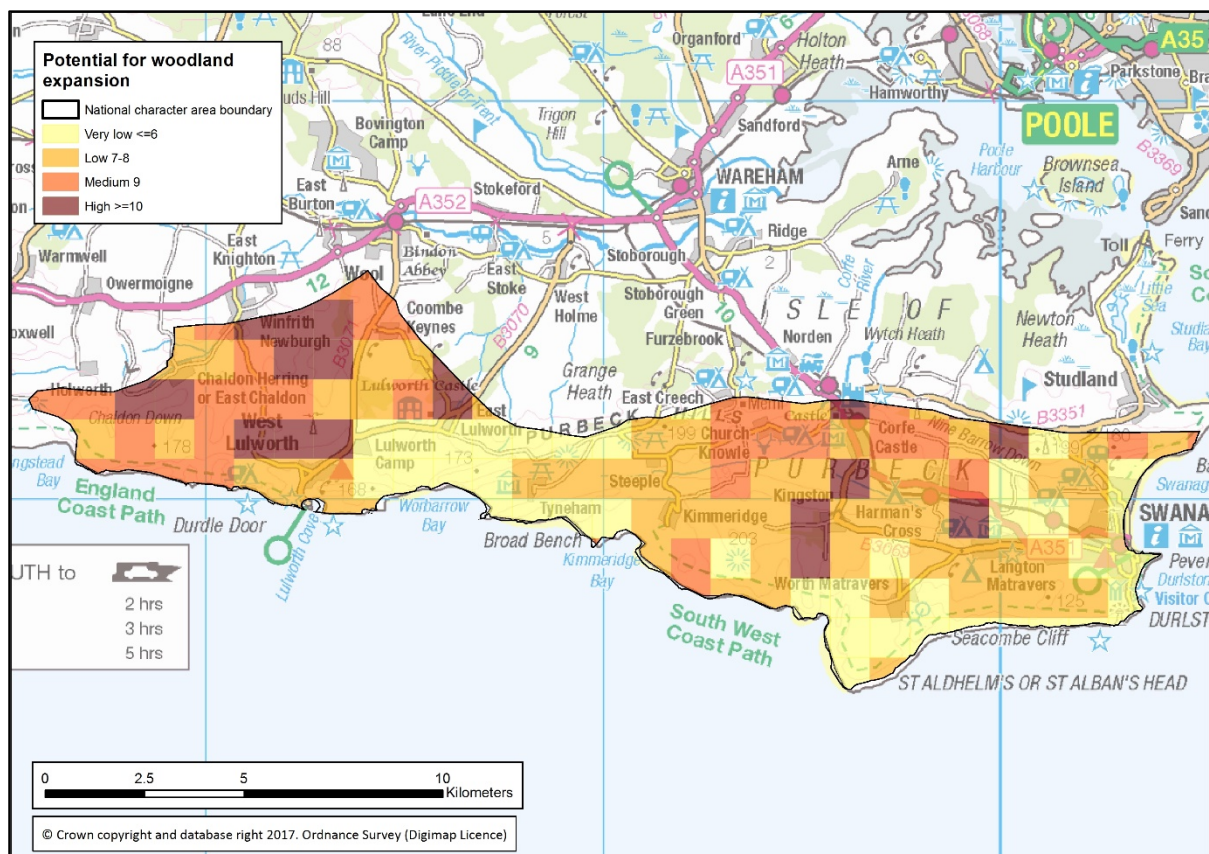
The South Purbeck NCA covers a small coastal strip to the south of Poole Harbour, between Swanage and Ringstead Bay to the west of Durdle Door. Included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, it comprises a steeply seaward-dipping chalk ridge, rising from sea level to a maximum height of 200m. Along the coast, there are cliffs of Portland and Purbeck stone, which have been included within the Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site, known as the Jurassic Coast, for the importance of their geological and geomorphological features, including several internationally important fossil sites. The NCA lies within the Dorset AONB. It is a largely rural area, dominated by pastoral farming, though there are some mixed and general arable farms. The field pattern is mainly irregular, with smaller more irregular fields to the north west. Fields are bounded by hedgerows and drystone walls, with more drystone walls on the Limestone plateau south of Swanage and Langton Matravers, where the landscape is divided into long, sub-divided, regular strips, with gently curving boundaries. The main settlement is the resort town of Swanage, on the coast at the western end of the NCA. Settlement is sparsely distributed and generally nucleated in character, with villages such as Kimmeridge, Corfe Castle and Worth Matravers, though the area between Corfe Castle and Swanage is more densely settled with villages, hamlets and farmsteads. The area's few roads link the local settlements and are mostly minor roads and lanes. Although there is a dense coverage of hedgerow trees, particularly in the Corfe area, the overall woodland coverage is low, at 8% of the NCA, of which around 43% is ancient woodland. Tree cover is concentrated in the northern half of the NCA, particularly around the Corfe Valley, with belts of ancient woodland along the northern chalk edge. The Limestone plateau in the south is largely treeless.

The Historic Environment Character

There are many earthwork monuments of Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age date surviving on the areas of Chalk down and on the Limestone plateau. Sites include settlements, barrows, and field systems, such as the late prehistoric site known as The Warren to the west of Durdle Door. The area was known for the production of ornaments made from Kimmeridge Shale from the Iron Age, continuing into the Roman period, and both Portland and Purbeck stone were exploited for building from the Roman period. Portland Stone and Purbeck Marble were also exploited in the medieval period, becoming an important source of material for the construction of monumental buildings. Corfe Castle was built as a royal castle in the 11th century, with a settlement and market place laid out at its foot. The area has remained rural in character, even with the development of Swanage as a seaside resort in the 19th century. The landscape park at Lulworth Castle, a former hunting lodge, was developed out of a medieval deer park, whilst the park at Encombe House developed out of former monastic lands and was landscaped in the 18th century. In the Second World War, a military training was established to the east of Lulworth, including the village of Tyneham, which was evacuated and never repopulated. It is still in use as a military range.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a medium level of opportunity for woodland expansion within the NCA, particularly in the western part of the area, and along the edge of the Chalk scarp. Opportunities for extensive woodland planting are limited, however, because of the extensive grassland habitats that are highlighted in the NCA profile. The profile does emphasise the need to conserve, enhance and extend existing woodland habitats, however, particularly areas of ancient woodland. Care would also need to be taken to avoid the sites and settings of well-preserved archaeological monuments, such as the numerous barrows and field systems.



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