

NCA 137 Isle of Portland

Overview

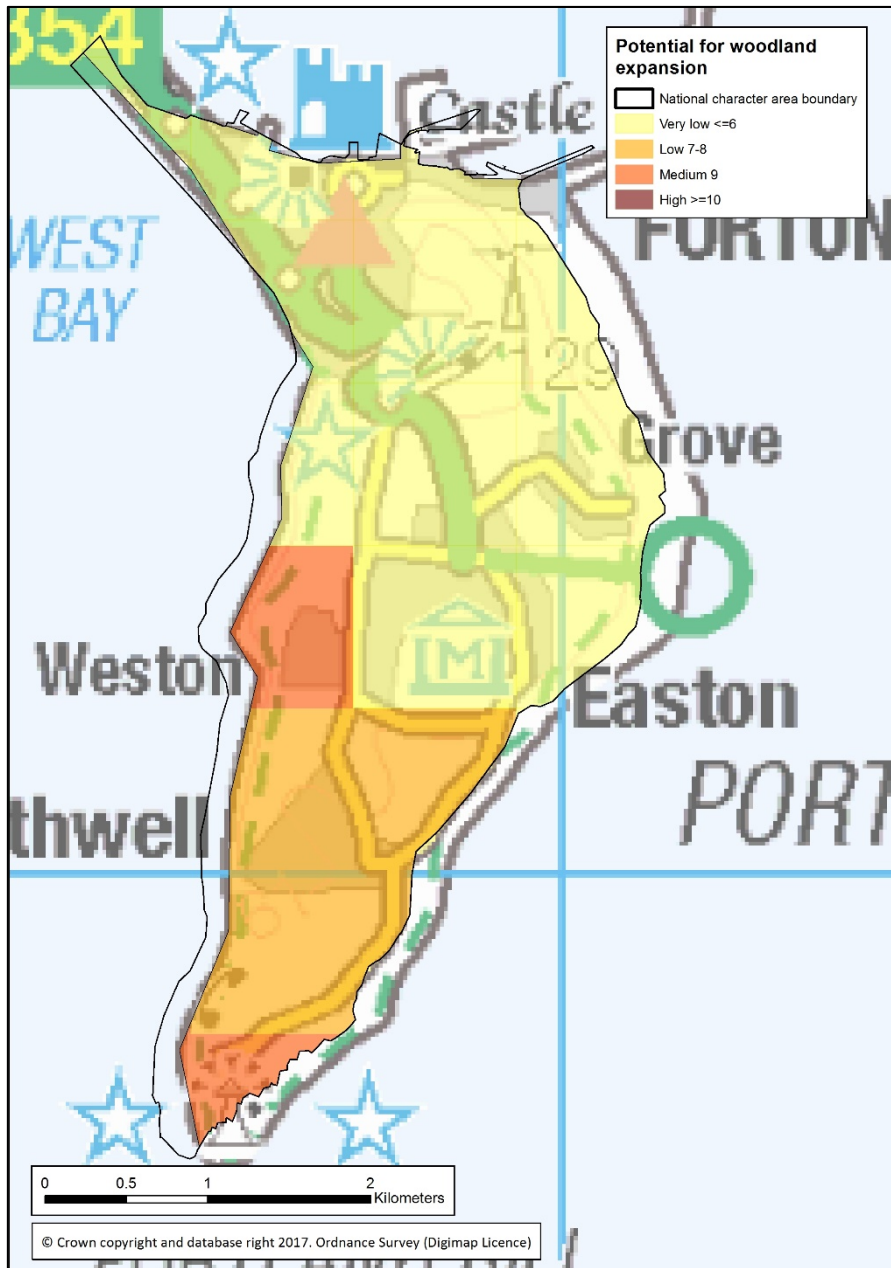
The Isle of Portland NCA is a very small island connecting to the south coast by a shingle spit. It is included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and the island's Limestone geology has led to the inclusion of much of its coastline in the Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site, known as the Jurassic Coast. The island is highly developed, with only a third of the area considered agricultural land. The field pattern is largely one of enclosed open fields, including enclosed strips with curving boundaries of drystone walls and occasional hedgerows, as well as areas which have been consolidated into larger parcels. Open field agriculture is still practised across part of the island, characterised by narrow strips divided by earthen banks, or baulks. The coastline is rugged and rocky with Limestone grassland. The character of the island has been shaped by the extensive quarries, both active and disused, which scar much of the landscape. Settlement on the island is dominated by sprawling villages, such as Southwell, Easton, Weston and Fortuneswell, which have expanded greatly in the second half of the 20th century, as well as the naval base and the prison, HMP Verne. Access to the island is along the shingle spit, via the A354, which continues onto Easton at the centre of the island, though the rest of the roads system is made up of minor routes. Woodland is very sparse, covering only 5% of the NCA, and none of which is ancient woodland. Where there are trees, they are found in small areas of secondary woodland.

The Historic Environment Character

There is evidence for human activity on the Isle of Portland from early prehistory, including a Palaeolithic hand axe and an extensive spread of Mesolithic material recorded in the south of the island south of the village of Southwell. The dominant historical features of the island are the stone quarries. Stone has been quarried in the area from the Roman period, and there is evidence of significant Roman occupation. Portland stone was also used in the late medieval and post medieval periods for many important religious and secular buildings, such as Sir Christopher Wren's St Paul's Cathedral. As well as the extensive scars from former and extant quarries, there are also the remains of a stone quay in the south of the island, which was used for loading stone onto boats. In the 1850s, a royal naval station was established on the Isle of Portland on the site of a former coaling station. The port was an embarkation point for Allied forces for the D-Day landings, and until 2005, was the berth for HMP Weare, the UK's only prison ship. The military presence also led to the installation of other military features across the island. In 1847, a prison camp was built, which became a fortress and is now HMP Verne.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a low level of opportunity for woodland expansion within the NCA, which reflects the extensive areas of built environment and quarrying across the island. There are a few small areas where woodland may be planted, particularly around settlements, but care should be taken not to impact on the historic and important fields systems of the south of the island.



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