

NCA 139 Marshwood and Powerstock Vales

Overview

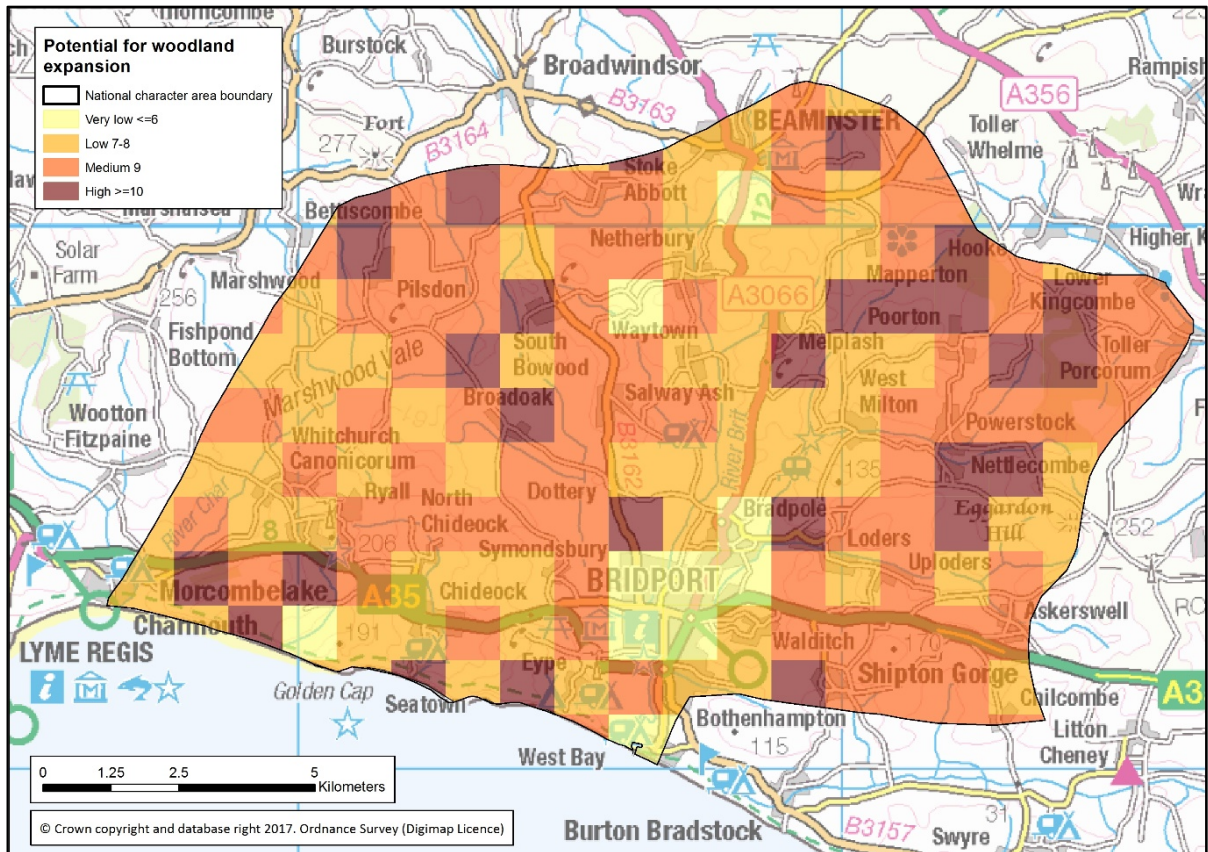
The NCA lies on the south coast and encompasses a bowl within a horseshoe of Greensand hills to the north and west and, to the east, terraces of clay, sands and Limestone lead up to the Chalk downs of Dorset. The coast is characterised by high cliffs, including Golden Cap, the highest point on the south coast, and the entire length is within the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site. It lies within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and the NCA is characterised by the valleys of the Rivers Char and Brit and their tributaries. The vales are dominated by small, irregular pasture fields bounded by overgrown hedgerows. There are limited areas of arable in the Brit valley, to the east. It is a rural area, with a dense mix of villages, farmsteads and hamlets. The main settlement is the town of Bridport, an historic market town. Bridport is a communications hub, where many of the local and main roads converge, including the A35 coastal road and the A3066 that runs south from the smaller town of Beaminster. The NCA has a woodland coverage of 9% of the total area, of which nearly 28% is ancient woodland. The main concentration is on the Greensand in the north-western edge of the vale. There are smaller areas of woodland along the coast to the west of Bridport.

The Historic Environment Character

Evidence for prehistoric settlement within the NCA is most apparent on the hills in the east of the area, in the form of Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows, and Iron Age hillforts. Bridport, the main town in the NCA, was an Anglo-Saxon burh, and by the Conquest was a borough with a mint. As well as functioning as a market town, Bridport also developed as a centre of the flax and hemp industries in the medieval period, making rope, netting and sailcloth. It continued as a manufacturing centre into the 19th century, and netting products are still made there. The local soils were well-suited to growing flax and hemp, and the surrounding villages and farmsteads had workers employed in the industry. Other key agricultural production in the post medieval period included dairying and orcharding for cider.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a medium level of opportunity for woodland expansion within the NCA. The principal areas of potential are around existing woodland, along the coastal strip and in the north west of the NCA, with some potential along the north-western boundary. The NCA profile does not specifically identify woodland expansion as a key environmental opportunity, but it does emphasise the need to restore woodland, replace plantations with native species and introduce traditional woodland management. Areas of new woodland planting should be in sympathy with the historic field pattern of ancient enclosures. In the north-east of the NCA, where there is the greatest extent of existing woodland, any new planting should take account of the well-preserved archaeological monuments and their setting.



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