

NCA 140 Yeovil Scarplands

Overview

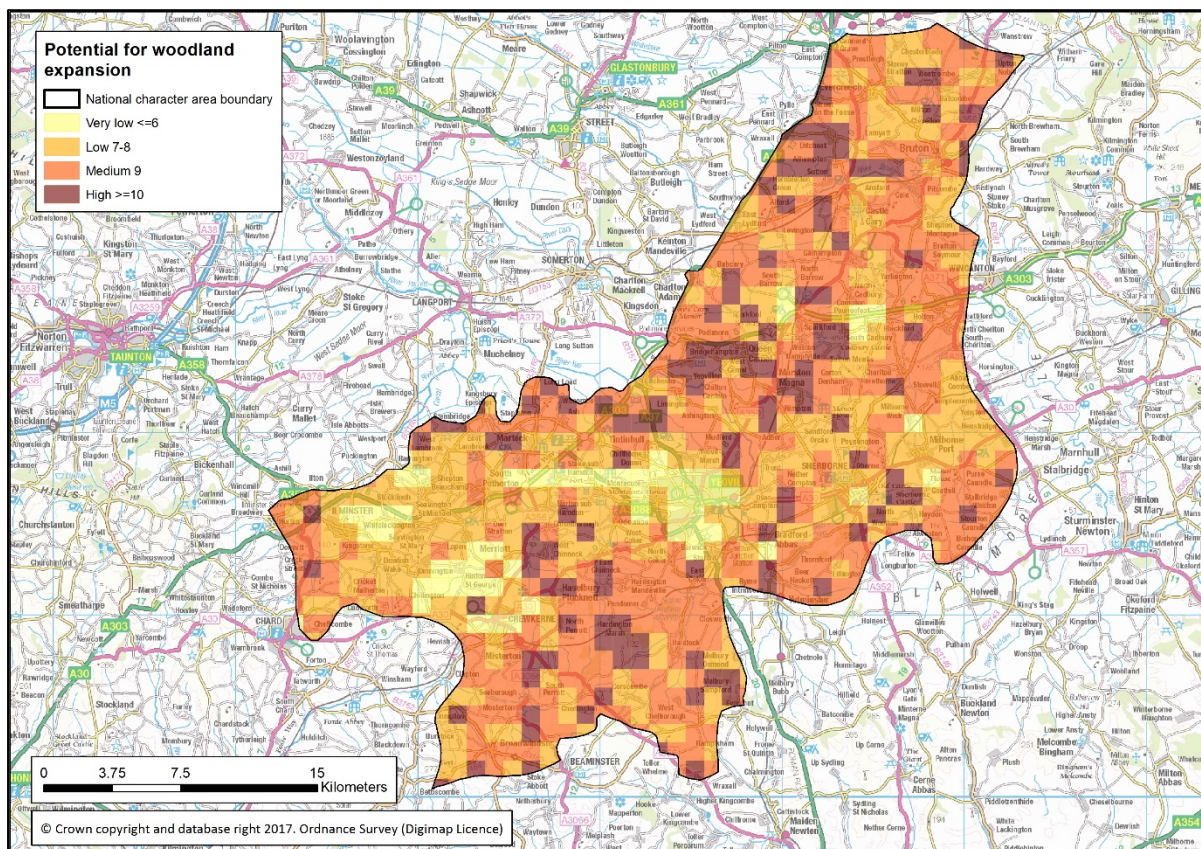
The Yeovil Scarplands NCA straddles the Somerset/Dorset border and runs in a shallow arc from Shepton Mallet in the north around the southern edge of the Somerset Levels to Chard and Ilminster in the south. It is a rural landscape of broad ridges and steep scarps separating the sheltered clay vales of the Rivers Brue, Parret and Yeo, which drain towards the Somerset Levels. The southern edge lies within the Dorset AONB, which covers around 12% of the NCA. It is included within the Chalk and Limestone Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and there are distinct pastoral, arable and mixed farming landscapes. The dominant land cover is grassland, varying from improved pastures in the valleys to rough grazing on the steeper hillsides. Enclosures vary from smaller, irregular fields of ancient closes to more regular, modified and enlarged fields, including areas of enclosed former strip fields. Field boundaries are mostly hedgerows and hedge banks, with some stone walls on higher ground. The main urban centre is Yeovil, in the centre of the NCA, with smaller towns at Bruton, Crewkerne, Ilminster and Sherborne. Outside the towns, the landscape is well-settled with mainly nucleated villages and hamlets. The NCA is crossed by major communication routes, including the main rail line to the south west and the A303, though most of the road network comprises local lanes and minor roads. The area does not have a high woodland cover, with 6% of the total area characterised as woodland, of which nearly 30% is ancient woodland. Woodland tends to be small and scattered, though there is a concentration of larger wood cover on the steep sides of the Yeo valley. There has been woodland loss, including the grubbing up of traditional orchards, and the replacement of native species with conifers.

The Historic Environment Character

Within the NCA are the well-known prehistoric monuments of Ham Hill and South Cadbury. Ham Hill, which includes a large scheduled area known as Hamdon Hill, is a multi-period archaeological landscape, with evidence of settlement from the Mesolithic period onwards, in the form of flint and chert tools, as well as Bronze Age settlement including metal working. Ham Hill has a large, multi-vallate, Iron Age hillfort, within which a Roman villa was built in the 2nd century AD. South Cadbury is a large multi-vallate hillfort of Iron Age date, though there is archaeological evidence of human activity from the early Neolithic period. There is evidence for some Roman occupation that continued into the 5th and 6th centuries AD. In the early 11th century, King Æthelred established a mint here. The area was well-settled in the Roman period, and Ilchester was established as a town within the ramparts of an early fort on the Fosse Way. It became a walled town in the 4th century. Its place name also indicates that Ilminster was the location of a late Saxon minster church, and may have been a town before the Conquest. South Petherton was also a significant settlement before the Conquest when it was a royal manor with a mint, and may have been a town with a minster church. In the later medieval period, several deserted settlements, including moated sites, indicate that the settlement pattern was quite dense with a complex pattern of planned villages with common field systems, as well as scatters of hamlets and farmsteads.

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 across the hillsides and ridges that divide the clay vales. The NCA profile highlights opportunities to manage woodland as part of the complex and diverse pastoral and mixed farming landscape. Woodland management includes existing native-species woodland, as well as replanting coniferous woodland with native species, and planting new woodlands as screening around new developments. The mapping, however, also identifies opportunities to extend areas of existing woodland, though this includes areas of archaeological sensitivity, such as Ham Hill where new planting must be avoided.



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