

NCA 144 Quantock Hills

Overview

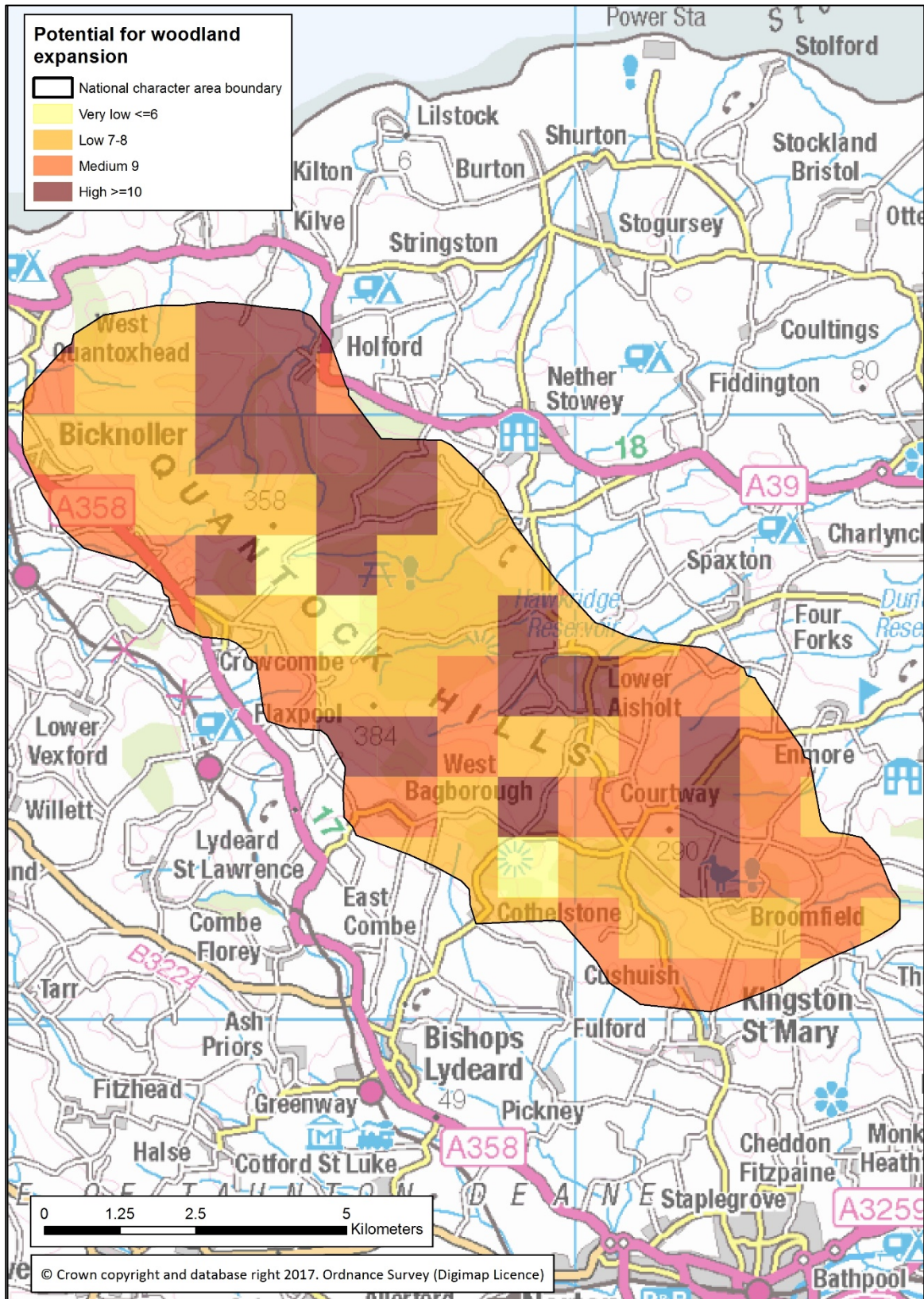
The Quantock Hills area is a small NCA comprising a north-west to south-east aligned ridge on the edge of the Vale of Taunton. Almost the whole of the NCA lies within the Quantock Hills AONB. It is varied landscape of open moor and upland heath, wooded valleys and rolling fields, and is included within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type. The prominent plateau to the north of the NCA is largely open moorland, whilst the enclosed fields to the south are dominated by small irregular fields bounded by hedgerows and stone-faced hedge banks. More regular fields on the steep hillsides are bounded by beech hedges. Most agricultural land is pasture or uncropped land, with only 10% cultivated for cereals. Settlement is sparse and largely dispersed, comprising mainly individual farmsteads or hamlets. There are some villages on the edge of the NCA at the foot of the scarp slope and along spring lines. The road system is wholly local, made up of minor roads and lanes. The A39 and A358 roads skirt the north-east and south-west edges of the NCA, respectively. It is a very well-wooded area, with a total coverage of 31%, of which 44% is ancient woodland. In places, native woodland has been replaced by coniferous plantation, but the steep-sided stream valleys, or coombes, are mainly under semi-natural oak and beech woodlands.

The Historic Environment Character

There was extensive human activity in the area in the prehistoric period, and the moorland landscape has ensured a high survival of monuments with a good legibility in the landscape. Monuments include burial mounds, standing stones, hill forts and smaller defended enclosures. The present settlement pattern was established in the medieval period, but there have been periods of expansion and retraction onto the hillsides and the plateau, seen in the earthworks of settlements and ridge and furrow within the woodlands and on the heath. There was a strong manorial presence in the medieval period, often with associated deer parks, many of which survive as designed parkland around country houses. Post medieval agricultural improvement included the development of catch water meadows, particularly on the southern hills, which helped provide an early flush of grass growth for grazing.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a high level of potential for woodland expansion within the NCA, particularly on the steep scarp slopes as an extension to existing woodland. The NCA profile highlights opportunities to extend and buffer existing woodland, to connect fragmented habitats, as well as restoring and managing existing woodland using traditional techniques. Any new woodland planting, however, should take account of the historic field patterns, historic features such as deer parks, and avoid impact on the setting of archaeological monuments.



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