

## NCA 148 Devon Redlands

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### *Overview*

This is a low-lying, fertile NCA, which extends from the mouth of the River Exe estuary northwards to the Exmoor NCA. It encompasses the valleys of the Rivers Exe, Clyst and Otter, with their major tributaries, including the Creedy, Culm and the Tale, as well as the lower reaches of the River Teign. It lies within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, and is a hilly landscape with steep valleys, opening out onto the floodplains and saltmarshes of the Exe estuary at the coast. The rural landscape east of the River Exe, and including the lower reaches of the Otter valley, are part of the East Devon AONB, and this part of the coastline is included within the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site. The name of the NCA derives from its distinctive red, well-draining, fertile soils. Across much of the area, the field pattern is one of medium-sized irregular fields, though there are also areas of more regular 'barton' fields. In the flood plains and on the higher land there are larger-scale and more regular fields, representing later phases of enclosure. Hedgebanks are a feature of the more anciently enclosed land, whilst low, trimmed hedges are a feature of the later enclosures. Grassland accounts for well over half of the farmed land, though mixed farming is common but declining. The settlement pattern, too, is mixed, with scattered farmsteads and hamlets along valley sides on spring lines, and nucleated settlement, both villages and towns, is located along the river valleys and on the coastal flood plains. The city of Exeter is the main urban area, but there are also traditional market towns such as Cullumpton, Crediton and Tiverton, as well as the coastal resorts of Exmouth and Budleigh Salterton. Exeter is a cathedral city and the county town of Devon and as such it is a communications hub for road, rail and air. Roads converge on the city from the surrounding towns and villages, it is also at the southern end of the M5 motorway and on the route of the A30, the main highway accessing the south-west peninsula. The main rail lines from London and the west side of England also meet at Exeter. It has an historic canal, linking the city centre to the estuary. The NCA is quite well-wooded, with a coverage of 10%, though only 12% of the total area of woodland is classified as ancient woodland. Much of the woodland is found along the sides of the river valleys, in some cases covering large areas, particularly in the Clyst and Exe valleys. Smaller woodlands are found in the higher valleys, and there are frequent hedgerow trees and very small farmland copses. The most heavily wooded area is the Haldon Hills, to the south west of Exeter, where there are extensive mixed woodland plantations.

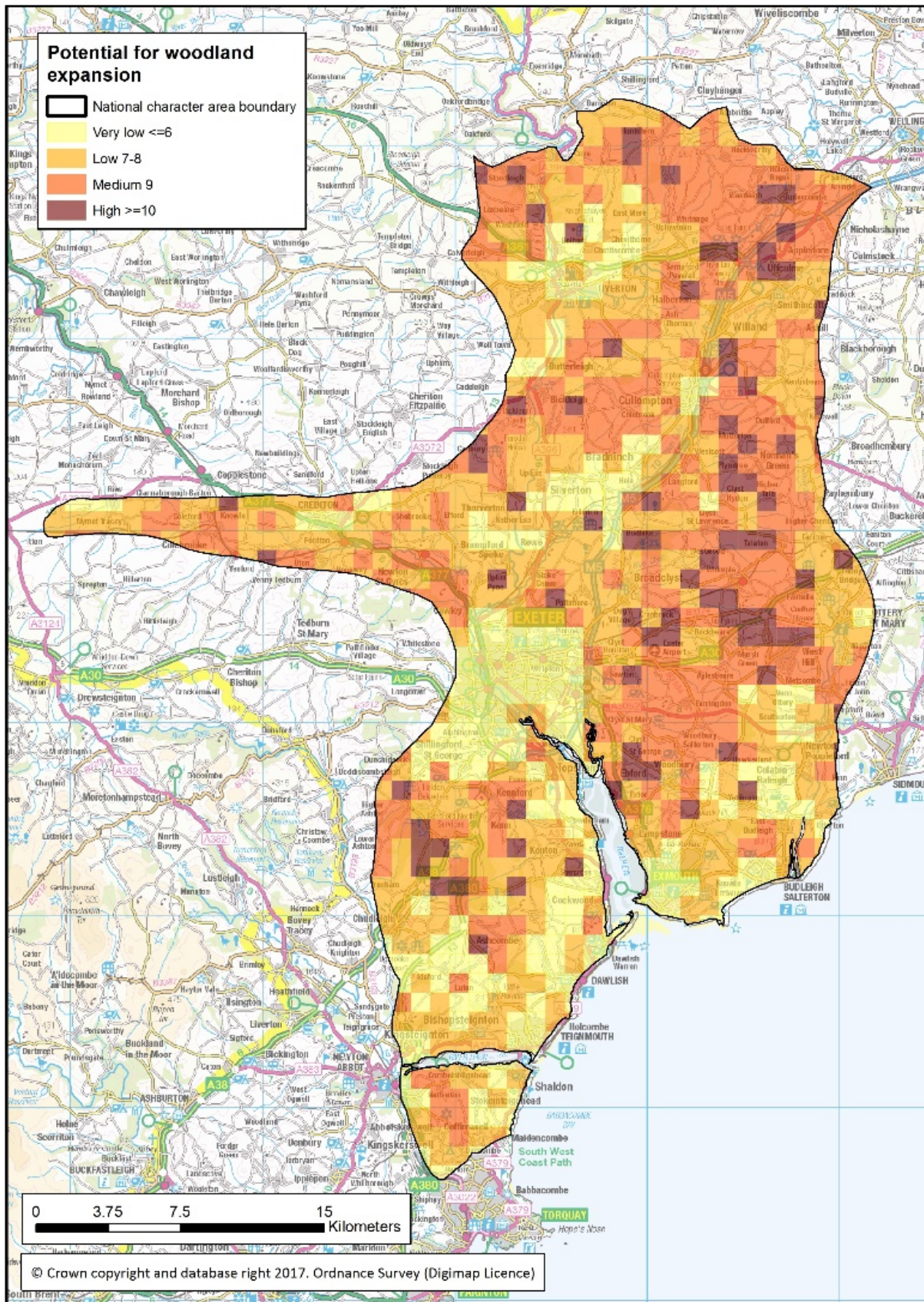
### *The Historic Environment Character*

There is evidence of human activity across the area from early prehistory, including finds of Mesolithic date, a Neolithic causewayed enclosure and later hillfort and field system on Raddon Hill, numerous barrows and hillforts. The area is also significant for Romano-British settlement, focused on the regional capital at Exeter where several Roman roads converged, but also including camps, forts, fortlets and a few villas. Exeter remained a place of significance into the early medieval period, having a 7<sup>th</sup> century abbey, and becoming a burh in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century. Several late Anglo-Saxon charters provide information on estate boundaries in the southern part of the NCA: at Dawlish, Topsham, Littleham and Ottery St Mary. Exeter was a busy port in the medieval period, and in the 1560s, a canal was built to facilitate access for boats into the heart of the city. In the medieval countryside, livestock

farming was dominant, and watermeadow systems of irrigation developed from the end of the medieval period, including catchmeadows from at least the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Cider orchards and arable farming increased in the post medieval period, but stock-rearing and dairying remained dominant. Sheep were reared for their wool, which supplied the late medieval and post medieval cloth industry. The area's prosperity is reflected in the substantial country houses and associated landscape parks, particularly in the area to the south of Exeter. Exmouth was the site of a ferry quay and port, but the latter could not compete with Exeter. The town established itself in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as an early seaside resort, and grew in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of the railway. Other seaside resorts that developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were Budleigh Salterton, Teignmouth and Dawlish.

#### *Opportunities for Woodland Expansion*

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a low level of potential for woodland expansion within the NCA, though in part this reflects the extensive areas of urban development around the Exe estuary and along the coast. There are clusters of higher opportunity identified by the mapping, around the extensive woodland of Great Haldon and along the hills to the east of the Exe valley. New woodland in these areas would fit with the environmental opportunities identified by the NCA profile, to manage and create woodland in the priority catchment areas of the Exe and Otter, as well as to mitigate the landscape impacts of existing and new developments. Woodland planting schemes should be designed to complement historic field patterns.



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