

NCA 156 West Penwith

Overview

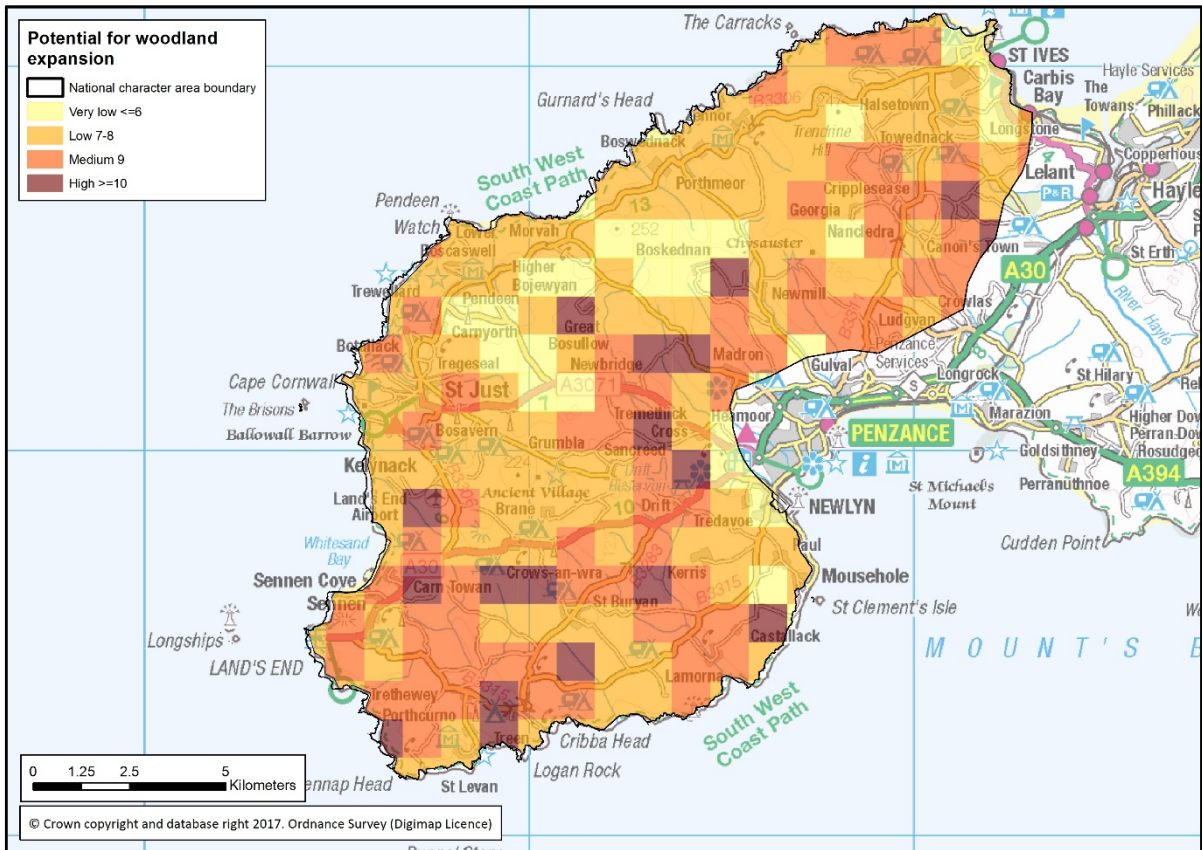
The West Penwith peninsula is a sparsely populated area, ringed by high cliffs, covering the peninsula at the western tip of Cornwall. Lying within the Upland and Upland Fringe Agricultural Landscape Type, it rises to high, rocky moorland at its centre, most of which is enclosed, though there are areas of common. Around two thirds of the NCA is within the Cornwall AONB, and the St Just mining district is included within the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site. It is an area of mainly pastoral farming, with extensive grazing on rough ground, though there is some mixed arable farming particularly around St Buryan and the southern part of the NCA. The field pattern is characterised by small- to medium-sized fields bounded by Cornish hedges, with the stone-faced banks made up of large granite blocks. The settlement pattern is a dispersed one of hamlets and farmsteads, within which small villages and towns are widely spread. The villages and towns developed around fishing and mining communities, the largest being St Ives, Newlyn, Mousehole and St Just. The road network is mostly one of minor roads and lanes connecting local communities, but also includes the A30 between Penzance and Land's End and the A3071 between Penzance and St Just. The area is a major tourist area, with former fishing settlements now forming popular destinations, with walking and surfing providing major tourism activities. The NCA has a very low woodland coverage, at 4% of the total area, of which less than 1% is ancient woodland. There are small blocks of plantation scattered throughout the eastern half of the NCA, but most woodland is in the sheltered valleys with some scrub woodland on the higher moors.

The Historic Environment Character

The NCA has a very high concentration of well-preserved prehistoric archaeological monuments. Sites include extensive prehistoric field systems, fogous, hill forts, hut circles, enclosed farms, courtyard houses such as Chysauster, and megalithic monuments including dolmens, standing stones, and stone circles. Many of the coastal settlements are of medieval origin, with fishing villages and hamlets developing on the coves, whilst farming settlements developed within a framework of prehistoric field systems. The area has numerous industrial archaeological remains of tin and copper mining, which grew rapidly from the late 18th century. Existing historic settlements grew rapidly to accommodate the industrial workforce, and new settlements grew up around the moors to accommodate miner-farmer smallholders, particularly in the area around St Just. The extent of mining has created a significant historic landscape character of mine waste, chimneys, shafts and engine houses.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a low level of potential for woodland expansion within the NCA, with the few clusters of higher potential limited to the southern half of the NCA, mainly lying outside the area of the AONB. Indeed, the NCA profile recommends woodland and scrub removal in areas of archaeological significance, particularly within the World Heritage Site. The profile does see opportunities for new planting in the sheltered valleys, in order to connect existing habitats and to create woodland networks, and this would fit with the areas of higher opportunity identified by the mapping.



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