

NCA 158 Isles of Scilly

Overview

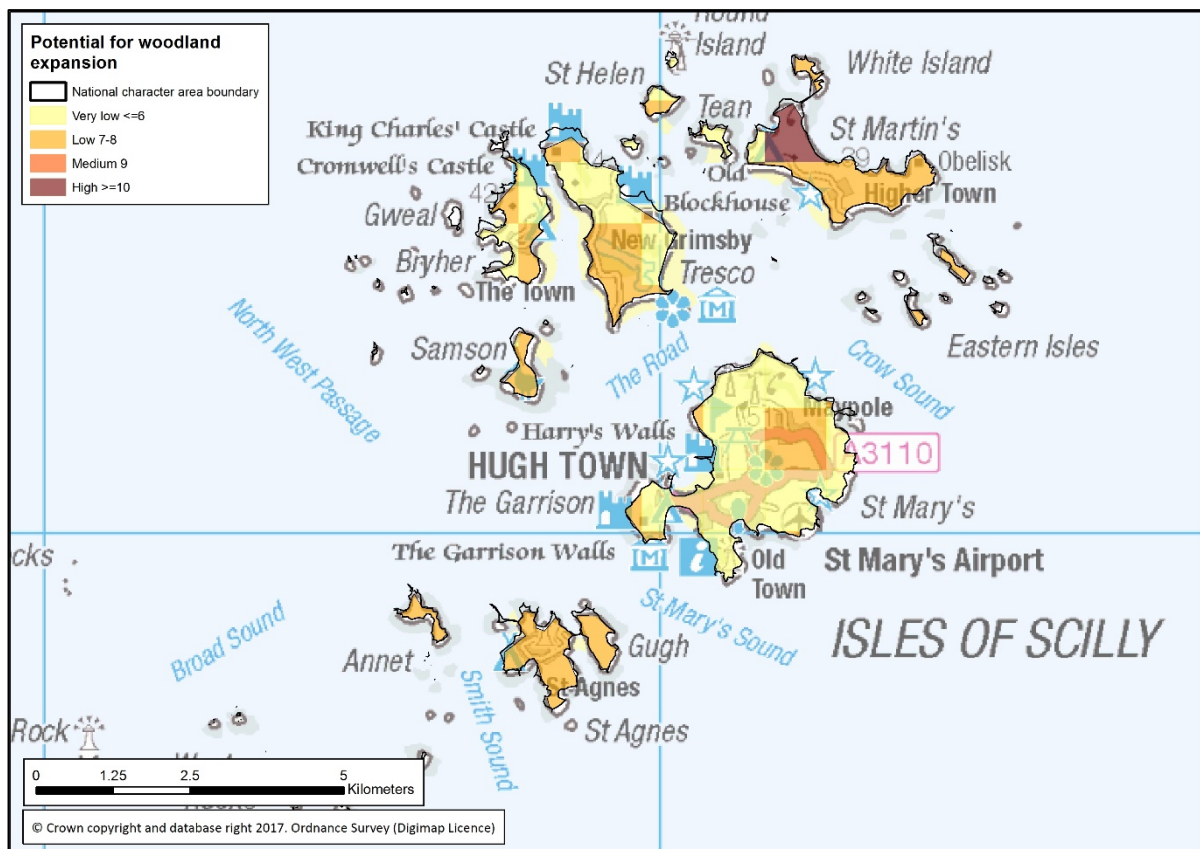
The Isles of Scilly NCA comprises all the islands in the group scattered across 200 km² in the Atlantic Ocean around 40km south-west of Land's End. It lies within the Western Mixed Agricultural Landscape Type, though only around a quarter of the islands support vegetation, and only five are inhabited: St Mary's, St Agnes, St Martin's, Tresco and Bryher. The entire group of islands, and the surrounding waters are designated as the Isles of Scilly AONB. There are large areas of rough grass and lowland heath, mainly on the unoccupied islands with vegetation, but also in some parts of the inhabited islands. Agriculture is mostly intensive horticulture, growing vegetables and flowers, and pasture, within a field pattern of small enclosures bounded by hedges and stone walls and banks. There are unenclosed maritime heaths and grassland around the coastlines. The settlement on each inhabited island has a nucleated core or cores, for example St Mary's main settlement is Hugh Town where the ferry port is located, but there are also polyfocal settlements and hamlets scattered across the islands. On St Martin's, for example, settlement is distributed across three foci: Lower Town, Middle Town and Higher Town. Roads are few on the islands, and St Mary's is the only one with public highways. There is little traffic, and electric buggies, bicycles and buses are common forms of transport. The islands are windswept and almost treeless, with a coverage of only 3%, none of which is ancient woodland. Woodland is found only on St Mary's and Tresco. On the latter, there are plantations of mostly coniferous trees around the Priory and Great Pool in the south of the island, and both islands have coniferous shelter belts. Around The Garrison, to the west of Hugh's Town on St Mary's, the sheltered coast of Porth Cressa is fringed by broadleaved woodland.

The Historic Environment Character

The Isles of Scilly have a remarkable number and range of archaeological remains from the Neolithic period onwards, with an exceptional level of preservation. All the occupied islands have complex, multi-period remains, including the uninhabited island of Samson, the whole of which is a scheduled monument. There are extensive areas that have been scheduled on the main islands, particularly on Tresco and St Martin's. Prehistoric monuments include numerous funerary monuments and field systems, settlements and standing stones. There is also evidence for Romano-British and early Christian settlement on the islands. The Benedictine Priory of St Nicholas was established on Tresco by the later 12th century, and may have been a re-establishment on the site of an earlier medieval priory. From the end of the medieval period, and particularly through the post medieval period, the islands occupied a nationally strategic location, resulting in an important concentration of defensive works, with a range of fortifications that demonstrate the presence of the military. From the late 1870s, the agricultural economy of the inhabited islands developed, particularly the growth of market gardening, with the improvement in transport networks, for example to the port of Penzance.

Opportunities for Woodland Expansion

The mapping of historic and natural environment attributes indicates a very low level of potential for woodland expansion within the NCA, reflecting the open, windswept nature of the islands. There are no clusters of higher potential for new planting within the islands, and woodland expansion should not be considered compatible with the historic character of the NCA.



NCA 158 Isles of Scilly