



South Gloucestershire

Landscape Character

Assessment

Supplementary Planning Document

South Gloucestershire Council

Draft report

Prepared by LUC

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Appendix A.7: Undulating Ridge LCT

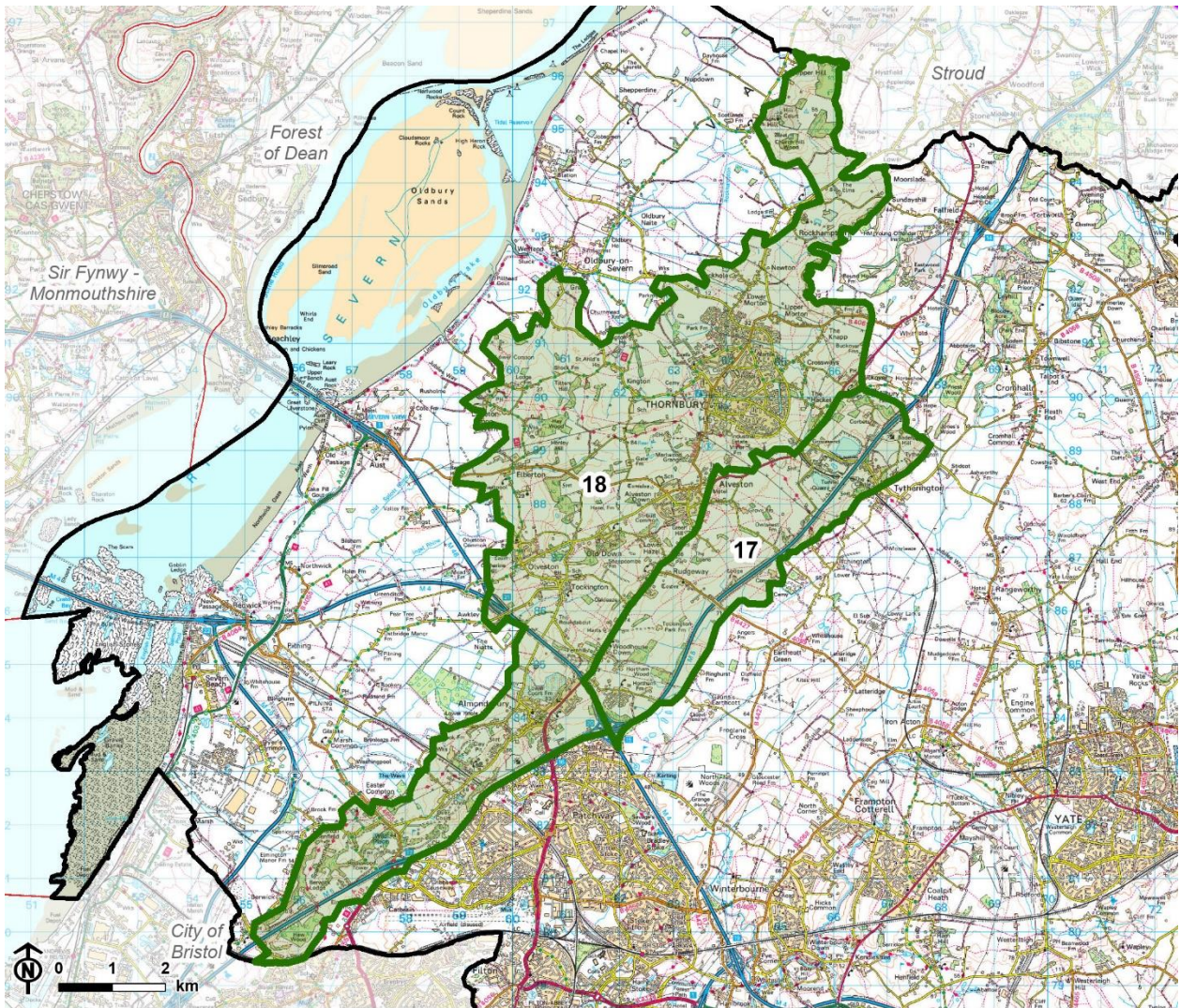
LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington
Ridge

LCA 18: Severn Ridges










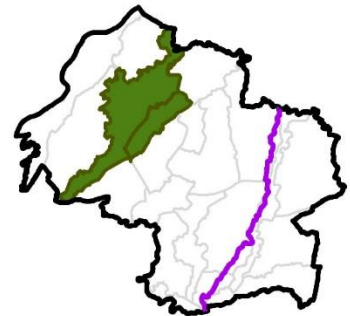
Undulating Ridge LCT

Figure 7.1: Location of Undulating Ridge LCT



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- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
|  | Undulating Ridge LCT |  | LCAs within Undulating Ridge LCT: |
|  | Council boundary |  | LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge |
|  | Neighbouring local authority |  | LCA 18: Severn Ridges |
|  | Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) boundary | | |



Description

The type comprises a distinct band of high ground running north-east to south-west across the western part of South Gloucestershire. This forms an extensive, prominent and distinctive 'ridge' landform, rising up quite quickly from the lowland levels to the west and less distinctly from the simple rolling vales to the east.

Key Characteristics

- The ridges are characterised by a diverse mix of sloping pasture and some arable fields, divided by hedges in varying patterns.
- Some remnants of ridge and furrow field pattern, laid hedges and old orchards remain visible, evoking a sense of time depth in the landscape.
- Deciduous woodland is typically associated with ridgelines and hill tops. This provides a strongly defined landscape framework and a sense of enclosure, particularly to the south.
- Towns and large villages are located on high points on the ridgelines, with numerous small villages and hamlets. Church towers typically form landmarks in the surrounding landscape.
- Major transport routes (including the M4, M5 and A38) cross the ridges, connected by an intricate pattern of roads and lanes which are often surrounded by hedges and woodlands.
- Ribbon development along the A38 and adjoining roads creates the impression of sub-urbanisation of the rural landscape, particularly along the main transport corridors.

Undulating Ridge LCT

Landscape Character Areas

The Undulating Ridges LCT is subdivided into two LCAs:

- LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge & Tytherington Ridge
- LCA 18: Severn Ridges

LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge

The Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge landscape character area is a broad open ridge comprising a pastoral landscape, punctuated by woodland and copses and dissected and defined by roads.

Undulating Ridge LCT

Photo 1: St Helens Church and linear settlement along Gloucester Road (A38) in Alveston.



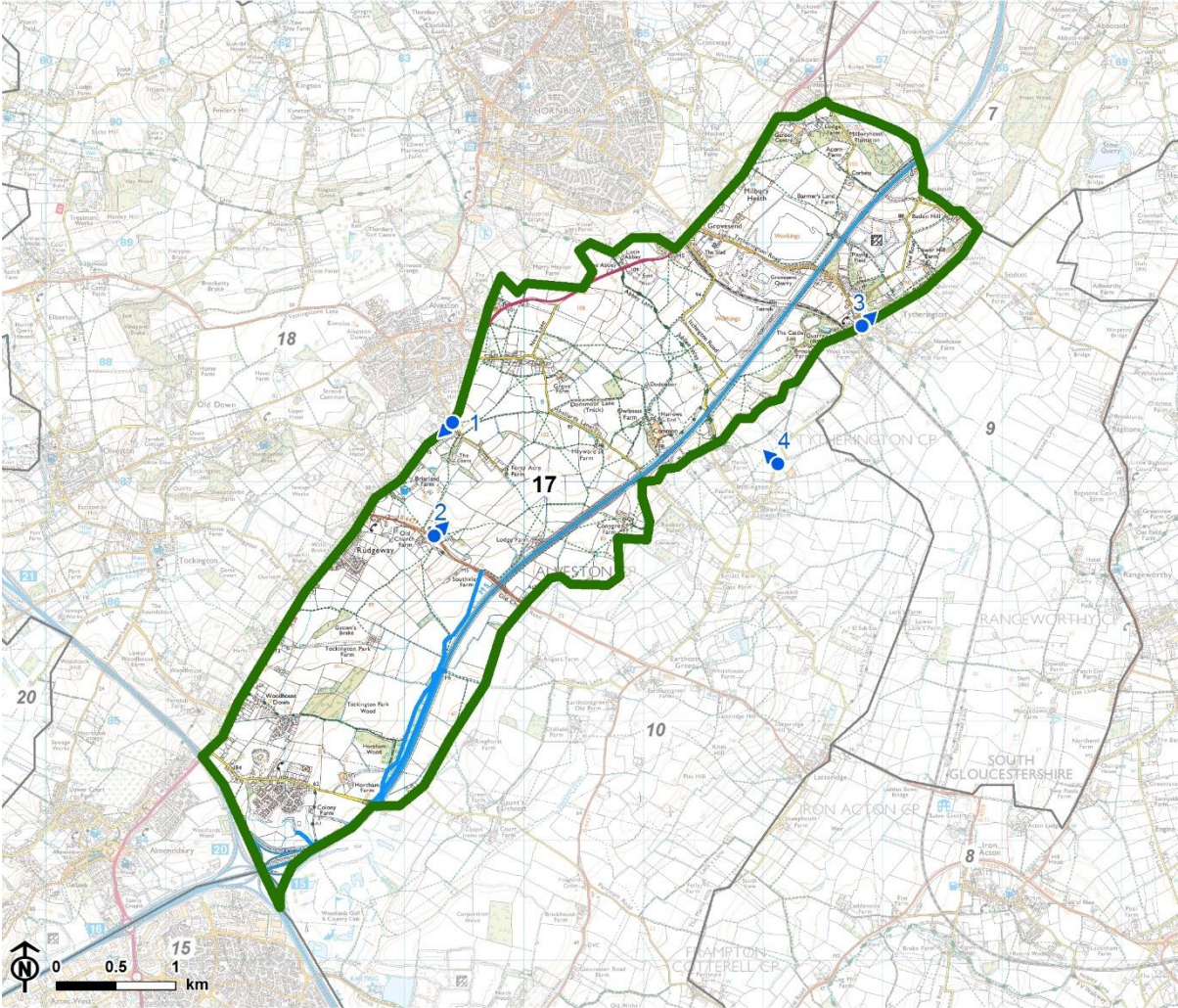
Undulating Ridge LCT

Location






The Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge landscape character area is located centrally within South Gloucestershire, extending north-eastwards from the M4/M5 interchange (adjacent to the northern edge of the Bristol conurbation). The western boundary follows the often-distinct landform change between the upper slopes of the Severn Ridges and the open plateau/rolling ridgeline of this area. The eastern boundary marks a transition between the lower eastern slopes of this area and the landform of the Tytherington Plain (LCA 9) and Earthcott Vale (LCA 10). The northern boundary defines the end of the ridge and its approximate skyline, the descending slopes beyond containing the Falfield Vale (LCA 7). The southern boundary follows the M4, incorporating part of the M4/M5 interchange.

Undulating Ridge LCT

Figure 7.2: Location and Landscape context of LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge



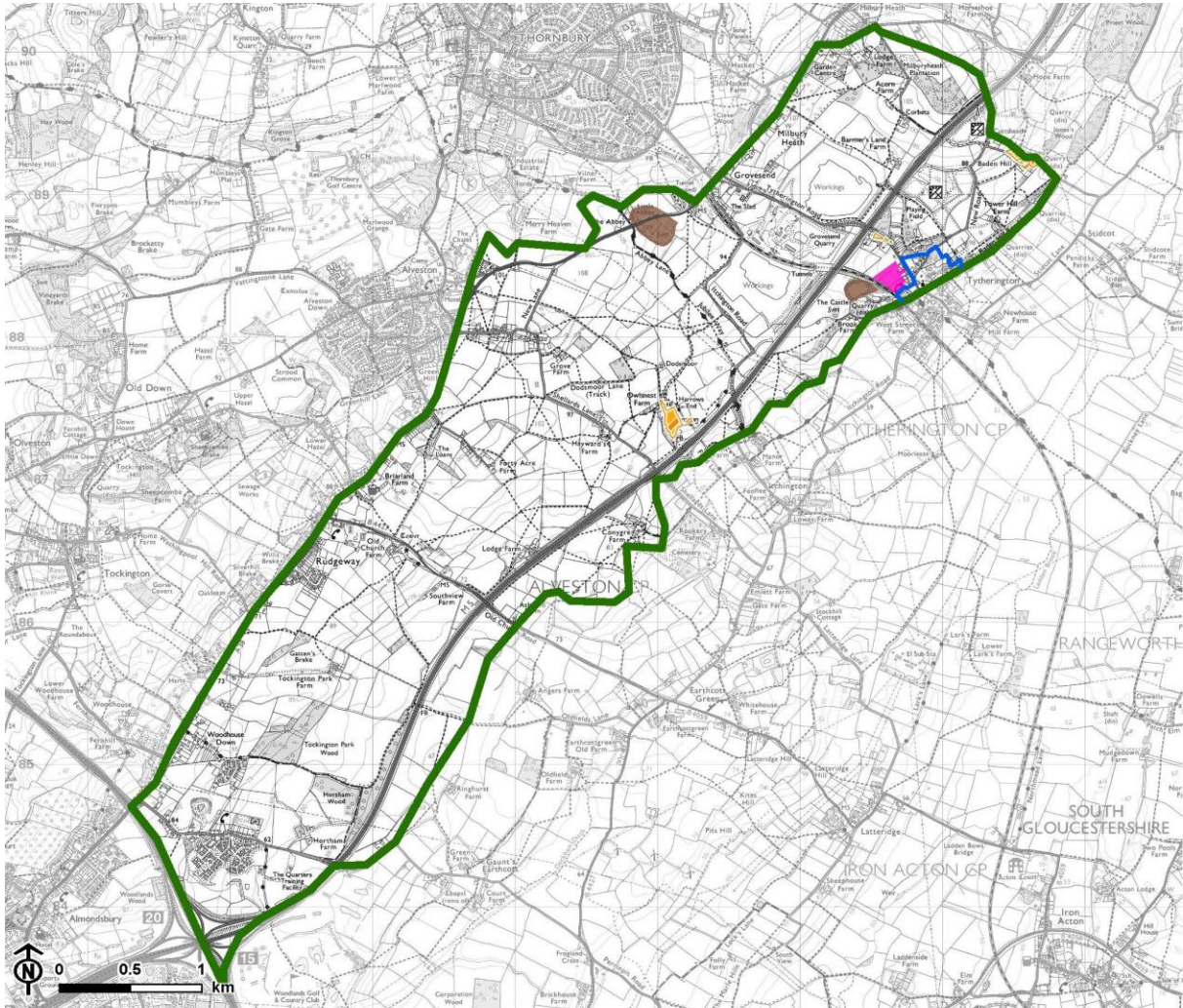
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-  LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge
-  Neighbouring LCA
-  Council boundary
-  River
-  Photograph location and direction



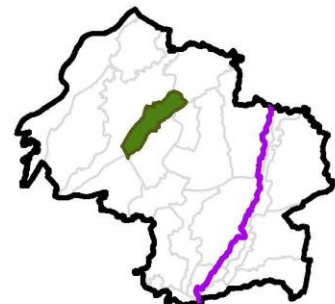
Undulating Ridge LCT

Figure 7.3: Development and Heritage context of LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge



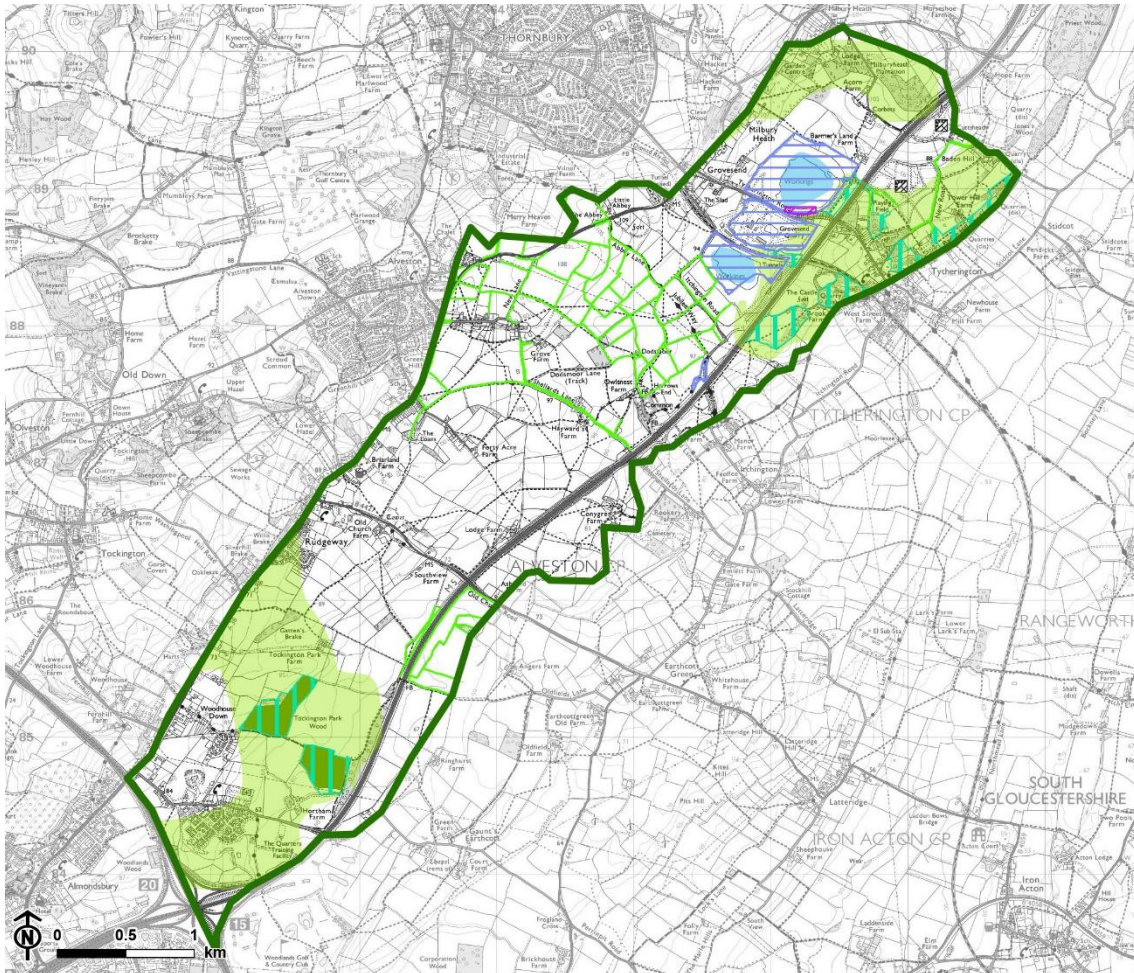
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-  LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge
-  Council boundary
-  CRoW Common Land
-  CRoW Open Access Land
-  Scheduled Monument
-  Conservation Area
-  Recent development (since 2014)











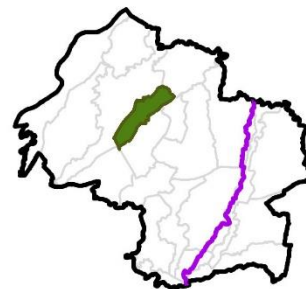
Undulating Ridge LCT

Figure 7.4: Ecology and Biodiversity Context of LCA 17: Rudgeway Ridge and Tytherington Ridge



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- | | | | |
|---|---|---|----------------------------|
|  | LCA 17: Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge |  | Wetland Strategic Network |
|  | Site of Special Scientific Interest |  | Woodland Strategic Network |
|  | Site of Nature Conservation Interest |  | Important hedgerow |
|  | Ancient woodland | | |
|  | Regionally Important Geological Site | | |



Landscape Description

Key Characteristics

- A broad linear ridgeline plateau which gently slopes to the east, forming a backdrop to the vale and plain beyond.
- Open to semi-enclosed predominantly pastoral landscape of regular, medium sized fields with a mix of thick, clipped and intermittent hedges, and stock fencing.
- There are occasional small pockets of common land in the north and east of the character area.
- Several areas of calcareous grassland are scattered across this character area (including areas of species rich grassland), which add texture to the landscape and provide important habitat for a diverse range of flora.
- A regular, dispersed pattern of woodland copses throughout, with large areas of deciduous woodland in the north and south which provide visual screening to the A38, while also providing valuable habitat for a wide range of species including European Protected Species.
- Occasional mature tree specimens are associated with some older farmsteads, occasionally within hedgerows or fields.
- There are occasional extensive views from the western boundary to the Severn Estuary and beyond. The eastern slopes look towards the Cotswold Scarp.
- The extensive road network defines this area and includes the M5, M4/M5 interchange and A38. The B4427 and other minor roads connect and cross the area.
- Settlement comprises small historic villages and hamlets and ribbon settlement along main roads. Stone walls line some roads, most notably sections of the A38 and roads adjacent to older farms.

Undulating Ridge LCT

- Tytherington Quarry is a large active quarry that includes a geological SSSI.

Natural Influences

Geology, Landform and Hydrology

The underlying geology of the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge comprises Jurassic limestone, interwoven with a small proportion of alluvium and Carboniferous limestone. Soils are predominantly Pello-stagnogleys. There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Tytherington Quarry, designated for its geological importance.

This combination of geological strata creates a broad ridgeline on a north-east to south-west axis lying at approximately 100 metres AOD, with a small plateau to the east of Alveston. The gently rolling south-east facing slopes fall towards the Tytherington Plain (LCA 9) and Earthcott Vale (LCA 10) at 50-65 metres AOD. Slopes are convex towards the south, with a small bluff forming Tytherington Hill to the north. The boundary of the LCA is located at the foot of the hill. Earthworks, road embankments, gantries and overbridges associated with the M4, M5, and Almondsbury Interchange introduce man-made landforms to the landscape.

The drainage pattern comprises a limited number of ditches along field boundaries feeding the Hortham Brook to the south. A number of small ponds are scattered across the area, generally near farms.

Land Cover

The character area is a predominantly pastoral landscape, with regular shaped, medium sized fields. The fields are divided by a mix of thick, clipped and intermittent hedges, with some stock fencing around horse paddocks near the

Undulating Ridge LCT

A38. Small copses of deciduous woodland occur frequently, scattered throughout the area. Larger areas of woodland lie to the south near Woodhouse Down and in the north at Milbury Heath, with a cluster of smaller woodlands and copses around Tytherington. Mature specimen trees are generally associated with old farmsteads and are limited elsewhere.

Small pockets of Registered Common Land are clustered around Tytherington at Baden Hill, Tytherington Hill, and Hilly Upman. The larger area of Itchington Common comprises rough grassland with dense boundary vegetation.

Tytherington Quarry occupies an extensive area of the northern part of the LCA, comprising areas of excavation which have been worked sequentially southwards, parallel to the M5. The edge of the site is largely contained by hedgerows and hedgerow trees, supplemented in places with earth mounds, and a developing woodland structure. The northern section of the quarry is SSSI-designated for its geological value and interest.

Photo 2: Pastoral fields near Rudgeway enclosed by dense hedgerows with mature trees.



Biodiversity

The LCA comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland and farmland, providing important habitat for a diverse range of species. Hedgerows, the Hortham Brook and its tributaries form ecological corridors which provide connectivity across the landscape.

Broadleaf woodland occurs in small blocks dispersed across the LCA, often associated with farms, with two larger areas at Tockington Park Wood and Hortham Wood (both ancient woodland sites) as well as at Milbury Heath plantation in the north of the LCA. Several areas of broadleaf woodland at Tytherington and Hortham are designated as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI). Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice both of which are present across the District and are European protected species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).

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There are seven sites within the LCA designated as SNCIs for their calcareous grassland habitat, including species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates and ant hills are a regular feature. These invertebrates in turn provide a food source for mammals including bats. Hedgerows and scattered trees provide connectivity for species such as these between the wooded areas and other habitats.

Although aquatic habits are uncommon in this LCA, the drainage ditches, tributary streams, ponds and pools support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

Underground quarries, mines and tunnels associated with the quarrying activity in the area provide an ideal habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

The majority of the agricultural land use within this area is pastoral farmland with small areas of arable cultivation. Arable farmland provides ground nesting, and the winter stubble provides foraging opportunities for farmland birds including some listed as being Globally Threatened Red list species.

South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor B (Charfield-Alveston-Hallen (*Western Scarp/Severn Ridges*)) covers the northern and southern parts of this LCA, associated with the woodland strategic network on the ridges.

Cultural Influences

Land Use and Time Depth

Early settlement and land use is indicated by the presence of two prehistoric hillforts at 'The Castle' to the west of Tytherington, and at Little Abbey Camp west of Grovesend, comprising a fortified enclosure segmented by the A38. Both are Scheduled Monuments. The former manorial complex at Old Church

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Farm, off the B4427, is a Scheduled Monument and locally listed building, and includes the old church of St. Helen's (Grade II listed). Tockington Park Farm, to the south of Rudgeway, is built over a Roman villa and lies within a former deer park. Another former large deer park, south of Alveston, can also be identified through its field boundary pattern.

Part of Tytherington Conservation Area falls within the east of the LCA, covering the core of the village with a cluster of listed buildings including St James' Church (Grade II* listed), with a framework of tall Pennant stone boundary walls.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement comprises the village of Tytherington, the hamlets of Woodhouse Down and Rudgeway, and small-scale ribbon development along the A38. Elsewhere are scattered farms and isolated houses, typically constructed from Pennant sandstone, with some limestone evident in the south-west of the area. The former Hortham hospital site (adjacent to the M4/M5 junction) has been redeveloped for housing, incorporating a structure of mature trees that formerly were part of the hospital grounds.

Tytherington village is located at a confluence of roads on the lower slopes of Tytherington Hill, partly extending into the adjacent Tytherington Plain (LCA 9) containing historic buildings built in pennant stone. The church spire and public house form locally prominent features. Acoustic fencing separates the western part of the village from the M5 motorway.

Along and adjacent to the boundaries of this character area, ribbon settlement extends continuously between Rudgeway and Alveston (in adjacent LCA 18) along both sides of the A38 and is more scattered further south. Woodhouse Down comprises a localised cluster of brick and rendered housing, in a regular pattern, laid out along a lane with cul-de-sacs. Rudgeway comprises a smaller, denser concentration of housing, along the A38. The linear pattern of Rudgeway and Woodhouse Down frontages, together with frequent houses scattered along

Undulating Ridge LCT

the A38 forms continuous ribbon development which has started to encroach along some of the minor roads to the east and west. Pennant boundary stone walls, set back from the A38 road edge, are common between Rudgeway and Alveston.

Major roads run along the edges of this area, dissected by a number of minor routes at regular intervals. The M5 passes near the eastern boundary, with parts of the central and northern section in cutting. The A38 passes along the western boundary, whilst the B4427, together with a number of minor roads and country lanes climb and descend the easterly slopes, connecting isolated settlements to the A38.

The area is served by numerous public rights of way, including the Jubilee Way locally promoted route, which climbs the ridge north-westwards, crossing the north of the area between Itchington and the southern edge of Thornbury. One of a series of circular rides comprises a circuit taking in a larger area of the Severn Ridges to the west, briefly crossing into the LCA, following lanes through Tytherington and climbing towards Milbury Heath.

A number of overhead powerlines ascend the ridge to the south of Tytherington, running across the area from the major sub-station within the adjacent Earthcott Vale character area (LCA 10). A further powerline crosses the skyline south of Woodhouse Down. Several mobile phone masts are present adjacent to the M5 and A38 road corridors, and when viewed in combination with overhead gantries and signage associated with the motorway can appear cluttered on the skyline. A mineral railway line crosses the area in cutting to the west of Tytherington, defining one edge of the Tytherington Limestone Quarry and smaller disused quarries between the M5 and A38. There are two small solar farms at Tower Hill Farm and Oakham farm near Tytherington in the north-east of the LCA, located on a concealed slope and only evident in local views.

Photo 3: St James' Church and traditional stone-built cottages in Tytherington Conservation Area.



Perceptual Influences

Visual Character

The visual character of the Rudgetway and Tytherington Ridge LCA is largely influenced by the ridgeline plateau and gentle easterly-sloping landform. Land cover of pasture within regular fields defined by clipped or intermittent hedgerows, infrequent hedgerow trees and frequent dispersed copses or areas of woodland, produces a textured, simple, open to semi-enclosed landscape. The rural character remains largely intact but is strongly influenced by major roads, quarrying activity, and frequent small settlement clusters.

The pattern of minor roads and rural lanes that cross the sloping landform of this area provides opportunities to view much of this area and its features.

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These slopes allow extensive views eastwards across the adjacent vale and plain landscapes, and further to Winterbourne, Yate and the Cotswold Scarp.

However, the ridge and plateau landscape varies between open and enclosed. Views from within this area are often curtailed by the slight hill and plateau landform. Sometimes views are contained by settlement edge, stone walls along the A38 and the wooded slopes of the Severn Ridge to the west, which line parts of the A38 or by the varying pattern and concentration of trees/copses. The large areas of woodland of Tockington Park Wood, Hortham Wood and Gatten's Brake to the south of the area, overlying gentle slopes of otherwise arable fields, produce a simple and balanced large-scale landscape feature. The ridgeline and elevated slopes continue north-eastwards, forming a prominent landform within views from the M5 and a backdrop to the lower adjacent vale and plain.

The combination of built features, setting, and vegetation form areas of distinctive landscape character. The frequent distribution of older stone farmhouses, located on the ridge and along minor roads, is a common characteristic of the area, notably along Shellards Lane (east of Alveston) and Old Church Road (B4427): The complex of farms and outbuildings, linked along by stone walls, set within an open plateau of fields with mature specimen trees, forms a locally distinct feature. The manorial complex of Old Church Farm and adjacent tower of St Helen's Church along Old Church Road, forms a prominent landmark, visible from the M5 and adjacent vale character area (LCA 12).

The wooded slopes of Tytherington Hill and setting of the village and common land at Tytherington are visually distinctive, with the church forming a locally prominent landmark. The village is largely well-integrated, set above the wooded slopes of Tytherington Hill. However, an eastward extension into the adjacent Tytherington Plain character area (LCA 9) is more prominent, due to the regular shaped concentration of houses and limited vegetation within or along its edge to provide integration.

Settlement, structures, roads and non-agricultural land use have a strong influence over the adjacent landscape in places, for example in the south of the LCA, where the settlement edge at Woodhouse Down breaches the otherwise

Undulating Ridge LCT

undeveloped skyline with little vegetation to provide integration. Similarly, the sports playing field adjacent to the site of the former Hortham Hospital introduces an urbanising element to the rural landscape and is incongruous with the surrounding rural land uses. Along lower slopes there is a scattering of mismatching buildings, including glasshouses within a nursery complex, a group of large modern agricultural sheds, and a disused farm with unmanaged fields. These elements detract from the otherwise intact rural character of the locality. The group of three wind turbines in adjacent vale landscape LCA 10 are prominent in views to the east.

Tytherington Quarry is generally well-integrated by mature vegetation and hedgerows with occasional trees and mound/planting mitigation measures along the quarry's site boundary. The works' buildings form prominent industrial structures, visible above the natural ground level, appearing within some local views on the skyline.

The A38 is largely a well-integrated and visually contained rural corridor. A linear framework of stone boundary walls between Rudgeway and Alveston, and sections of broad roadside verges soften the edges and aid its integration into the landscape. The road is fringed by woodland to the west, mixed with mature pine trees, however garden vegetation in combination with sections of ribbon development, has a suburban influence in places. Occasional paddocks and pasture fields, enclosed by post and wire fencing, form open pockets within the landscape along sections of the eastern edge of this road corridor. The vegetation structure largely integrates the frequent scattered ribbon settlement. There are occasional extensive views to the west from the A38, looking over the steep descending slopes of the Severn Ridge towards the levels and Severn Estuary beyond.

The M4/M5 interchange close to Bristol comprising large-scale earthworks and an elevated interchange structure, in combination with the M5 at grade introduce structures and traffic volumes which are visually and audibly prominent in the south-east corner of this area. The M5 has a wider influence to the northwest of Tytherington where it passes on embankment, permitting extensive views eastwards along Tytherington Hill and over the Tytherington plain below. The interchange and large-scale earth bunds around Woodlands

Undulating Ridge LCT

Golf Course, immediately to the south-east (within Bristol City Authority area) largely screen commercial development on the edge of Bristol, although the roofs of some buildings remain evident as a skyline feature, with the RAC tower forming a prominent landmark.

A number of powerlines to the east of Alveston form prominent linear features ascending the ridge. Where they cross the edge of the ridge/plateau area, these powerlines and towers are particularly prominent on the skyline. Mobile phone masts adjacent to the M5 and A38 are generally evident within local views, their prominence is locally dependent upon mast size and requirement for associated infrastructure, such as buildings, compounds, access tracks and fencing.

Photo 4: View north from Itchington towards the ridge, with traffic on the M5 motorway intermittently visible through gaps in vegetation.



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Tranquillity and Dark Skies

The extensive road network of the M4, M5, M4/M5 interchange and A38 are defining features and introduce noise and visual disruption to the area. The sound of traffic can be heard across much of the LCA, resulting in limited sense of tranquillity. When the quarry is active, movement and noise from quarry traffic impacts on the sense of tranquillity within the locality. Light pollution from adjacent urban areas Bristol and Thornbury, as well as lighting associated with the A38 and M5/Almondsbury interchange has a relatively wide-spread impact across the LCA, with few areas of dark skies.

Visually Important Hillsides

The southern extent of Wick's Hill / Butchers Hill and Baden Hill Visually Important Hillside (VIH) is located within this LCA. It comprises an elevated area of three hillsides stretching between Torthworth in the north and Tytherington in the south. Baden Hill is the southernmost hillside and forms part of the setting to the Tytherington Conservation Area.

Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

Strategic Viewpoints

There are no Strategic Viewpoints within this LCA.

Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Value Features

- Remaining areas of pastoral land use, enclosed by hedgerows which provide structure to the landscape and habitat connectivity .
- Ecologically valuable woodland and calcareous grassland habitats, including designated areas.
- Assets of historic significance, including prehistoric hillforts and the manorial complex at Old Church Farm.
- Traditional rural settlements with distinctive vernacular using local building styles and materials, for example in Tytherington.
- Wide views available from more open parts of the ridge, including west towards the Severn Ridges and Estuary.
- Recreational value in the form of Common Land and public rights of way network including part of the Jubilee Way , and a Circular Ride.

The Changing Landscape

The Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge character area is a predominantly agricultural area with significant transport and settlement influences and pressures on its fringes. Much of the existing landscape framework of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and woodland is in good condition and intact, however there is evidence of a loss in hedgerows adjacent to the A38 corridor, with some land use changes from agriculture to horse grazing.

The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Rudgeway and Tytherington Ridge LCA.

Climate Change

- Pressure for renewable energy development including wind and solar to contribute towards maximising the generation of renewable energy from installations (as set out in South Gloucestershire's Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-2030), already evident in the presence of solar arrays at Tower Hill Farm and Oakham Farm near Tytherington.

Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- An increase in tree planting is required to reverse potential decline of existing woodland coverage and increased openness of the landscape. This will contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new native woodlands in the 'A38 Gap' as part of a loose accessible woodland framework around the fringes of Thornbury (within LCA 18) as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy. This may change the open character of the landscape and its expansive views.
- Pools and ponds and their associated aquatic species, including Great Crested Newt, are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.

Land Use and Cover

- Tytherington Quarry presently comprises a significant area of disused quarry and areas that at the time of writing are dormant. Potential future operations, identified in the Minerals & Waste Local Plan, could include the extension of the quarry to the south-west. This would require the removal and realignment of Tytherington Road, with the loss of field boundaries and hedgerow trees, affecting the character of the locality.

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- The sports pitch facility to the east of housing development on the site of the former Hortham Hospital is poorly integrated, lacking a landscaped setting it erodes the rural character of the local landscape.
- The increasing prevalence of horse paddocks is evident within the area, particularly along the edge of the A38, which in places has led to the loss or erosion of hedgerows with a resultant reduction in connectivity of habitats. The cumulative effect of this and associated stables, access tracks, exercise areas, jumps and floodlighting, can result in a marked change in landscape character and disturbance to wildlife.
- The tall poplar trees adjacent to Hortham Hospital are in contrast with the local agricultural framework and the character of the pre-existing tree cover within the former hospital site. The replacement of hedging with close boarded fencing, paving and to a lesser extent ornamental planting in gardens along the A38 corridor are significantly eroding the rural character of the area.

Development

- The presence of major transport routes around the boundaries of this area, together with the proximity of the urban edge of Bristol to the south, increase the pressure for development within this area. road corridors and existing ribbon development along the A38 already affect the character of the adjacent rural landscape. Further increase in traffic or additional built development could result in a significant change to the local character.
- The introduction of urban features within the rural landscape has the potential to erode the rural character.
- Older settlements and buildings contribute significantly to local character and are potentially sensitive to change resulting from new development which would erode their intrinsic character or setting. The buildings at and adjacent to the Grove Farm complex, Old Church Farm and Tytherington village are particularly sensitive to such change.
- The introduction of large modern farm sheds on the east-facing slopes could significantly change the visual prominence of these building groups

Undulating Ridge LCT

(as already seen at Hortham Farm) which are currently low-profile rural features.

- Large vertical elements such as wind turbines could have wide visibility and erode the rural characteristics of the locality- as already evidenced by the Tytherington Plain wind turbines.
- The undisturbed rural skylines of the ridge/ plateau are sensitive to change, particularly from the encroachment of built and vertical forms of development, due to its visually prominent location. The undeveloped areas of the easterly facing slopes are similarly sensitive, being visible from the adjoining vale and the Wickwar Ridge to the east.
- Further built development, fencing or tree planting along the western fringe of the A38 may conceal the extensive views towards the Severn Estuary, which are a distinctive and characteristic feature along parts of this route.
- Mobile phone masts in elevated and visible locations introduce detractive vertical elements to the skyline and has the cumulative effect of eroding rural characteristics.
- The M4/M5 interchange, M5 and, to a lesser extent, the A38 corridor, with associated traffic noise and lighting, have a wide visual and audible influence, eroding the local rural character.
- A large residential development site on the north-western edge of Tytherington, as well as a site on the south-eastern edge of Thornbury (in adjacent LCA 18) will impact on views west from the LCA and contribute to the sense of coalescence between settlements.

Guidance

These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4.

Landscape Strategy

Landscape Management

- Actively manage the landscape vegetation structure, including hedgerows, hedgerow trees, copses and woodlands, to maintain landscape character and biodiversity value of the locality for the long term.
- The loss of boundary features, including hedgerows and stone walls that contribute local landscape character and habitat connectivity should be resisted. New field boundaries should reinforce the particular and distinctive character and appearance of the locality, and fencing should be avoided.
- Preserve and enhance the landscape setting of Tytherington Conservation Area, together with key views towards and from it.
- Increase tree cover on eastern facing slopes and along the principal road corridors to reinforce landscape structure and mitigate impact on views from higher ground to the east.
- Preserve the rural character of undisturbed rural ridges and skylines, and open views across the estuary, including careful consideration of new large-scale vertical structures.

Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Ensure the mosaic of calcareous grasslands are appropriately managed in order to maintain their biodiversity value and contribution to nature recovery networks.
- Plan for the sympathetic restoration of Tytherington Quarry as different phases are worked out, seeking opportunities to create new habitat and enhance ecological corridors between existing habitats.

Undulating Ridge LCT

- Protect deciduous woodlands at Tockington Park Wood and Hortham Wood with appropriate buffers and seek opportunities for expansion and connections to the west.

Development Management

- Ensure that any new development respects the locally distinctive character of the traditional rural settlements (such as Tytherington) as well as within groupings of farm buildings. New developments should include landscape schemes that reinforce this objective.
- Ensure that recreational development including equestrian land uses are located and designed to protect, conserve, and strengthen the local pattern of hedgerows and tree cover and includes adequate landscape proposals to protect the particular rural character of the locality. Avoid the use of floodlights that can also disturb wildlife.
- Careful consideration must be given for the design and siting of new renewable energy developments, particularly wind turbines which would introduce prominent vertical structures on the skyline.

LCA 18: Severn Ridges

The Severn Ridges landscape character area is an extensive, complex landform of abrupt scarps and gentle ridges which rises from the lower Levels area running north to south through the length of South Gloucestershire.

Undulating Ridge LCT

Photo 1: View south towards the Severn Ridge with Tockington in the foreground and Almondsbury nestled on the wooded slopes of the ridge.



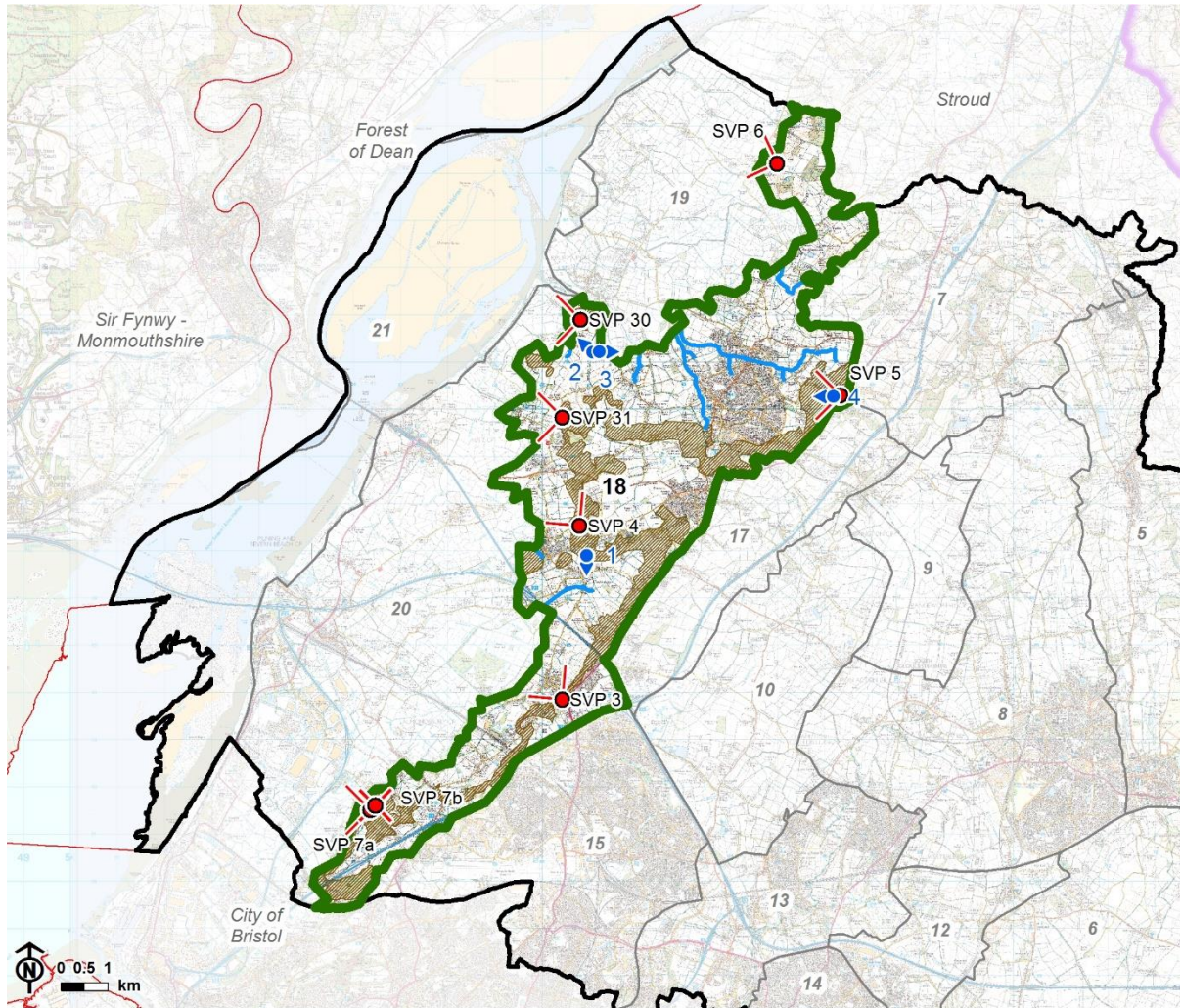
Undulating Ridge LCT

Location









The Severn Ridges landscape character area extends through the west of the District from the northern to south-western boundary of South Gloucestershire . The western boundary follows an often-subtle transition in landform, land cover and drainage pattern between the adjacent low-lying Levels landscape (LCT 8) and the rising ground of the ridges. The boundary generally follows the 10-metre contour line, although in some places the topographic change is imperceptible. The eastern boundary generally follows the scarp edge, defined by the A38 and the M5.

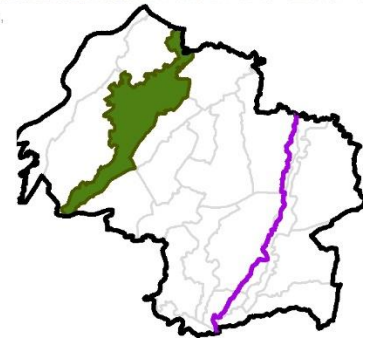
Undulating Ridge LCT

Figure 7.5: Location and Landscape context of LCA 18: Severn Ridges



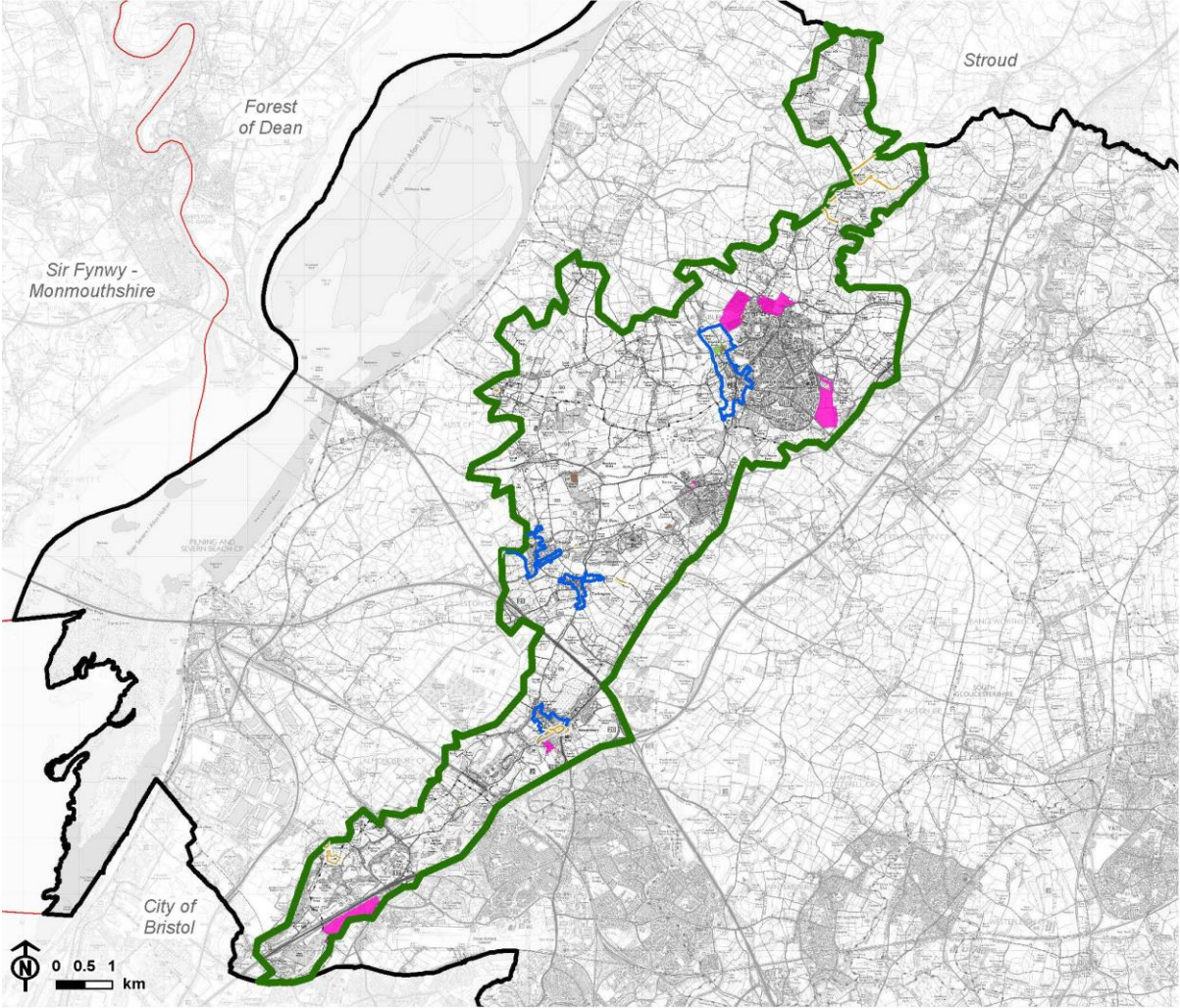
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-  LCA 18: Severn Ridges
-  Neighbouring LCA
-  Council boundary
-  Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB) boundary
-  Visually Important Hillside
-  River
-  Photograph location and direction
-  Strategic viewpoint and angle



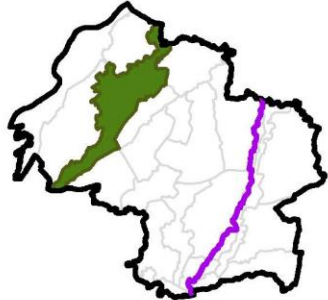
Undulating Ridge LCT

Figure 7.6: Development and Heritage context of LCA 18: Severn Ridges



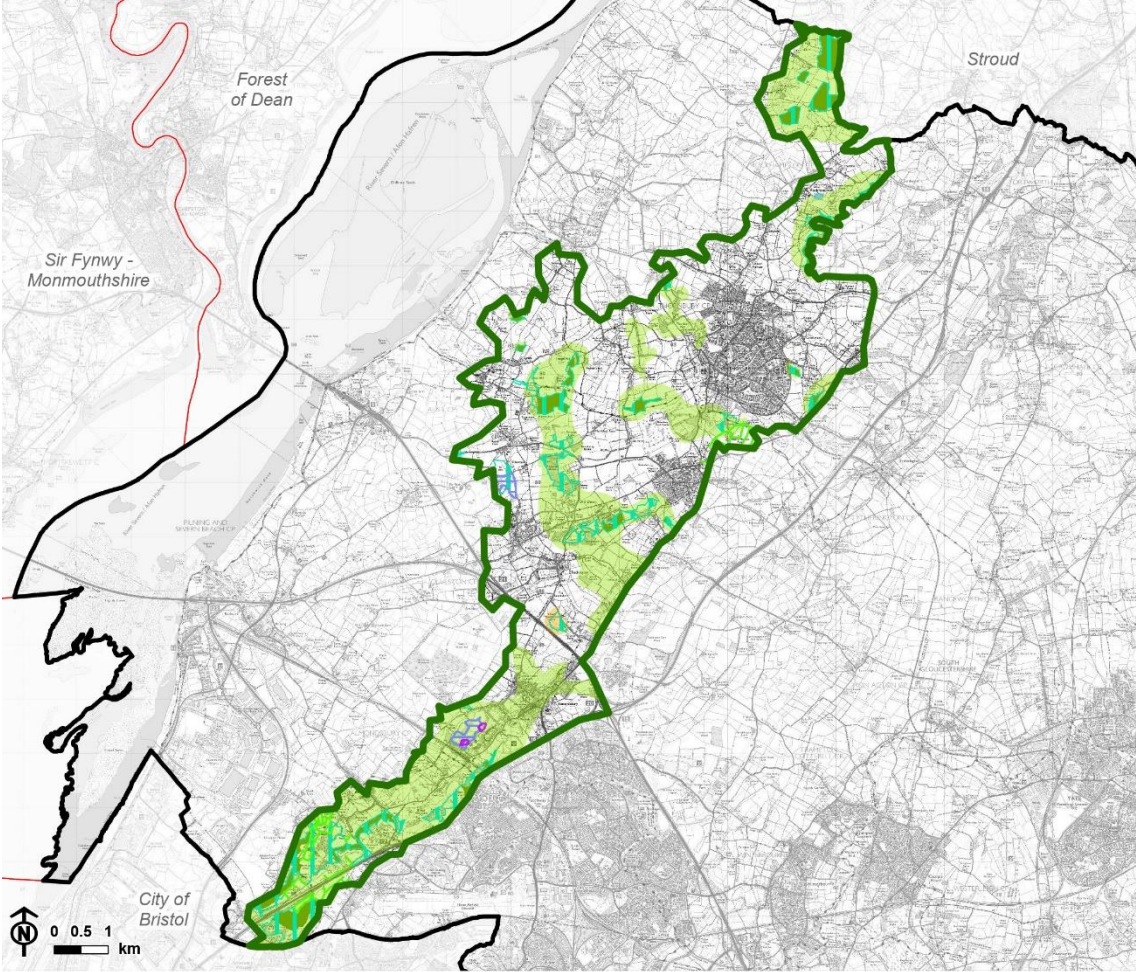
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- LCA 18: Severn Ridges
- Council boundary
- CRoW Common Land
- CRoW Open Access Land
- Scheduled Monument
- Conservation Area
- Registered Parks and Gardens
- Recent development (since 2014)



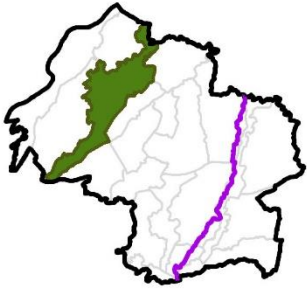
Undulating Ridge LCT

Figure 7.7: Ecology and Biodiversity context of LCA 18: Severn Ridges



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- LCA 18: Severn Ridges
- Council boundary
- Site of Special Scientific Interest
- Site of Nature Conservation Interest
- Ancient woodland
- Regionally Important Geological Site
- Grassland Strategic Network
- Wetland Strategic Network
- Woodland Strategic Network
- Important hedgerow



Landscape Description

Key Characteristics

- A distinctive large-scale landform rising from the Levels, with sections of steep scarp in the north and south and more gentle slopes elsewhere, and a narrow linear area of dip slope adjacent to the urban edge of Bristol.
- The ridgelines combine with the adjacent Levels and Severn Estuary to form a regionally distinct landform .
- Mature woodlands, including ancient woodlands, clothe the scarps, with occasional ornamental species within historic landscape parks.
- Scattered areas of calcareous, neutral, and marshy grassland across the Severn Ridges support a diverse range of flora including areas of species rich grassland.
- Numerous watercourses flow from the elevated ridge, draining to the adjacent levels. Areas of bankside vegetation at Groves Gully and Roundhouse and Fishponds Woods enhance habitat connectivity across the landscape.
- A pastoral landscape of regular small-sized fields which become more irregular on steeper slopes, with larger regular arable fields on more gentle slopes.
- Clipped and overgrown hedgerows with intermittent trees provide prominent landscape features and wildlife connectivity including between areas of woodland.
- Orchards and small areas of common land are often associated with older settlements and farms, with a large commercial orchard at Almondsbury.
- Numerous settlements linked by minor roads, are nestled within the landform, and contained by a strong landscape structure.

- Older villages, hamlets and scattered farms are built of local stone, with stone boundary walls. Churches form distinctive landmarks.
- Long history of settlement in the area, indicated by the presence of prehistoric settlement sites and hillforts.
- Small historic parklands locally influence the landscape character with designed parkland, mature woodland, and specimen trees.
- Expansive views, available from the length of the ridges, extend over the lowland Levels and Severn Estuary to the west.
- The Severn Bridges feature in views from the Severn Ridges and provide national landmarks within the wider estuary landscape.
- The scarp and lower ridges form a prominent backdrop in views from the Levels, South Wales, and the Forest of Dean.

Natural Influences

Geology, Landform and Hydrology

The underlying geology is varied, with a central area of Carboniferous limestone, continuing as a narrow band southwards along the ridge. A broad band of Old Red sandstone underlies the curved bowl and northern continuation of the ridgeline, which provides the setting to Thornbury. The remaining area is largely of Keuper marl and Rhaetic clays. The western boundary of the LCA approximately follows the geological boundary between the Keuper marl of this area and the estuarine alluvium of the adjacent Levels. Soils are a mix of Stagnogleyic Pello-argillic Brown Earths, typical Stagnogleys and Brown Rankers.

The landform is dominated by the large-scale ridgeline which runs roughly north-east to south-west, curving westwards around a centrally elevated area to the west of Thornbury and Alveston. The landform is sloping, rising eastwards from the Levels in the west. The ridgeline has gentle to steeply sloping scarp slopes, with lower slopes rising from the Levels at approximately 10 metres

Undulating Ridge LCT

AOD to the highest point along the ridge at approximately 100 metres AOD, south of Thornbury.

The scarp edge is most prominent in the north around Hill and Rockhampton, above Olveston, and from Rudgeway to Hallen. Spaniorum Hill forms a rounded promontory in the south before the scarp ends abruptly at Hallen. To the west of Alveston lies a linear plateau, its edges forming low-lying hills and ridges which radiate out into the Levels, often forming small bluffs, for example at Catherine Hill, Olveston. At the western extent of this landform, undulating ground and small outliers rise up to 40 metres AOD above the Levels, for example at Cowhill and Red Hill. To the south-east of the ridge, adjacent to the urban edge of Bristol, a narrow linear area of south-east facing dip slope continues beneath the Bristol conurbation. Embankments along the M4 and M5 motorways, and earth bunds along the Bristol Golf Course boundary form manmade landforms, introducing a localised suburban character to parts of the LCA.

Several watercourses flow from the ridge, generally westwards towards the Oldbury Levels, Pilning Levels and Severn Estuary. They form a mixture of natural brooks, streams, and man-made rhines (ditches).

Those flowing to the Oldbury Levels include regular drainage channels of Rockhampton Rhine which follow the angular field pattern. Pool Brook flows north-westwards to the Oldbury Pill within both natural and straightened channels.

Those flowing to the Pilning Levels are generally more varied, comprising Tockington Mill Rhine and its tributaries which flow south-westwards along partly straightened channels through the Sheepcombe Vale. Over Brook comprises small sections of straightened and irregular channels, whilst Bailey's Mead Rhine forms a linear channel flowing north-westwards.

Natural watercourses include a small stream cut into the ridge at Spaniorum Hill, and a tightly meandering stream course flowing north-westwards towards Oldbury Pill from Thornbury.

Undulating Ridge LCT

Land Cover

The land cover of the Severn Ridges is varied and is largely related to landform. Flatter and gently sloping ground on the lower slopes is dominated by arable farmland of medium to large, regular shaped fields, defined by low clipped hedges, fencing and intermittent trees. Elsewhere, the undulating and steeply sloping landform is used for pasture in small regular-shaped fields, with a more irregular field pattern along steeper, folded parts of the landform. Field boundaries generally comprise clipped or overgrown hedgerows, this boundary pattern extending along many of the numerous minor roads and lanes that cross the area. Mature hedgerow trees are intermittent.

Woodland is variable in both size and pattern, frequently interspersed with pasture along the scarp to the north at Upper Hill and Rockhampton, scattered linear and irregular areas within the central area, and linear belts along the scarp edge between Almondsbury and Spaniorum Hill where the woodland edge is combined with thick hedgerow boundaries. The steep slopes and scarps are clothed in mainly deciduous woodland, mixed occasionally with stands of Scots pine and ornamental deciduous/evergreen trees, particularly along ridgelines or associated with large houses or estates.

To the north of Rockhampton at Hill Court (a locally registered historic park) ridge and furrow field patterns are evident on the sloping hillsides. This is combined with a framework of mature, deciduous, and coniferous tree groups, sporadic laid hedge banks and old orchards. These are remnants of an ornamental and designed landscape, a medieval parkland and cleared and ancient woodland. Other small-scale historic landscape parks occur along the ridge south of Almondsbury at Knole Park, Over Court, Hollywood Tower, and Berwick Lodge (all included on the local register of Historic Parks and Gardens).

Orchards are a common feature across the LCA, with old, small, and scattered remnant orchards associated with settlements and farms. There is a large commercial orchard to the north of Almondsbury.

Recreational land use is widespread across the LCA. Thornbury Golf Course occupies land to the south-west of the town and forms part of a wider recreational and amenity landscape with a large area of allotments and playing

Undulating Ridge LCT

fields on the settlement edges. To the north-east of Olveston, Old Down Country Park is set within the grounds of an old estate. Opposite The Down House to the south is a football pitch, cricket field, bowling green and the Queen Alexandra Memorial Pavilion. Bristol Golf Course covers an extensively remodelled historic parkland along the lower slopes and scarp to the south and south-west of Over. The southern edges of Almondsbury on both sides of the A38 and adjacent to the M5, include sports pitches some with lighting, parking, pavilions, and some tennis courts, fencing and ground modelling.

Small areas of common land are dispersed across the LCA and include village greens, wide grass road verges, small fields, and rough grassland. A larger area on Almondsbury Hill comprises a linear open space of grassland overlooking the adjacent Levels.

A few small disused quarries are located along steeper slopes, with some disused lead mines at Almondsbury Hill. Cattybrook Brickpit, to the west of Almondsbury, is an active quarry and brickworks. The disused section of the site is now designated as a SSSI for its geological interest. A large disused limestone quarry at Harnhill, to the north of Olveston, has been reclaimed as a landfill site.

Undulating Ridge LCT

Photo 2: Characteristic small-scale rectilinear fields bound by hedgerows with mature trees. The church-tower of Thornbury is visible above the trees, with the wooded skyline of the Severn Ridge forming a backcloth behind.



Biodiversity

The Severn Ridges provide an extensive mosaic of grassland, woodland and farmland that is crossed by a number of watercourses and ponds. Hedgerows provide ecological corridors and habitat for a diverse range of species.

There are approximately 176 hectares of ancient woodland which represents roughly half of the total woodland within this character area. There are 28 SNCIs within this character area, comprising a mosaic of habitats including grassland and broadleaved woodland (including several large areas of ancient woodland), in recognition of their importance within the national context for flora and fauna. Key species likely to be associated with the broadleaved woodland include bats and dormice both of which are present across the District and are European protected species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP).

Undulating Ridge LCT

There appears to be good connectivity for species such as these between these habitats via hedgerows and scattered trees, however, the motorways may present a barrier to their movements.

Eleven of the SNCI sites are designated for the calcareous, neutral, and marshy grassland, including species-rich grassland. This diverse habitat supports a range of invertebrates that provide a food source for mammals including bats. Ant hills are also a regular feature.

There are many watercourses crossing the landscape that support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro- invertebrates to fish and otters. Ponds and pools within the area also support amphibians such as great crested newts (a European Protected Species).

Agricultural land use within this area is a patchwork of arable and pastoral farmland, the arable farmland providing habitat for many species of ground nesting and winter foraging by farmland birds including birds which have been listed as Globally Threatened Red listed species.

Underground quarries and mines associated with the disused and working quarries across the LCA provide habitat for many species of bat, including European Protected Species. The two golf courses may present a mosaic of habitats which can be utilised by a diverse range of species if appropriately managed.

South Gloucestershire Strategic Green Infrastructure Corridor B: (Charfield-Alveston-Hallen (*Western Scarp/Severn Ridges*)) covers a significant proportion of the LCA, associated with the woodland strategic network on the along the Severn Ridge.

Cultural Influences

Land Use and Time Depth

Early settlement and land use is indicated by the presence of large, fortified enclosures (similar to hill forts) of prehistoric origin at Elberton and Stroud Common, west of Alveston. Hill Forts are also present at Camp Hill Fort above Rockhampton and Little Abbey Hill Fort (to the south of Thornbury), which is partly severed by the A38. A round barrow lies to the west of Alveston, on Alveston Down. All are Scheduled Monuments

The historic core of Thornbury is designated as a Conservation Area for its significance as a planned medieval settlement. Important features include the vernacular building style in limestone, Pennant sandstone and light-coloured render and the variety in streetscape enclosure with pavements of varying widths.

There are three former deer parks near Thornbury, which show distinct evidence of later sub-division by hedgerows and more recent land use changes. Thornbury New Park occupied a significant area of land to the north of Thornbury, extending up to Butt Lane and Oldbury Lane. Marlwood Park to the south-west now includes Thornbury Golf Course and some fields to the north. Eastwood Deer Park originally extended some distance southwards from Eastwood Park (within adjacent LCA 7) over the Severn ridgeline and down to the Old Gloucester Road.

Settlement and Infrastructure

This is a relatively settled LCA, comprising a small town, villages, hamlets, and scattered building groups.

Thornbury is the largest settlement within the area and is sited within an open 'bowl' landform, contained to the south, east and north by higher ground. It is a planned medieval town, the historic linear form laid out along two main streets and their intersection. A stone castle and church are located to the north of the

Undulating Ridge LCT

old town above a small valley. The west and northern aspect are open, with a rural outlook to the Severn Estuary. The old town walls, set within open space, form a locally important landscape feature, as do structures associated with the former railway line. The town has expanded significantly, with several large-scale residential and commercial developments around its boundaries, notably to the north and east.

Alveston is situated on higher open ground of the Severn Ridge, to the south of Thornbury. It is an older, linear settlement of cottages and houses in a mix of limestone, Pennant sandstone and render, with stone boundary walls along a network of intersecting roads. More recent brick infill housing dominates a sizeable area of the village.

There are numerous other villages scattered over the lower ridge slopes, set above the lowland Levels landscape to the west. The historic core of many of these settlements are designated as Conservation Areas, including Lower Almondsbury, Olveston and Tockington.

Almondsbury is a ribbon settlement, with various clustered and scattered phases of development associated with the road network. The north-west and south-east linear settlement fringes relate closely to the ridge topography and face the Severn Estuary, elevated above the Levels. The original centre of Lower Almondsbury (a Conservation Area) is a crossroad settlement, centred around a manor house and church along the gentle lower slopes of the ridge, with scattered houses along the wooded scarp of Almondsbury Hill which provides a backdrop to the village. A mixture of more recent ribbon/ clustered development follows the A38 and B4055 along the upper slopes of the ridge. Rich in variety and style, but united through the common use of stone, including limestone, Pennant sandstone and conglomerate as building materials, it has extensive stone wall boundaries, both in and on the edge of the settlement. A significant area of the village to the south and associated with the A38, comprises 20th century housing development, typically constructed of brick.

Olveston and Tockington are positioned on lower slopes just above the Levels. Both historically developed in association with the rural economy of cattle farming and their older buildings are built from a variety of limestone, Pennant sandstone and conglomerate stone.

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Olveston is a linear settlement, based around two crossroads and a number of minor roads, with an infilled village green to the south. Frequent tall limestone wall boundaries define the key properties and contain the road margins. The older fabric of the village includes 16th to 18th century properties, the fortified stone manor house (a Scheduled Monument) and church. A number of orchards lie along the settlement's periphery. Twentieth century housing development is clustered to the south-east, comprising reconstituted stone buildings.

The neighbouring village of Tockington has developed around a village green and church at the junction of minor roads and lanes, sharing similar characteristics with Olveston. The extensive use of limestone walls to define property boundaries is a notable characteristic. The building style varies, but is typically medieval in origin, stone built, some now finished in render. The village's periphery also includes some remnant orchards and a playing field.

A section of the eastern boundary of this area abuts part of the A38, between the M4 and Alveston. This road corridor has extensive sections of ribbon development, which variously straddles both sides of the road, containing either the east or western edge of this corridor. Stone boundary walls are common between Rudgeway and Alveston. The B4055 extending south-west of Almondsbury, has a more regular distribution of houses. Both of these patterns of settlement are sited along the upper edge of the Severn Ridge, facing the Levels and Estuary.

A number of smaller villages and hamlets are dotted throughout the lower slopes along the edge of the Levels. To the south, Easter Compton is the largest of these, comprising a linear settlement of Pennant sandstone, brick and render cottages and houses between farms, with more recent brick infill. The village extends beyond the lower slopes into the adjacent Levels. To the north Rockhampton, Littleton-upon-Severn and Elberton are all associated with farms and orchards, clustered at intersection of lanes, some with churches. Kington, to the west of Thornbury, has a more scattered pattern of farms and houses along lanes.

The remaining landscape between settlements has a regular scattering of farms. St. Arilda's Church of Oldbury on Severn is located within the LCA on an outlier of the Severn Ridge, forming a prominent landmark above the

Undulating Ridge LCT

surrounding lower lying land. (The village of Oldbury-on-Severn lies in adjacent character area LCA 19).

Cattybrook Claypit near Almondsbury includes large clay extraction and storage areas, as well as a brickworks. The large industrial building and chimney are locally prominent in views, set within the gentle slopes above the Levels.

The area is crossed by a complex network of major and minor roads and lanes, connecting the numerous settlements. Roads generally follow the natural landform, becoming sunken lanes when ascending the steeper scarp. The A38 passes through part of this area at Almondsbury and abuts the central eastern boundary. Diverted around Thornbury in the early 19th century, Gloucester Road (now the A38) and connecting minor roads were historically a major influence on the settlement pattern within the area, engendering frequent roadside settlements.

The B4461, B4061 and B4055 connect with the numerous minor lanes that cross the area and intersect with each other, generally well enclosed by hedges and banks.

The M4 passes across the area south-east to north-west and connects with the M48 towards the western boundary. The M4 is on embankment for much of its length through the area, before passing into a cutting at the junction with the M48. The M5 defines part of the south-eastern boundary and largely delineates the urban/ rural edge of Bristol, which lies immediately south-east of this part of the character area. For approximately 3 kilometres, the road alignment closely parallels the top of the ridge and scarp landform and, at one point, defines the skyline of a small, curved 'bowl', which recedes into the scarp to the south-west of Over Court. The M4/M5 interchange near Almondsbury forms a significant feature with large earthworks, elevated slip roads and overbridges, flanked by rough grassland and some scrub. This structure straddles the boundary of this area and two adjacent character areas.

The South Wales to Bristol Railway line crosses the area south of Almondsbury. As the line is in cutting and surrounded by mature vegetation, it is well-integrated, minimising its visibility within the locality.

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A small solar farm located on the plateau to the south-west of Almondsbury (adjacent to the M5) is largely concealed from views.

A dense network of public rights of way cross the area, including parts of the Jubilee Way and Forest of Avon Community Forest Path promoted routes. A Circular Ride route comprises a large circuit following lanes and tracks, descending towards Oldbury-on-Severn via the eastern edge of Thornbury, before returning to Alveston, over rising and slightly undulating ground. The Jubilee Way runs east to west, undulating as it crosses the westward ridges towards the Estuary, passing Thornbury, to Littleton-upon-Severn and then the Estuary, Shoreline and Levels foreshore (LCA 20) beyond. The Community Forest Path descends the scarp, passing south-westwards along the edge of the Levels to Easter Compton, before climbing steeply to Spaniorum Hill, crossing over the M5, and descending towards Bristol. A section of the Avon Cycleway regional route and part of National Cycle Network Route 41 passes through the west of the LCA, following quiet rural lanes at the foot of the scarp slope. Pockets of CROW Open Access Land on Almondsbury Hill and Spaniorum hill enable further recreational access to the landscape.

Undulating Ridge LCT

Photo 3: St Arilda's Church (Grade II* listed) perched on a small mound above the surrounding low-lying farmland.



Perceptual Influences

Visual Character

The Severn Ridges LCA is unified through its landform of visually prominent wooded scarps and more complex broad ridges which extend towards the Severn Estuary, forming a prominent and distinctive rural backcloth to the adjacent Levels landscape (LCAs 19 and 20).

The Severn Ridges visually influence, and are influenced by, the adjoining Levels landscape (LCAs 19 and 20). The scarp provides frequent expansive views west over the adjacent flat, low-lying Levels, towards the Severn Estuary and across to South Wales and the Forest of Dean. Views are most extensive from the upper scarp edge, including places such as Spaniorum Hill, Almondsbury Hill and Tockington Hill. Within this context, changing skies, the

Undulating Ridge LCT

tidal pattern of the estuary, the colour and textured variety of this area and the Levels, form dynamic and highly distinct features in views from these elevated vantages. Similarly, the scarp slopes feature prominently in views from adjacent lowland landscapes and from South Wales and the Forest of Dean, providing the backdrop and physical containment to the Levels and Estuary.

The western part of the LCA shares similar characteristics with the adjacent Levels (LCAs 19 and 20). Here, the very gently sloping landform and small-to-medium-scale hedgerow-bound field pattern results in a broad area of transition between the two areas, often without a distinct boundary. This is most notable to the north-west of Thornbury, near Littleton-upon-Severn and to the south-west at Easter Compton. The variety in landform, strong vegetation structure and pattern of frequent settlement, historic courts, parks, and roads produce areas of distinct local character.

The northern scarp at Upper Hill and Rockhampton forms a visually prominent, gently scalloped ridgeline, with a simple vegetation structure. Frequent areas of mature woodland are interspersed with regular-shaped pasture fields (more irregular at Rockhampton), defined by clipped hedges and intermittent trees. Isolated farms are well-integrated, producing a tranquil, rural landscape. Within this area, Hill Court has a rich diverse framework of mature, ornamental, deciduous and coniferous tree groups, sporadic laid hedge banks and old remnant orchard of a designed landscape and medieval parkland. This mix of elements results in a distinctive local landscape. (The other historic parks within the character area have more subtle influences upon local character, being largely absorbed within woodland along the ridge and scarp).

The broad ridges to the west of Alveston form a rolling upland of pasture and arable land, with a number of distinct small hills and bluffs near to, or defining the edge of, the Levels. The rounded tump to the north of Cowhill, crowned by St. Arilda's Church, is a prominent and distinctive landmark locally, both within this area and the adjacent Pilning Levels (LCA 19).

Further south, the ridge and wooded scarp forms a long landform extending from Rudgeway to Easter Compton. The slopes and upper edge are covered by a dense regular pattern of houses, well-integrated within the mature tree cover which forms a wooded skyline. The mix of mature Scots pines, the large orchard at Almondsbury, and ornamental trees associated with the historic

Undulating Ridge LCT

courts and small landscaped parks create a visually textured and seasonally diverse landscape in views within the LCA and from the Levels. The commercial orchard at Almondsbury is a prominent feature within views from the M4, from where the regular dense planting structure and springtime blossom are most apparent.

The rounded promontory of Spaniorum Hill further south forms a prominent landmark visible from the Levels, with its distinctive wooded crown and pattern of dense overgrown hedges radiating towards the edge of the Levels. The scarp south of Spaniorum Hill has a simple structure of continuous woodland, finishing abruptly at Hallen, and forms an angular silhouette above the flat Levels.

The south-east facing dip slope in the south-west of the LCA is distinctly different in character, strongly influenced by the M5 and urban edge of Bristol. Haw Wood forms an important feature in the landscape, although the character of this area is mainly influenced by the motorway, its traffic, and the Bristol urban edge beyond, all of which have some degree of visual influence upon this area and erode its rural character. The wooded ridgeline at Mount Skitham near Hallen forms an important rural backcloth in views from Bristol and its western fringes, including in important views from Blaise Castle historic parkland (within the City of Bristol). The large commercial development of Cribbs Causeway, to the south of the M5 (within LCA 15) is prominent from the M5 corridor and visible on the scarp's skyline.

To the south of Almondsbury, the landscape is a simple pattern of regular shaped pasture fields, clipped hedges, small copses, and occasional Scots Pine trees. The sloping area is flanked to the north by Almondsbury's residential fringe, which is variously integrated by tall hedgerow boundaries, or more prominent to the west along the skyline. The area also contains a cricket ground, sports pitches, radio masts, powerlines, roads, and elevated junctions. The commercial edge of Bristol at Almondsbury Business Park and M5 traffic, are visually prominent. All of these elements dilute the rural character of the area.

More widely across this character area, small, dispersed settlements nestle within the landscape, linked by an intricate pattern of lanes following the landform, contained by clipped or overgrown hedges. The mature woodland along slopes, numerous orchards adjacent to villages and farms, plus

Undulating Ridge LCT

intermittent hedgerow trees, form a distinctive 'patchwork' landscape, which helps to integrate settlement, often resulting in a semi-enclosed character. Older settlements are typically well-integrated within a strong vegetation framework. Their layout and common use of local stone (including limestone, Pennant sandstone and conglomerate, with geological variations in between) influence local character. The villages of Olveston and Tockington have a distinct pattern of village greens and spaces defined by largely historic stone buildings, walls, and network of rural lanes.

The churches of Rockhampton, Thornbury, Oldbury-on-Severn, Elberton, Olveston and Almondsbury are all located on elevated ground, forming prominent landmarks in local views.

The extensive expansion of Thornbury is prominent within local views from elevated ground of the Severn Ridge. Despite the size of the town, the vegetation structure throughout the older areas of the settlement greatly contribute to its integration within the landscape framework of the wider Levels and of the slopes of the ridge, which provide a backdrop to the town.

Along the upper edge of the Severn Ridge, concentrations of ribbon settlement and scattered houses are associated with the A38 and B4055. These routes generally closely follow the edge of this landform. Settlement is located along the skyline, in the narrow margin between the road and the top of the steeply falling scarp face, such as between Rudgeway and Alveston, or extends over steep slopes along descending lanes, for example at Almondsbury. Vegetation including Scots pine and garden vegetation generally integrates these properties, the A38 and its traffic and largely limits buildings being visible against the skyline. Ribbon development in Easter Compton has extended significantly beyond the older core of the village, with more recent housing and infill introducing a suburban character along the B4055 in an otherwise rural area.

The concentration of industrial complexes and chemical works within the adjacent Pilning Levels and in the Bristol City area at Avonmouth beyond greatly affect westerly views from the southern section of the ridge and scarp, which is largely rural in character. The large-scale buildings, structures and chimneys dwarf the adjacent vegetation and flat landscape. Further north, the two Severn Bridges form prominent, distinctive landmarks, again within views

Undulating Ridge LCT

from the southern and central ridge area. These built features are not visible from the more northern areas of the Severn Ridge landscape, with only the Second Severn crossing partly evident within limited, elevated, long-distance views from northern scarp slopes.

The reactor buildings of the existing Oldbury Power Station, located on the shoreline of the Oldbury Levels (LCA 21) forms a prominent large-scale structure in long views west, often seen against the expanse of the Severn Estuary and distant ridgeline of the Forest of Dean, or in silhouette against the sky. The chimney at Cattybrook Claypit forms a local landmark, seen in silhouette within local views. However, the quarry itself is generally well screened.

The visual impact of the M5 has increased over time due to carriageway widening, loss of vegetation, and construction of overhead gantries which are prominent in views from the surrounding landscape, particularly where the motorway is on embankment.

The visual and audible effects of the motorway traffic and infrastructure are a significant detractor from the rural character along the M5 corridor, particularly in the south-east from where the motorway is visible along the skyline near Haw Wood. The M4/M5 interchange similarly has a significant local effect upon the adjacent landscape and built edge of Almondsbury Business Park but remains screened from Almondsbury village and the wider Severn Ridges area by the ridge landform at Almondsbury.

The M4 has wider effects, descending the open rural slopes of the Severn Ridge. Here, the sweeping landform of the Sheepcombe Valley is visually interrupted by the M4 on high embankment, which has visually severed the connection between Tockington and the Levels landscape to the south-west, which formerly existed along the line of Tockington Mill Rhine.

A number of overhead electricity lines on steel pylons cross the ridges and scarp, generally east to west. Several of these extend around Thornbury, with two connecting to the decommissioned Oldbury Power Station on the Levels. Mature tree cover and undulating landform reduce their visual influence to some degree, however, the large-scale vertical pylon towers and linearity of

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powerlines form prominent vertical structures within the context of the open rolling landform, exaggerated where multiple towers are visible against the skyline.

Photo 4: View west from Buckover illustrating the setting of Thornbury with scattered farmsteads across the rural landscape and views towards the estuary beyond.



Tranquillity and Dark Skies

The sense of tranquillity across much of the eastern part of the ridge is limited due to the presence of major transport routes and settlements. In the north-west where the land transitions to the Levels around Rockhampton, Kington, and Hill there is a stronger sense of tranquillity resulting from the sparser settlement pattern and absence of major roads or modern development. Similarly, pockets of dark skies exist in the north-west, with localised areas of light pollution around Thornbury and throughout much of the southern part of the LCA, as well as along the M5 corridor and on the edge of Bristol.

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Visually Important Hillsides

The Severn Ridge itself is a Visually Important Hillside (VIH), extending along the full length of this LCA. This includes the outlier hills of Catherine Hill, Eastcombe Hill, and two unnamed hills to the north and south of Cowhill. Part of the Eastwood Park Spur falls within the north of the LCA, its western extent straddling the edge of the LCA and forming a physical boundary between Rockhampton to the west and the M5 to the east.

Further details are provided in **Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides**.

Strategic Viewpoints

Seven Strategic Viewpoints are located within this LCA. They are:

SVP 3: Provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the levels, Severn Estuary and hills of South Wales, the historic settlement of Almondsbury, and the landmark features of The Church of St Mary, the Severn Bridge and the Prince of Wales Bridge.

SVP 4: Provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the Levels, the wooded slopes of the Severn Ridges, the Severn Estuary and the hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark features of St John's Church, the Severn Bridge and the Prince of Wales Bridge

SVP 5: Provides a panoramic view that demonstrates the relationship between Thornbury within its 'bowl' landform setting, takes in the notable landscape features of the levels, the hills of the Severn Ridges and Eastwood Park Spur, the Severn Estuary and the hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark features of St Mary's Church, Oldbury Power Station and the Severn Bridge.

SVP 6: Provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the levels, the Severn Estuary and the hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark features of Oldbury Power Station, the Severn Bridge

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and the Prince of Wales Bridge; and is a designed viewpoint from the locally registered historic park of Hill Court.

SVP 7: Provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the levels, Severn Estuary and hills of South Wales, the historic settlement of Almondsbury, and the landmark features of The Church of St Mary, the Severn Bridge and the Prince of Wales Bridge.

SVP 15: Provides a panoramic view that takes in the notable landscape features of the levels, Severn Estuary and hills of the Wye Valley and South Wales, and the landmark features of the Severn Bridge, the Prince of Wales Bridge, Oldbury Power Station and Berkley Power Station.

SVP 21: Provides a panoramic view that that takes in the notable landscape features of the Yate Vale, the Tytherington Ridge, the Severn Ridges, the hills of South Wales, and the landmark feature of the Purdown BT Tower.

Further details are provided in **Annex II: Strategic Viewpoints**.

Evaluation

Key Sensitivities and Value Features

- Distinctive scarp slope which is prominent in views from surrounding landscapes and forms a rural backdrop to the adjacent Levels landscape.
- Ecologically important woodland and grassland habitats, including nationally designated sites.
- Well-wooded character with visually prominent mature wooded scarps including areas of ancient woodland, hedgerow trees and occasional ornamental species within historic parks.
- Historic assets including prehistoric enclosures and hill forts which reflect the long history of human settlement and land use in the area.
- The rural character, particularly in the west and in transition to the Levels, enhanced by the presence of small settlements and farms with a local vernacular of stone and render.
- Extensive open views west afforded from many parts of the ridge.
- Recreational access provided a network of public rights of way, including locally promoted routes and small areas of Open Access land.

The Changing Landscape

The following section sets out the changes and pressures to the Severn Ridges LCA.

Climate Change

- Change in woodland species composition and increased prevalence of pest and disease as a result of warmer average temperatures which could impact this well-wooded landscape.
- Changes to flow rates of watercourses and resulting impacts on riparian and aquatic habitats and species. Aquatic species including Great Crested newts are vulnerable to any loss of habitat including the terrestrial habitat around ponds as well as the ponds themselves.
- Pressure for locating renewable energy developments within the South Gloucestershire landscape to contribute towards maximising the generation of renewable energy from installations (as set out in South Gloucestershire's Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-2030). The elevated ridgeline would be particularly sensitive to the introduction of wind turbines which would form prominent vertical structures on the skyline.

Climate Emergency and Nature Recovery

- The widespread loss of mature hedgerow trees through Dutch Elm Disease during the late 20th century, significantly changed the landscape character of the area, increasing its openness. The cyclical regrowth and die-back of elm suckers, which mark the location of former mature trees in overgrown hedgerows, continues to influence local visual character and the degree of openness. This is less apparent where the main vegetation structure comprises mature trees or woodland, as found along the upper slopes of the ridge.
- An increased recognition of the landscape and biodiversity importance of orchards is helping to arrest their decline, and they still remain an integral

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feature of older farms and small settlements, contributing greatly to local character.

- An increase in tree planting is required to contribute towards South Gloucestershire's objective of doubling tree cover by 2030, and in accordance with the proposed woodland strategic network which forms part of the West of England's Nature Recovery Network. This may include the establishment of new native woodlands, broad hedgerows, or parkland trees, in order to enhance connectivity with existing woodlands (including ancient woodland) and other semi-natural habitats in adjacent character areas, as set out in the Forest of Avon's Tree and Woodland Strategy. This may change the character of the expansive views afforded from the Severn Ridge.

Land Use and Cover

- Limited management, expansion of recreational uses, pressure of use from nearby urban populations and sometimes farm diversification, have eroded the intactness of its rural characteristics in some areas.
- The openness of the views from some locations (e.g., Almondsbury Hill) will diminish if self-seeded trees on the scarp slopes below grow both in height and extent if not appropriately managed. Conversely, loss of over-mature trees may result in new views opening up along the ridge.
- Areas of calcareous and neutral grassland are declining. Encroachment of scrub or trees onto ecologically important grassland would also result in a loss and pressure from recreational use can also result in the loss of or otherwise harm this habitat.
- Where overgrown hedgerows are brought back into management, the landscape character could become more or less open as a result, dependent on the number of hedgerow trees that are planted or allowed to develop.
- The distinctive character of historic small landscape parks which contribute to the textured scarp, are sensitive to management issues. In the long term, the ornamental landscape framework will be eroded without new planting to replace the ornamental tree structure

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- Rural character is being eroded, particularly near the fringes of these settlement areas, by changes in land use from agriculture to recreation, with sports grounds and golf courses and 'horsiculture' as well as recreational land uses such as an outdoor activity centre and paintballing site at Spaniorum Hill.
- Farm diversification has introduced large buildings into the rural landscape in the north of the area, as well as restructuring the landscape, with the loss of hedges, introduction of features such as timber fences, car parks, tall metal fences and light columns at sports grounds, and earth raising at golf courses such as at Bristol Golf Course near Almondsbury.
- Equestrian land use has resulted in the subdivision of fields with fencing, the introduction of stables, storage, structures and lighting as well as the potential for over grazing and consequent 'poaching' of the ground. These changes affect the visual texture of the land cover and erode the rural character of the landscape, as well as potentially disturbing wildlife.
- The effects of road infrastructure, including lighting and signage, often extend beyond the road corridor. Increased traffic on rural lanes is eroding landscape features, while highway improvements along rural roads and lanes also have the potential to introduce new urban materials, design features, signage and lighting within a previously rural road network.

Development

- Expansion of Thornbury to the north, east and west, has pushed the settlement fringe closer to the Levels and further into the bowl landform defined by the Severn Ridge. The visual expanse of the town is evident within elevated views.
- Extensive ongoing residential development on the edge of Thornbury (and smaller residential developments on the settlement edge of Alveston) has significantly altered the settlement form, encroaching into surrounding countryside and increasing the extent of the urban character.
- Further built development has the potential to change the character of older settlement pattern unless it is influenced by local character and distinctiveness. Older villages and hamlets often have a sympathetic

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relationship with their rural setting, due largely to their small, clustered form, the close historic interrelationship of these settlements (using traditional materials and building form) and their agricultural hinterland.

- A large mixed use development site adjacent to Cribbs Causeway (including extensive ongoing residential development) partially falls within this LCA, imparting a strong urban character.
- Further expansion of Olveston beyond the containment of its natural shallow bowl setting and onto the surrounding rising slopes, is likely to be more visually prominent.
- The spread of fencing or walling and some ornamental planting and Leylandii hedges within gardens along the A38 and within the wider rural landscape has eroded the rural characteristics of some sections of this corridor.
- Further expansion of industrial developments in adjacent character areas and along the Severn Estuary has the potential to encroach closer to the Severn Ridges, raising the prominence of built development within views and affecting the rural character and setting of the ridge. Due to the visual relationship between the Severn Ridges, the Levels and Severn Estuary, changes within the adjoining areas have the potential to influence the character of this area.
- Changes to significant built infrastructure in adjacent character areas, including the existing Oldbury Power Station in LCA 21. Demolition is currently in progress and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority currently anticipates final site clearance in 2080. Current adopted South Gloucestershire planning policy states that nuclear new build on the adjacent 150ha nationally-designated nuclear new build site should reuse land and infrastructure associated with the existing power station site where possible, resulting in a change to views west from the Severn Ridge.
- The extensive road network introduces pressures for change, particularly through built development and/or recreation. The rural character of some lanes and minor roads is also subject to erosion both through the pressure of traffic on verges and hedges and also from highway improvement schemes.

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- The spread of new or tall structures such as telecommunication masts or the introduction of wind turbines in this area or other nearby character areas has the potential to intrude on the rural skyline.
- An extension of the zoological garden (Bristol Zoo Project) is currently in progress but remains contained within historic parkland and woodland at Hollywood Tower, extending down the slopes from the Severn Ridge. The existing landscape features are retained and the extension is well-integrated into the landscape.

Guidance

These guidelines recommend how the landscape can be managed to ensure future change respects the local character and should be read in conjunction with the overarching management strategy objectives of the South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment, as set out in Chapter 4..

Landscape Strategy

Landscape Management

- Actively manage vegetation including hedgerows, hedgerow trees, and woodland, to maintain landscape character and to frame and maintain characteristic views across the adjacent Levels landscape and the estuary.
- Encourage succession planting to ensure long term protection of the wooded character of the ridgeline as a rural backcloth.
- Maintain and enhance traditional orchards, parkland trees and woodland within the various historic parks, to maintain the landscape character and to meet the South Gloucestershire 15% target for increased tree cover.
- Conserve the rural character of the visually prominent Severn Ridges and associated hills, and the Thornbury 'bowl' landform.

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- Conserve and enhance the landscape setting of Thornbury, Almondsbury, Olveston, and Tockington Conservation Areas, together with key views towards and from them.
- Conserve views to Grade I listed churches and Thornbury Castle, which form landmarks in the local landscape.
- Preserve the rural tranquillity of the landscape, particularly to the north and west of the character area.

Ecology/Biodiversity Management

- Conserve and appropriately manage the important grassland habitats, both as habitat and in contributing towards the maintenance of characteristic and panoramic views. Seek opportunities to expand the strategic grassland network.
- Encourage new tree planting to maintain and/ or reinstate the parkland character of the historic parks scattered across the character area.
- Expand and reconnect woodlands to improve ecological connectivity along the ridges, including ancient woodlands at Haw Wood, Blackhorse Wood and Spaniorum Hill.
- Protect and restore remaining areas of traditional orchard and seek opportunities to create new ones to strengthen landscape character and enhance biodiversity value.

Development Management

- Consider the impact of development in the Levels (in particular, the scale, massing, and appearance of continuing new development at Severnside), on views from, and the setting and character of the Severn Ridges;
- New development should seek to respect the characteristic steeply sloping landform of the area and avoid unsympathetic cut and fill.
- Protect the 'open closes' on the west of the historic core of Thornbury, and open spaces of Tockington.

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- Encourage the use of local materials and building styles in new developments to reinforce the particular and varying landscape and settlement characters found across this character area.
- Any new vertical development should avoid dominating, or visually competing with, landmark heritage assets or undisturbed rural landscapes or skylines in the character area.
- Ensure that new development respects and integrates with the historic pattern of the host landscape or the settlement pattern of small, dispersed hamlets, villages, towns and scattered building groups.
- Encourage the use of limestone, pennant sandstone, conglomerate to render building materials to compliment the local vernacular and reinforce local distinctiveness.
- Ensure new renewable energy developments are sensitively designed and sited to reduce their impact on views within and to the Severn Ridge, avoiding prominent slopes and open skylines.

References

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