



Area 18

Severn Ridges



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Figure 55
Severn Ridges
 Sketch Map



Key

↙17 Photograph viewpoints

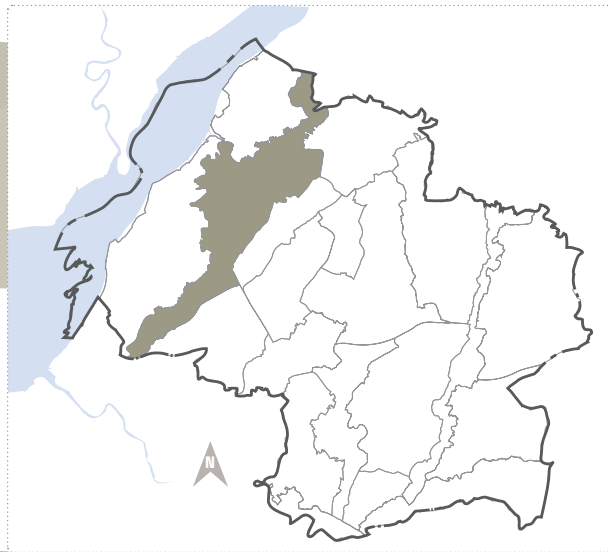
▨ Core strategy proposed new neighbourhood

Scale: not to scale

Area 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.



Key Characteristics

- Distinctive large scale sloping landform rising from the Levels, with sections of steep scarp in the north and south and more gentle slope profiles elsewhere. A large central area of low hills and radiating ridges extends westwards. A narrow linear area of dip slope, lies adjacent to the Bristol urban edge.
- Area is greatly influenced by adjacent Levels and Severn Estuary. All combine to form an area of regionally prominent landform, distinct within and beyond South Gloucestershire.
- Expansive and readily available views extend over the lowland Levels and Severn Estuary to the west.
- Scarp and lower ridges form a prominent backdrop in views from the Levels, South Wales and the Forest of Dean.
- Diverse vegetation cover, with:
 - Visually prominent mature wooded scarps including areas of ancient woodland that make a significant contribution to landscape character and provide habitat for notable species including European Protected Species, occasionally with ornamental species within historic landscape parks.
 - Numerous areas of calcareous, neutral or marshy grassland across the Severn Ridges that support a diverse range of flora including areas of species rich grassland.
 - Areas of bankside vegetation along flowing water at Groves Gully and Roundhouse and Fishponds Woods, and arable farmland that provides nesting opportunities for ground nesting birds and winter stubble that provides foraging opportunities for farmland birds, including Amber and Red listed species.
 - A geological SSSI at Cattybrook Brickpit.
 - Clipped and overgrown hedgerows and intermittent trees divide small pasture fields and provide wildlife connectivity including between areas of woodland, with larger arable fields on more gentle slopes.

Key Characteristics

- Orchards and limited common land are often associated with older settlements and farms, with a large commercial orchard at Almondsbury.
- Extensive distribution of settlements and minor roads, with older villages, hamlets and scattered farms of local stone, with stone boundary walls. All largely nestled within the landform and strong landscape structure. Churches form distinctive landmarks.
- To the south, the Bristol urban edge, M4 and M5 are prominent within their local landscape. Sections of the motorways are also prominent within wider views, forming physical and visual barriers.
- Powerlines frequently cross parts of the area, particularly to the north and vary in prominence.
- Industrial buildings, distribution sheds, Oldbury Power Station, within the adjacent Levels and Estuary, visually influence this character area.
- The Severn Bridges provide national landmarks within the wider estuary landscape, and feature in views from the Severn Ridges.

Location

The Severn Ridges landscape character area extends from the northern to south western boundary of South Gloucestershire, running through its western side.

The western boundary follows an often subtle transition in landform, land cover and drainage pattern between the low lying Levels landscape 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. (See figures 61 & 64) The eastern boundary generally follows the scarp edge, the A38 and M5. (See Figures 46 & 52).

Physical Influences

The underlying geology varies, with a concentration of Carboniferous limestone centrally, 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, with the remaining area largely of Keuper marl and Rhaetic clays.

The western boundary approximately follows the geological boundary between the Keuper marl of this area and the Estuarine alluvium of the adjacent Levels. The soils are a mix of Stagnogleyic Pello-argillic Brown Earths, typical Stagnogleys and Brown Rankers.

The landform is varied within the extent of this area, but is dominated by the large scale features of a ridgeline which runs roughly north east – south west, curving westwards around a centrally elevated area, to the west of Thornbury and Alveston. The sloping landform rises 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 a.o.d., to the highest point along the ridge at approximately 100 metres a.o.d. south of Thornbury.

The scarp edge is most prominent in the area of Hill and Rockhampton to the north, above Olveston centrally and from Rudgeway south 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 a.o.d., above the Levels, for example the two hills either side of Cowhill, (one of which is shown in Photo 3) and Red Hill.

To the south east of the ridge, adjacent to the Bristol urban edge, lies a narrow linear area of south east facing dip slope, which continues beneath the Bristol conurbation.

There are many watercourses that 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.

Those flowing to the Oldbury Levels include:

- Regular drainage channels of the Rockhampton Rhine following the angular field pattern.
- Natural, tightly meandering stream course and linear ditches flow from Thornbury, north westwards towards Oldbury Pill, in places within a slightly incised valley.
- Pool Brook flows north westwards to the Oldbury Pill within both natural and straightened channels.

Those flowing to the Pilning Levels include:

- Tockington Mill Rhine and tributaries, which flow south westwards along partly straightened channels, through the Sheepcombe Vale.

- Over Brook, which forms both small sections of straightened and irregular channel, and the linear Bailey's Mead Rhine which forms a linear channel, both flowing north westwards.
- A natural stream course follows the small valley cut into the ridge at Spaniorum Hill and flows northwards.

Man made landforms have been formed, with embankments along the M4 and M5 motorways and earth bunds along the Bristol Golf Course boundary with the M5.

Land Cover

The land cover of the Severn Ridges is varied and largely related to landform. The flatter heart of the area and gently sloping ground is dominated by arable farmland of medium to large, regular shaped fields defined by low clipped hedges, often with fenced boundaries and intermittent trees (Photo 6).

Elsewhere, the undulating and steeply sloping landform over much of the area is used for pasture within small regular shaped fields, with pockets of a more irregular field pattern along steep, folded parts of the landform. Boundaries are typically a mix of clipped hedges, some overgrown. This boundary treatment also extends along many of the numerous minor roads and lanes that cross the area. Mature hedgerow trees are intermittent, with areas of woodland clothing steep slopes and scarps, mixed occasionally with stands of Scots pine and ornamental deciduous/evergreen trees, particularly along ridgelines or associated with large houses or estates.

Woodland is variable in both size and pattern, with frequent areas, interspersed with pasture, along the scarp to the north at Upper Hill and Rockhampton (Photo 1); scattered linear and irregular areas within the central area (Photo 6) and, linear belts along the scarp edge between Almondsbury and Spaniorum Hill (Photo 13 & 17). In this latter area, the woodland edge is combined with small enclosed pasture with mixed thick hedgerow boundaries.

At Hill Court (a locally registered historic park), to the north of Rockhampton, 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 hedgebanks and old orchards. These are remnants of an ornamental and designed landscape, a medieval parkland and cleared and ancient woodland (Photo 2). Other small scale historic landscape parks occur along the ridge south of Almondsbury, comprising Knole Almondsbury, Over Court, Hollywood Tower and Berwick Lodge. (These are all included on the local register of Historic Parks and Gardens).

There are three former large 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 the adjacent character area) over the Severn ridgeline and down to the Old Gloucester Road.

Orchards are a common feature, with old, small and scattered remnant orchards associated with settlements and farms. A large commercial orchard has been established to the north of Almondsbury (Photo 14).

Dead elm trees are present within a number of hedgerows scattered within the area, typically evident as small, ivy clad trees.

Recreational land use is evident within a number of locations.

- Thornbury Golf Course lies to the south west of the town and north west of Alveston, which and forms part of a wider recreational and amenity landscape with a large area of allotments and playing fields on the settlement edges.

- The area of Old Down, north east of Olveston, includes Old Down Country Park, within the grounds of an old estate. Opposite The Down House, just to the south, near the intersection of several local roads is a football pitch, cricket field, bowling green and the Queen Alexandra Memorial Pavillion.
- Bristol Golf Course, an extensively remodelled historic parkland, extends 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.
- Almondsbury Hill, within Upper Almondsbury and adjacent to the A38, comprises a linear open space of grassland, overlooking the Levels.

Common land is limited and dispersed, evident within the village of Rockhampton, with village greens, wide grass road verges and small fields; at Stroud Common, south west of Alveston (Photo 9), comprising rough grassland; and adjacent to Olveston Court, comprising orchards.

Large fortified enclosures, similar to hill forts, are found at Elberton and at Stroud Common west of Alveston. A more usual hill fort can be seen at Camp Hill Fort above Rockhampton. Little Abbey Hill Fort (to the south of Thornbury) is partly severed by the A38. All are Scheduled Ancient Monuments.

Knole Hill, south of Almondsbury, also appears a likely spot for a hill fort, although 18th century landscaping has removed possible evidence.

A scheduled round barrow lies to the west of Alveston.

One large disused limestone quarry at Harnhill, to the north of Olveston, has been reclaimed. Cattybrook Claypit, to the west of Almondsbury,

is an active quarry and brickworks. A few small disused, sometimes wooded, quarries are located along steeper slopes, with some disused lead mines at Almondsbury Hill.

Biodiversity

The Severn Ridges provides a particularly extensive mosaic of grassland, woodland and farmland that is crossed by a number of watercourses and ponds connected by wildlife corridors including hedgerows, that provides important habitat for a diverse range of species.

The area includes approximately 176 hectares designated as ancient woodland which represents approximately half of the total woodland within this character area. The 28 SNCIs within this character area comprise a mosaic of habitats including calcareous, neutral and marshy grassland and broadleaved woodland (including many and 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 UK priority species with associated Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). 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.

There are 11 sites within the Severn Ridges designated as SNCIs for the calcareous, neutral and marshy grassland present on the sites and includes 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 through this area that will support a diverse range of species from aquatic macro-invertebrates to fish and otters. Ponds and pools within the area will 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.

There are disused and working quarries across this area. Underground quarries and mines provide habitat for many species of bat including European Protected Species.

There is a golf course within the Severn Ridges area, which when appropriately landscaped and managed can present a mosaic of habitats which can be utilised by a diverse range of species.

Settlement and Infrastructure

Settlement makes a major contribution to the character of this area, with its numerous settlements including a small town, villages, hamlets and scattered building groups.

Thornbury is the largest settlement within this area and is sited within an open bowl, contained to the south, east and north by higher ground (Photo 11). It is an important planned medieval town, the historic, original linear form laid out along two main streets and their intersection (Photo 4). A stone castle (Photo 5b) and church (Photo 5c) are sited to the north of the old town above a small valley. Designated a Conservation Area, important features comprise the diverse building content in limestone, Pennant sandstone and light coloured render, the variety in streetscape enclosure with pavements of various widths. The west and northern aspect are open, with a rural outlook to the Severn Estuary. The old town walls, set within open space, form an important landscape feature as do structures associated with the former railway line (Photo 5d)

The town has expanded significantly to the east, with new residential and commercial development along its boundaries.

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 largely a ribbon settlement, with various clustered and scattered phases of development associated with the road network. The original centre at Lower Almondsbury (a Conservation Area) is a cross-road settlement, centred around a manor house and church along gentle lower slopes of the ridge, with scattered houses along the wooded scarp of Almondsbury Hill (also within the Conservation Area), which provides a backdrop to the village (Photo 13 & 15). The scarp includes a number of small disused lead mines in this area. A mixture of more recent ribbon/ clustered development follows the A38 and B4055 along the upper slopes of the ridge. The north west and south east linear settlement fringes, relate closely to the ridge topography and face the Severn Estuary, elevated above the Levels.

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.

Olveston has a linear pattern of settlement, based around two crossroads and a number of minor roads, with a now 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 Ancient Monument) and church. A number of orchards lie along the settlement's periphery, with common land also including an orchard, to the west. Late 20th 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, also sharing similar details with Olveston. In particular, the extensive use of limestone walls to define property boundaries is a notable characteristic of the village. 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.

Alveston, to the south of Thornbury, is situated on higher open ground of the Severn Ridge. It comprises linear, older settlement of cottages and houses in a mix of limestone, Pennant sandstone and render, with stone boundary walls, along a network of intersecting roads (Photo 10). More recent brick housing estate infill predominates within a sizeable area of the village.

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. There is a particular concentration of houses at Rudgeway, set along the scarp edge within this area, comprising stone houses and more recent brick and render buildings, often with large gardens. Stone boundary walls are common between Rudgeway and Alveston. The B4055 extending south west of Almondsbury, has a more even and 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.

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 (Photo 8). 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.

The church of Oldbury-on-Severn, St. Arilda's, is located on the higher ground of the outlier north east of Cowhill, above the surrounding Levels. (The village of Oldbury-on-Severn lies in the adjacent character area).

Cattybrook Claypit, near Almondsbury, includes large clay extraction and storage areas, as well as a brickworks, with a large building and chimney (Photo 6), set within the gentle slopes above the Levels.

The area is extensively crossed by a complex network of major and minor roads and lanes, connecting the numerous settlements.

- The Bristol to Gloucester Road (A38) formed a major influence to settlement within the area. It was diverted around Thornbury in the early 19th century. This road and numerous connecting minor roads engendered frequent roadside settlement. 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.

- 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.

Elsewhere, the motorway is sited along the east facing dip slope of the Severn Ridge, within a deep cutting near Hallen, largely at grade elsewhere, with raised overbridges and embanked slip roads at two junctions.

- The M4/M5 interchange, further north, 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 Bristol to South Wales Railway line, south of Almondsbury, passes beneath the ridge in a tunnel, emerging within a cutting, then on embankment across the Levels.

Numerous public rights of way cross the area and connect with one of a series of Circular Rides, the Jubilee Way and Community Forest Path recreational routes.

- The Circular Ride 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 follows an east-west route, largely undulating as it crosses the westward ridges towards the Estuary, passing the industrial edge and Conservation Area of Thornbury, to Littleton-upon-Severn and then the Levels and Estuary foreshore beyond.
- The Community Forest Path enters the area to the south of the railway, 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 number of overhead powerlines also cross the ridges and scarp, generally east to west. Several of these extend around Thornbury, with two connecting to Oldbury Power Station on the Levels, although this is no longer generating electricity.

Landscape Character

The Severn Ridge landscape character area is predominately united 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.

The scarp provides frequent expansive views, generally over the extensive large scale flat Levels, the Severn Estuary and South Wales/ Forest of Dean to the west. 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 changing estuary tidal pattern, the colour and textured variety of this area and the Levels, form a highly distinct feature from these elevated vantages.

Similarly, frequent views of the scarp slopes are obtained from within the adjacent Levels, from the Estuary and from South Wales and the Forest of Dean, from where they provide the backdrop and physical containment to the expansive lowland landscape. The Severn Ridges therefore visually influence, and are influenced by, the adjoining Levels.

The south east facing dip slope to the south west of the area is quite different in character, influenced by the sometimes prominent M5 and urban edge of Bristol.

Along the western boundary of this area, much of the landscape shares similar characteristics with the Levels beyond. The combination of very gentle landform and the continuation of hedgerows and a similar field pattern, produces a broad area of transition between the two areas, often without a distinct boundary. This is typical particularly of areas to the north west of Thornbury, near Littleton-upon-Severn and to the southwest at Easter Compton.

The variety in landform, strong vegetation structure and pattern of frequent settlement, historic courts, parks and roads, produce areas with distinct local character.

The northern scarp at Upper Hill and Rockhampton forms a visually prominent, gently scalloped ridgeline, with simple bold vegetation structure of frequent areas of mature woodland, interspersed with regular shaped fields of pasture (more irregular at Rockhampton), defined by clipped hedges and intermittent trees.

The relatively limited pattern of 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 hedgebanks 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 (Photo 3).

The open arable landscape to the north west of Thornbury and the plateau west of Alveston, comprises large, regular shaped fields defined by low clipped hedges and intermittent trees. The central parts of the plateau have a perception of remoteness, due to the generally low skyline and few focal points within views.

The plateau also includes a golf course, which is largely visually contained where located within the plateau area, but more evident where fairways, greens and linear tree structure extend over the skyline and along the upper slopes, to the south west of Thornbury. Here, the golf course structure and land cover texture, contrasts with adjacent pasture fields and hedgerows. The amenity landscapes of Mundy Park and the allotments are visually prominent within wider views from the southwestern edge of the town centre. To the north of the town there are extensive and panoramic views available to the west and north across the levels landscape.

A number of hedges have been removed in the Alveston area and replaced by stock fencing. There are extensive views from these open, arable areas to the wooded scarp and west over the rural Levels (Photo 6).

Further south, the ridge and wooded scarp forms a long distinct, bold linear 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, often continuous, tree cover which forms

a wooded skyline.

The intermix of mature Scots pine along the skyline, the large orchard at Almondsbury and ornamental trees associated with the historic courts and small landscape parks, create a visually, textured and seasonally diverse backcloth, within views from the Levels. The large 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 open, rough grassland scarp of the Bristol Golf Course is distinct and visibly different in texture and colour to the lower, enclosed pasture fields and dense woodland framework above.

The rounded promontory of Spaniorium Hill, further south, forms a prominent landmark, visible from the Levels, with its distinctive wooded crown and pattern of dense overgrown hedges, descending and radiating towards the edge of the Levels.

The scarp south of Spaniorum Hill has a simple structure of continuous woodland, finishing abruptly at Hallen. The scarp forms an angular silhouette above the flat Levels.

Towards the south eastern boundary, the eastern dip slope, bounded by the M5 motorway, forms a narrow rural fringe, varying from north to south in structure. Unlike the rest of the character area, it has a south easterly aspect. Although Haw Wood forms an important feature in the landscape, the character of this area is greatly 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.

Similarly, this area is visible from the motorway, with the elevated southern tip of this character area formed by the wooded ridgeline at Mount Skitham near Hallen, forming an important rural backcloth in views from Bristol and its western fringes, including important views from Blaize Castle historic parkland.

The following variations occur within this dip slope area from north to south:

- Adjacent to the south of Almondsbury, lies a simple pattern of agricultural land, comprising regular shaped pasture fields, clipped hedges, some overgrown with dead elm, little tree cover (occasional Scots pine), small copses and an area of woodland abutting the M4. 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.

The small open hill/ridgeline just west of the M4/M5 interchange however maintains a strong rural character, is prominent in views from the motorway network and largely conceals a section of Almondsbury's residential fringe.

- Further south west, a linear strip of remnant fields, is fringed by woodland along the scarp slopes contained by the M5/urban area. Here the M5 briefly passes along the very edge of the scarp, giving a glimpsed long distant view of the Levels and Severn Estuary below. Conversely, traffic movement and road lighting in this area are visible from the Levels.
- Nearer the M5 motorway, tall steep sided earth mounds have been constructed, covered by rough grass, along the Bristol Golf Course's boundary with the motorway. The abrupt mounding has no vegetation cover to provide integration with the surrounding landscape, with only remnants of the former agricultural landscape structure remaining and former hedgerow trees now surrounded by earth mounds.

- The large commercial development of Cribbs Causeway, to the south of the M5 and in the adjacent character area is prominent from the M5 corridor and visible on the scarp's skyline, within long distance views from the Levels.
- Further west, a prominent wooded ridgeline is fringed by regular shaped pasture fields with clipped or overgrown hedges (some containing dead elm trees), extending into the adjacent Patchway, Filton and the Stokes area, abutting the Bristol fringe. This backdrop and rural framework is prominent from the Bristol fringe with the elevated landform containing views. The M5 traffic is however, both visible and has audible effects where it forms a skyline feature, passing over this landform.

The impact of the M5 has been increased by widening, loss of associated vegetation and construction of overhead gantries which are prominent from the surrounding landscape.

- Where the M5 is on embankment, traffic and lighting columns are prominent from the south. The deep cutting near Hallen is visible largely within the motorway corridor itself and as a prominent notch in the landform from the south west, beyond this character area.

More widely across this character area, small dispersed settlements typically nestle within the landscape, with the intricate pattern of lanes following the landform and contained by clipped or overgrown hedges. The mature woodland along slopes, numerous orchards adjacent to villages and farms, plus intermittent hedgerow trees, form a distinctive landscape patchwork, which helps to integrate settlement and lanes, often forming a semi-enclosed landscape.

Older settlements are typically well integrated within an often large scale setting and strong vegetation framework (Photo 12). Their pattern and common use of local stone (varied within such an extensive area from limestone and Pennant sandstone, to conglomerate, with geological variations in between) influence local character and

frequently form distinctive landmarks.

The villages of Olveston and Tockington have a distinct pattern of greens and spaces defined by largely historic stone buildings, walls and the network of lanes. Thornbury's historic centre is similarly influenced by the built form and pattern of roads, creating a distinctive streetscape (Photo 4).

The churches of Rockhampton, Thornbury, Oldbury-on-Severn, Elberton, Olveston Almondsbury are all located on elevated ground, forming distinctive landmarks and influencing local views (Photo 3, 5 & 8).

More modern settlement expansion, major roads and built development influences the character of some localities. The extensive expansion of Thornbury is prominent within local views from adjacent elevated ground of the Severn Ridge (Photo 11).

Some sections of the settlement edge are locally prominent, due to limited vegetation structure, the dense linear nature of housing, or the grouping of large scale industrial units/sports hall, the latter visually prominent against the adjacent smaller scale development and rural landscape.

The topographic bowl within which Thornbury sits, limits the prominence of the town in the wider landscape, by the physical containment formed by the Severn Ridge; the open sided bowl merges with the adjoining Levels landscape to the west. Visually, despite the size of the town, the well treed 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. The integration of some sections of the settlement edge has been improved through the use of building materials. The muted colour and tonal range of brick, roof tiles and window frames have helped reduce the prominence of built edges.

Alveston largely sits within a plateau landform, with a sense of visual remoteness from the wider ridge area, due to the curtailment of views by

landform and the woodlands which edge the plateau.

The settlement edge in places however, forms a dense, built linear feature, prominent within local views. This façade however, conceals the greater extent of the village, due to the relatively low viewing points. The western boundary is slightly more prominent, where it descends partly into a small valley, increasing the extent of built settlement visible within this aspect.

Olveston has a significant area of recent housing to the south and south east of the village. However, with the exception of visibility from along local lanes, this development is largely screened from the wider landscape, by rising landform and the bowl setting within which the village nestles.

The upper edge of the Severn Ridge has concentrations of ribbon settlement and scattered houses associated with the A38 and B4055. These routes generally closely follow the edge of this landform (the B4055 descends the ridge further to the south west). 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. The location of settlement typically allows extensive views of the Levels and Estuary. The strong woodland framework along the ridge, including Scots pine and garden vegetation, generally integrates these properties, the A38 and its traffic and largely limits buildings being visible against the skyline. The replacement of planting by fencing associated with the sections of ribbon development along the A38 have however introduced a suburban character, evident along parts of this corridor.

Ribbon development in Easter Compton has extended significantly beyond the older heart of the village, with more recent housing and infill introducing a suburban character along the B4055, in an otherwise rural area.

The visual and audible effects of motorway

traffic and elevated gantries and overbridges are a significant detractor from the rural character along the M5 corridor, particularly influencing the narrow dip slope landscape corridor to the south east and the lower landscape of the Henbury Trym (within the adjacent landscape character area to the south east), from where the motorway is visible along the skyline near Haw Wood. The extent of influence is however largely local, with the road's impact contained by the dip slope landform to the north.

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 however has wider effects, descending the open rural slopes of the Severn Ridge. Here, the sweeping landform of the Sheepcombe Valley is physically and visually interrupted by the M4 and its traffic (with associated noise) on high embankment. The road embankment 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.

The junction of the M4 with the M48 to the north west is largely well integrated within cutting, with sympathetic regrading of land between the slip roads.

The chimney at Cattybrook Claypit is a prominent industrial landmark, seen in silhouette within local views (Photo 16). However, the quarry itself and clay storage area are largely well screened.

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 Bridge crossings form prominent, distinctive landmarks, again within views 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 central and northern section of this character area is however visually influenced by Oldbury Power Station. Located within the Oldbury Levels, the reactor building is a prominent large scale structure, often seen against the expanse of the Severn Estuary and distant ridgeline of the Forest of Dean, or in silhouette against the sky.

Dead elm trees are evident within a number of tall hedgerows throughout the area and are most prominent where defining large fields, with little adjacent supplementary vegetation. They influence the condition, integrity and appearance of the landscape framework in the locality.

There are a number of large overhead electricity lines, supported on steel pylons, which cross the area. Mature tree cover and undulating landform reduce their visual influence to some degree. However, the vertical large scale pylon towers and linearity of powerlines often remain prominent within the context of an open rolling landform, or where multiple towers are visible against the skyline, particularly near the Levels, or where they cross the scarp.

The South Wales to Bristol Railway line crosses the area south of Almondsbury in cutting. Due to this and its associated vegetation it is well integrated, minimising its visibility within the locality.

The Changing Landscape

The Severn Ridges landscape character area is a semi-enclosed to visibly exposed and diverse landscape. It retains a distinct rural and sometimes remote landscape character, particularly to the west and, with the exception

of a small section of landscape to the south east, remains visually unaffected by the proximity of the Bristol urban edge to the south. The area is also subject to further significant change resulting from new developments including for example at Thornbury and the proposed zoological gardens at the Hollywood Tower estate.

Although the overall landscape is in a good to reasonable condition, the consequences of limited management in some areas, 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, and can also threaten habitat value.

In spite of the generally good landscape structure and woodland cover, the elevated landform of ridges, scarp and plateau edges are all sensitive to change, due to the prominence and wider visual influence of these areas within open views. Similarly, the lower ridges and hills, generally to the west, are visually evident from the scarp and Levels.

In these locations, the extent of tree cover significantly influences the degree of integration of existing development, the availability of viewpoints and the extent of view.

Views from the ridge are a particular feature of the area which in the long term are also dependent on active management of the intervening landscape, including its trees and hedgerows. The openness of the view from Almondsbury Hill, for example, will diminish as if self-seeded trees on the scarp slopes below, grow both in height and canopy spread, unless management is undertaken. Conversely, the potential 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.

The vegetation structure generally is not being supplemented by new planting to create succession and sustain it in the long term. Without this, or without active management, the existing strong landscape framework will decline in the future, potentially increasing the prominence of the existing development pattern within the area. This would be evident particularly along the ridge and scarp from Rudgey to Easter Compton. 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 which are allowed to develop, or are planted.

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

There is active community engagement in the management of woodland at Thornbury Community Woodland (Filnore Woods) to the south of Thornbury. Developing planting at Hollywood Towers and Wheat Hill Farm, both near Easter Compton, will help maintain the wooded landscape structure along these sections of the ridge, in the long term. Woodland at Wheat Hill Farm also extends beyond the lower slopes of the Severn Ridges and into the Levels thereby strengthening the landscape framework. In the long term, this will also change the character of the existing smaller scale woodland pattern found elsewhere within these two character areas.

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

The development and expansion of the commercial orchard at Almondsbury, introduced an extensive area of fruit tree planting in a closely spaced regular pattern that is distinctly different to the traditional, more open orchard pattern. New allotments sites have been developed at Thornbury and Alveston.

The distinctive character of historic small landscape parks which contribute to the textured scarp, are also sensitive to management issues. In the long term, the ornamental landscape framework will be eroded without new planting to replace the ornamental tree structure.

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 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.

Large scale residential expansion has occurred along the edges of Thornbury, Almondsbury, Alveston and Olveston, within the last 30 years.

The expansion of Thornbury to the north, south and east, 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. However, Thornbury generally sits well in the landscape, due to its large scale landscape setting and present constraint of development, to within the low lying bowl landform, set above and separate, from the Levels.

The Core Strategy proposes further residential development to the north of Thornbury at Park Farm and Morton Way. Development

at Park Farm is to be set within a landscape framework that seeks to protect the setting to the Conservation Area, flood plain, significant tree cover and much of the hedgerow network. The Morton Way site has now been consented for 300 houses. A framework of open space is necessary to preserve the setting of the Listed Buildings near the site and to retain the setting of the stream. New tree planting will be needed to create integration with the rural surroundings.

Further expansion of the town would become more prominent were it to extend over elevated slopes, visually increase the apparent expanse of Thornbury within the bowl landform, or spread out beyond the bowl.

The ridgeline backdrop and skyline also currently provides an intact rural feature and setting to Thornbury. It is therefore sensitive to change which would visually erode this feature.

Upper Almondsbury has seen some residential expansion focused south of the Severn Ridge, adjacent to the A38. The adjacent landscape to the south is sensitive to change, presently providing a rural backdrop and green corridor in views from the M5, M4 and interchange and providing physical separation from the Bristol urban edge.

The proposed urban expansion at Cribbs Causeway will increase recreational pressure on the woodland at the southwestern tip of this character area, and potentially on areas beyond the motorway where access permits.

The interchange and M5, together with its traffic and the adjacent urban edge of Bristol, are visually prominent features within the locality. Although the isolated ridgeline, woodland and fields in the vicinity have a strong rural character, due to their scale, simple form and elevation, this is partially eroded by these built elements. This effect is more evident to the west, where the M5 is on embankment. In addition, dead elm trees are more apparent in the adjacent overgrown hedgerow structure, which also influences local character and the openness of the landscape.

Alveston, within its plateau setting, is largely visually remote from the wider landscape. The edge of the plateau to the west and its undeveloped skyline are however sensitive to change which might affect its present rural characteristics.

Olveston has expanded to largely fill its natural shallow bowl setting. Further expansion, beyond the containment of the bowl and onto the surrounding rising slopes, is likely to be more visually prominent.

The spread of closeboarded and other 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.

The extensive road network provides good access to much of the area, which in conjunction with concentrations of settlement, most notably at Thornbury, Alveston, Almondsbury and the proximity of Bristol, all introduce 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.

- 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' which has increased in the central part of the character area. Farm diversification for example in the north of the area has similar effects, in some cases introducing large buildings into the rural landscape. Change has also resulted in the restructuring of the landscape, with the loss of hedges, the introduction of various 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 Overscourt. In addition activities such as a scouts facility and paintballing have

intensified use at Spaniorum Hill. Horse keep often results 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 dip slope landscape to the west of the M5, with its wooded ridgeline and rural character, provides a prominent and distinctive visual backdrop to the Bristol urban area within views from the M5 corridor. More importantly, this area provides a physical buffer to the Bristol urban edge/M5 corridor, limiting the visual impacts of this development upon the wider Severn Ridges and Levels landscape.
- An extensive zoological garden is proposed within the historic parkland and woodland at Hollywood Tower, and will extend down the slopes from the Severn Ridge. This is proposed to retain the existing landscape features, and to incorporate robust new landscape works, however the character of this area will be altered. The proposed landscape works should however largely absorb the proposed development over time.
- The effects of road infrastructure, including lighting and signage, often extend beyond the road corridor. Recent highway changes along the motorways such as larger signage gantries, which have widened the visual impact of 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 low key rural road network.

The powerlines crossing the ridges are a visually prominent feature above the rural framework. Similarly, depending on their location, 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.

At Almondsbury there has been extension and intensification of sports use, and the installation of relatively small wind turbines, giving an urban character, however this is seen in the context of the motorway junction and its associated signage and lighting.

Cattybrook Clayworks, to the west of Almondsbury, remains active as does the brickworks, and is evident within views from the adjacent Levels' landscape. Earth bunding, provides some containment of views of the site activity and tree planting is providing some integration with the surrounding wooded Severn Ridge, in the long term.

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.

The large scale industrial structures at Avonmouth, Severnside, the distributor warehousing near Severn Beach, Oldbury Power Station, the Severn Bridges and extensive motorway network, are significant built features within the adjacent Levels and Severn Estuary. In particular the Severnside area is subject to significant change as the 1957 consent continues to be implemented and other land uses change. Their large scale, form and colour contrasts with the simple horizontal landform of these areas and dwarfs the pre-existing vegetation framework. Where implemented the robust landscape and habitat structure implemented as part of for example the existing Seabank Power Station and the early phases of Western Approaches have had some success in providing a robust new landscape setting for the large scale buildings. Later phases are at risk of not delivering this, and therefore achieving less integration with the landscape. These developments are apparent in views from adjacent higher ground and therefore visually influence the Severn Ridges character area.

Further expansion of these industrial areas 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.

Decommissioning of Oldbury Power Station, which is now under way is likely to result in some ongoing changes to the structures surrounding the main reactor buildings and changes in the use of the site and remaining structures. In the very long term (over 100 years), the site is currently proposed to be returned to open landscape. . However an adjacent 150+hectares has been nominated as being potentially suitable for the construction of a new nuclear power station. This will be largely developed on a green field site and will be a significantly larger facility, due in large part to the cooling facilities that will be required. The existing station site may however present an opportunity for reuse of land and/or facilities, thereby reducing the extent of the built form in views across the wider landscape.

Landscape Strategy

- Active management of landscape features to frame and or maintain characteristic views across the adjacent levels landscape and the estuary
- Active management of and succession planting in the woodland framework, and hedgerow network to ensure the conservation and enhancement of the habitat value and connectivity of these key landscape features for the long term, and to ensure long term protection of the character of the ridgeline as a rural backcloth, and of the panoramic views across adjacent character areas.
- Ensure the protection and sensitive management of important grassland habitats, both as habitat and in contributing towards the maintenance of characteristic and panoramic views.
- Management and succession planting to maintain and enhance Traditional Orchards and extend the distribution of this habitat across the character area.
- Encourage new tree planting to maintain and/ or reinstate the parkland character of the various historic parks scattered across the character area.
- Conserve the rural character of the visually prominent ridges and hills, and the introduction of lighting that would impact on landscape character and disturb wildlife.
- Proposals for new development and public facing boundary treatments should reinforce the particular and varying landscape and settlement characters found across this character area.
- Ensure the retention or replacement of characteristic landscape features as an integral part of highway improvement schemes.
- Ensure that the implications of proposed change in the Levels landscape character areas are considered in terms of effects on the views from, setting to and character of the Severn Ridges Landscape Character area. This should include careful consideration of massing, colour and ensuring that landscape proposals are commensurate with the scale of the development proposed, as well as consideration of the impact of tall or extensive structures or buildings.
- 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 and reinforces local distinctiveness through the use of building materials that compliment the local vernacular, as well as the integration of landscape schemes that are locally appropriate. Materials vary according to locality from limestone, pennant sandstone, conglomerate to render.
- Preserve the tranquillity of the landscape, particularly to the north and west of the character area.



1 View from Upper Hill, towards trees and woodland surrounding Hill Court. Hill Parish is still largely, if not entirely, estate owned by Hill Court.

2 Hill Church, Hill Court and Dovecot. Specimen trees planted by Herbert Jenner-Furst over 100 years ago, with extensive views over the Oldbury Levels.



3 Cowhill in the evening sunshine below St Arilda's Church. Two fine oak trees show up now Dutch Elm Disease has done its worst. The Forest of Dean ridgelines feature in the distance.



4 Thornbury Castle Street.



5 View looking north from hill below upper Marlwood Farm (clubhouse of Thornbury Golf Course) to Thornbury, with St Mary's Church a landmark visible from many directions.



5a Cowhill Photo 12 View towards Thornbury from Buckover with the estuary, Wales and the original Severn Bridge in the background.



5b Thornbury Castle showing main components of the castle including Tudor chimneys and the wall between the castle and church.



5c St Mary's Parish Church and Thornbury Castle from the parklands to the west.



5d View of the old bridge under the former railway line at Thornbury.



6 Low-lying cultivation and wooded ridges. The ubiquitous Oldbury Power Station is in the background.



8 Looking south west at Elberton, showing the church, manor house and tithe barn. The barn is now converted to a residential property.

9 View over Stroud Common towards the ribbon development between Alveston and Rudgey, which follows the A38 along the Severn Ridge.





10 View to the east of Alveston, showing 17th century farmhouse and outbuildings. Stone walls are prominent and show the rural character 100 metres from the A38.



11 Although the original medieval centre of Thornbury sits on a low ridge to the west of the town, the built-up area is in a saucer with higher land to the south, east and north. This view from close to the A38 shows industrial buildings in the foreground, but also shows how wooded the town is. The Severn and the Forest of Dean provide the background.



12 View north east from Catherine Hill over Olveston Court and village with the wooded ridge at Little Down in the distance.



13 View south west of the wooded Severn Ridge with Lower Almondsbury and church in the centre middle distance, large orchard to the left and scattered houses along the scarp and ridge top.



14 New large scale cider orchard, planted in formal rows.



15 Lower Almondsbury village green, original village school, church with lead spire and village pump.

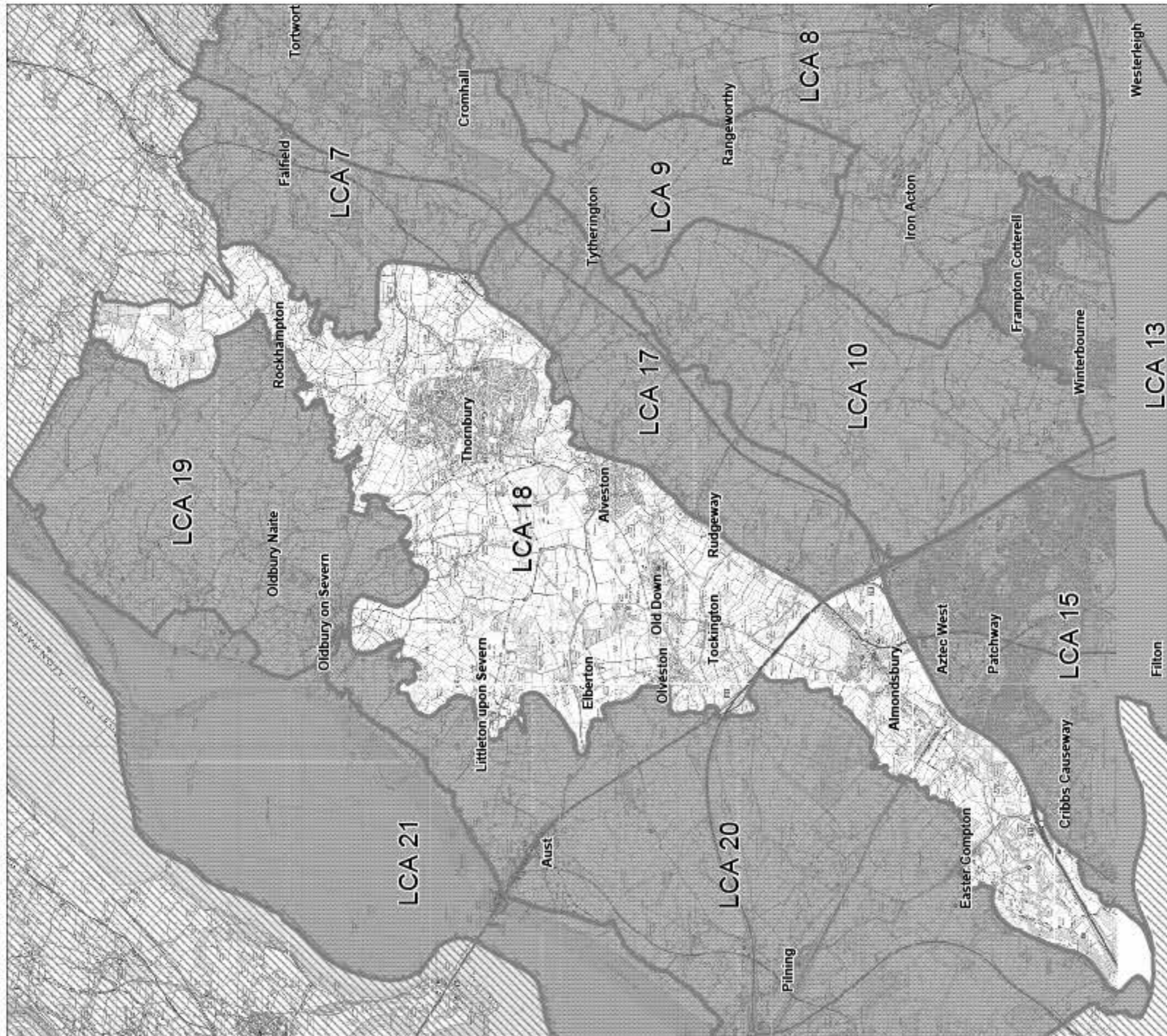


16 Panoramic view from scarp over the Pilning Levels, to the Severn Estuary and beyond. Cattybrook Brickworks is evident to the left, with distributor warehouses and chemical works more distant, near the estuary (not evident here due to the hazy image).



17 View of Spaniorum Hill, Compton Greenfield in the middle distance, from across the Pilning Levels.



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS



Legend

-  South Gloucestershire Boundary
-  Landscape Character Area

The Landscape Character Area boundary shown on this map is indicative, sometimes marking a distinct change, but more often representing a transition in character with adjacent areas.

Similar attributes may therefore be evident within adjacent areas. (For further information refer to Report Section 4.1)



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Figure 57
Area 18
 Severn Ridges