

South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment

Annex I: Visually Important Hillsides

South Gloucestershire Council

Final Draft Report for Adoption Chapter 5

Prepared by LUC

September 2024



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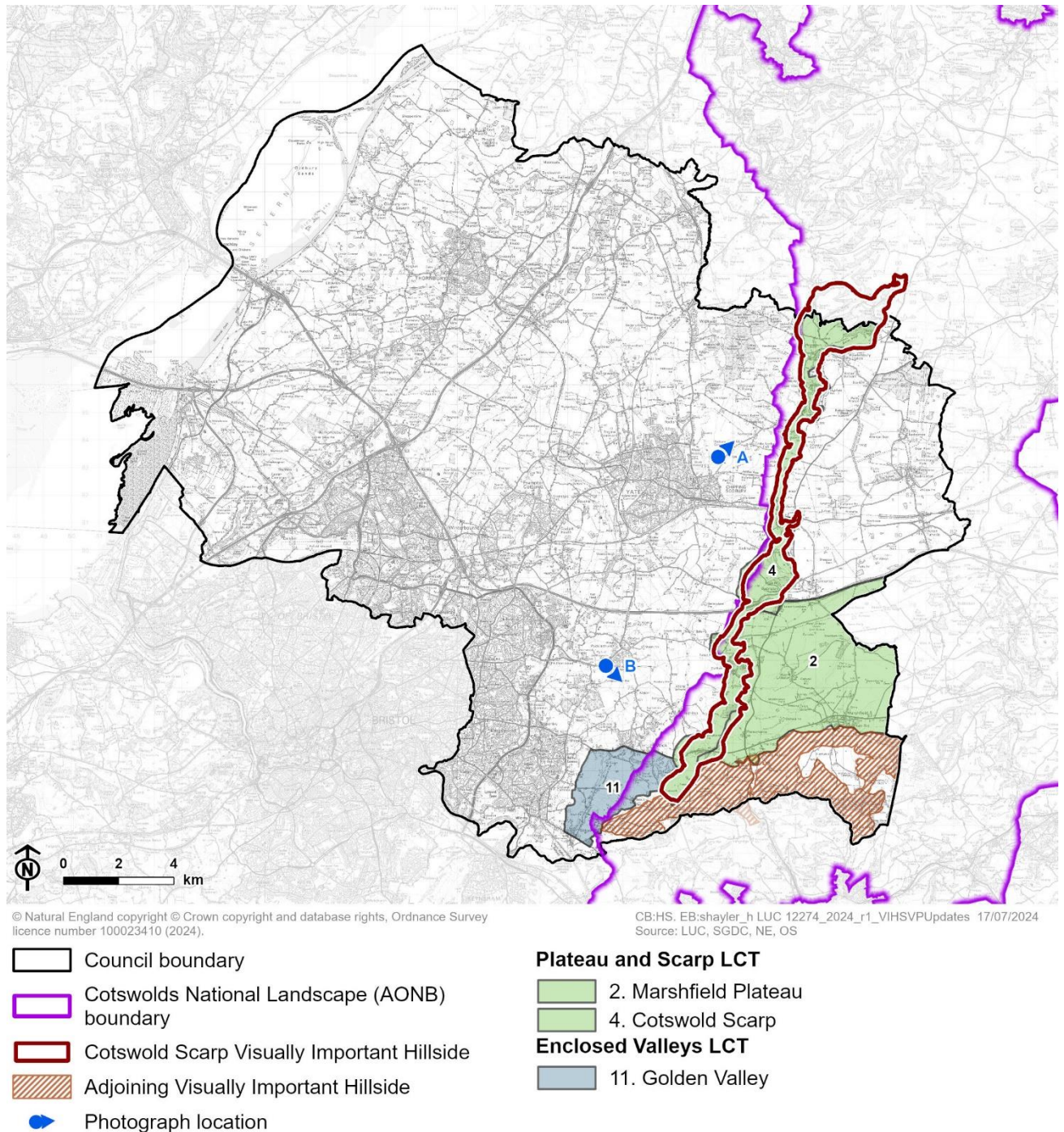
Chapter 5

Cotswold Scarp – including Hawkesbury Knoll, Broad Hill, Birch Hill, wooded slopes of Dodington Park and Dyrham Park, Tog Hill and Freezing Hill

The Cotswold Scarp VIH encompasses a long stretch of escarpment, interspersed with small-scale valleys, and a series of hillsides. The VIH is located near the eastern edge of South Gloucestershire, defining the Cotswold Scarp landscape character area (LCA 4), and spans from the north to south, where it joins the Ashwicke Ridges VIH in the south. Its distinct form and elevation on the edge of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL) defines a marked change in character from the considerably lower-lying undulating ridges and vales to the west and the broader plateau/dip slope landscape to the east. As a result, the VIH is visually prominent when viewed from across the majority of South Gloucestershire, and perhaps the most dramatic VIH alongside the Ashwicke Ridges, forming an integral landscape feature and characteristic of the CNL. The Cotswold Scarp VIH also encompasses and influences a number of Conservation Areas and RPGs, forming an intrinsic part of their setting and character.

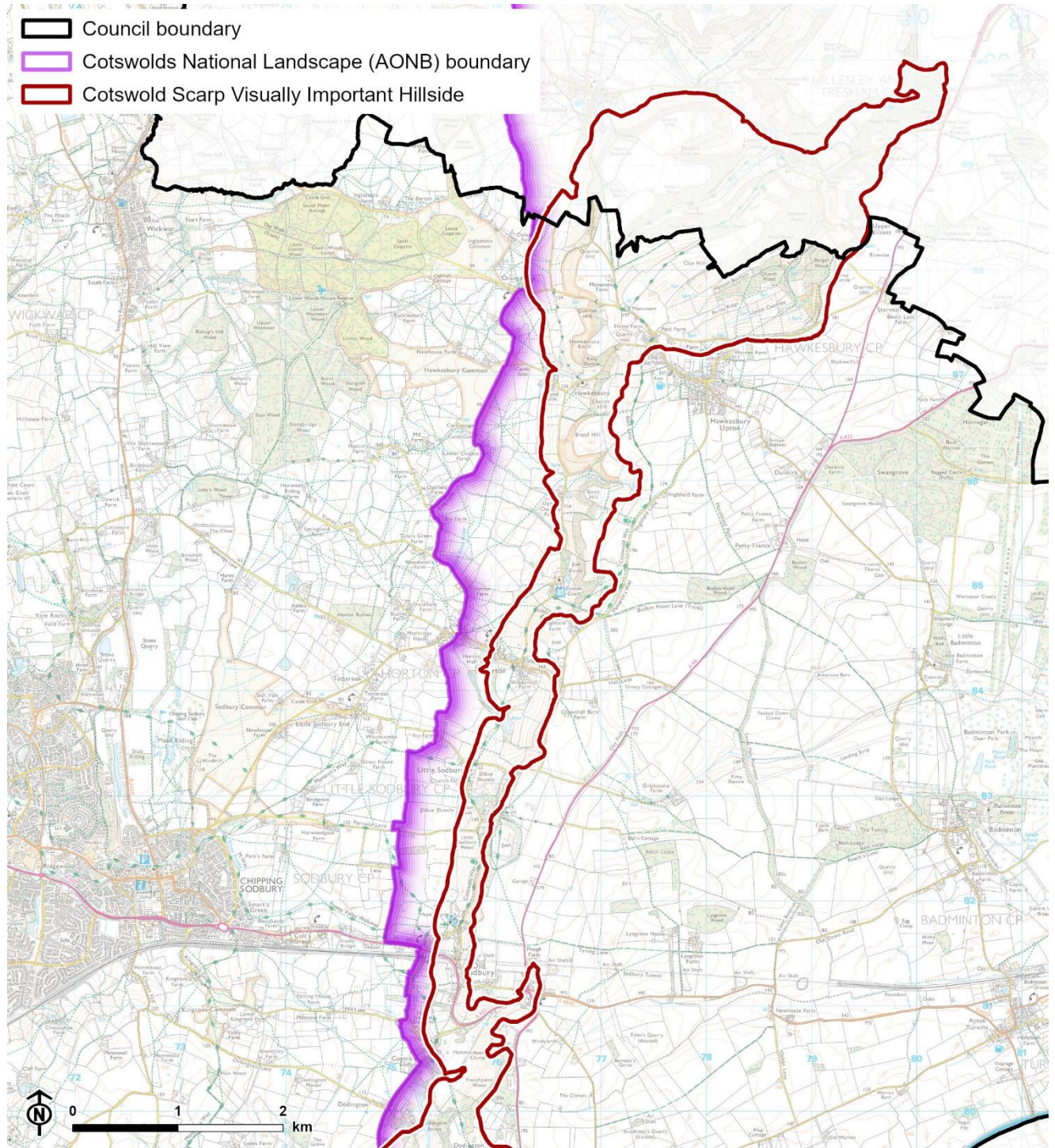
Chapter 5 Cotswold Scarp – including Hawkesbury Knoll, Broad Hill, Birch Hill, wooded slopes of Dodington Park and Dyrham Park, Tog Hill and Freezing Hill

Figure 5.1: Location of the Cotswold Scarp Visually Important Hillside and landscape character context



Chapter 5 Cotswold Scarp – including Hawkesbury Knoll, Broad Hill, Birch Hill, wooded slopes of Dodington Park and Dyrham Park, Tog Hill and Freezing Hill

Figure 5.2: Detailed map of the Cotswold Scarp Visually Important Hillside (North)



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CB:HS. EB:HS. LUC 12274_2024_r2_VIHSVPUpdates 19/07/2024
Source: LUC, SGDC, NE, OS

Figure 5.3: Detailed map of the Cotswold Scarp Visually Important Hillside (South)



Chapter 5 Cotswold Scarp – including Hawkesbury Knoll, Broad Hill, Birch Hill, wooded slopes of Dodington Park and Dyrham Park, Tog Hill and Freezing Hill

Figure 5.4: View of the Cotswold Scarp from Sodbury Common (Photo point A)



Chapter 5 Cotswold Scarp – including Hawkesbury Knoll, Broad Hill, Birch Hill, wooded slopes of Dodington Park and Dyrham Park, Tog Hill and Freezing Hill

Figure 5.5: View of the Cotswold Scarp from the edge of Pucklechurch (Photo point B)



Characteristics

Distinctiveness and identity

- The Cotswold Scarp VIH is readily identifiable as a natural landform feature on OS mapping as close contour lines indicate steep slopes with a westerly aspect (descending from around 200m to 110m). The distance between consecutive contour lines gradually increase outwards from the top of the scarp towards the flatter/ gently undulating vale and plateau landscapes to the east and west respectively. The VIH includes a series of steep hills, including Hawkesbury Knoll, Broad Hill, Birch Hill, Tog Hill and Freezing Hill. These landform features are also easily identifiable on OS mapping due to contour lines forming concentric circles (or ovals).
- A promoted viewpoint is marked on OS mapping along the scarp near Haye's Farm, which implies that a scenic elevated view is afforded from this part of the VIH, and that there is intervisibility with the surrounding landscape. This is the location of the strategic viewpoint at St John's Church (Old Sodbury) (SVP 14). A historic fort near Chipping Sodbury is also evident on OS mapping, indicating a high point.
- The VIH is a distinctive feature with a strong sense of identity as noted in the following publications:
 - LCA 4: Cotswolds Scarp description within South Gloucestershire Landscape Character SPD notes the feature is a "*large-scale, steeply sloping and folded scarp landform, falling from the Cotswold Plateau westwards to lower vales*". LCA 4 also states that the VIH comprises a consistently uniform concave landform feature with limited variation, apart from where it is "*interspersed with small-scale valleys*" which have created "*simple valley forms and a more complicated deeply folded scarp with convex upper slopes, knolls, rounded hills, promontories and descending broad spurs.*"
 - The Cotswolds National Landscape Management Plan [\[See reference 1\]](#) identifies the escarpment as a special quality of the CNL, including the views from and to it.

Chapter 5 Cotswold Scarp – including Hawkesbury Knoll, Broad Hill, Birch Hill, wooded slopes of Dodington Park and Dyrham Park, Tog Hill and Freezing Hill

- The Hawkesbury Conservation Area appraisal [See reference 2] refers to Hawkesbury Knoll (located in the north of the VIH) as being a *"distinctive landscape feature"*.
- The Doynton Conservation Area appraisal [See reference 3] refers to the *"dramatic Cotswold escarpment to the south-east"* and notes that long-distance views are *"particularly notable...towards the Cotswold escarpment and Freezing Hill"*.
- The Pucklechurch Conservation Area appraisal [See reference 4] refers to the Cotswold Scarp as providing a *"prominent, panoramic backdrop that dominates and encloses views out of the Conservation Area, reinforcing its rural setting"*.

Visual prominence

- The prominence of the VIH is noted in LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp, which describes it as a *"prominent landform feature, forming a highly visible and distinctive backcloth in views from the lowland vales and ridges to the west"* and as being *"regionally prominent, being evident from as far away as South Wales"*.
- The VIH is visible from several public vantage points and forms a key feature in views from the strategic viewpoints at Sodbury Common (SVP 9), Abson (SVP 22) and Pucklechurch (SVP 27).
- The line of beech trees on Freezing Hill in the south of the VIH and the Somerset Monument in the north are prominent and notable local landmarks on top of the VIH and can be seen within long-distance views, both within and beyond the South Gloucestershire area to the north and west. These features contribute towards the prominence and conspicuousness of the VIH.

Character and value

- The VIH contributes to the setting of the Hawkesbury, Horton and Dyrham Conservation Areas (which are located on the VIH), as it forms a

Chapter 5 Cotswold Scarp – including Hawkesbury Knoll, Broad Hill, Birch Hill, wooded slopes of Dodington Park and Dyrham Park, Tog Hill and Freezing Hill

prominent backdrop, enclosing these areas. It also contributes to the setting of the Conservation Areas at Doynton and Pucklechurch, as the VIH contains notable landscape features seen in views from these areas.

- The landform of the scarp contributes to the character of the Dodington House RPG (Grade II*) and the Dyrham Park RPG (Grade II*), with steeply sloping parkland.
- The character and appearance of the VIH is generally unspoilt by visual detractors as long stretches of the scarp are undeveloped. Visual detractors are mainly limited to pylons and telecommunication towers close to the Tomarton Interchange along the M4, which given their position towards the top of the scarp, have some visual prominence when seen from the surrounding landscape. An existing turbine near Hinton (66m tip height) is also relatively prominent as it lies at the top of the scarp (just outside of the VIH). The scarp is scattered with nucleated villages, hamlets, farmsteads and dwellings, although many of the villages are located along the lower slopes of the scarp. The M4 crosses near the middle of the scarp in a cutting so is not visually prominent.
- Landcover across the VIH comprises predominantly of pastoral fields with some arable fields extending beyond the base and crest of the slope. Linear woodland and the hedgerow pattern complement the scarp by following the contours of the slope and open grass hillsides with small, isolated tree clumps or scrub reveal the scarp's profile and exposed ridgeline. LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp identifies the woodland as being distinctive and visually prominent in the area.
- The VIH provides ample opportunities for expansive views across the landscape, including from the strategic viewpoints at Little Sodbury Hillfort (SVP 13), Old Sodbury (SVP 14), Tog Hill (SVP 16), Dyrham Park (SVP 17), and Freezing Hill (SVP 18).
- The VIH has a role in the landscape by defining LCA 4: Cotswold Scarp and providing a watershed (as to the west of the scarp, springs flow into the Little Avon River, River Frome, River Boyd and eventually to the Severn, whereas springs and streams on the other side of the scarp flow in an easterly direction). It also forms a highly prominent backdrop to the surrounding lower-lying landscape.

Summary

The Cotswold Scarp is categorised as a VIH as it significantly meets all of the criteria. It is readily identifiable as a natural landform feature on OS mapping; a distinctive feature with a strong sense of identity; prominent in views across the landscape; visible from many public vantage points; has high visual/sensory/perceptual value; contributes to the setting of Conservation Areas and the character of RPGs; its character and appearance is generally unspoilt by visual detractors; it provides the opportunity for views across the landscape; and has a role in the landscape by defining a character area, providing a visual watershed and forming a highly prominent visual backdrop. The Cotswold Scarp forms the western edge of the Cotswold National Landscape.

References

- 1 Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan 2023-2025. Available at:
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- 2 Hawkesbury Conservation Area Advice Note (2000). Available at:
<https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/static/5326407b166ee9a37976470ec872cd51/pte050036.pdf>
- 3 Doynton Conservation Area SPD (2013). Available at:
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