

South Gloucestershire Landscape Character Assessment

Annex I: Visually Important Hillside

South Gloucestershire Council

Final Draft Report for Adoption Chapter 18

Prepared by LUC

September 2024



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1	Draft Method and Pilot	E White	K Davies	K Davies	24.02.2023
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Chapter 18

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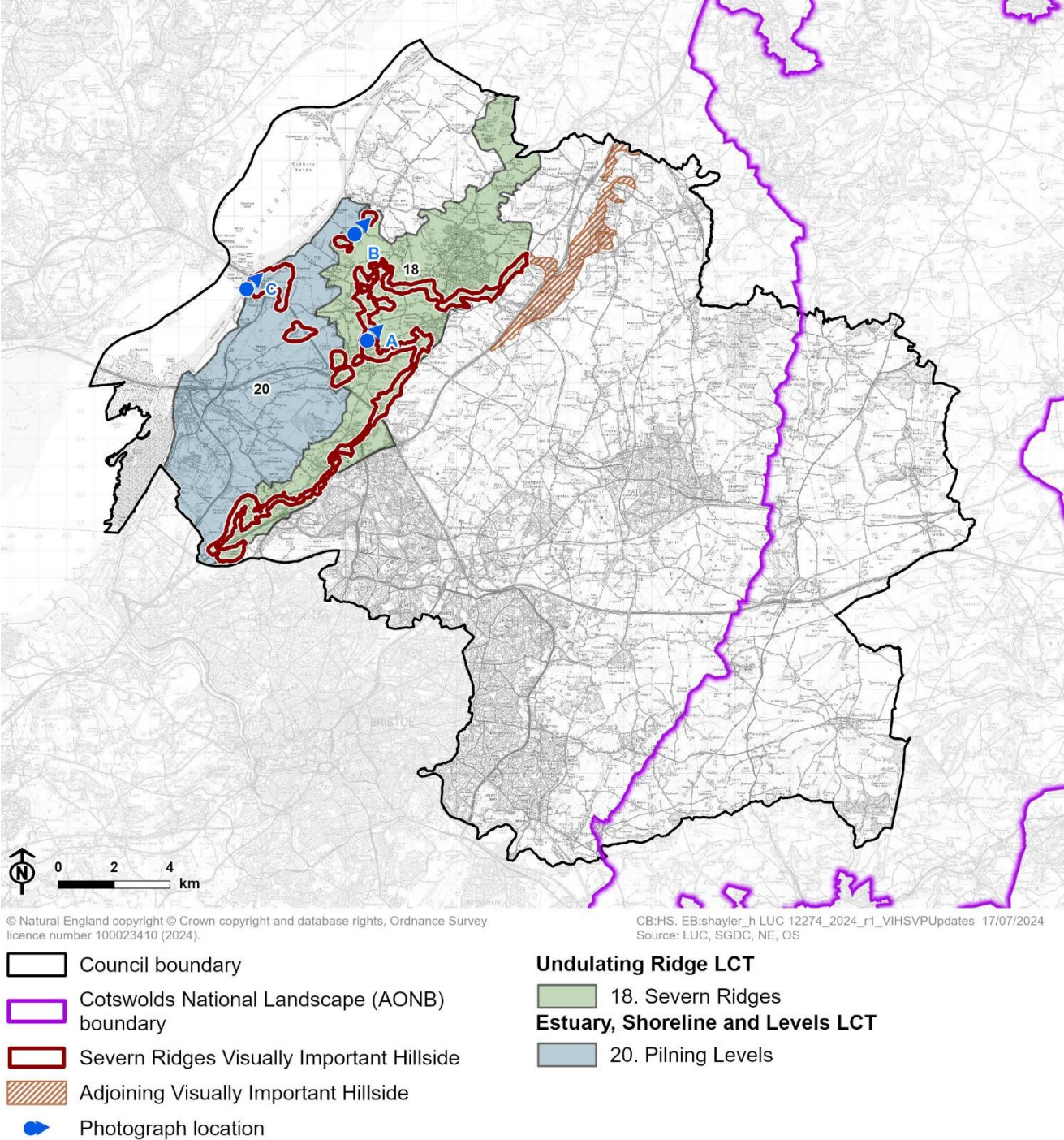
The Severn Ridges VIH comprises a complex area of ridges, punctuated by a series of hills, and also includes several outlying hill formations lying to the west of the main spine, as well as the cliff edge at Aust. It is located along the western edge of South Gloucestershire close to the Severn estuary, defining the LCA 18: Severn Ridges landscape character area, and spans from the north-east to the south-west, forming a S-shape. The outlying hill at Ingst lies within the LCA 20: Pilning Levels landscape character area, and Aust Hill partly defines the edge of this landscape character area. The VIH adjoins the Wick's / Butcher's Hill and Baden Hill VIH in the north-east at Buckover. Its distinct form and elevation defines a marked change in character from the considerably lower-lying levels associated with the River Severn to its west. As a result, the VIH is visually prominent when viewed from the west, including within long-distance views from South Wales and the Forest of Dean. It represents an undeveloped

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landscape feature, which provides a green backdrop and setting to several Conservation Areas.

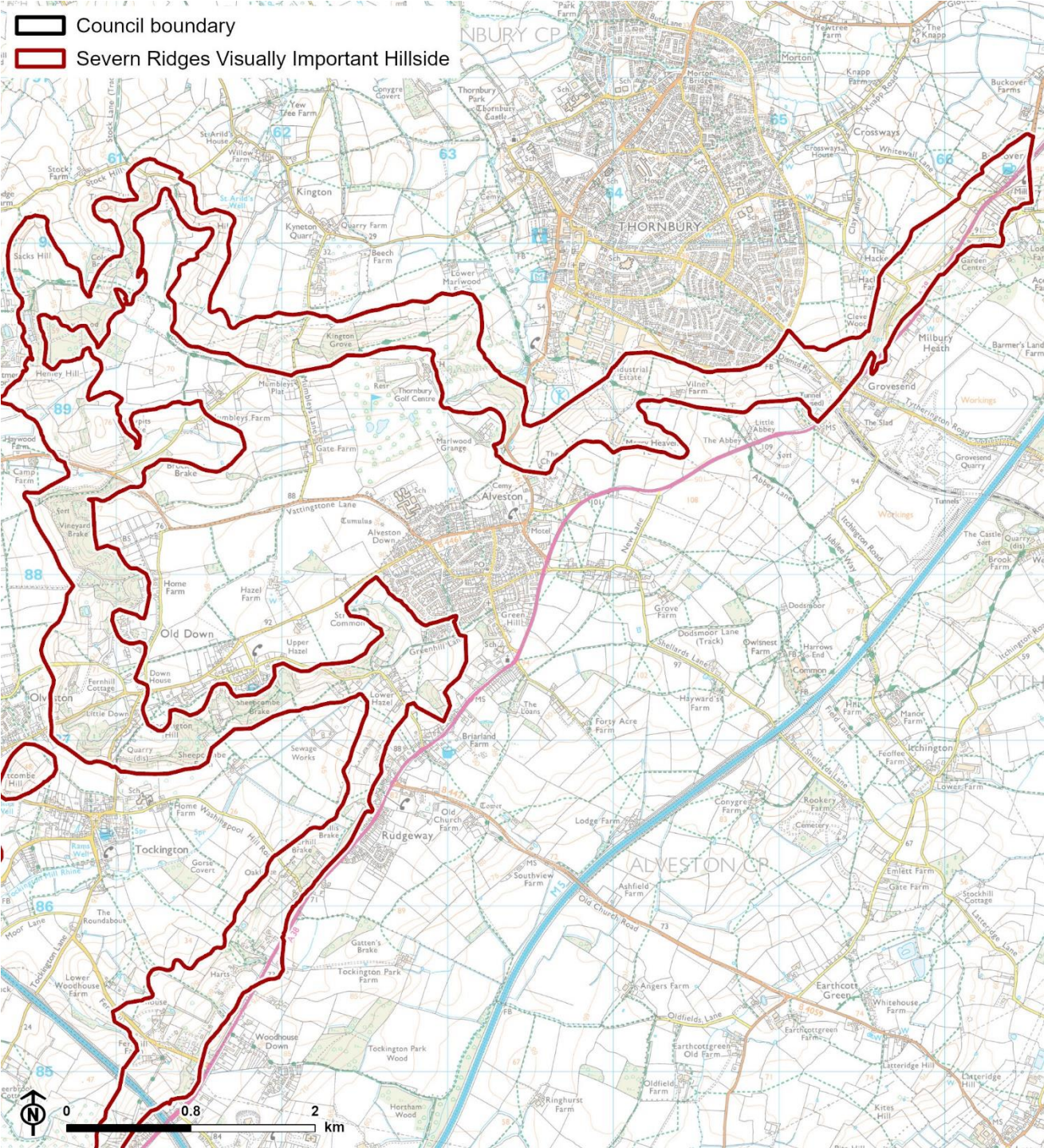
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Figure 18.1: Location of the Severn Ridges Visually Important Hillside and landscape character context



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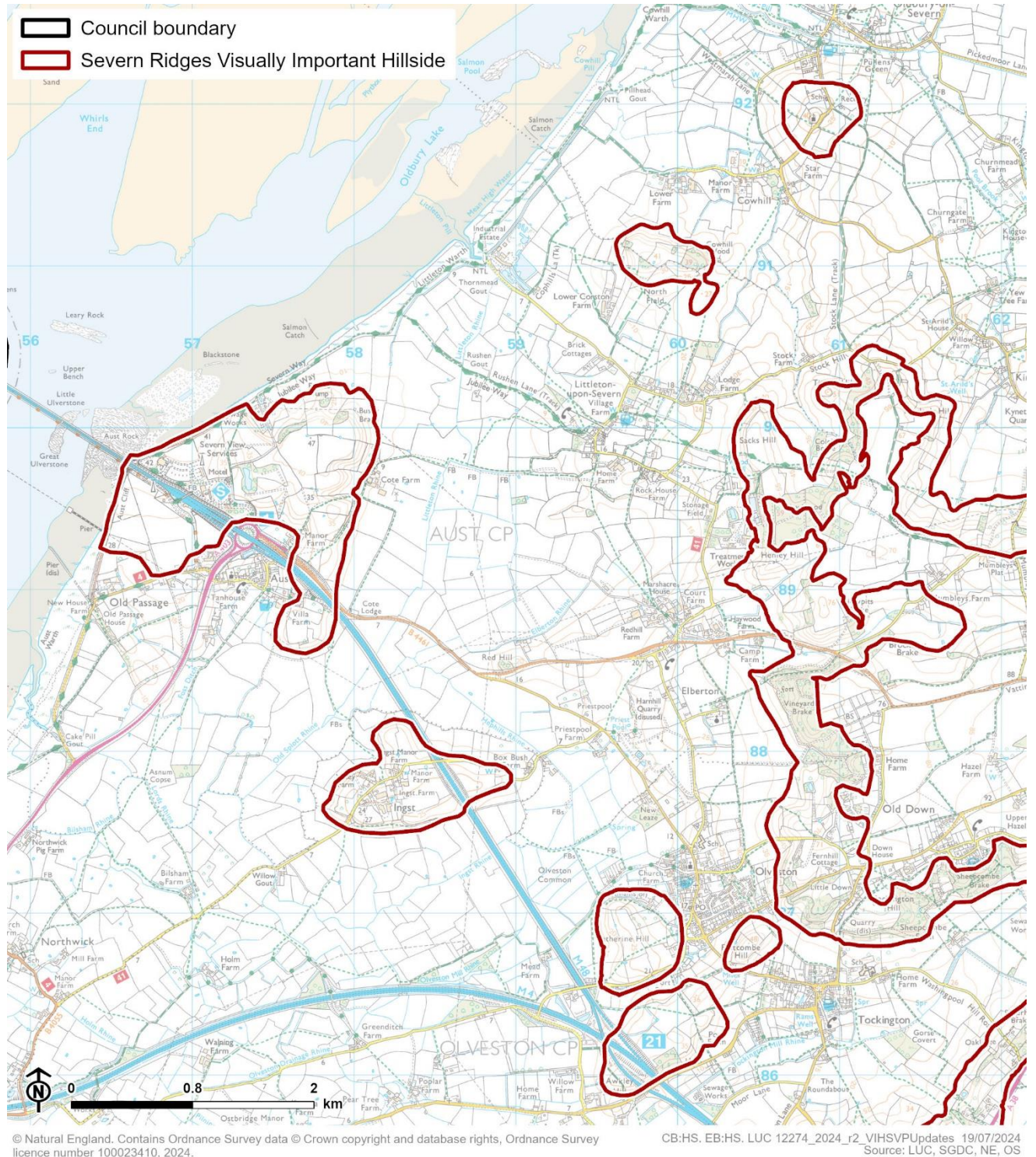
Figure 18.2: Detailed map of the Severn Ridges Visually Important Hillside (North-East)



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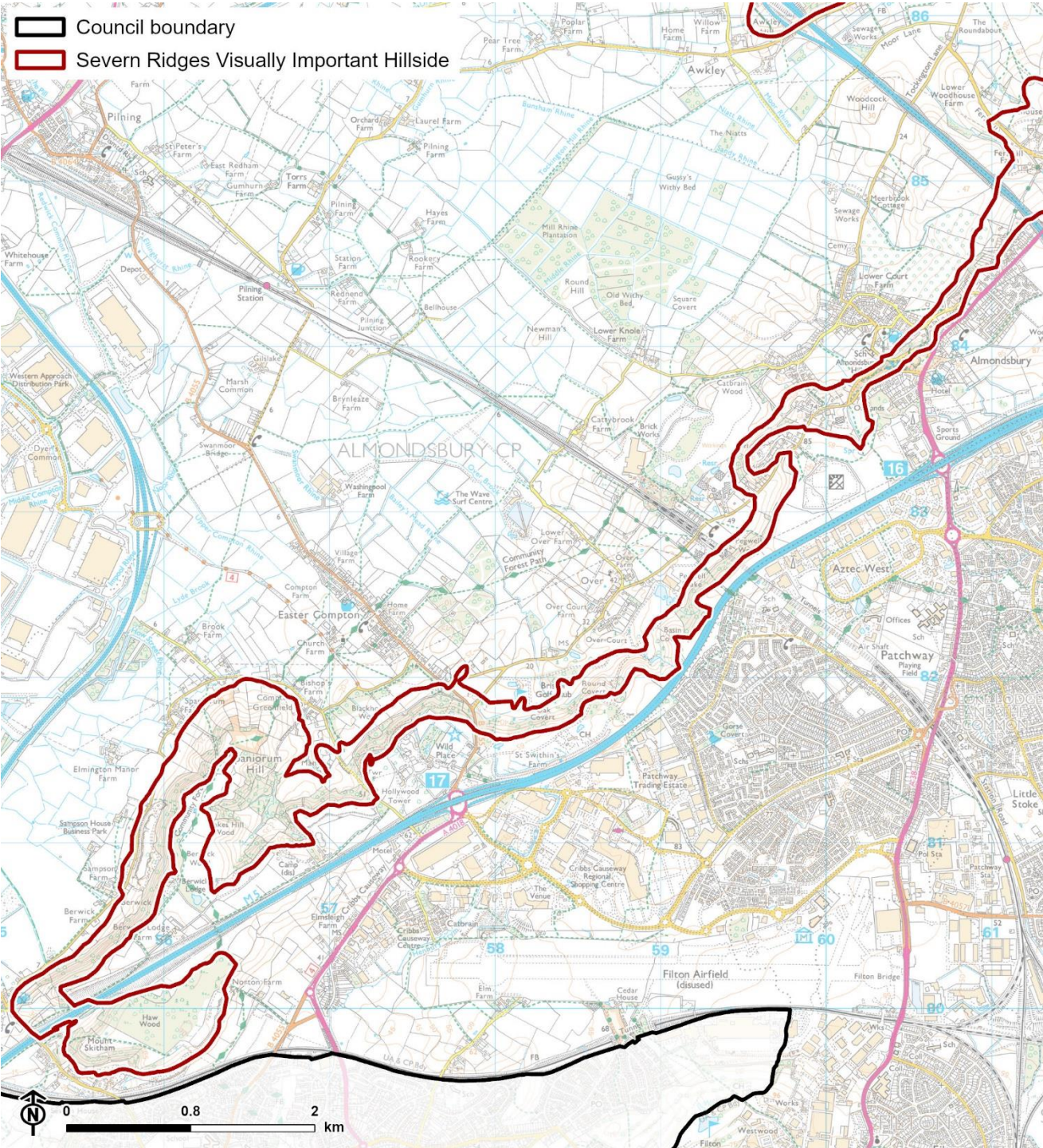
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Figure 18.3: Detailed map of the Severn Ridges Visually Important Hillside (North-West including outlying hills)



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Figure 18.4: Detailed map of the Severn Ridges Visually Important Hillside (South West)



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Figure 18.5: View of Severn Ridges from Olveston (Photo point A)



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Figure 18.6: View of St Arilda's Church on an outlying hill to the Severn Ridges from Cowhill (Photo point B)



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Figure 18.7: View of Aust Cliff (Photo point C)



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Characteristics

Distinctiveness and identity

- The Severn Ridges VIH is readily identifiable as a natural landform feature on OS mapping as close contour lines indicate steep slopes with a northerly and westerly aspect (descending from around 100m to 40m in the north and around 65m to 10m in the south). The distance between consecutive contour lines gradually increase outwards from the top of the ridges towards the flatter levels landscape to the west and the gently undulating ridges/ vale landscape to the east. The Severn Ridges are punctuated with a series of steep hills, including Fowler's Hill, Titters Hill, Henley Hill, Tockington Hill, Spaniorum Hill and Milbury Heath, as well as the outlying hills of Cow Hill, St Arilda's Church, Catherine's Hill, Eastcombe Hill, Awkley Hill, Ingst and Aust. These landform features are also easily identifiable on OS mapping due to contour lines forming concentric circles (or ovals), while the cliff edge at Aust is marked as a 'vertical face/ cliff'.
- A promoted viewpoint is marked on OS mapping along the ridge at Almondsbury which implies that a scenic elevated view is afforded from this part of the VIH, and that there is intervisibility with the surrounding landscape. A historic fort near Elberton 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 18: Severn Ridges description in the SGC Landscape Character Assessment SPD notes the "*Distinctive large-scale landform*" of the VIH and that the "*ridgeline has gentle to steeply sloping scarp slopes*".
 - The Olveston Conservation Area appraisal [\[See reference 1\]](#) refers to the "*attractive rural landscape within a sheltered valley between a backdrop of the prominent wooded limestone ridge to the east...*" and "*series of low hills including Eastcombe Hill and Catherine Hill*".

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extending westwards from the scarp slope ensure that some areas feel sheltered and contained whilst others feel exposed and open, offering extensive views towards the Severn levels".

- The Almondsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan [See reference 2] refers to the "steep limestone scarp of Almondsbury Hill" and how the wooded ridge and hill forms a "distinctive backdrop to the village and its historic buildings". It identifies the "steep wooded hillside above the village" as being a "key aspect of Lower Almondsbury's distinctive and special character".
- The VIH is distinctive in separating the northern extents of Bristol and the levels landscape.

Visual prominence

- The prominence of the VIH is noted in LCA 18: Severn Ridges, which states that "*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.*" It also states that "*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.*" LCA 20: Pilning Levels states that the outliers at Ingst and Aust "*form prominent low hills*" and that "*Aust Cliff is a prominent feature on the western boundary facing the Severn Estuary*".
- The VIH is visible from several public vantage points and forms a key feature in views. The wooded areas at high elevations along the VIH are prominent and notable features that can be seen in views from around the levels and estuary to the west.
- The grade II* listed St. Arilda's Church on the top of an outlying hill in the north-west of the VIH is a prominent and notable local landmark and can be seen within long-distance views, contributing towards the prominence and conspicuousness of the VIH.

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Character and value

- The VIH contributes to the setting of the Almondsbury and Olveston Conservations Areas which are partly located on the VIH. It also contributes to the setting of the Tockington Conservation Area (which lies at the base of the main spine) and Thornbury Conservation Area, where the VIH forms part of the distinctive 'bowl' landform that partly encloses Thornbury and should be preserved.
- The character and appearance of the VIH is generally unspoilt by visual detractors as some stretches of the ridges are largely undeveloped. Visual detractors are mainly limited to pylons which cross the VIH in the north, and have some visual prominence when seen from the surrounding landscape given their position on the top of the ridge. The scarp is scattered with hamlets, farmsteads and dwellings, and part of the village of Almondsbury is located upon an upper slope of the VIH. The M4 crosses near the middle of the scarp. Development around the VIH does partly influence its character including the large commercial development of Cribbs Causeway, to the south of the M5, and housing development which has diminished views from the VIH.
- Landcover across the VIH comprises predominantly of pastoral fields with clipped hedges, intermittent mature hedgerow trees and areas of woodland.
- The VIH provides ample opportunities for expansive views across the flat levels, Severn Estuary and towards South Wales, including from the strategic viewpoints at Almondsbury (SVP 3), Old Down (SVP 4), Buckover (SVP 5), Spaniorum Hill (SVP 7a and 7b), St. Arilda's Church (SVP 15), Woodwell Meadow (SVP 23) and Severn View Viewpoint (SVP 28).
- The VIH has a role in the landscape by defining LCA 18: Severn Ridges and forms a highly prominent backdrop to the surrounding lower-lying landscape.

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Summary

The Severn Ridges 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 several public vantage points; has high visual/sensory/perceptual value; contributes to the setting of Conservation Areas; 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, and forming a highly prominent visual backdrop.

References

- 1 Olveston Conservation Area SPD (2013). Available at:
<https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/static/72cbbbee52e4fd320dc0a4a91b8356b8/Olveston-Conservation-Area-SPD-1.pdf>
- 2 Almondsbury Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan (2024). Available at:
<https://beta.southglos.gov.uk/static/56701b76f9ecc09cd4f33eddf77f5821/Almondsbury-Conservation-Plan.pdf>

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