

An abstract map of the West Midlands region, featuring a dark background with various colored lines (blue, red, yellow, purple) and red dots. The lines represent roads, rivers, and boundaries, while the dots represent specific locations. The map is overlaid with a grid of white lines.

CREATING A NATIONAL PARK FOR THE WEST MIDLANDS

A NEW 21ST CENTURY IDENTITY

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Critical Artistic Thinking in Design

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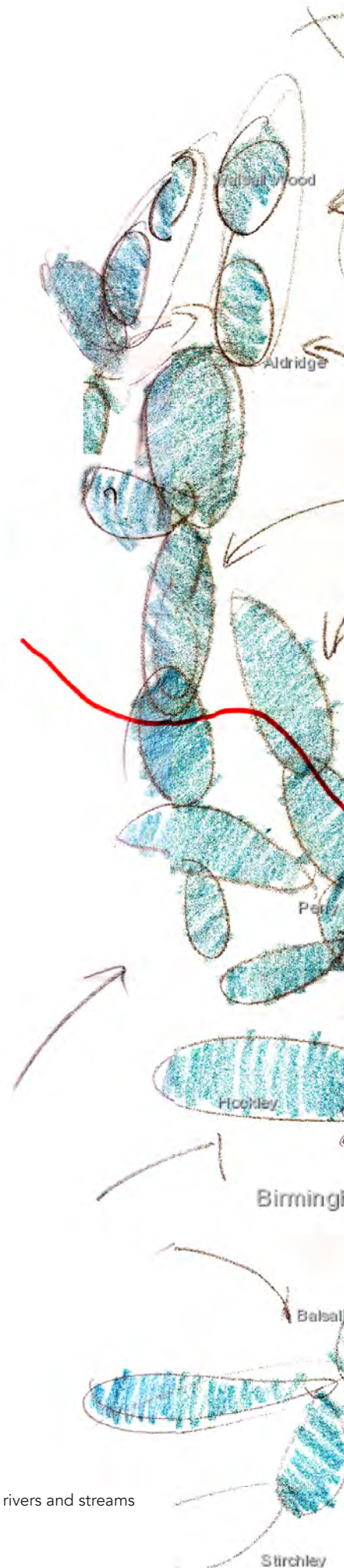
A strategic spatial vision to deal with the challenges faced by the WMCA relating to:

REGENERATION
ENVIRONMENT
TRANSPORT
IDENTITY
INFRASTRUCTURE
EMPLOYMENT
SKILLS
WELL BEING

PROPOSAL

- To create a proposal and lay the foundations for the West Midlands National Park in support of and as the legacy of the Commonwealth Games 2022
- To develop a detailed business case to guide investment
- To deliver a number of spatial studies to guide and shape employment, housing, health, tourism, food, environmental and cultural strategies

Connecting communities: the rivers and streams of the West Midlands Plateau







Benefits

- Increased quality of life for the region, impacting on regeneration, investment and tourism and changing the perception of the region from the outside
- New approaches to infrastructure planning and development to generate long-term economic benefits for the region
- Supporting employment and skills through skilled employment in land-based activities and engaging local communities
- Numerous environmental benefits, e.g. carbon capture and storage, improved water management leading to cleaner water and less flood impact, better air quality, wildlife and habitats protection, biodiversity and sustainable regional food production
- Improve participation rates in sports and leisure activities

Ask

- That WMCA establishes the Landscape and Infrastructure Advisory Board
- That WMCA commissions BCU's CATiD Hub¹, with its unique skill set, to bring together a public-private-academia partnership to deliver the detailed development of this project
- To provide pump priming to stimulate grants and investment to deliver the project

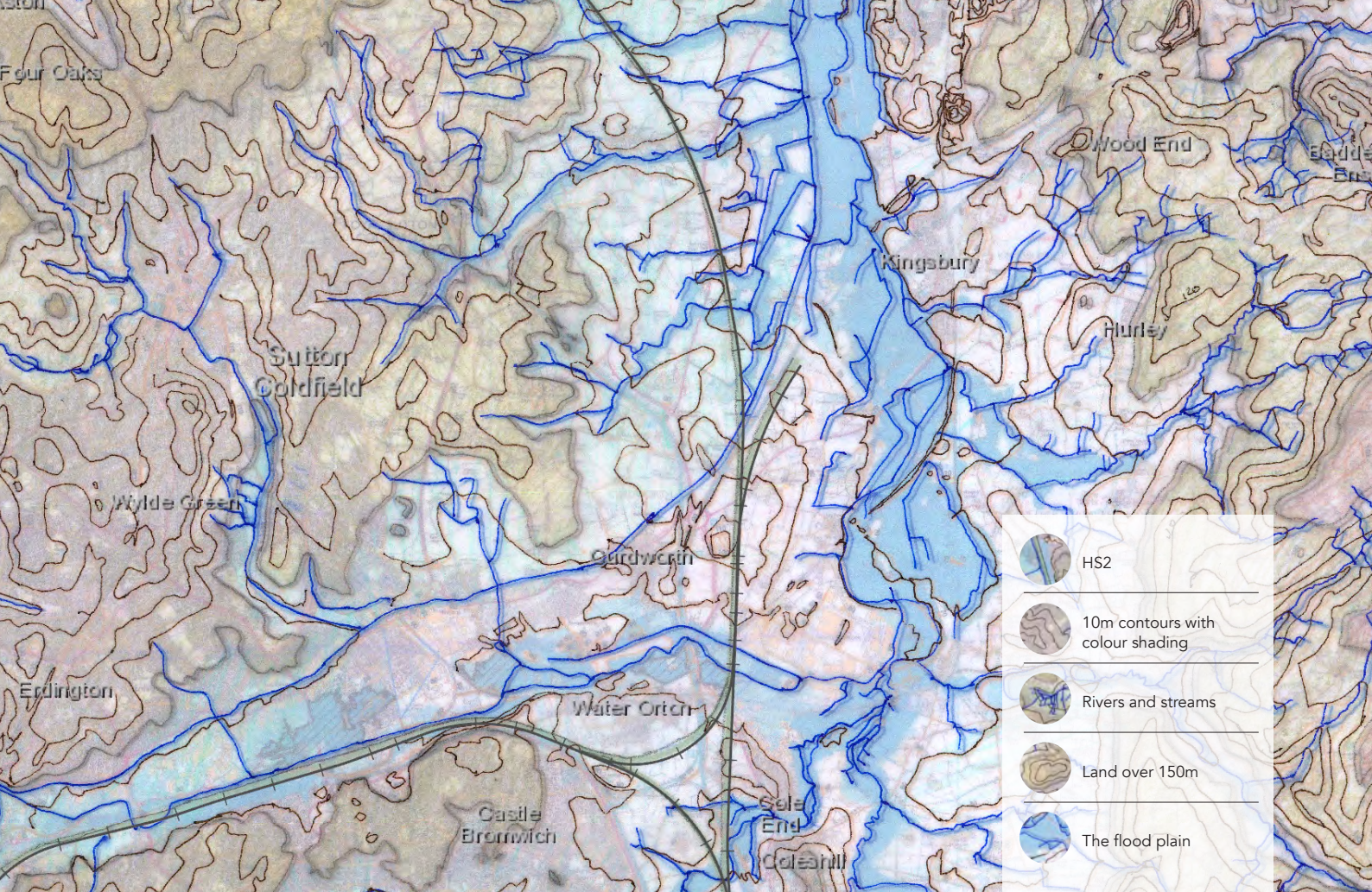
1. BCU's CATiD Hub exploits Critical Artistic Thinking in Design (CATiD) and works with UK and global partners to apply new insights to masterplanning and generate landscape visions for increased quality of life and benefitting communities and the economy.

Reinventing and rekindling the connection between the communities and the countryside in a way not experienced for decades

Vision

This ambitious proposal is to create the West Midlands National Park. It will help re-discover a vast landscape that has been hidden away and largely ignored for too long, reinventing and rekindling the connection between the communities and the countryside in a way not experienced for decades, recognising the pride people take in the space they inhabit, the identity and culture linked to that space, the cityscapes, neighbourhoods, towns and villages as much as woodlands and rivers. It is a modern, contemporary look at landscape.

Seeing the plateau of the West Midlands as a whole, as a significant watershed between two immense systems of rivers, streams and valleys, a nexus of agricultural regions, former ice sheets and diverse cultures, with an impressive industrial legacy utterly dependent on its physical landform, is to see landscape, not as something



fragmented into bite-size pieces, but as a functioning, powerful and complex ecosystem of canals, waterways, soil, air, geology, energy and communities in its own right. The very thing upon which sustainable development depends.

By opening up this unique landscape infrastructure in the heart of England, the myriad communities of the West Midlands will all benefit from its astonishing resources. With a 1000 miles network of trails and cycle routes connecting homes, schools, shops, cities, towns and villages, its numerous green and blue corridors will capture and store carbon, manage, cleanse and purify flood and storm-water, filter air, protect wildlife and repair habitats. An area of spectacular biodiversity with replenished, productive valleys, woodlands and extensive tree canopies, will provide food and skilled employment in land-based activities. The use of the valleys' abundant resources will help combat global challenges at a regional scale.

Who and how

This idea is so compelling that it has already gained considerable traction, nationally and internationally. It is important to capitalise on the keen interest expressed from all quarters – government, education, civil societies and business – and it is our intention to partner with these and other interested organisations, institutions and

communities to work collaboratively in order to achieve real change.

With the encouragement of the Rt Hon Dame Caroline Spelman MP and Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands Combined Authority in addition to the Environment Agency, the National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership and the Nobrega Foundation we are now establishing the means to take this project forward on to the next stage.

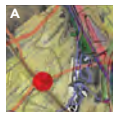
The West Midlands National Park proposal builds on the unique approach developed in the HS2 Landscape Vision (2010–15) and the Tame Valley Landscape Vision (2016) (see case studies illustrated on page 6–7 and 8–9) that have, during the course of the last seven years received support from Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, Emma Howard Boyd (Chair of the Environment Agency), David Higgins, HS2 Ltd, David Prout and Sir Brian Briscoe (formerly of HS2 Ltd), UNESCO, the Prince's Trust, the Canal and River Trust and a host of local institutions including the Chambers of Commerce from Birmingham and Solihull, Birmingham City Council, the Heart of England Forest, Smarter Cities, Birmingham, the Birmingham Metropolitan College, West Midlands Parks Forum, Directors of Public Health for local authorities and the Curzon Regeneration Board.

CASE STUDY: HS2LV 2012

KEY COMPONENTS

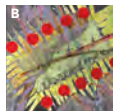
Economics and Governance

Using a different base line, with a different mindset, working practices and economic models, considering the long-term cost of out-dated 19th and 20th century practice, this proposal uses new governance models, sharing aspirations, costs and rewards, ensuring investment, development and long-term aftercare is not determined by landownership or individual stakeholders, but collaboratively by groups of key partners concerned with achieving the best solution spatially, visually and economically for the whole city.



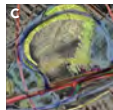
A. The Valleys

The proposal uses HS2 as the impetus and generator to resolve local and regional environmental problems, rather than compound them. Improving quality of life, environmental and educational facilities and economic potential for residents, students, visitors and employees, in 20–30 years the Tame, Rae and Blythe valleys will be award winning exemplars of low carbon development, be highly productive landscapes having a strong economic and cultural symbiotic relationship with the cities of Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull. A destination for ecological tourism and culinary expertise, there will be opportunities for local entrepreneurship, food technology and production with accommodation for digital media, engineering, creative studios and pods.



B. Birmingham Central Park: a major gateway into the city and entrance to the Tame Valley

HS2 Birmingham Station is located in Birmingham Central Park (BCP) stretching from Digbeth and the viaduct out to Millennium Point, from the city centre to the gasholders towards Washwood Heath. Addressed by major new commercial and residential development around the generous park boundary (comparable to Central Park in New York), it is connected by matrix of 100 new public squares and gardens into the rest of the city. BCP is an intense ecological, horticultural, botanical and agricultural display, a grand civic, public park.



C. Tame Valley: replenishment, purification and production

All development is low carbon, and addresses issues of health, education, biodiversity, agriculture, horticulture. It has a distinct "valley" identity. A productive valley landscape, there are allotments, fisheries, fields, orchards and forests and hi tech agriculture, green industries, and creative/media hubs. Canal and riverside developments provide homes, and employment, commercial, educational and training facilities. The Tame is reinstated with riffles, pools, cliffs and meanders, sweeping across from side to side across the valley, able to flood water meadows and fill retention pools.



Long distances footpaths, cycle paths, new bridges and minor roads traverse the valley, linking viewing platforms and vantage points, knitting the communities together, improving accessibility, employment, educational and cultural opportunities.

Water is pumped up from the aquifer in the most badly contaminated areas, cleansed and purified through a series of retention pools and lakes and fed back into the river system near Minworth.



D. Entrance to the Tame

As HS2 slows down to curve into the Tame valley, an impressive new sailing and swimming lake, sports centre and striking backdrop of woodland provides a striking and unexpected vision of Birmingham.

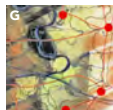
E. The City Boundary

The city boundary is reinforced by high quality development, which makes it very permeable to encourage access across and into the valleys.



Lines of wind turbines mark the horizon and demarcate the city, the forest of Arden is extended to emphasise the city boundary and to give a strong spatial cohesion and identity to the valley structure.

New residential and commercial developments, insulated against noise and air pollution, have fantastic views across the valleys. Development at the motorway junctions does not spill into the valley but encourages access and exchange from the city to the valleys and vice versa.

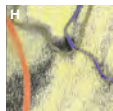


F. The Confluence

A new wetland centre and bird sanctuary at the confluence of the Tame and Blythe is a place for collection, exhibition and exchange of the unusual and creative, a centre for traditional knowledge and for design, ecology and manufacturing: a showcase catalogue for the spectacular work of the region.

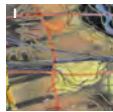
G. The Blythe Valley

Facilities are developed to promote ecological tourism, culinary courses, in rural crafts, traditional agricultural techniques, horticulture and gardening, as well as fishing, cycling, walking and birdwatching. Agricultural production is intensified, supplying a wide range of crops for local communities, visitors and microbreweries.



H. Cycling and Walking

Contributing to regional health strategies by prioritising cyclists and pedestrians over cars, cycleways and footpaths connect local facilities into and across the valleys. Frequent bridges connect communities across rivers, under motorways and across HS2. Within the valleys local and long distance routes connect hilltops and ridges giving views of the valley structure.

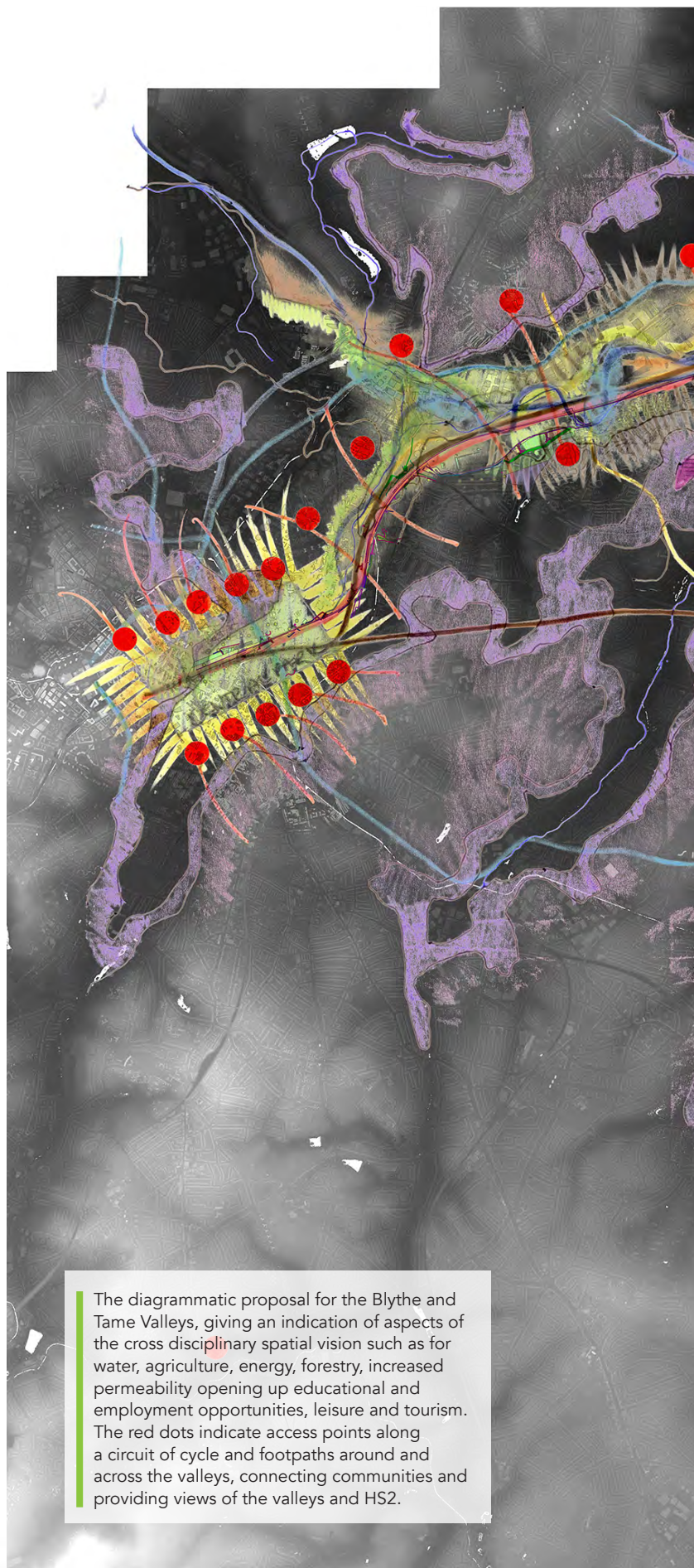


I. The Forests of Arden

Existing woodlands are extended and new ones planted to create legacy forests for future generations. Dramatic blocks symbolise the entrance into the Blythe Valley. Woodlands are structured to give views of the horizon along the length of the valley, across the valley and to key landmarks such as the BT Tower in Birmingham and the church spire at Coleshill.

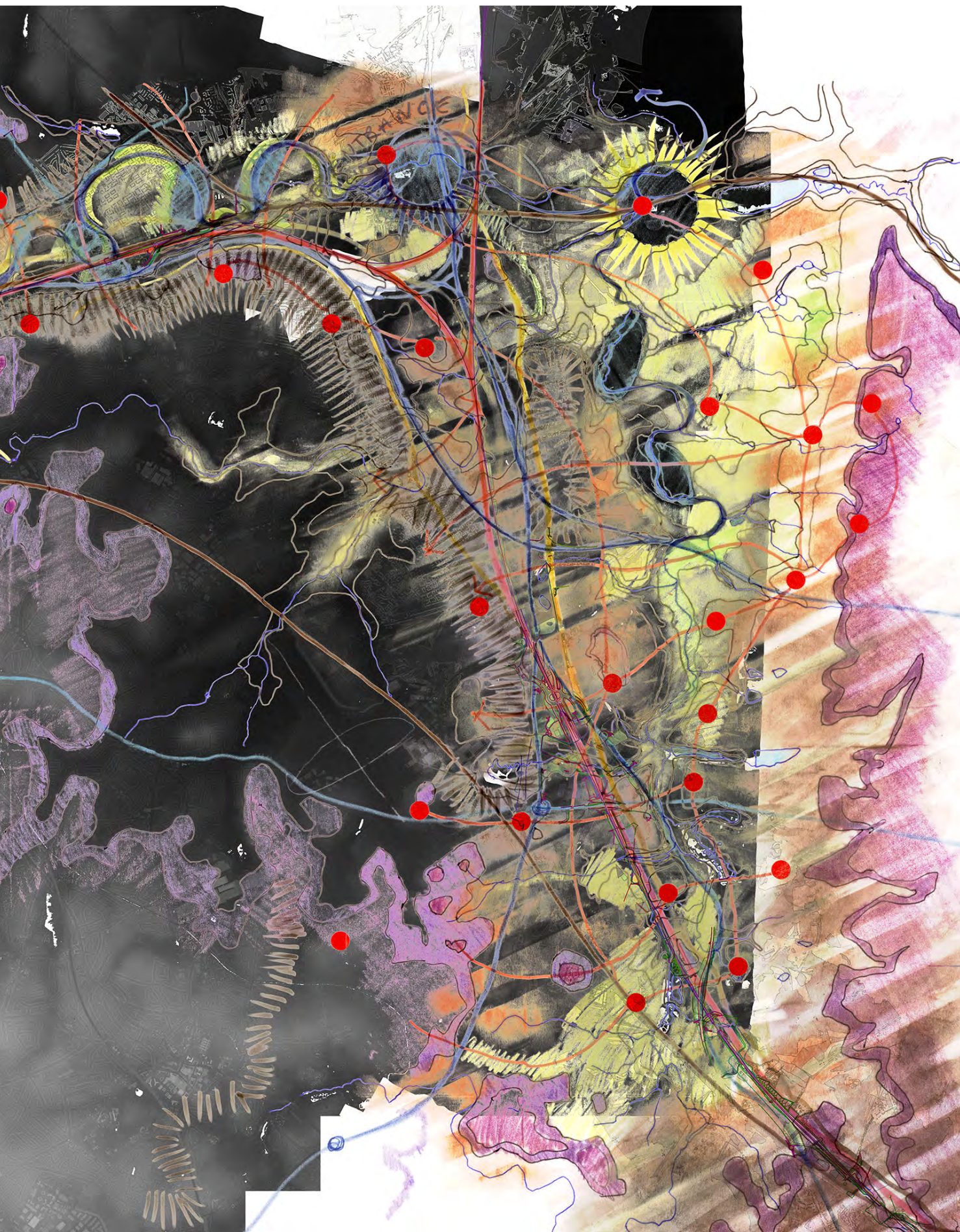
A – I. Micro Technology, Water and the Digital Landscape

The length of HS2 is utilised for fibre optic cables, climatic monitoring and forecasting, water storage, purification and distribution.



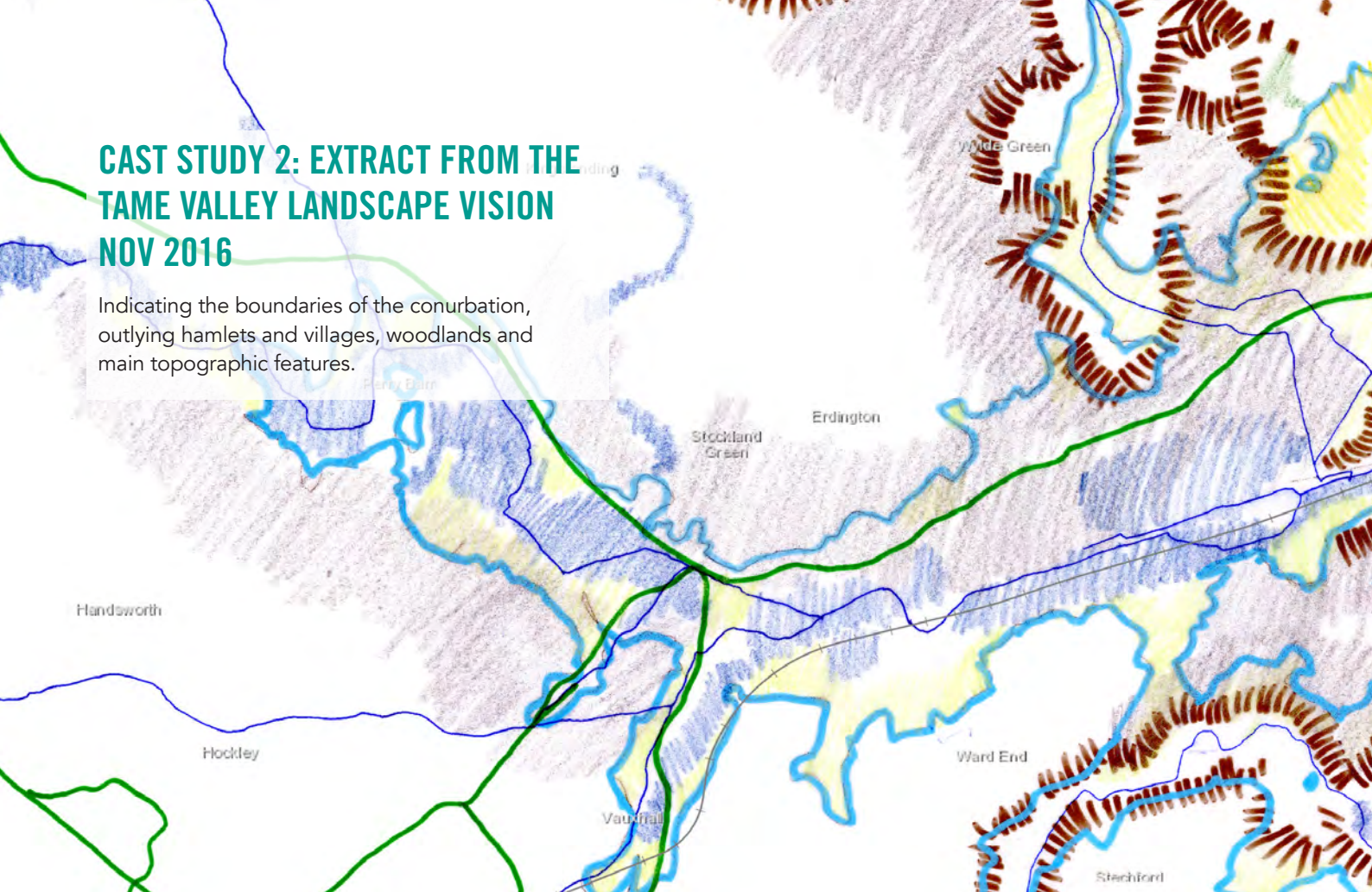
The diagrammatic proposal for the Blythe and Tame Valleys, giving an indication of aspects of the cross disciplinary spatial vision such as for water, agriculture, energy, forestry, increased permeability opening up educational and employment opportunities, leisure and tourism. The red dots indicate access points along a circuit of cycle and footpaths around and across the valleys, connecting communities and providing views of the valleys and HS2.

0 0.5 1 2 3 4 Kilometers



CAST STUDY 2: EXTRACT FROM THE TAME VALLEY LANDSCAPE VISION NOV 2016

Indicating the boundaries of the conurbation, outlying hamlets and villages, woodlands and main topographic features.



Potential sources of funding

Institutional funding has been provided by BCU to establish CATiD, led by Professor Kathryn Moore, to kick-start the project. We anticipate working collaboratively with a number of partners to gain further support to undertake its executive development and implementation. Currently, potential partners include the Department for Transport, DEFRA (via the Environment Agency and Natural England), Natural Improvement Area Funds, possibly from the Canal and River Trust, The Nobrega Foundation, local authorities (in kind) other HEI and FE institutions, local businesses and civil societies. Possible opportunities exist via the GBSLEP ERDF Sustainable Urban Development Fund. Other international and local sources are being investigated.

**This proposal puts quality of life,
health and well being front and
centre of the political agenda by
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Why is this a good thing to do?

This proposal puts quality of life, health and well being front and centre of the political agenda by properly engaging communities with place, location and environment. Increasingly it is recognised that traditional development practices have contributed to long-term social, economic and environmental loss or damage – the landscape is literally a blind spot in most regional economic strategies. Investigating an innovative and THIS approach to spatial planning and delivery based on an in-depth understanding of the physical materiality of the region, its social and cultural identity as well as environmental and economic drivers would undoubtedly be a first in the UK and could radically change the current perception of the West Midlands as a whole.

Water management, flood alleviation and replenishment

Water is the commodity that will be under more pressure than any other in the future. Climate change and an ever-expanding population means that we need to plan now to protect its future (see Water for Life).

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/publications/lifepublications/lifefocus/documents/waterlife.pdf>



The extent of the valley system of streams, tributaries, rivers and groundwater of the Tame, Blythe and Stour connects virtually all of our communities. It is a massive, powerful regional landscape that has a rich history and culture. This project will engage communities in its care, through interventions such as the creation of rainwater gardens, swales, traditional celebrations of water, ecological cleansing projects, habitat creation and making room for the river. It represents a significant change of emphasis in how we engage with the terrain of water in collaboration with the Environment Agency and Severn Trent.

Jobs, skills and tourism

By developing both traditional and new skills in sectors such as agriculture, horticulture, ecology and food production, a complementary range of employment to the manufacturing and technology sectors would be generated. It will give great impetus to local crafts and green skills as well as boosting tourism and activities based recreation, contributing to local identity, keeping the region healthy, thriving and economically sound.

UNESCO

UN agencies such as UNESCO and UNEP are interested in this project. The creation of a centre for traditional skills and knowledge will help establish relationships with UNESCO and the Nobrega Foundation, helping to develop new knowledge related to water management, agriculture and ecological stewardship of the land across the WMCA, in urban and rural areas.

Image and identity

Redefining the West Midlands in this way and the role it plays in the UK will inspire government, partners and stakeholders to provide sustained support and resources to further this vision and the WMCA region to compete far more effectively in the global battle for talent.

Legacy

This proposal will provide the context and legacy for Birmingham's Commonwealth Games 2022, spreading the physical environmental and community impact of the Games across the region. This would be a truly positive legacy with a focus on active, healthy lives, quality of life and well being for generations to come.

Sustainability goals and national strategies

Embedding a territorial approach within the institutional psyche and frameworks within the WMCA will enable it to take a leading role in planning and development, not only in the UK but internationally, led by a clear commitment to achieving the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It will help partners to develop their strategic plans such as the DEFRA 25-year Strategic Plan.

Engagement

The concept of the City of Valleys identified in the Tame Landscape Vision report has been described as being 'like discovering our pyramids' and 'Birmingham's answer to the Lake District!' Tapping into the great (and usually unacknowledged) bond between people and their landscape by introducing them to the region in a way that has not been seen before, encouraging participation in a host of events celebrating the physical qualities of the region promotes real community engagement, a sense of ownership and belonging. This can be a powerful economic generator. It will set great infrastructure projects such as HS2 in a meaningful regional context.

Connecting communities

Working across traditional boundaries through the landscape will connect people, disciplines, sectors, organisations and resources. Since the valleys touch every community, everyone from the conurbation has to play a part in its transformation, for example through the creation of sustainable urban drainage systems and rain gardens in the upper reaches of tributaries from Pelsall, Walsall and Solihull to New Arley to Polesworth, to environmental and cultural projects with landowners and in schools and universities as well as in the strategies of business, commerce, agriculture, civic society and government institutions.

Working collaboratively and across silos and boundaries

Working to deliver this vision will enable us to develop the strategy, policy and activity needed to forge an inclusive, integrated and cohesive approach to landscape and infrastructure, based on an in depth understanding of the physical, materiality of the region, its identity, social, cultural, environmental and economic drivers including water, soil, air quality, biodiversity, agriculture, health, transport and digital networks. It can be used to encourage collaborative working across silos and boundaries adding considerable value to the many different sectors and strategies that have spatial implications regionally.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This proposal represents a strategic spatial vision to deal with the challenges faced by the WMCA relating to regeneration, environment, transport, identity, infrastructure, employment and skills. A radically different view with international significance, it will become the benchmark by which others can measure progress and would demonstrate a truly holistic approach to the management of the environment in the most sustainable way for now and into the future.

It is driven by a commitment to cement the WMCA's reputation as a leading global destination based on its quality of life for local people, business, tourism and education, by integrating the work of partners and collaborators to ensure that future generations choose to stay in the region because of the high quality of life, environment, employment and educational opportunities.

KEY STAGES

The first of these is to set up a number of interrelated mechanisms to allow a regional partnership to be formed and operate across boundaries to develop this approach to spatial planning and delivery. These mechanisms will complement rather than compete with existing national, regional and local structures.

We suggest therefore that the WMCA:

Establishes the Landscape and Infrastructure Advisory Board to provide strategic advice on the big spatial issues and infrastructure across WMCA to help achieve this vision (see attached report)

Facilitates collaborative partnerships and pump priming to enable CATiD to undertake the executive development of this project, bringing in a high level team together under BCU, to deepen the collaborative ethos and develop the strategy and projects together. This broader alliance of public, private and not-for-profit organisations, could include organisations such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, the National Trust, UNESCO, the Maria Nobrega Foundation and the International Traditional Knowledge Institute, the Midlands Engine, HS2 Ltd, Severn Trent Water, Wildlife Trusts, local cities, counties and districts in order to anchor this vision into broader regional strategic policies

Commissions CATiD, with its unique skill set, to undertake in collaboration with its partners, the detailed development of this project including:

- 1 The proposal for an Urban Regional/National Park as both the context and legacy for the 2022 Commonwealth Games and as a precursor to the West Midlands National Park.
- 2 A series of WMCA spatial studies/visions at landscape scale to guide and shape employment, housing, health, tourism, food, environmental and cultural strategies.
- 3 Defining the business case to set out the potential benefits of the investment.
- 4 A programme of conferences, exhibitions and public engagement events to maximise publicity and media impact for this proposal (initial event proposed for 23 March 2018) to encourage new partnerships.

COSTS

The cost depends on the scale, scope, speed of development and partner contributions. At this point it is expected that the costs will be:

Executive development

£350,000 pa for 3 years.

Phase 1 implementation (2018–2020)

To be agreed and developed in conjunction with HS2/DFT and other partners.

Phase 2 (2020–2022)

Future stages to be agreed and developed in conjunction with HS2/DFT and other partners.

Other phases to be discussed

ANNEX 1

CREATING A NATIONAL PARK FOR THE WEST MIDLANDS

Issues

The 1949 Act of Parliament was passed to establish national parks to preserve and enhance their natural beauty and provide recreational opportunities for the public. There are currently 15 NP'S and a long list of authorities hoping to establish more.

- Achieving National Park status is a heavily regulated, lengthy and competitive process via Natural England, the National Park Authority and Parliament. The latest park, the South Downs, took 20 years to gain NP status.
- The Midland Plateau would not be recognised as traditional NP territory and might come up against considerable resistance from those who fiercely protect the brand.
- The restrictive nature of the NP legislation may alienate some landowners and users.

The difficulty in creating a national park is the primary reason why London is pursuing the concept of 'London City National Park' and Manchester, the 'Manchester City of Trees'. Without needing the same statutory planning framework or having the same level of support these are easier to establish than a National Park. Along these lines we could initiate a West Midlands Urban Regional Park as a precursor to a West Midlands National Park. Or we could be brave and forward a proposal for the West Midlands National Park, to be achieved by this new way of looking at landscape, one that is suitable and relevant to the 21st century ideals, values and challenges.

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