

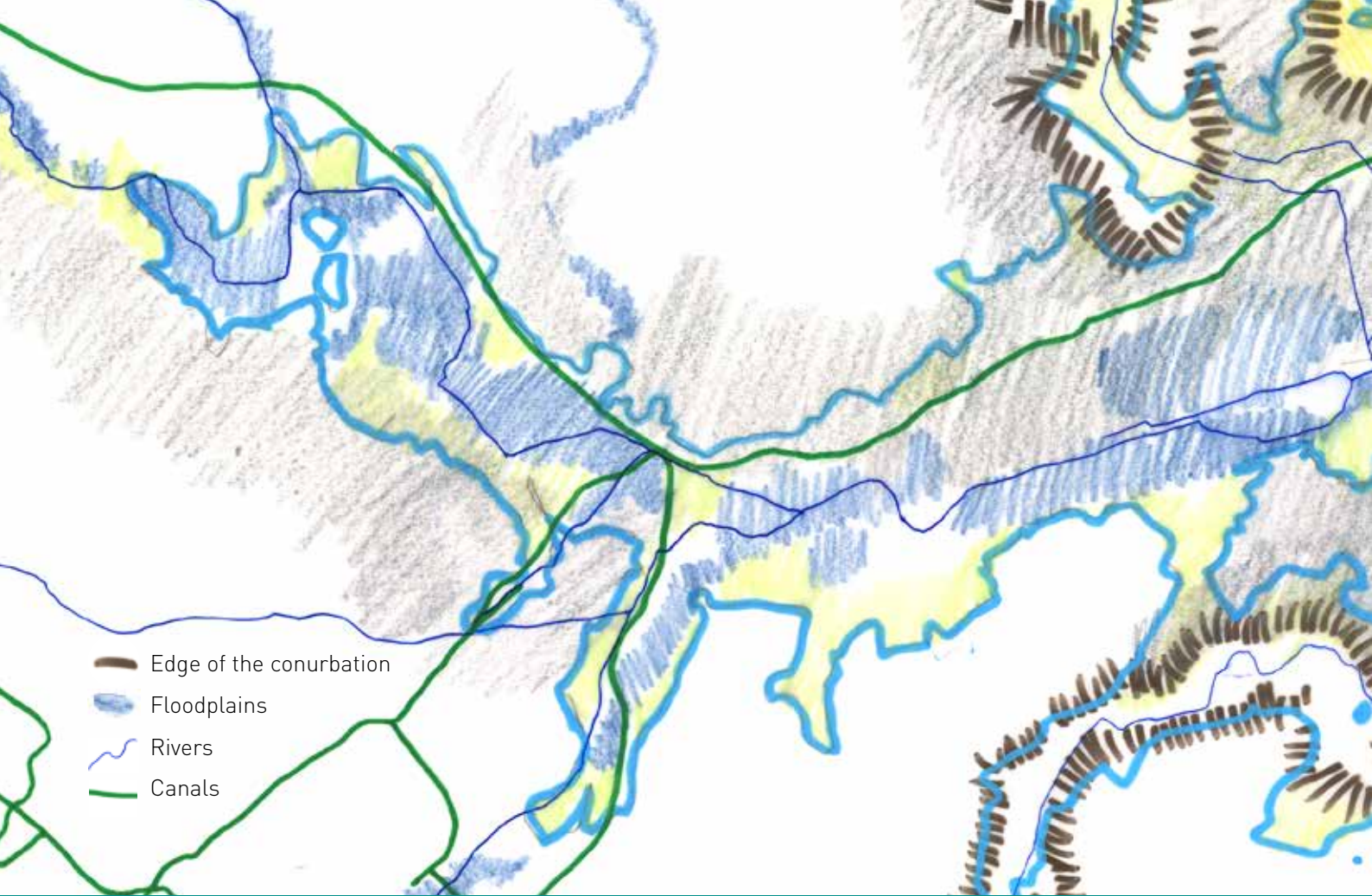
THE TAME VALLEY LANDSCAPE VISION DEVELOPMENT

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Commissioned by the Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership

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A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME
OPPORTUNITY TO
RE-SHAPE THE
LANDSCAPE IN ENGLAND
BY SEIZING THE
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REKINDLE THE
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SYNOPSIS

The boroughs of North Warwickshire and Tamworth are under major development pressures from new housing, industrial and infrastructure projects. HS2 is the largest infrastructure project in Europe and provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to re-shape the landscape in England by seizing the opportunity to reinvent and rekindle the connection between the people and the countryside in a way not seen for decades. This makes it an important time for the authorities in the region, including Birmingham City Council, North Warwickshire Borough Council, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Tamworth Borough Council, Warwickshire and Staffordshire County Councils as well as the cross authority groupings, such as the Combined Authority, the Midlands Engine and the Local Economic Partnerships. Pressure from development has provided the catalyst to consider the Tame Valley in the context of strategic regional environmental, social and economic concerns.

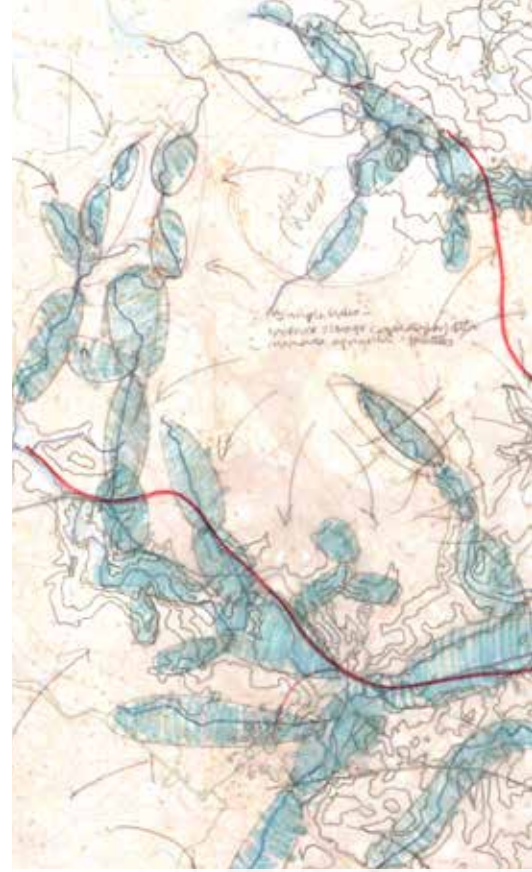
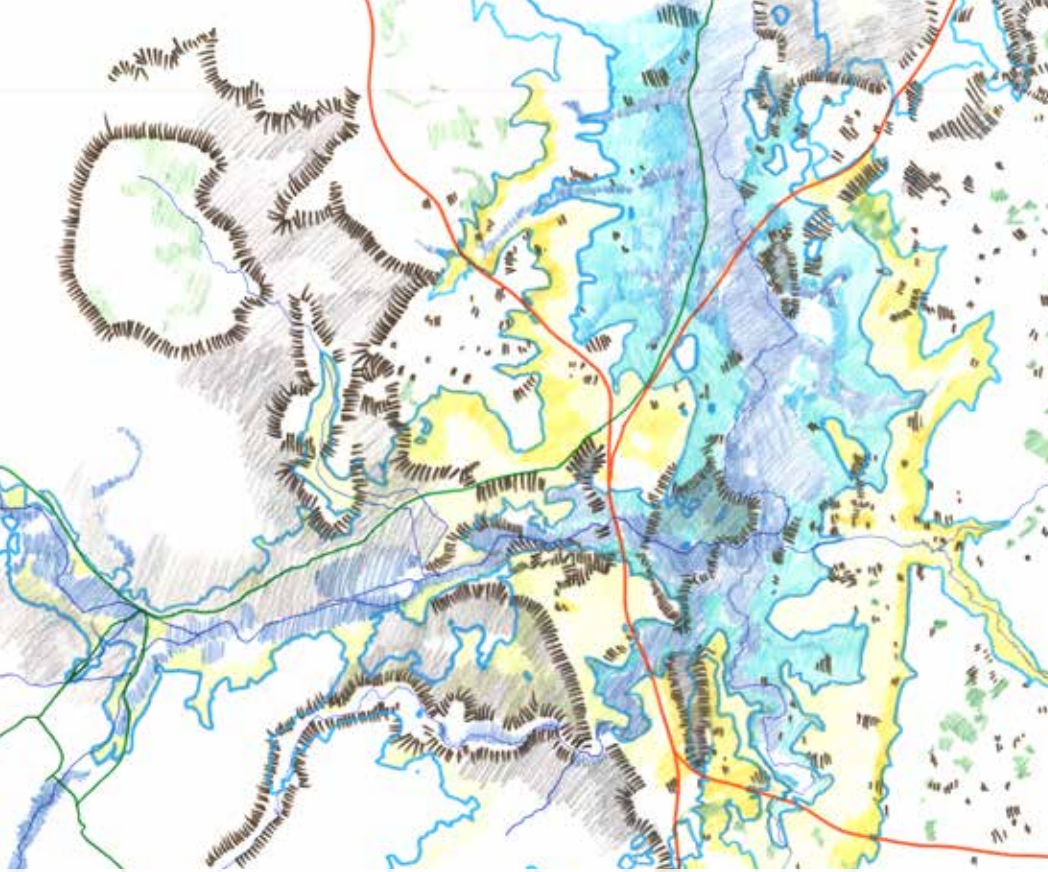


The main conclusion of this study is to flag the immense capacity the valley has to help the region face the challenges of substantial predicted growth, an urgent need to address climate change, food and water security and threats to biodiversity as well as the need to deal with shifting populations. It can play a vital role in improving the quality of life, health and well-being, which will boost economic prosperity, attract new business, tourism and improve the region's cultural offer. The area has the potential to accommodate a significant proportion of the new homes required, as well as vital ecosystem services and could become an important 'habitat bank' benefiting from biodiversity offsetting. On the basis of the work undertaken so far it would be possible to provide a well-argued and convincing narrative to support the protection of the landscape and the countryside that characterises much of it. If this plan and its recommendations are adopted, it will, over a 25-year period, ensure that the East and West Midlands will be well prepared to compete on the national if not global stage and will give a tremendous economic, social and environmental boost to local communities.

STUDY AREA

To many, the Tame Valley and its wetlands is an unknown asset for the UK. Rich with wetlands, SSSI's, ancient woodlands and an AONB, it is a highly important migratory route for birds. It encompasses four of Natural England's National Character Areas, with a range of strategic environmental objectives. For more details see the Natural England website.

The purpose of this report is to demonstrate the great potential the valley has to provide a substantial ecological, cultural and economic role in the future of the region. The area studied, defined by topography and landscape rather than administrative boundaries, includes the Tame Valley as it rises out of the Black Country from Wolverhampton and Walsall, reaching into Birmingham and cutting eastwards under the Spaghetti junction with the significant tributaries of the Rea, Cole and the Blythe SSSI as it flows into North Warwickshire towards Tamworth. To the east of Birmingham it incorporates the western fringes of Coventry, eastern periphery of Birmingham and Solihull and the Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership area



The edges of Birmingham, Tamworth and scattered development in the Tame Valley floodplains and low lying land.

Making visible a massive, powerful and hidden regional landscape that has a rich history and culture and connects virtually all of our communities.

covering a large proportion of the borough of North Warwickshire and encompasses the Saxon town of Tamworth. To the northeast it includes the Anker Valley and there is the opportunity to extend the study area into the East Midlands towards Nottingham and Leicester.

Geographically low lying, wet and boggy and generally unsuitable for residential development the valleys have traditionally accommodated ground hungry and/or the less attractive functions of the city – sewage works, industry, the infrastructure of transport, power and domestic landfill. Quarried for sand, gravel and clay, the valleys have been filled by industrial waste and contaminants from the industrial era. Agricultural products traditionally included fish farming, watercress, strawberries, and timber. Recreational facilities included horse racing, cycling and onion fairs. The Tame Valley between Birmingham and Tamworth, although once heavily degraded and damaged, is now cleaner and home to important agriculture and recreation and the largest series of interconnected waterways and wetlands in the region. The gently rolling Blythe Valley to the south east of Birmingham has

33km of SSSI and a vast landfill site close to the airport. www.tamevalleywetlands.co.uk

Bounded by a fault line to the east and the uplifted sandstone plateau of the Birmingham conurbation to the west, the valley has been occupied by several major road interventions of the late 20th century, a large housing estate for those relocated by the A38M/Spaghetti Junction project, a growing number of distribution centres and other kinds of large shed developments. The route for HS2 follows the valley alignment from Coventry to the south of Tamworth and from Solihull into the city centre of Birmingham.

THE FORGOTTEN LANDSCAPE

This immense valley and floodplain on the periphery of the towns and cities of the conurbation is close to about 2.0 mi people, but is almost invisible. The valley structure is literally hidden from view by the built development. It is virtually impossible to access because of the infrastructure that skirts around Birmingham and snakes along and across the valley, including railways, powerlines, the M6,



Transforming the region to give it a strategic advantage that quite literally comes with the territory.

Spaghetti Junction, M42, A38, A47, A452, A5 and A45. Dissecting the city, the Tame Valley is practically impossible to cross even by car – it is seen as a place to avoid rather than visit or enjoy, a kind of cultural no-go area. The Blythe and Tame valleys are visible from the escarpment to the east, but there is very little tourism infrastructure to makes the most of this extraordinary landscape.

In planning the city, distracted by an over emphasis on built development, the white space at the edge of towns and cities (if plans are even produced) is thought to be blank, available, flat and up for grabs. We have lost our connection with the landscape, as well as any way of seeing and understanding its profound importance in our everyday life and culture. The valley is peripheral and forgotten. Ignored and abused for too long, it is time to turn things around – the cost of continuing “business as usual” is far too high, as many institutions are now recognizing, “... poorly managed natural capital ... becomes not only an ecological liability but a social and economic liability too” (see <http://naturalcapitalforum.com/about/>).

VISION: THE CITY OF VALLEYS, WATERWAYS AND WALKS

A series of mapping, topographical and digital studies reveals the vast extent of the valley system of streams, tributaries, rivers and groundwater of the Tame, demonstrating that it connects virtually all of our communities. A massive, powerful and hidden regional landscape that has a rich history and culture, it is capable of contributing significantly to current challenges. 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>

Putting the Tame at the heart of the region will help to redefine the Midlands and the role it plays in the UK. Seeing this vast area as a whole, not as fragmented bits and pieces on the outskirts of major towns and cities, but as a functioning, powerful and complex ecosystem of canals, waterways and communities in its own right, (like

a green/blue lung) will make it as culturally dynamic and physically significant as the Emerald Necklace in Boston, an ecological and horticultural version of the Royal Parks in London and as valuable as the Intertwine in Portland, Vancouver.

Its clear topographical definition, preventing erosion of its extent and character, particularly by the nibbling away of its structure by peripheral development, will enable it to become a large, visually striking and coherent landscape, through which the major transport arteries of the UK pass. Since the valley touches 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 and government institutions.

The Tame Valley, its canals and rivers, hidden for so long, will become renowned as a place to live near, overlook and enjoy, not only to travel through on foot or by bike but as a local destination in its own right, stimulating good health, boosting the economy and creating a great sense of identity and place. A unique vast green infrastructure in the heart of England, this astonishing resource, marking the beginning of a footpath from the middle of England to the North Sea, will have 1000-mile network of footpaths, trails and cycle routes connecting homes, schools and shops. It will capture and store carbon, manage, store, cleanse and purify flood and stormwater, filter air, protect wildlife and repair habitats. A game changer, it will become the benchmark to which others measure against and would demonstrate a truly holistic approach to the management of the environment in the most sustainable way for now and into the future.

The region's inherent beauty, views, skylines and minimal light pollution will be a captivating draw to employees and business, giving the region a strategic advantage that "literally comes with the territory" (Intertwine 2012). New kinds of urban living built on the higher ground overlooking the valley with expansive views, a strongly defined boundaries and a strikingly clear identity, this permeable development will re-establish a powerful symbiotic relationship between the conurbation and its landscape.

With the help of its partners and through engaging other key stakeholders, the Tame Valley will become renowned for developing traditional and new skills, supplying food and other land based products as well as creative industries for local communities to help build up resilience and contribute to its local identity, keeping the region healthy, thriving and economically sound. Evidence for example, from ECONorthwest shows that homes located near and overlooking the parklands of Portland Vancouver can be worth as much as 20 to 30% more than identical homes elsewhere.

THE TAME VALLEY WETLANDS LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP – A BRIEF CASE STUDY



VISION

TO CREATE A WETLAND LANDSCAPE, RICH IN WILDLIFE AND ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

The Tame Valley Wetlands Landscape Partnership (TVWLP), set up in 2005 is currently delivering a large landscape-scale scheme with local people, waterways, heritage and wildlife at its heart. Located between Birmingham, Solihull and Tamworth, in North Warwickshire and south east Staffordshire, it is led by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and a variety of organisations including local councils, groups, charities and statutory bodies.

Its vision is 'to create a wetland landscape, rich in wildlife and accessible to all' across a 104km² area of the Tame Valley landscape. Its vision, to make the landscape 'bigger, better and more joined up' mirrors that of other partnerships and visions in the Tame Valley, such as the 'Bigger and Better' collaborative 2050 vision for the Trent and Tame River Valleys (2014), The Wildlife Trusts' Living Landscape and RSPB's Futurescape approaches, the Lawton Review (2011) and the UK Government's Natural Environment White Paper (2012). Visit www.tamevalleywetlands.co.uk for more information on the TVWLP. TVWLP Board members: TVWLP Board Members: Canal & River Trust, Environment Agency, North Warwickshire Borough Council, the RSPB, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Warwickshire County Council and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

NEXT STEPS

Integrating the TVWLP vision into what the region could become in 25 years time, this study is based on an idea that is so compelling it will galvanise considerable local and international support. It could lead to new ways of delivering infrastructure, with the multidisciplinary spatial landscape vision and quality agenda at its heart, guided by a number of interwoven social, spatial, environmental and cultural strategies, with aims to promote social cohesion and community engagement, increase aspirations, demand higher standards and create an upward spiral leading to better development. It is driven by a commitment to cement the region's reputation as a leading global destination based on its quality of life for local people, business, tourism and education.

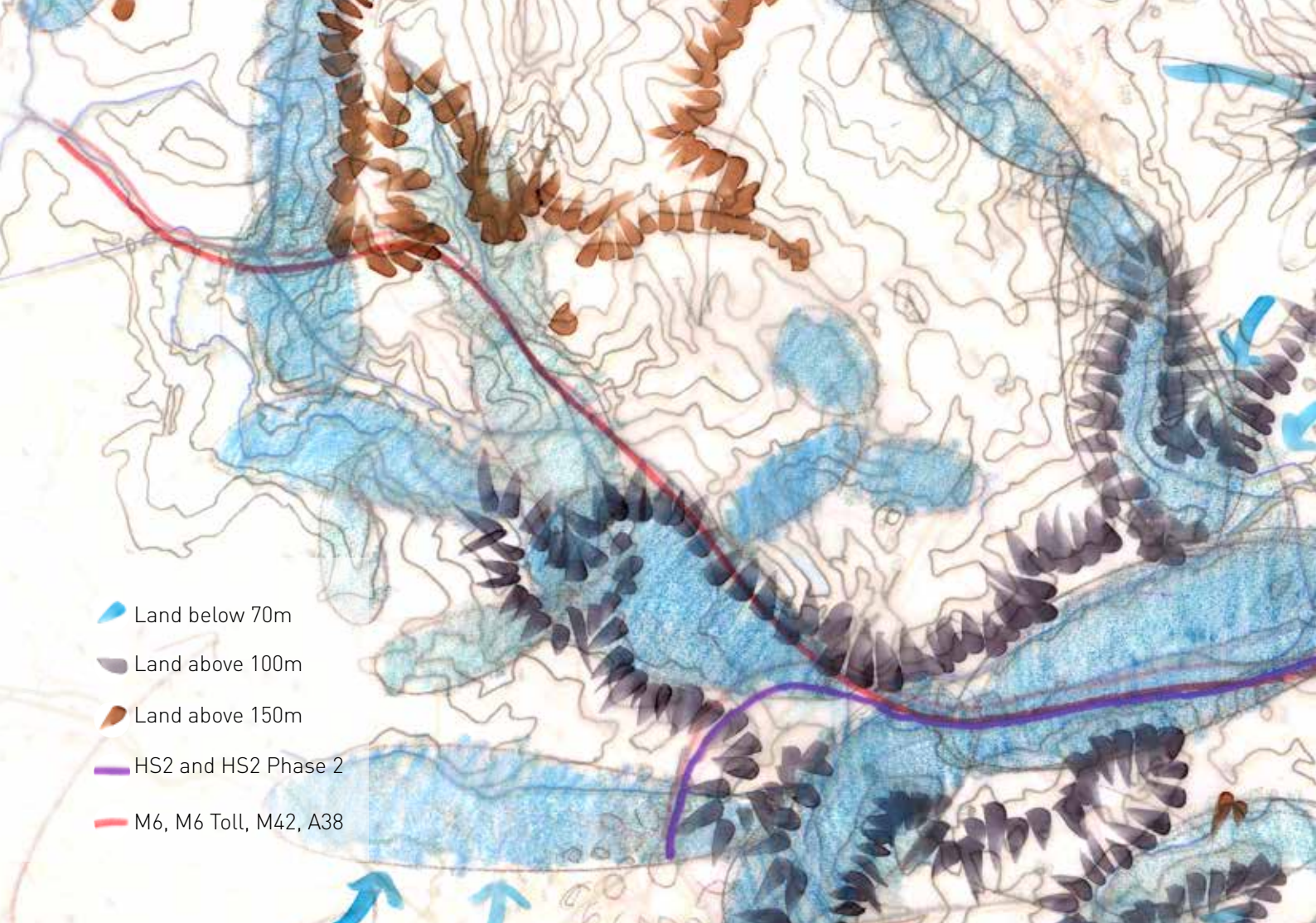
Based on research of the best international practice, mapping and topographical studies, site visits and briefings, a conference, workshop and consultations with key decision makers, it was prompted by the need to consider the opportunities and challenges offered to the TVWLP and the valley structure as a whole by HS2, which will impact on many communities during its construction and its long-term operation.

Giving a different agenda to guide future development, this regional blueprint is a new way to lead and shape strategies for employment, housing, health, tourism and food as well as environmental and cultural strategies. It will provide a sustainable and positive legacy for the current TVWLP Scheme and set out the next steps and future strategy for the Tame Valley Wetlands landscape, as well as linking wider areas, partnerships, visions and strategies together to provide an overall direction for the whole of the Tame Valley.

References

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