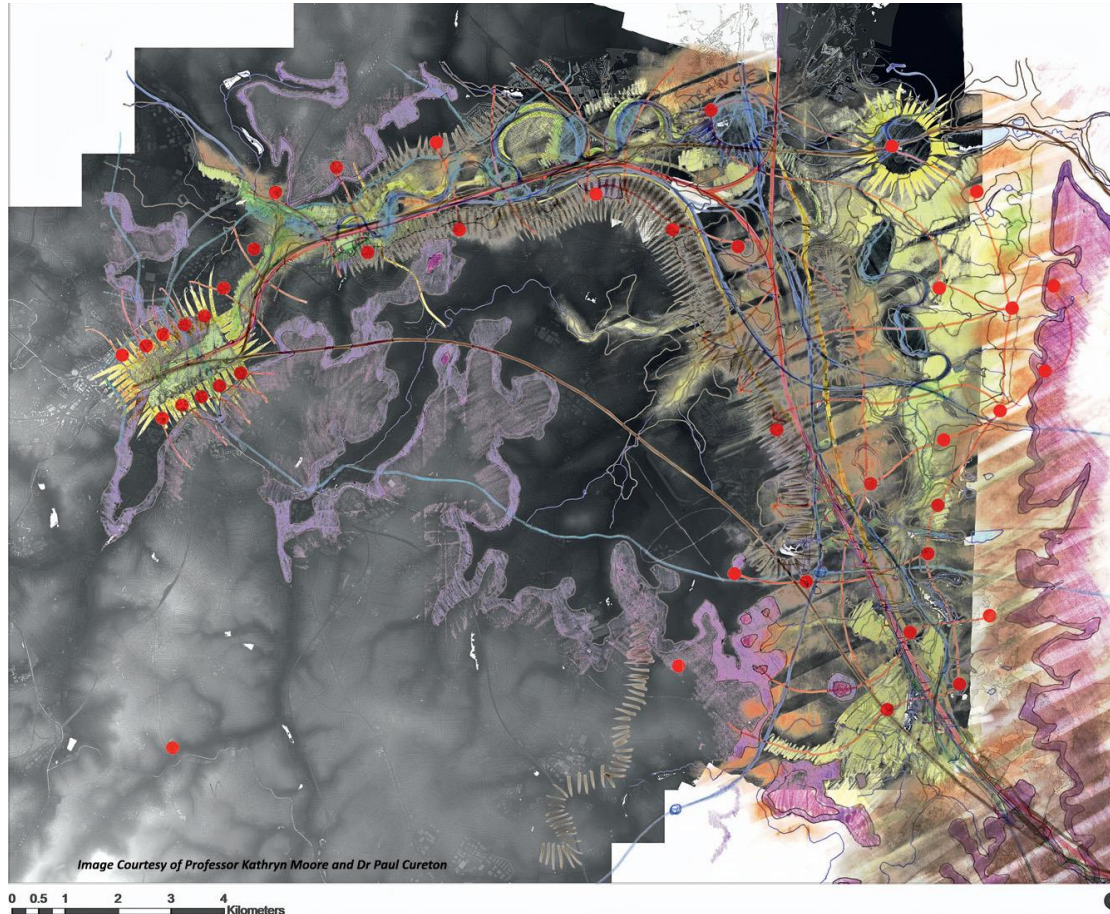


A National Park for the West Midlands

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With the youngest, fastest growing, most diverse population in the UK, the imminent arrival of HS2 and the hosting of City of Culture 2021 and the Commonwealth Games, the West Midlands has a unique opportunity to re-discover a vast, hidden landscape that has been largely overlooked and undervalued for decades.

The West Midlands plateau, a watershed between two of the largest river systems in the United Kingdom, is one of the most geologically diverse regions in the world. Previously an area of dense woodland, its matrix of valleys stretches from the Black Country, the crucible of the industrial revolution, to Birmingham, once the city of a thousand trades and now one of the most rapidly developing business hubs in Europe, from Medieval Coventry to the Saxon town of Tamworth. This immense rolling landscape, the nexus of the UK's major agricultural regions, with its complex infrastructure of canals, highways and byways is married to some of the most beautiful, forgotten areas in Britain and awaits a re-imagining for millions of people with the creation of a West Midland National Park (WMNP).

Proposing a new concept for the West Midlands National Park will not only enable social, cultural, economic and environmental change in the region, but it is also a step towards many of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the area. The WMNP proposal takes the climate emergency under consideration and identifies ways in which a low carbon design can be successful on a regional scale. This is a vision of what the West Midlands could become when the significance of its landscape is properly realised and celebrated. It will profoundly change the identity of the region.

The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) offers a perfect platform for people to create and develop the capacity to introduce new skills to the wider world and to profoundly change the identity of the region through this ambitious vision. Our proposal for a National Park for the West Midlands (WMNP) aims to utilise major strategic initiatives throughout the region to create a new type of a National Park which champions the relationship between people and place: A relationship that shapes our cultural identity, pride and self-confidence, and which rightly acknowledges the landscape as being the matrix within which all development occurs. It aims to create improved collaborative and citizen-engaged solutions which focus on the relationship communities have with a landscape, as well as support the positioning of UK agriculture, which is on the verge of a second agricultural revolution, and a gathering world focus on high-tech agronomy, reforestation, organic growing, water storage and cleansing.

Image 1 – WMCA map

The West Midlands with its muscular, working landscape is inextricably linked to the extraordinary imaginations of its foremost industrialists, scientists and thinkers such as James Brindley, Thomas Telford, James Watt and Matthew Boulton, members of the Lunar Society and founders of the Midlands Enlightenment, the park would be a living and lasting testimony to their vision and ambition. Rekindling and re-inventing the connection between communities and the space they inhabit, recognising the pride people take in that space, its cultural identity be it urban, suburban or rural is very much a modern, contemporary view of how our landscapes work. This is what the West Midlands National Park is all about. With 1,000 miles of tracks and trails, 1,000 lakes and 1,000 miles of rivers and streams and more canals than Venice. A mighty, rolling landscape with an abundance of woodland, heathland, hills and valleys with open country, working farms, small villages and larger towns. Great walking country for serious hikers or gentle strollers out looking for a place to picnic, for runners, riders, bikers and anglers, there is a huge diversity here that quite literally goes with the territory.

Image 2. Dudley Borough Council

Looking into the future, this proposal supports the West Midlands, but it can also become a pioneer example for other cities and regions. The vision aligns with many of the UN 2030 SDGs and demonstrates how these could be interpreted in as part of strategic development. The concept of regenerating the whole area and visioning a sustainable and environmentally resilient region fits with the ‘Sustainable Cities and Communities’ goal (No11), projects on water management, the Tame and Blythe valleys and other locations are strongly related with goals number 14 (Life below water), 6 (Clean water and Sanitation) and 15 (Life on land) while ‘Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (No 9), Partnerships for the goals (No 17) and Good health and well-being (No 3) are addressed by an economic and entrepreneurial vision that will significantly impact on health and living of all communities.

The National Park for the West Midlands proposal will give us a perfect storm of opportunity to re-imagine a long-forgotten landscape, creating a living, working national park, for jobs, education, good health and well-being, leisure and above all, for a high-grade, sustainable environment. Because the quality of our environment is equal to the quality of our lives, it is an equation as simple as it is compelling.

Image 3 – HS2LV

IMAGE CAPTIONS:

Cover Photo *(named in email Cover Photo)*

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Other Photos

- **Image 1** *(named WMCA Map)*

TITLE: The Boundary of the West Midlands Combined Authority

Image Credits: Contains OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2017

- **Image 2** *(named Dudley Bumble Hole Local Nature reserve)*

TITLE: Bumble Hole Local Nature Reserve

Image credits: © Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

- **Image 3** *(named in email HS2LV Map)*

TITLE : HS2LV 2012/2015

HS2LV is a proposal to transform the High Speed 2 (HS2) rail link, the UK’s largest infrastructure project for generations, from a linear engineering scheme into an iconic

land-scape vision that would be a catalyst for wider social and economic transformation.

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 high points along a circuit of cycle and footpaths around and across the valleys, connecting communities, providing access to the city and valley system as well as views of HS2.

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Author Bios and Photos attached in separate documents.