

Case Study 3: HS2 Balsall Common Viaduct

Background



Figure 1. An artist's impression of Balsall Common Viaduct

The HS2 route will be elevated and travel along a viaduct as it passes Balsall Common on the north-eastern side of the existing Network Rail line. The viaduct will be 425m long, approximately 10m above ground level crossing over Station Road, Bayleys Brook, Heart of England Way Walk and the associated floodplain. It will cross an area of native species grassland with trees, and a wetland close to Bayleys Brook that includes several fishing lakes. As HS2 transversing through this landscape, it and its construction has the potential to cause the following fragmentation issues;

- **Field Boundary Preservation and Hedgerow Connectivity:** Preserving field boundaries is critical for maintaining the ecological integrity of a landscape. Hedgerow connectivity, in particular, ensures that natural habitats and wildlife corridors are protected, fostering biodiversity and a balanced ecosystem.
- **Integration into Rural Setting:** Seamless integration of any development into a rural setting is vital to uphold the charm and character of the surrounding environment. This involves careful planning to harmonize architectural elements with the existing landscape, minimizing disruption to the natural flow of the rural scenery.
- **Maintain Views:** The preservation of unobstructed views is essential for both aesthetic and environmental reasons. Protecting scenic vistas contributes to the overall visual appeal of the landscape, while also acknowledging the psychological and recreational benefits associated with open, expansive views.

- **Restore the Environment:** Addressing environmental degradation is a key challenge in fragmented landscapes. Restoration efforts may involve reforestation, soil conservation measures, and sustainable land management practices to counteract the impact of development and promote the recovery of natural ecosystems.
- **Footpath Connectivity:** Ensuring footpath connectivity is crucial for enhancing accessibility, recreation, and community engagement. Well-planned footpaths not only facilitate movement but also encourage outdoor activities, fostering a sense of connection between individuals and the natural spaces within the fragmented landscape



Figure 2. Design Principals for Balsall Common Viaduct from the public exhibition boards

The Landscape Strategy for Balsall Common Viaduct to preserve the GI revolves around key aims, implementing strategies in line with the HS2 landscape design principles of 'Conserve,' 'Enhance,' and 'Restore.' The comprehensive approach aims to address multiple aspects including the fragmentation issues as listed above, ensuring minimal impact on the landscape, local ecology, and cherished countryside views.

- **Minimize Impacts of HS2:** The primary focus is on minimizing the impact of HS2 on the landscape, local ecology, and panoramic views enjoyed by the community. This involves careful planning to preserve the intrinsic character of the surroundings.
- **Maintain Connectivity Networks:** An integral part of the strategy is the preservation of existing public rights of way and local connectivity networks, fostering accessibility and maintaining the social fabric of the area. The Viaduct design maintains existing public rights of way, enhances local habitats, and respect the existing rural character of the landscape.

- Protect and Enhance Habitats: The design places emphasis on protecting and enhancing existing habitats near the route, promoting biodiversity and ecological resilience. Native species in this location are selected to contribute to the sustainability of the local ecosystem.
- Reflecting Rural Character: Respecting the rural character of the landscape involves specifying plant species indigenous to the area, creating a harmonious blend between human development and the natural environment. The design aims to minimise the impact of HS2 on the landscape, rural setting and views of the countryside,
- Reveal and Reflect Theme: The landscape design at Balsall Common Viaduct follows the 'Reveal and Reflect' theme, focusing on revealing scenic views through the landscape while reflecting the sky and surroundings on polished parapets, enhancing the visual appeal.
- Woodland Planting and Species Choice: Planting choices in the design of the Viaduct include wet woodland and mixed native woodland plants, reflecting the local flora. The selection is informed by the National Vegetation Classification and aims to create woodland suited to local conditions.
- Conserve, Enhance, Restore: The 'Conserve' approach in the Viaduct design preserves the local field boundary pattern and historic features, while 'Enhance' involves blending structures into rural surroundings. The 'Restore' strategy enhances hedgerow connectivity and allows for views under the structure, promoting visual and ecological connectivity.
- Habitat Restoration and Seeding Typologies: The restoration strategy extends to Bayleys Brook, identifying locally important fish species and incorporating measures to enhance habitat for aquatic life. Proposals include wildflower seeding mixes and bird boxes to support local fauna.

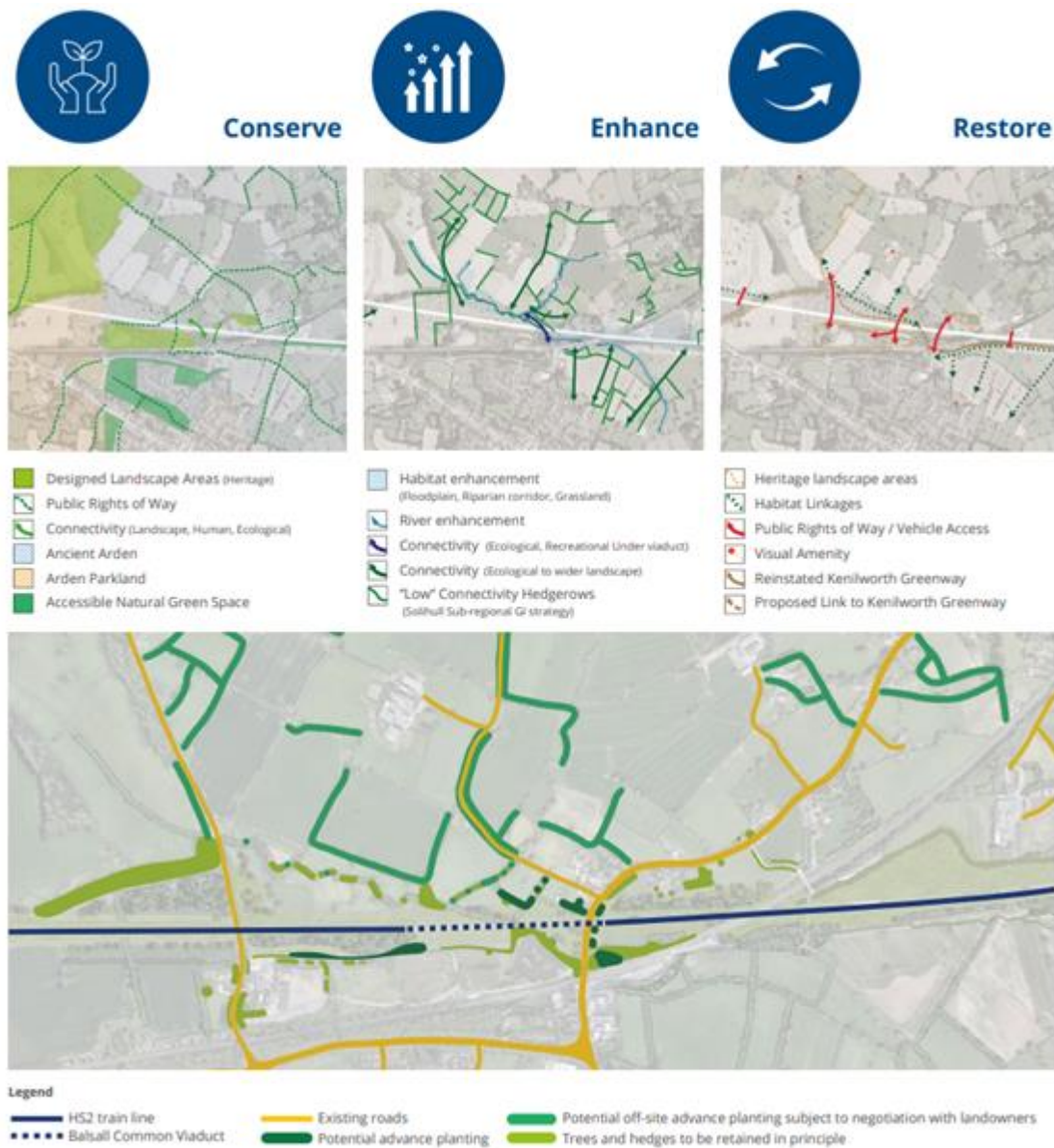


Figure 3. Conserve, Enhance and Restore Principals for the Balsall Common Viaduct taken from the public exhibition board

Overall, the landscape strategy for Balsall Common Viaduct intricately addresses ecological, visual, and community considerations, aligning with HS2's commitment to responsible and sustainable development.