

Reimagining the Levels - Introductory Presentation at the Open Space Meeting
Red Brick Building, Glastonbury. 16 November 2016



Reimagining the Levels – Why now?

- The Vision produced by the Levels Task Force is two years old. *Time to revitalise it and put flesh on the bones*
- Growing urgency over climate change. *Need for more ambitious action*
- Government plans to give the Somerset Rivers Authority new powers. *Ensure it has suitable governance structures and purposes*
- Brexit – Uncertainty for farming and environmental protection. *A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to shape the future*



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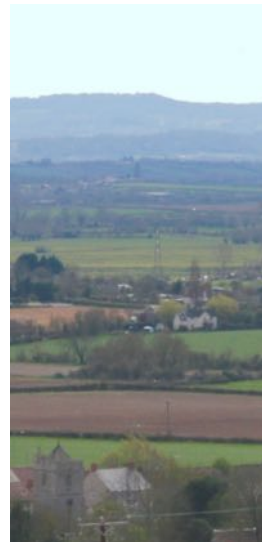
Reimagining the Levels - Practical motivations

- **Declining soil quality** in the catchment, leading to silting up of rivers and fast run-off of rain
- **Poor planning decisions** leading to development on the floodplain
- **Poor maintenance of drainage infrastructure** in some urban and rural areas
- **A stalemate** on whether to compensate farmers for storing additional flood water on farmland

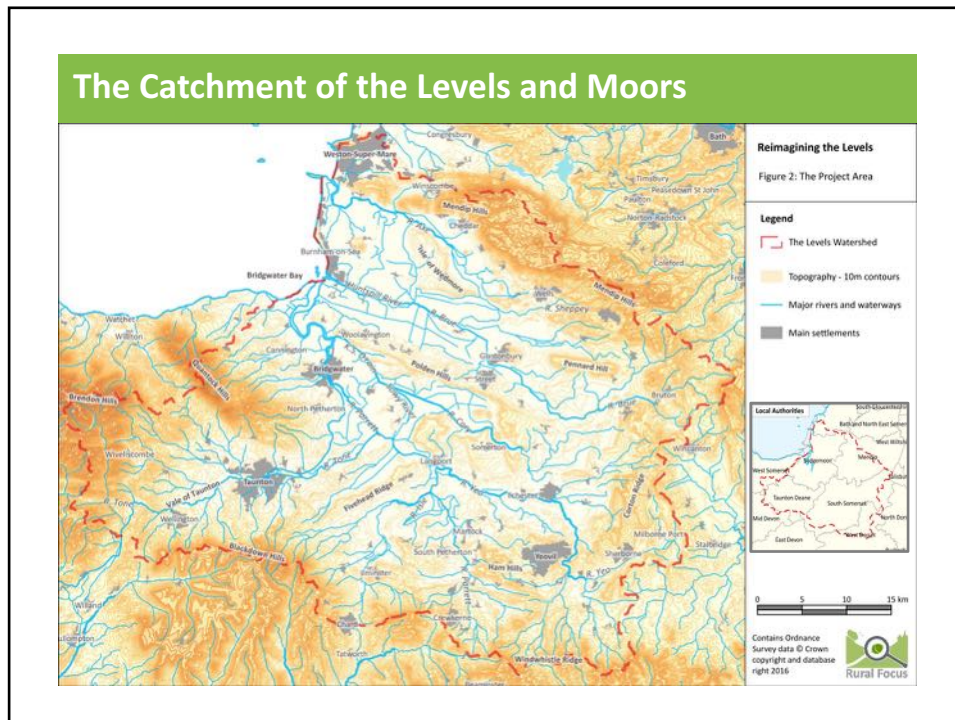


Reimagining the Levels - Our aims

- To help **implement the vision for water and land management** across the whole catchment supplying the Levels and Moors
- To reconcile the needs for **conservation and livelihoods**
- To contribute to **global sustainability** objectives
- To **inform and stimulate dialogue** between communities, landowners and decision-makers about priorities for action



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Climate Change – Global threat : Local impacts

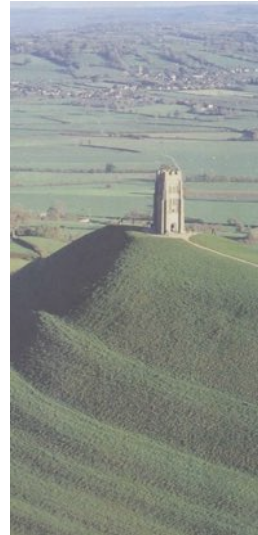
- **Rising sea levels** along the coast and tidal rivers (half a metre higher by 2100)
- **Stormier weather** (more than doubling the number of days of heavy rain in winter by 2080, with tidal surges further increasing sea level)
- As a result **severe '1-in-100 year' flood events** 3 to 5 times more frequent by 2080
- Increasing periods of **drought** and heat stress in summer



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Connecting Landscapes – Drivers of change

- **Soils and land use** that exacerbate flood risk
- **Low-levels of woodland cover** (compared to national and international standards)
- **Impoverished landscape character** (orchards, meadows, withies, hedgerow trees etc)
- **Isolated habitats** with low resilience to changing climate and species movement
- **Post-Brexit environmental policy** (an opportunity)



Connecting People – Drivers of change

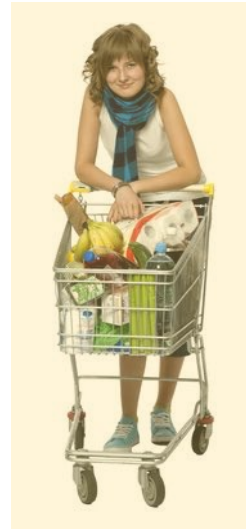
- Growing levels of **distrust** between citizens and policy makers (across the world – but also on the Levels)
- Gaps in **democratic accountability** (e.g. potentially the Somerset Rivers Authority)
- **New approaches** to delivering public services based on the needs of users ('co-production') – but not obviously evident on the Levels



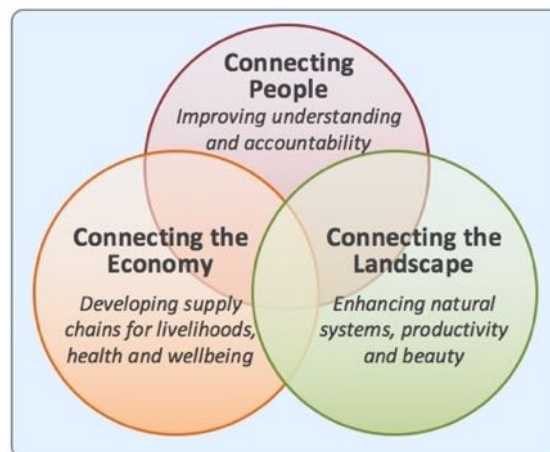
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Connecting the economy – Drivers of change

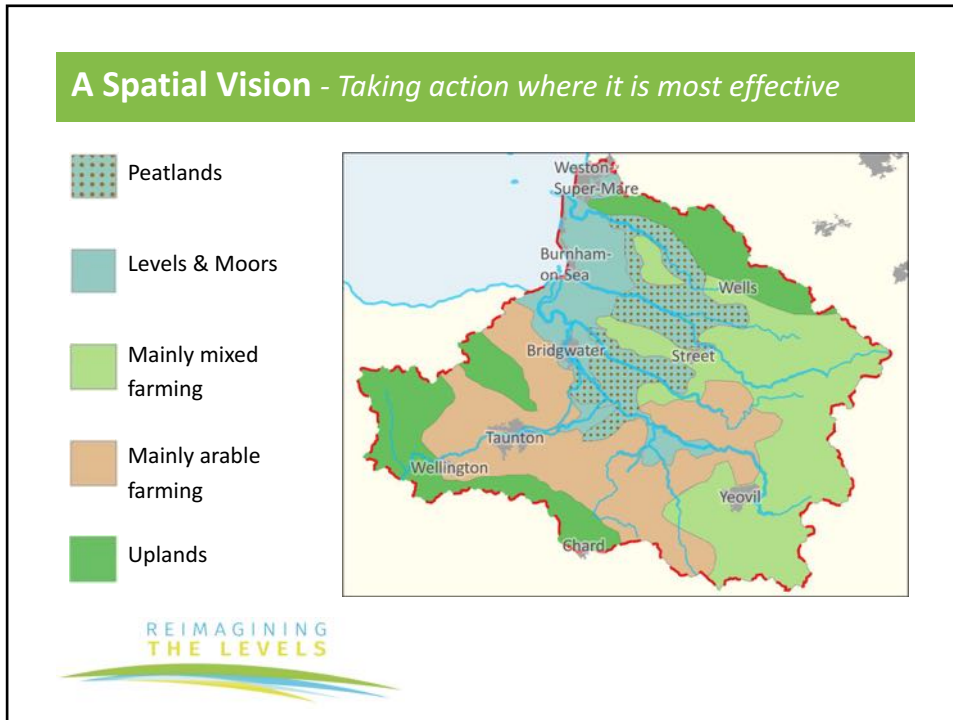
- **Low profitability** in farming – declines in mixed family farms
- **Weak connections** between producers and consumers – loss of value to local economies
- A **food economy** that works against health, well-being and the environment
- **Post-Brexit trade and agricultural policy** (a threat and opportunity)



A Schematic Vision – Making the connections



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REIMAGINING THE LEVELS

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

Further information about the project will be available soon at:
www.reimaginingthelevels.org.uk

In the meantime, the project reports can be downloaded from:
www.rural-focus.co.uk