

A Forward-Looking Upper Medway

The 2025-2030 Plan



The work done within Area 5 this past winter has been an exceptional demonstration of the practical success that can be achieved with appropriate time and staffing, particularly when focused into storage and capacity type works on existing networks. This increased pioneering delivery shows that whilst the administrative element of the Board is progressive, it has less of an immediate impact upon the landowners we manage. It remains important that the Board continues to offer the main service of draining land to maintain agricultural and stewardship needs, whilst still pushing for improved ecology and natural flood management. To that end, the following 5-year plan considers the consenting side of the business, but favours increase in the practical delivery on both a maintenance and ecology basis, without a significant loss in the theoretical applications that we have enjoyed in the last 18 months.

What has changed since the last plan?

The Board has continued to support recruitment, with a further officer brought in during January 2025 and the upskilling of a member of the ground team to act as the delivery party on nature-based solutions and natural flood management. With the resignation of the Sustainable Development Manager in May 2025, however, there is a need to consider the impact of this against the long-term plans of the Board and determine whether there is an opportunity to once again refocus the efforts into the practical side of the business. The Board can meet its legislative demands regarding consent, with the SDO being capable of commenting and responding to planning applications in much the same way as was enjoyed previously. Whilst there is clearly a need to allow space and time for them to develop in the role, the overall workload remains manageable from a day-to-day outlook. By giving itself the time to allow the SDO to grow into the role, the Board could look at following up the efforts on the 2024/25 pioneering season and increasing the district involvement by investment in the works team instead of replacing the outgoing SDM. This would also give rise to an eventual name change from Sustainable Development to Sustainability, as a broader department title.

The delivery of the works team is now refined to the point that we have been able to take on additional PSCA work, whilst also offering our services within the Section 20 boundaries. There is also an agreement ready to be finalised with KCC that will allow us to operate in some new areas and extend our influence into the catchment. The main goal with this pilot is to see if the issues we would typically face in the district were now such that our work remit should be extended permanently in the future, utilising the mechanisms within the Environment Act that are coming to fruition.

Generally, there has been a good achievement progression against the previous plan, with most Year 1 elements fulfilled and progression into the Year 2-3 plan already under way, including exploration into the office premises and the way that the Lees Road Depot is used and managed into the future. This all represents a continual growth of the Board and its services, but as with all 5-year plans does require the flexibility to pivot when issues arise.

Key Objectives

The focus for the Board at present is consolidation against the 5-year plan in order to reduce surprise expenditure, stabilise the levy increases as part of a wider financial management plan, and to allow the Board to consider its decisions with the long-term in mind, all within a broad view that the catchment needs to be considered over just the traditional district boundary. To that end, the next 5 years still needs to follow the existing pattern of solid decisions based on a progressive attitude, but now likely needs to consider whether or not it should adjust the major liabilities of recruitment from the office back into the ground teams. There is a potential need for investment into more plant and equipment to allow greater scope for works across the district and catchments, providing a public heavy approach to the works of the Board, whilst maintaining the basic administrative roles set out in the Land Drainage Act. The increase in our public interaction has come with some significant advantages, none so important as the fact that locally we are being seen as a good value service, something that was previously under question. The next steps should continue this positive public persona, by extending our works into the ecological hybridisation that has been discussed over the past few years and giving rise to the continued pressure for better habitat and stewardship opportunities that come from properly managed watercourses and landscapes.

YEAR 1-2

Staffing

- Depot team to go to 6
- Complete initial upskilling of Conservation Officer

Sustainable Development

- Set out direction for sustainability versus sustainable development
- Consolidation of in-house administration, including consideration for outsourcing.

Catchment Involvement

- Commence catchment maintenance within pilot areas
- Begin creation of catchment plans in pilot area
- Biodiversity Action Plan outcomes metric to be devised

Facilities

- Board to improve Lees Road storage to accommodate tractors, most likely through garage provision

Works

- Works diary to extend over all 5 areas
- Maintenance team to split into two teams with depot leader oversight
- Adoption of all A5 watercourses and commencement of A1 rotation
- INNS removal to extend further along Lesser Teise, possibly into full Teise

YEAR 3-5

Staffing

- Depot team to go to 7 or 8 depending on financial management as per 2025 decision
- Consider professional requirements for further office-based staffing (potentially looking at modelling and IT opportunities to better design and manage wetland and flood alleviation schemes)
- Break off Ecology and Conservation into single department, likely under Sustainability heading.

Sustainable Development

- Reassessment of sustainable development role and need for inhouse administration
- Board to consider statutory consultee position on development
- Manage financial impact of reduced SWDC

Catchment Involvement

- Rating of land to be agreed with DEFRA and landowners (0%, same etc.)
- Expand into first catchment
- Recognised NFM creator and partner for all major authorities and NGO's
- Measurable improvement demonstrated across district and catchment areas of reduced peak flows
- Determine need for further expansion or consolidation regarding catchment involvement

Works

- Board to be recognised partner for all surface water works within catchment
- Board to have PSCA's with all LPAs within IDD
- PSCA's with Parish Councils to begin
- Maintenance programs with LPA's to be established
- Tender for outside IDB maintenance programmes

Ecology and Conservation

- Establish full INNS removal programme across main river and IDB watercourses
- Create and manage key inflow areas for NFM and flood alleviation opportunities
- Hybridise working practices with Works Manager and monitor impact including invertebrate, fish, birds, and bats (along with any other key considerations or indicators).

Finance

- All excess funds to have been successfully diminished or fully repurposed.
- Resilience Fund to have been assessed and determination on it's future made.

YEAR 6-10

The main aims in the long term will be to increase the amount of practical delivery (both standard and PSCA), ensure consistency with the rate and audit, and to look at how the region can be closer to improve financial efficiency and public service.

It should also be clearer to see how well the hybrid approach to maintenance has been received, and whether our increased conservational efforts have significantly improved conditions within our watercourses, against monitoring metrics. There should also be increased local interactions, with participation within all major flood management groups, seats taken on local flood strategy boards, and potential for offering design services in relation to natural flood management and river restoration or enhancement. Finally, the Board should aim to have replaced its aged plant in this period and have increased the number of maintenance assets to include transportation means to compliment any purchases of larger plant.

By year 10 (2035) the Board should also have set a revised series of objectives to meet the new challenges faced, mostly down to extremes in weather seen by the district (both flood and drought), changes in farming practices now the BNG 30 year plans and the longer High-Tier plans surrounding water are well established, and how it works from a strategic flood risk management position with the newly formed devolved Mayoral districts.

The current strategic objectives revolve around:

- Climate Change
- Conservation
- Development
- District Management
- Education
- Funding
- Public Interaction

As high-level objectives, these titles remain relevant into the future, but the level of involvement in each will likely be the main variation based on a long-term assessment of how well the Board has achieved against these in the past 10 years. This should then offer the metric and justification for funding and administration decisions moving into the following 10-year period, where there should be consideration for the collective agreement of all Boards across the district surrounding how the area is managed.

Timeline of Events – To Present

2020-21

2021-23

2023-24



Timeline of Events – Present to 2030



