

UPPER MEDWAY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

MINUTES OF THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

held at Bullen Court, East Peckham
on Tuesday 31st March 2026 at 10:00am

Members of the Committee in Attendance

Cllr T Harwood – In-coming Chair

S McAll – Incoming Vice Chair

M Summersgill – Board Member

H Rogers – Board Member (Finance Chair)

S Highwood – Board Member

O Baldock – Board Member (Works Chair)

D Kent – Board Member

C Donaldson – Conservation Expert

B Thomson – Sustainability Manager

O Pantrey – Clerk to the Board

P Watson – Conservation Officer

1. Appointment of Committee Chair

The Committee considered the appointment of Chair.

Two candidates were proposed:

- Cllr Tony Harwood
- Susan McAll

Both candidates outlined their experience and vision:

Following discussion, it was **AGREED**:

- **Cllr Tony Harwood** be appointed as **Chair**
- **Susan McAll** be appointed as **Vice Chair**

It was noted that a collaborative approach between Chair and Vice Chair would support both strategic direction and environmental expertise.

2. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were recorded.

3. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

4. Introduction to Committee – Aims and Responsibilities

The Committee received an overview of its purpose and remit.

It was noted that the Committee will:

- provide strategic direction on sustainability, conservation, and environmental delivery,
- oversee consent and enforcement matters where delegated,
- contribute to funding applications (e.g. resilience and conservation funds),
- guide biodiversity, natural flood management, and environmental policy,
- support integration of drainage functions with wider environmental outcomes.

Key areas of focus include:

- Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)
- INNS and glyphosate use
- Natural Flood Management (NFM)
- Water quality and catchment planning
- Corporate sustainability and supply chains

It was emphasised that:

- the Committee's role is strategic, working alongside Finance and Works Committees,
- local knowledge from non-committee Board members remains important and should continue to inform decisions,
- partnership working and stakeholder engagement will be critical to delivery.

Members discussed the importance of site visits to understand projects, opportunities to invite external partners to present to the Committee, and the need for a collaborative and inclusive approach to decision-making.

5. BAP Objectives 2026

The Committee reviewed Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) objectives and potential delivery approach.

It was noted that:

- the BAP provides a strategic framework for environmental delivery,
- existing objectives remain relevant but require practical interpretation and prioritisation,
- not all projects are expected to be delivered within a single year.

Discussion focused on:

- adopting **aspirational but realistic objectives**,
- aligning works with biodiversity outcomes,
- improving communication and presentation of BAP delivery (e.g. simplified summaries or "one-page" outputs).

Members discussed the potential to identify "**keystone**" or **flagship species** to guide decision-making. It was hoped that this would link habitat management directly to species outcomes and improve public engagement through clearer environmental messaging.

It was noted that habitat management (e.g. riparian woodland, pollarding, channel structure) is as important as species selection. Members suggested that delivery should balance ambition with practical constraints and Board function.

The Committee also discussed:

- the need to review and update the BAP in due course.
- ensuring alignment between strategic objectives and operational delivery.

6. Presentation from Carol Donaldson (Environmental Advisor)

The Committee received a detailed presentation on potential environmental projects and management approaches.

Strategic Themes

It was noted that key opportunities include:

- later channel cutting to support breeding species,
- reduced bank cutting to benefit wildlife,
- installation of barn owl boxes,
- expansion of woody debris interventions,
- removal or modification of weirs,
- proactive willow pollarding to prevent collapse and improve habitat.

It was emphasised that many interventions provide both **flood risk management and biodiversity benefits**, and that proactive management can reduce long-term maintenance costs. It was broadly agreed however that delivery is highly dependent on **landowner engagement and cooperation**.

Water Quality and Catchment Approach

Discussion included the need for ongoing nitrate and phosphate testing. C Donaldson said there was evidence of high nutrient levels, particularly downstream of treatment works. Members said there were limitations on the Board's ability to influence water company performance.

It was agreed that the Board should focus on **what it can influence**, particularly land management, riparian buffers and woodland planting to offer practical improvements, and use partnership working (e.g. with farm clusters and wildlife organisations) where opportunities presented themselves.

Project Development – Sherway (Headcorn)

A detailed proposal was presented for works at Sherway.

Key elements include:

- installation of deflectors and pinch points to improve channel diversity,
- creation of wet meadow and flood storage areas,
- potential pond and scrape creation,
- use of spillways to manage water levels,
- opportunities for training and practical delivery.

It was noted that:

- the landowner is supportive,
- Natural England is engaged,
- stewardship funding may be available,
- the project offers a strong opportunity for early delivery.

Project Development – Maplehurst / Friday's Land

Opportunities were identified for:

- wetland creation,
- flood storage,
- habitat enhancement.

However, it was noted that:

- engagement with additional landowners is required,
- some proposals require further consideration due to proximity to properties and flood risk concerns,
- further work is needed before progressing.

Project Development – Hammer Stream

Opportunities include:

- further deflector installation,
- creation of small flood storage features,
- woodland wetting and flow attenuation,
- improving channel diversity.

It was noted that:

- previous works have shown positive results,
- opportunities exist to build on existing interventions,
- practical constraints (e.g. spoil management, access, timing) require further consideration.

It was **AGREED** that B Thomson and C Donaldson should pursue the work on the Sherway as a primary project and engage with Friday's on the Hammer Stream to deliver in channel works where possible.

7. INNS 2026 – Use of Glyphosate

Members were given an overview of the Works Committee discussion on glyphosate by the Works Committee Chair, O Baldock. The general view was that use of glyphosate, whilst not preferable or ideal, was the best way to tackle the vast scale of the issue faced on the Medway and its surrounding tributaries.

The Chair suggested that the following happen:

- The committee establish an aspiration to see the removal of glyphosate in the effort against invasive species.
- Recognition of the fact glyphosate was a necessary tool in the battle and was the most pragmatic approach currently available.
- A desire to see alternative methods explored and used by the ground teams.
- A policy on glyphosate was to be created to highlight use, limitations, and aspirations.

All members **AGREED** this should be the way forwards for the Board.

8. Resilience Fund

The resilience fund was officially renamed the **Natural Flood Management and Conservation Fund**.

The Chair asked the members to approve the literature provided by B Thomson, including governance documents, expression of interest and application forms, and FAQs.

All members **AGREED** to adopt these new documents and relaunch the fund.

B Thomson gave an overview of the first application that had been received from a landowner in Laddingford. Member suggested this should be moved forwards as promptly as possible and that a site visit should be conducted as soon as everyone was available.

9. Any Other Business

The Clerk asked members if they would be give comment on the questions raised by the Board Chair regarding strategy on sustainability.

The members suggested that the wording around function, remit, and objective be considered. All agreed sustainability and conservation should be functions of the Board within the statutory remit of agricultural land drainage.

Members felt the committee was a sign that the Board was looking to do more in this area.

It was agreed that changes in farming practices should mean a change in stance on drainage need, where it could reasonably benefit conservation and habitat projects.

There was a suggestion that a water audit might identify key areas for storage and drainage in the district, helping to target water conservation, habitat opportunity, and drainage need.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was noted as Tuesday 2nd June 2026.

11. Close

The Chair thanked members for their efforts and input, and closed the meeting.

Action List – 31 March 2026

- Review and update Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)
- Produce simplified one-page Committee Mission Statement and separate BAP summary for Board use
- Identify and agree key/flagship species
- Align habitat management with species outcomes
- Develop framework linking BAP → species → projects → delivery
- Consider allocating dedicated operational time for environmental delivery
- Progress Sherway as primary 2026 project
- Explore opportunities to expand water quality monitoring where feasible
- Develop materials to demonstrate environmental delivery

- Explore opportunities to present work externally and raise profile
- Create glyphosate policy
- Include funding update in rates newsletter, ADA gazette, and publish on website