

## UPPER MEDWAY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD

### MINUTES OF THE WORKS COMMITTEE

held at Bullen Court, East Peckham  
on Tuesday 24th March 2026 at 11:00am

Members of the Committee in Attendance

O Baldock – Incoming Chairman

Cllr D Kent

J Schuling – Works Manager

O Pantrey – Clerk

L Carey

B Thomson

K Saunders

P Watson

P Venn

O Brunning

#### Committee Arrangements

J Schuling confirmed that this was the first Works Committee meeting of 2026.

He requested a Board member to become Chair of the committee for the coming term.

All **AGREED** O Baldock would be Chair for the term.

#### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from S McAll and W Elliott, who were unable to attend.

#### 2. Minutes of Previous Meeting – September 2025

The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed. All **AGREED** the minutes were approved.

#### 3. Actions from Previous Meetings

The Committee reviewed outstanding actions.

Key points:

- Parrot's feather monitoring at Sherway to be scheduled.
- Ongoing control at Haviker sluice noted.
- Mapping accuracy (access/tracking routes) requires updating:
  - Errors to be identified during fieldwork,
  - Updates to be submitted via weekly reporting.

It was agreed that updates will be captured during the upcoming season and consolidated.

#### 4. Accident Reports

No accidents were reported since the previous meeting.

It was noted that:

- the last recorded incidents (bee stings) had already been addressed,

- the absence of incidents reflects good working practices.

#### 5. Health and Safety Policy and Risk Assessment

The Committee reviewed the current Health and Safety Policy format.

It was noted that:

- the revised, shorter format improves readability and engagement,
- the intention is to ensure staff actively read and understand the document,
- the policy is clear, concise, and accessible.

Members agreed:

- the format is effective,
- no amendments are required at this stage.

Members **AGREED** that an updated version of this policy should be submitted to the Board for approval.

#### 6. Works Plan 2026

Works Progress

The Committee received an update on the 2026 works progress.

It was noted that:

- winter and pioneering works have progressed well,
- approximately 9 reaches remain in Area 1,
- outstanding works (e.g. chipping in wet areas) will be completed shortly.

INNS Plan 2026 (Invasive Non-Native Species)

A detailed discussion took place regarding invasive species management.

Strategic Direction

- The Committee agreed an aspiration to reduce the use of glyphosate where practicable.
- Glyphosate will remain the primary control method due to scale and practicality.
- Alternative methods (digging, mowing, potential future methods such as hot foam) will be explored where feasible.

Operational Approach

- Treatment will shift to a top-down approach (working from upper catchments downstream) to better control seed spread.
- Teams will identify:
  - Suitable locations for alternative control methods,
  - areas where glyphosate remains necessary.

Constraints Identified

- Significant safety risks when handling plants (particularly hogweed exposure).
- PPE limitations and risk of skin exposure.

- Labour intensity of digging methods.
- Access constraints (steep banks, brambles, terrain).
- Environmental and regulatory constraints (e.g. EA restrictions on vegetation removal).

#### Key Principle Agreed

- Reduction in glyphosate is aspirational, not mandatory.
- Staff must not be put at risk to achieve reduction targets.
- Decisions will be made site-by-site based on practicality and safety.

#### Implementation

- 2026 will act as a baseline year ("Year 1"):
  - trial opportunities,
  - assess feasibility,
  - gather evidence for future improvements.
- Findings will be reviewed post-season and reported to the Sustainability Committee.

### 7. Creation of In-House Certification, Courses, and SSoW

#### Hydraulic Breaker

The Committee reviewed the new: Risk Assessment, and Safe System of Work (SSoW) for the hydraulic breaker.

It was noted that:

- the format has been redesigned to improve clarity and usability,
- the new structure is easier to read and interpret,
- this format will be rolled out across other procedures.

The Committee approved:

- the new documentation format, and
- adoption of the hydraulic breaker procedure.

### 8. Safety Report

#### February Safety Report

The Committee reviewed the February Safety Report.

It was noted that:

- the report is visual and easy to interpret,
- it provides a clear overview of operational safety activity.

Members were satisfied with the format and content.

#### 2025 Summary and Trends

The Committee reviewed the annual safety summary.

Key insight:

- Operational risk peaks in summer,
- Defect reporting peaks in autumn.

It was agreed:

- a mid-season inspection should be introduced to assess whether earlier intervention reduces defects.

The Committee recognised:

- strong safety culture within the team,

- high standard of defect reporting.

### 9. Near Miss Action

The Committee reviewed near miss reporting.

It was noted that:

- reporting levels dropped due to reduced management focus, not workforce behaviour,
- staff engagement is strong when prompted.

Agreed actions:

- reintroduce daily near miss prompts,
- focus on identifying trends rather than attributing blame,
- aim for consistent reporting (e.g. ~1 meaningful report per week).

Discussion clarified:

- distinction between near miss and accident,
- importance of capturing risks (e.g. access issues, hazards, operational constraints).

### 10. Welfare and Wellbeing

The Committee discussed current welfare provisions.

It was noted that:

- existing provisions include:
  - eye tests,
  - health checks,
  - Employee Assistance Programme.

Feedback from staff was of general satisfaction with Board support, but they raised concerns regarding:

- quality of hearing tests,
- limited depth of health assessments.

The Committee **AGREED** to consider improving hearing assessment provision and reiterated that wellbeing support should remain accessible through multiple channels (management, HR, Board). The Board members present reaffirmed a commitment to staff wellbeing, highlighting the importance of maintaining a positive working environment.

### 11. Works Strategy and Future

The Committee discussed strategic direction.

#### Capacity and Resourcing

- Current workforce considered at or near capacity.
- Additional staff would significantly increase output.

It was noted that:

- a sixth staff member would enable:
  - two operational teams,
  - improved productivity

#### Plant and Equipment

- Additional resources may be required (e.g. diggers, tractors) but acknowledged a balance required between utilisation, cost, and seasonal demand.

#### Contractors

- Quality and consistency of external operators discussed.

- Preference for reliable, repeat contractors.

#### Development Impact

- Concerns raised regarding:
  - reduced access due to development,
  - increased maintenance time,
  - need for stronger planning input and enforcement.

It was noted that:

- in theory, development should not impact maintenance, but in practice, access and efficiency are often reduced.

#### 12. H+S Achievements

The Committee noted:

- continued strong safety culture,
- effective defect reporting,
- absence of accidents,
- successful implementation of improvements (e.g. vehicle adjustments).

#### 13. Feedback or Concerns

Feedback from operational staff highlighted included concern over hand removal of hogweed and PPE for such tasking.

#### 14. Environmental Issues

Environmental considerations were discussed in relation to:

- A potential pollution incident in the Gravelley Ways Stream, Paddock Wood

D King said that it would be worth seeing if all the instances of this in Paddock Wood are linked.

#### 15. Training Update

The following training was noted as upcoming:

- Chainsaw (P Venn)
- Excavator
- Fire
- GDPR was being pushed to 2027

#### 16. Any Other Business

Additional discussions included:

- Use of rubber matting to access soden fields. This was a move away from using OSB plywood. All **AGREED** that 25 mats should be purchased using existing 2025/6 budget if possible.
- Contract renewals for all staff. The Clerk said the handbook not being released at the same time caused confusion for which he apologised. He confirmed this would be resolved and contracts reissued.

#### 17. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 26th May 2026

#### 18. Close

There being no further business, the meeting was closed.

#### Action List – 24 March 2026

- Inspect parrot's feather at Sherway before peak growth
- Update incorrect access/tracking routes during 2026 works
- Record and submit mapping corrections via weekly reports
- Implement top-down INNS treatment approach (upper catchments first)
- Identify sites suitable for non-glyphosate treatment methods
- Trial alternative INNS controls (digging, mowing, etc.) where feasible
- Review safety and PPE requirements for manual plant removal
- Explore external training for safe invasive species removal
- Procure additional equipment if required (e.g. spades, PPE)
- Report INNS outcomes to Sustainability Committee post-season
- Roll out new SSoW format across all procedures
- Introduce mid-season safety inspection (summer 2026)
- Reinforce daily near miss reporting through Depot Leader
- Review and improve hearing test provision
- Maintain and communicate wellbeing support routes
- Assess requirement for additional staff resource
- Review plant and equipment needs in line with staffing
- Improve consistency and quality of contractors
- Monitor and raise concerns on development impact to maintenance access