

# enjoying water

A group of people, including children and adults, are kayaking on a river. They are wearing life jackets and holding paddles. The kayakers are in various colored kayaks, including yellow, orange, and red. The background shows a concrete wall and a fence.

Strategic priorities for water related  
recreation in the East of England

2009-2014





A full copy of 'enjoying water'.  
Strategic priorities for water-related  
recreation in the East of England  
can be downloaded from  
[www.brighton.ac.uk/waterrecreation](http://www.brighton.ac.uk/waterrecreation)

## Purpose of this document

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The aim of these strategic priorities is to maximise the economic, environmental and social benefits of water-related recreation in the East of England. 'Enjoying Water', the strategic priorities for water-related recreation in the East of England, has been developed by the University of Brighton, Exegesis SDM Ltd, Rubicon Associates, Plumpton College and G and L Hughes for the Environment Agency in association with a steering group from British Waterways, Natural England, Sport England, GO-East and in consultation with the East of England Development Agency and East of England Regional Assembly.

The strategic priorities offer an approach to maximising the recreational potential of inland and coastal waters, encouraging sustainable and responsible opportunities for everyone who wishes to participate, now and in the future. Consistent with the East of England Plan, Regional Economic Strategy and environmental strategy, the strategic priorities contribute to making the region an attractive place for business and skilled labour to locate, by providing jobs and contributing directly to the regional economy and by contributing to the regeneration and conservation of the coast and coastal towns.

## Introduction

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Recreational use of coastal and inland waters of the East of England provides major benefits to the economic, environmental and social well-being of the region:

- close to 133 million tourist visits are spent in the region each year. Tourists enjoy activities related to coastal and inland waters, plus visits to major centres such as Cambridge, Norwich and Peterborough. Tourism generates over £5bn spend per annum, employing around 180,000 people;
- sport and culture are significant economic activities for those living in the region, generating nearly £2bn spend and some 56,500 jobs;
- the Great Ouse and Nene river systems are highly significant for all forms of boating, with over 5,500 annual craft registrations and 27 marinas on the Great Ouse alone. Links to the national waterway network, via the proposed Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway and the Fens Waterway Link could generate over 100,000 extra boat movements per annum, contribute around £8m per annum to the local economy and provide over 500 permanent jobs;
- better and more facilities are needed to support increased participation. Regional adult participation in water related recreation is slightly below the national average;
- siting of the 2012 Olympic canoe slalom course at Broxbourne, its enduring Olympic legacy, and the presence in the region of high quality rowing and sailing venues underlines the value of water related sport and recreation.



## Using inland and coastal waters for recreation

### The supply of water resources

The East of England has an abundance of inland and coastal waters, including the world-famous Norfolk and Suffolk Broads and Cambridgeshire Fens, the Essex estuaries (including the Thames), the Great Ouse and Nene river systems and the Grand Union Canal in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. A significant proportion of the region, including much of the coast, is designated for its environmental value, while most of the region is low-lying and prone to flooding and the likely impacts of climate change. Water resources are generally well distributed across the region, although there is a south-west to north-east 'spine' where there are few major rivers or other waters. There are natural lakes (and broads), ex-mineral workings and some reservoirs, mainly in a north-south corridor on the western boundary to the region. Strategic links between these and some of the major rivers could create 'the Cambridgeshire Broads'. Nearly all the region's population can reach the coast or an estuary within one hour, and can get to inland waters or a major river within half an hour.

### Demand for water-related recreation

Nearly 40% of the adult population now spend some of their leisure time enjoying water related recreation. The most popular activities are walking, swimming and visits to the beach. Boating, angling and other water recreation activities are increasing in popularity, with nearly 10% of the adult population now participating regularly. There has been a significant growth, in the region, of participation in coarse angling, open swimming, some canoe disciplines, sub-aqua and rowing, with indications that participation in motor boating will increase as facilities improve.

Notwithstanding the economic climate, participation in most water related recreation activities is expected to grow further. This will be underpinned by continuing social change, including:

- increasing relative affluence over the long term, with an accelerated shift from manufacturing to service employment and a greater focus on the 'experience economy', where services take precedence over material goods;
- an ageing population with a growing interest in activities associated with health and well being, although many younger people are likely to experience increasingly sedentary and 'indoors' lifestyles;
- increasing demand from growth areas and potential for more pressure on resources as temperatures increase due to climate change. This could result in significant changes to future tourism patterns for the region.

### Case Study

## Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway

The proposed Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway (joining the River Great Ouse at Bedford to the national inland waterway network near Milton Keynes) will not only provide the first major new build of a waterway for generations, but it will also fulfil an ambition first mooted in 1810 to link the Grand Union and eastern waterways. It will also link a number of water sports venues stretching from Willen Lake in Milton Keynes (powered water sports) through Brogborough and Stewartby Lakes (sailing, canoeing and the potential for white water provision), rowing on the River Great Ouse at Bedford, to a potential new rowing lake north east of Bedford. There would also be major provision for land-based activities, through 24km of non-motorised shared use routes running alongside the Waterway. The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway proposal enjoys high level support, including recently a Department of Communities and Local Government secondment and interventions by Ministers to help secure the route. It will mitigate the further housing development inevitable in the area, has the potential to create and regenerate a range of water based sports and travel options, and could fundamentally transform the character of Bedford and many other market towns along the Great Ouse Navigation.





## What people say about water resources in the East of England:

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“ The government has set a new standard for voluntary access agreements with the Waveney (paddler)

“ Generally, councils – both... district and county – and other organisations, need to make better use of what nature has supplied us (motor boater)

“ Integrated water recreation should be a compulsory part of local planning (commercial boat hirer)

“ Grafham Water ... is a fine example of the diversity of activity that can be provided by water and the land adjacent to water... (local government officer)

“ The visionary planner, Sir Patrick Abercrombie, recognised [in the Greater London Plan, 1944] the potential of old gravel pits to provide places to swim; over sixty years later his modest ideas still haven't been implemented (open swimmer)

“ Because angling has no social boundaries, and can be participated in by people of all abilities and skill levels, 'education through angling' can inspire and motivate and provide a platform to raise aspirations and self-esteem (angler)





## Gaps in provision

There are several strategic ‘gaps’ in provision that act as constraints to achieving the full benefits from water related recreation in the East of England. These are:

- a need to upgrade existing facilities and resources, to ensure that they can provide for more participants and more and better activities;
- uneven distribution of facilities for some water related sport and recreation activities, and a general shortage of regional centres of excellence or for competition;
- shortage of large scale multi-activity centres that are accessible to large numbers of people;
- there is a need for more doorstep opportunities, green infrastructure planning and engagement in the policy process, to ensure that water related recreation makes a full contribution to the economic and social health of the region;
- there is insufficient understanding of environmental issues, particularly how to manage fragile environments to achieve their full recreational and environmental value;
- there is insufficient public understanding of the benefits of water related recreation and an under-developed approach to communicating what activities can be undertaken where and when;
- there is insufficient development of marine recreation to meet the changing needs of participants and the environment.

### Case Study

## The River Waveney Canoe Agreement

The River Waveney rises in Redgrave Fen, west of Diss, and has a public right of navigation starting at Geldeston, some 40km downstream. From Geldeston, it enters the Broads. While there has traditionally been some informal canoeing near Bungay, there has been no access agreement to allow unpowered craft on the river. An agreement was reached, in 2006, between over 100 land and riparian owners and numerous angling clubs, to allow canoeing on a 33km stretch of the river between Brockdish, east of Diss, and Ellingham, west of Geldeston, subject to a code of conduct and there being sufficient water in the river to protect the bed and banks of the river. More canoeists can now use a greater length of the river than was previously the case, while other users – principally anglers – report that conflicts and interruptions have declined, largely because of the code of conduct. This ‘365 day per year’ agreement is being held up nationwide as the benchmark for successful and sustainable canoe agreements



## Initiatives to improve water-related recreation

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**The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Park:** The Grand Union Canal already represents a huge doorstep resource in the region, but the proposed Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway (joining the River Great Ouse at Bedford to the Grand Union Canal and, thus, the national inland waterway network near Milton Keynes) will provide the first major new build of a waterway for generations. It will also fulfil an ambition first mooted in 1810 to link the Grand Union and eastern waterways. Furthermore, it will also link together and develop a range of water sports venues stretching from Willen Lake in Milton Keynes (powered water sports) through Brogborough and Stewartby Lakes (sailing, canoeing and the potential for white water provision), rowing on the Great Ouse, to a potential new rowing lake north east of Bedford. There would also be major provision for land-based activities, through 24km of non-motorised shared-use routes running alongside the Waterway.

**The Fens Waterways Link:** This proposal will connect the cities of Lincoln, Peterborough and Ely and a number of market towns such as Boston, Crowland and Kings Lynn, and has the potential to open up 240 km of waterway. The proposed Link will create a new circular waterway for recreation and tourism throughout the Fens, and will be able to accommodate 5000 additional motor cruiser movements per annum and sustain at least 600 new cruise boats, bringing a tenfold increase in the number of cruising boats and hire craft in the region. The King's Lynn Waterfront Regeneration scheme will add further touring and marina capacity,

while planned proposals to develop moorings at other locations in Cambridgeshire could further increase capacity while also providing good examples of sensitive recreation development within a nature conservation context.

**The Cambridge waterways:** There are plans to develop regional-level water recreation facilities in Cambridge, as part of the sub-regional plan for Cambridgeshire. These plans include the privately-funded Cambridge Sports Lakes, to the north of Cambridge, which will include provision for rowing, canoe sprinting and training, and for triathlon. The lakes may connect to the River Cam, and could provide additional visitor moorings for those wishing to visit Cambridge, facilitate touring canoeing and, potentially, cater for outdoor swimming. The camToo Project will improve the facilities for the established and prospective city community and for college rowing and canoeing. It will also offer a much-needed dedicated public transport link across the River Cam, as well as new cycleways. The camToo Project will add one mile to the existing river system, increasing the capacity of the river for performance training along two miles of waterway by 100%. The Project will also reduce flood risk in Cambridge.

**The Broxbourne Olympic white water course:** the Broxbourne Olympic white water venue – with a 300m competition course and a course for intermediate use – will create a major new international-quality paddlesports site which, in conjunction with the

existing provision in the Lee Valley, will provide for a range of water related sport and recreation activities. The courses will be located within a wider parkland setting and will be entirely artificial with a new water body constructed and the white water created through a system of pumps. The venue will be completed in time for test events in 2011 and pre-Games training, and will remain as a legacy of the Olympic Games.

**Envirofish angling training centre, Norwich:** Envirofish is an ambitious scheme devised by a group of conservation-minded anglers in Norfolk to create a centre of education that provides an avenue for all to experience the wonders of the natural environment. The group hope that just 'being there' in the environment will enhance people's sensory perception of what is naturally around us so that the love, understanding and care of it becomes important and, through the activity of angling, can create inspiration to further protect and sustain it. Angling is central to the aims of Envirofish, as a means of getting people aware and interested in their environment. The significance of angling is that it has no social boundaries, and can be experienced by people of all abilities and skill levels; 'education through angling' can inspire and motivate and provide a platform to raise people's aspirations and self-esteem. Envirofish is currently seeking charitable status, and aims to include a satellite training centre recognised by the Angling Development Board and Sport England. Discussions with Environment Agency officers are already in progress concerning a possible site in Norwich.

## Addressing the gaps

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The gaps that have been identified can be addressed through a range of high and medium priorities:

### High Priorities

- **Improving existing provision.** There are a number of initiatives to be undertaken to improve the existing stock of resources available for water related recreation. These include: a review of public provision and management; opportunities to deliver smarter investment and strategic provision through a number of mechanisms; improvements to access and infrastructure, such as slipways and car parking, to improve the quality and range of doorstep and local recreation opportunities.
- **'Access East'.** A high proportion of the region's water network is underused and underdeveloped. Major investments in small links to connect to the national waterway network are key to stimulating regeneration, growth and commercial investment across much of the region. Significant investment could also provide major green infrastructure opportunities for healthy living and sustainable transport to serve growth areas.
- **A necklace of green, local gateway sites along the water network.** The water network provides the opportunity to develop a network of local green spaces or gateway sites to serve local towns and rural communities, with shared facilities such as parking, toilet & shower facilities, starting points for health walks & cycle rides, canoe trails, fishing, bird watching, picnic & barbeque areas etc. A 'necklace' of regularly spaced sites could help increase participation in healthier lifestyles and outdoor recreation, tackling people's concerns and lack of confidence in using linear outdoor resources. Links can also potentially be made to the coastal route under consideration in the Marine and Coastal Access Bill.
- **Best practice in environmentally friendly recreation.** There is a need to develop and disseminate good practice in environmentally sensitive and sustainable recreation management. This can best be achieved by initiating a number of demonstration and pilot projects that can allow stakeholders to learn from good practice. The Green Blue education initiative is a good example of current practice.
- **Influencing the regional policy agenda:** There is a need to ensure that the full benefits of water related recreation are recognised within the regional policy framework. This includes developing specific guidance on the planning and use of water resources for recreation and promoting the amenity of water environments more generally. This is particularly significant as the Water Framework Directive is implemented in the region. There is also potential to cater more fully for water recreation as an integral part of 'home life' in new and expanding settlements throughout the region.
- **Better provision of information to improve understanding and use:** Not all current opportunities for water related recreation are well used or understood, resulting in congestion at popular locations and under-use elsewhere. An information system is required (either stand alone or linked to current local authority and tourism information systems), to raise awareness of the water related recreation opportunities available and encourage more effective and responsible use of these resources.

- **Addressing gaps in the provision for some water sports.** There is a need for additional provision for a number of water sports and water-related recreation activities. Some of these requirements (especially for paddlesports and sail sports) are recognised in Sport England’s regional sports facilities plan. The principal requirements are for better access to more rivers for a number of activities, including angling, canoeing and inland motor cruising, new sub-regional provision for rowing and other sprint disciplines, more provision for outdoor swimming and scuba diving, and new cable tow provision for waterskiing and wakeboarding. Growing environmental pressures at the coast also means that it may be necessary to find new sites for personal powered craft.

## Medium Priorities

- **The development of ‘wild water parks’** as havens for wildlife that are accessible, under certain conditions, to water craft and for water-related activities. There are particular opportunities to provide sustainable transport links for visitors to some of the most important wetland sites in the region via the water network (water taxis, moorings, cycle routes etc)
- **To develop demonstration sites to pilot and test a range of approaches to improve the quality, range and benefits of water related recreation in the region.** Examples include: a tourism-based voluntary payment scheme for environmental improvements; new forms of river basin canoe agreement; demonstrating the potential benefits of widening access to many water activities to tackle social inclusion and anti-social behaviour; and establishing climate change monitoring sites.
- **Developing a network of water related recreation hubs.** There is a need for a range of large scale facilities and opportunities to be made accessible to large numbers of people, throughout the region. This can be addressed through developing hubs in each of the region’s Growth Areas, each capable of offering a range of opportunities, and each having the facility to host national and regional events in specific activities.
- **To encourage greater participation in inland and coastal activities through the public transport network, including fast light rail,** to encourage people out of urban settlements to participate in a range of recreation activities. This could be linked to potential green tourism developments at key locations, such as new holiday accommodation with access to a range of water recreation activities.
- **Improved estuary and coastal management:** Consistent with the regional Coastal Initiative, there is a need to address a range of management issues related to estuaries and the coast. Estuary management involves regulating conflicting uses often in highly significant ecological environments. Current management approaches vary, meaning that there is a need for more integrated and environmentally aware approaches, informed by best practice.





## Looking forward

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This strategic framework provides a broad direction for the delivery of more and better recreation opportunities in the region, outlines the scope of what can be achieved, and should promote engagement and collaboration with current and potential partners. The strategic priorities must be seen as part of a 'living' document reflecting activities and initiatives which will evolve and change over time. Initially it covers a five year period (2009-14), with continual review as priorities are completed. Overall success depends on:

- key regional agencies working together to take forward the strategic priorities, encourage their implementation, and help identify and target resources. Working with groups directly involved in the provision of water based recreation, especially those encouraging participation in outdoor recreation activities;
- the Environment Agency is taking the lead for the steering group in co-ordinating and monitoring the delivery of the strategic priorities;
- new ways of working, guidance and best practice being developed to lead the way forward;
- the recognition that projects and initiatives, whether cited in the strategic priorities or subsequently, do not impose any commitment on the partners at this stage, and will be based on case by case justification to assess how they deliver against the overall priorities and criteria set by others (eg funders, environmental impact assessments, local planning authorities and other interested groups).

### Case Study

## Whitlingham Country Park

Built on the site of a quarry just outside Norwich, Whitlingham Outdoor Education Centre, which is run by Norfolk County Council, offers a full range of land and water-based activities, including sailing, windsurfing, kayaking, rafting, canoeing, navigation, climbing and off-road biking - all of which can be undertaken in the safe and fun learning environment of Whitlingham Country Park. Training is available for novices right through to coach training at advanced levels. Paddle Craft can be hired on selected weekends, or visitors can bring their own craft subject to approval and registration with the centre. The park also operates week-long or single day school holiday activity sessions with something available for water lovers and land lubbers alike.

Other activities within the Country Park include Treasure Hunts, Shelter Building and Mini Beast Hunts all run by the country park rangers. The £1.6m outdoor education centre was built with funding from Sport England, the Lottery and Norfolk County Council.

[www.whitlinghamoec.co.uk](http://www.whitlinghamoec.co.uk)  
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## Acknowledgement



'Enjoying Water', the strategic priorities for water-related recreation in the East of England, has been developed by the University of Brighton, Exegesis SDM Ltd, Rubicon Associates, Plumpton College and G and L Hughes for the Environment Agency in association with a steering group from British Waterways, Natural England, Sport England, GO-East and in consultation with the East of England Development Agency and East of England Regional Assembly. Endorsement of this document is without prejudice to any comments members of the steering group may make as part of any statutory approval process for a project. Whilst the Environment Agency and members of the steering group cannot pre-endorse investment in any projects suggested or otherwise in the document, 'Enjoying Water' is expected to help inform the selection and assessment of projects where this is consistent with their own corporate priorities and funding criteria.



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