

Access and Environment Charter



**Clear Access
Clear Waters**



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Executive Summary

Fair, shared, sustainable access to healthy waters... that's not much to ask for?

England and Wales have some of the most restricted access to water in the world. Only 3.4% of our rivers have an uncontested public right of navigation.

Our communities are rarely far from rivers, canals or lakes. But the vast majority of us are unable to access them.

Rivers, estuaries, canals, reservoirs and lakes touch our lives in many ways. They provide water for us to drink, they help grow our food and also provide a means of transport

Blue spaces can be our natural protection from flooding. They can be places where we educate our children and provide recreational opportunities. They are vital for our wellbeing.



Following the Covid pandemic, interest in being in, on or alongside blue spaces, has grown. About 7.5m people now take part in paddlesports every year in the UK¹.

The popularity of stand up paddleboarding continues to grow. Over three million adults participated at least one or two times in the discipline, in 2022. This was an increase of 258,000 on the previous year.

Our waterways are also vital for swimmers, rowers, sailors and anglers.



¹ Watersports Participation Survey 2022



Underinvestment and political ambivalence has left our blue spaces in trouble. They are drowning in chemical and sewage pollution. They are being degraded by urbanisation, intensive agriculture and invasive non-native species.

The Environment Act (2021) is a step forward, but the dial on saving our rivers is not shifting quick enough.

In 2022, around 1,700 British Canoeing volunteers removed about 1,400 sacks of plastic pollution and other junk, from our rivers. Hundreds of people continue to tackle invasive non-native species like floating pennywort, which restricts paddling and kills native wildlife. We will continue to campaign for our waters to be sewage-free.

People care for what they love, but they only love what they know.

" This is not just a question of us needing our waters, our waters now need us. "

We want the government to commit to a long-term strategic plan for outdoor recreation. The public needs greater access to the outdoors, including more of our inland waters.

We recognise that these are challenging times for our economy. The UK Government is facing significant fiscal pressures. It is important we find long-term, cost effective ways of getting our nation moving.

A healthier population would be more productive and boost economic growth. Public expenditure on costly treatments would reduce via early intervention.

Policies enabling people to lead healthy lifestyles usually help promote a greener economy, build stronger communities and protect our environment.

We need to tackle inactivity and reduce the spiralling costs of healthcare.

A step in the right direction would be to expand our freedom to access our waterways. Helping people get active outdoors and enjoy a healthy, thriving natural environment.

It's not too much to ask for... is it?

Our vision

for a fair, shared, sustainable access to healthy waters.



The next government can, if they choose, leave a legacy for the next generation. A healthier, happier nation and thriving, nature rich blue spaces. Our waterways should be available to everyone, regardless of who you are or where you live.

This is our vision:



More people, more active, more often

- Blue spaces should be welcoming, accessible and clean, for the enjoyment of all.
- People of all backgrounds, cultures and abilities can get out and be active closer to home.



Nature rich blue spaces that everyone, everywhere can access

- Healthy blue spaces, rich in native wildlife and unaffected by invasive non-native species.
- Stakeholders and volunteers working together to recover and enhance our waters.
- Local nature recovery strategies should be balanced to benefit people and nature.



A universal commitment to respect, protect and enjoy our waterways

- Recreational users, rural communities and other custodians, united in respecting, protecting and enjoying blue spaces.
- Embed a Countryside and Paddlers' Code within our communities.
- Manage water safety through education, awareness of risk and responsibility for personal safety.



Ensuring a legacy for the next generation

- All stakeholders committed to ensuring we do not pass on the same threats to our blue spaces as we face today.
- A recovery plan that includes young people.



Prosperous communities and a trusting partnership with landowners

- Landowners, authorities and custodians of our waterways supported in providing safe and sustainable access for people to enjoy the water.
- Funding and advice available through the Environmental Land Management Scheme or other grant sources - creating accessible infrastructure.
- Demand on popular locations should reduce as more spaces to paddle and swim open.
- Rural communities benefiting through hospitality, parking and catering.



Our priorities for action:

Expand our freedom to **enjoy** more of our **inland waters**.



Go further, faster to **recover** our **blue spaces** from pollution.



Educate, **inspire** and inform responsible, **sustainable behaviour**.

Specifically we want the **government to act to:**

Commit to expanding our freedom to access more of our inland waters

- 1 Consider all options for land reform that extend public access rights, including amending the existing Countryside and Rights of Way Act to extend rights of access to, alongside, and on inland waters.
- 2 Additional funding for local authorities, navigation authorities, National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty to maintain, enhance, and extend new and existing rights of way.
- 3 Public-access options to be embedded in the Environmental Land Management Scheme, supporting farmers and landowners to create more opportunities for people to access the outdoors.



Go further, faster to help our blue spaces recover from pollution

- 4 Introduce a legally binding target to end 90% of sewage discharges by 2030 - prioritising places where there will be the greatest benefit to recreational users.
- 5 Mandatory monitoring of all sewage outlets enabling accurate real-time water quality information year round, including, load, duration and enhanced testing.
- 6 Increase in the number of designated inland bathing waters to 200 by 2030, prioritising places where there will be the greatest benefit to recreational users.
- 7 Allocate more resources to the Environment Agency to monitor, investigate and hold polluters to account.

Educate, inspire and inform responsible, sustainable behaviour

- 8 Increase investment in publicising the Countryside Code, promoting greater environmental responsibility and good practice by recreational users and land managers.

Our pledges

In 2018, British Canoeing published its first Clear Access, Clear Waters charter. Three pledges have remained at the very heart of our campaign work since.

We are proud of the work we have done. We continue to champion the case for greater access. We take action to protect and enhance our environment and grow the number of people who enjoy our sport.

Our pledges guide our work pursuing fair, shared, sustainable access to healthy waters. We will go even further by taking action to change behaviours which contribute to climate change.



1

Champion the case for fair, shared, sustainable open access on and along inland waters to be confirmed in law.

3

Inspire more people to be active outdoors, connecting people with their environment and promoting the benefits of mental and physical wellbeing.



2

Act to improve the health of our rivers, working to protect and enhance the natural environment.

4

Through our 'Places we Paddle' sustainability strategy we will reduce our impact on the environment and take action to change behaviours which contribute to climate change.



Who are we?

British Canoeing is the national governing body for paddlesports in the UK.

We inspire people's passion for paddling for health, enjoyment, friendship, challenge and achievement. We serve a community who care about the environment and its sustainability.

In 2022, we launched Stronger Together, a four-year strategy, to support, grow and celebrate paddling in England and the UK.

It builds on the work and progress achieved over the previous five years. The plan guides the work of all within British Canoeing and the paddling community. This includes our clubs and delivery partners, coaches, staff and volunteers, alongside our key partners, stakeholders and sponsors.

A key ambition is to 'improve access on and along waterways, promoting responsible use and environmental awareness'. The growth of paddlesport and member satisfaction relies on paddlers having open access. The waterways need to be clean and healthy environments in which to take part.

British Canoeing was recently recognised by Sport England as the National Governing Body for Stand Up Paddleboarding in England.

British Canoeing is also the umbrella organisation for the home nation associations - Scotland (Scottish Canoe Association), Wales (Canoe Wales) and Northern Ireland (Canoe Association Northern Ireland).

We are the membership body for England and responsible for developing the sport within the country.





For further enquiries please contact
ben.seal@britishcanoeing.org.uk



3.4%

Only 3.4% of rivers in England have a clear statutory public right of navigation.



7.2%

Of all our inland waterways, 7.2% have a clear, uncontested right of public access.



7.5m

It's estimated that 7.5m people used a kayak, canoe or stand up paddleboard, in the UK, in 2021.



96%

The public are effectively shut out and excluded from more than 96% of our blue spaces.

