



MOVEMENT IN BLUE SPACES PLAYBOOK

Supporting Active Partnerships to work together with clubs & strategic organisations in place to grow movement in water for everyone.

CLEAN WATER
SPORTS ALLIANCE



Active Partnerships

↑ 🌱 ❤️
PLANSWITHPURPOSE

EXEC SUMMARY



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This Playbook has been designed to support **Active Partnerships** in their engagement with **local clubs & strategic partners** in place to help **inspire, connect & convene** more people, especially those who currently have less access to blue spaces, to benefit from movement in water more often.

This initiative brings to life the sustainability ambitions of the **Clean Water Sports Alliance (CWSA), Sport England & the Active Partnership Network (AP)**. The CWSA was recently formed (2024) and has been working as a collective of National Governing Bodies to influence within the UK for healthier blue spaces. Partnering with Sport England & the AP Network, the CWSA will continue working at the national level but also at a more local level, supporting clubs to be closer to the conversation & action.

This Playbook focuses on two key barriers to more movement in blue spaces: **access for all & water quality**. We explore the root causes of both & the opportunities to unlock meaningful movement in & around our **seas, lakes, rivers, canals & reservoirs**.

For some APs, access to green & blue spaces & biodiversity will already be a focus of your **Environmental Sustainability Plan**, aligned with the Sport England Every Move strategy. For others this may feel newer. Wherever you are on your Environmental Sustainability journey, we invite & encourage you to dive into your local blue spaces with your **network of local clubs**, for the benefit of **our communities, our health & our environment**.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK



Ok. 76 pages. That's a bit much, isn't it? Well, hopefully we didn't throw the kitchen sink in!

We've road tested this Playbook with a few APs & clubs (thanks – you know who you are 😊) & they've told us whilst the Playbook is big, they wouldn't take anything out.

The key is in how you **navigate** it and that depends on where you're at on your **environmental sustainability journey**:

- **LEARNING MODE:** Just want to learn more about movement & blue space opportunities & barriers, check out Sections 1-6 to get some background.
- **ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES FOR ACTION MODE:** Check out our recommended options for action. Want a linear methodical approach then follow our 4 step process with supporting templates. Want to follow your nose & explore with your local network then go for it & get stuck in - just use this for thought provocation. Want some short cuts to quick wins – we've got suggestions for that too. Or a blend of all 3 approaches. Whatever works for you. Progress over perfection. Check out Section 7: Taking Action.
- **HERE FOR INSPO MODE:** Check out our wealth of 32 case studies from across England, covering all sorts of different activities in all sorts of different blue spaces (Section 8 + a separate case study supplement).
- **LOOKING FOR USEFUL RESOURCES MODE:** We've listed out inspiring videos, related calendar moments, links to the Sport England Movement Fund and, yes you guessed it, a list of useful resources (Section 9).
- **ASK A FRIEND MODE:** Just want to chat the journey & approach through with a friendly face, head over to our contacts page in Next Steps for a chat with Nicki or Eve (Section 10).

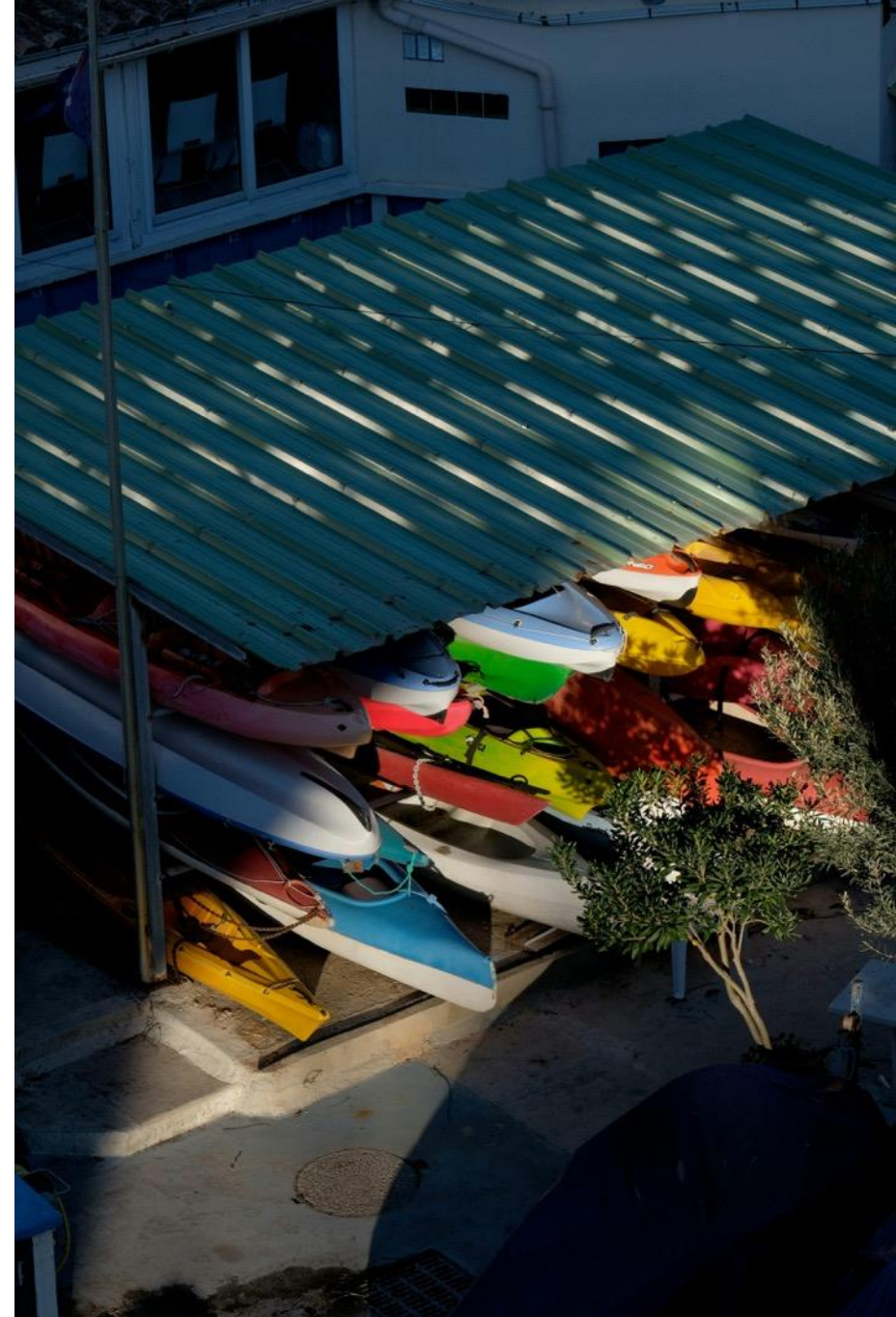
If at any point it all gets too much or you get lost, hit one of the frequently placed **blue back arrows** to take you back to the Contents page.

PLAYBOOK CONTENTS

Click on the page numbers to go direct to each section. The back arrows help you navigate back to this Contents page. So you can jump around as suits you!



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- SECTION 6** **Tackling inequalities.** [Pages 35-41](#)
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- SECTION 10** **Wrap-Up.** [Pages 72-76](#)





2. WHY GET INVOLVED?

- Our vision
- Blue spaces & participation in numbers
- Blue health concept & co-benefits of movement in water

OUR VISION

Healthy & nature rich blue spaces
across England for everyone to enjoy
movement in water.



WHAT IF.....?

we could **convene** our local network together to create **blue health step changes** in our place through some key initiatives?



blue spaces were baked into our **Active Design** work just as green spaces are?



we could champion the opportunities of individuals from marginalised backgrounds to have their **fair share of blue water activity**?



we could help grow **awareness** of the blue activity space opportunities in our area & grow participation?



blue activity spaces featured more & more in **HAF opportunities**, like in Birmingham?



we could grow **water confidence & ability** in our area for those who have least access to it?



we could play a role in sharing blue space **best practice** in our place?



we could support **on-going water quality testing** in the right places to ensure more people get moving in the water?



we lead the **communication** that blue spaces are **for everyone**



WHAT SUCCESS COULD LOOK LIKE – FOR PEOPLE & PLANET

Thriving healthy waters everywhere for everyone



A right to **access blue space** within a **15 min walk** of home



Cost is never a barrier to participation in water



No-one is left out of the water because of a lack of **swim confidence** or **ability**



Confidence in **water quality** through easy to access kits & information, & monitoring champions



Everyone feels like the blue spaces around them are their spaces – we all **belong**



A **clear right of access** on unregulated waters to explore waterways freely



Equipment is available for all – no water activity is off limits for anyone



IN NUMBERS: WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES & BLUE SPACES IN ENGLAND

Blue spaces in England are already enabling movement in many different ways for many different people.

Blue spaces



3,347

water recreation locations in England (1)



5,580Kms

of coastline in England (2)



4,500Kms

of statutory navigations in England



390+

large lakes in England



451

designated bathing waters (1)



Blue participants



271m

annual visits to UK coasts & beaches, with walking the most common activity (3)



13.2m

people participated in some form of boating activity in the UK in 2022



7.7m

Brits now participate in paddle



4.4m

adults participated in open water swimming in 2023 (4)



2m

anglers fish & spend time in the water environment each year



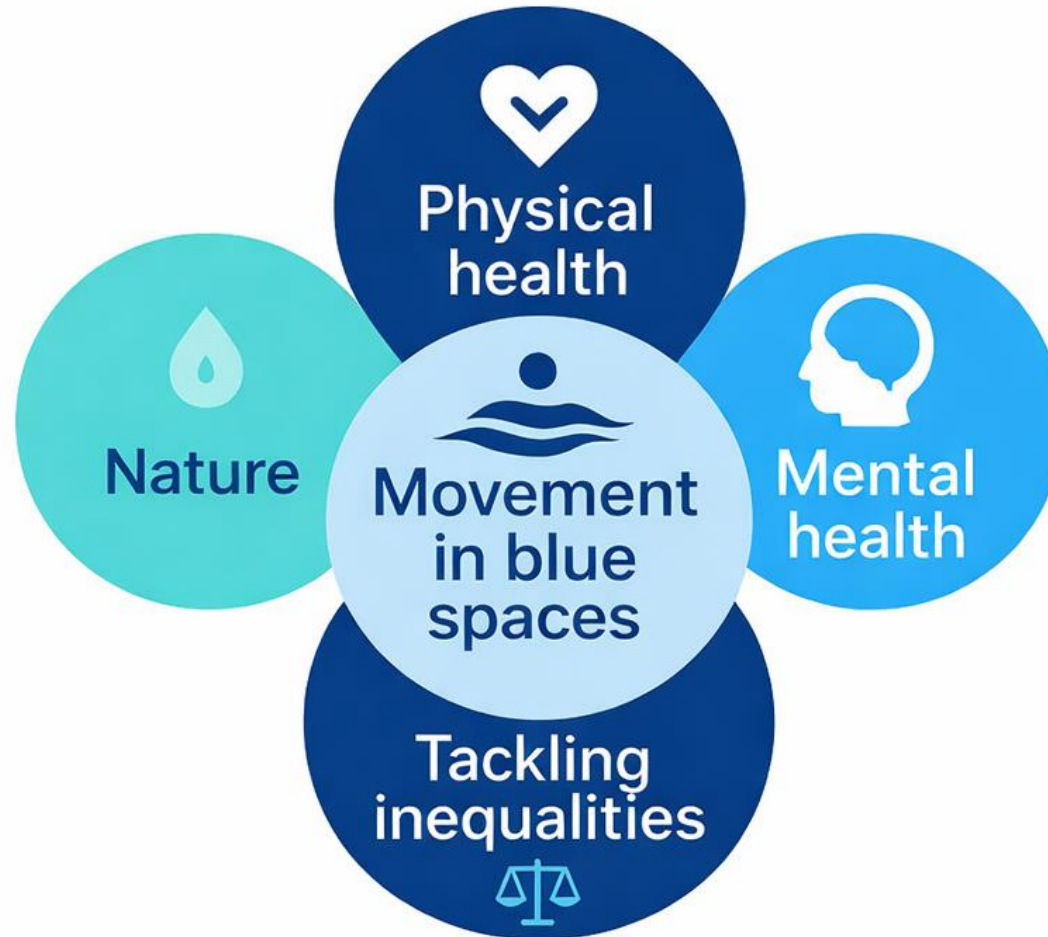
(1) Environment Agency – Exploring Recreational Water Use in England Report , 2025. (2) www.unitedkingdommaps.com/faq/how-long-is-the-coastline-of-the-uk (3) <https://bluehealth2020.eu/news/coastal-visits/>.

(4) Sport England's Active Lives Survey

MOVEMENT IN BLUE SPACES – MANY BENEFITS IN ONE

Part of what's so exciting about movement in blue spaces is the opportunity for co-benefits:

Better for nature, physical health, mental health & a means of tackling inequalities – all focus areas for APs.



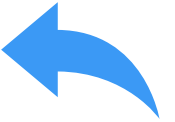
WHY IS 'BLUE HEALTH' SO IMPORTANT?

Movement in water is one of the most holistic forms of activity — strengthening the heart, protecting the body, sharpening the mind, reducing stress and building confidence. Blue spaces don't just feel good; they actively make us healthier.

- For many people, there's something that just feels **instinctively good** & natural about water, from the mesmerising **reflections, ripples & waves** to the feeling of connecting with and being in cold water.
- There is an increasing body of **scientific research** that shows how blue spaces directly support our mental & physical well-being.
- It's no coincidence that in a study of 20,000 individuals, **coastal areas** ranked the highest for **happiness & emotional well-being**.
- Exposure to blue spaces supports the release of our **feel-good brain chemicals**: dopamine, serotonin & oxytocin.
- Being around water reduces our stress hormone **cortisol** and helps activate our **parasympathetic nervous system** which is our body's natural calming response.
- Marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols describes the **calm yet alert state** of being in, on, under or near water as the **'blue mind'**.
- A 2022 study showed that individuals who spent **time in blue spaces as children** had significantly better wellbeing as adults.
- Even the colour blue itself is synonymous for many with **calmness**.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS: WHY GET INVOLVED?



1

A **vision** of healthy nature-rich blue spaces across England for everyone to enjoy movement in water.

2

Movement in water brings **multiple benefits** for nature, physical health, mental health & tackling inequalities.

3

An **abundance of blue spaces** (3,347 recreational locations) are already in use for water-based activities from paddle to row to yacht to triathlon or simply walking along the beach.

4

Celebrating the feel-good factor of all things blue & water-based, summed up in the concept of '**blue health**'.



3. INTERCONNECTING ROLES

- Intro to CWSA
- Partnership roles

AN INTRO TO THE CWSA

The Clean Water Sports Alliance launched on 30 April 2024. Why? We realised **working together** with other NGBs who rely on water to take action in this space would help us **move faster**, gain extra support and fundamentally – **make more impact!**

We have a vision for **healthy and nature rich blue spaces across the UK for everyone to enjoy water sports.**

Who are we? A coalition of National Governing Bodies who represent almost 450,000 members, elite athletes, participants and many more water users. The group is managed across all 12 NGBs with representatives across Sustainability, Operations and Policy Engagement.

Engaging with Water Companies, Government Departments, MPs, NGOs and most importantly, our members, **we will influence all to go further and faster to take action on pollution.**

CLEAN WATER SPORTS ALLIANCE



ROLE OF ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

APs lead, connect and support partners locally and nationally to create the conditions for active lifestyles to become the norm, using the power of collaboration to drive inclusive, sustainable social change.

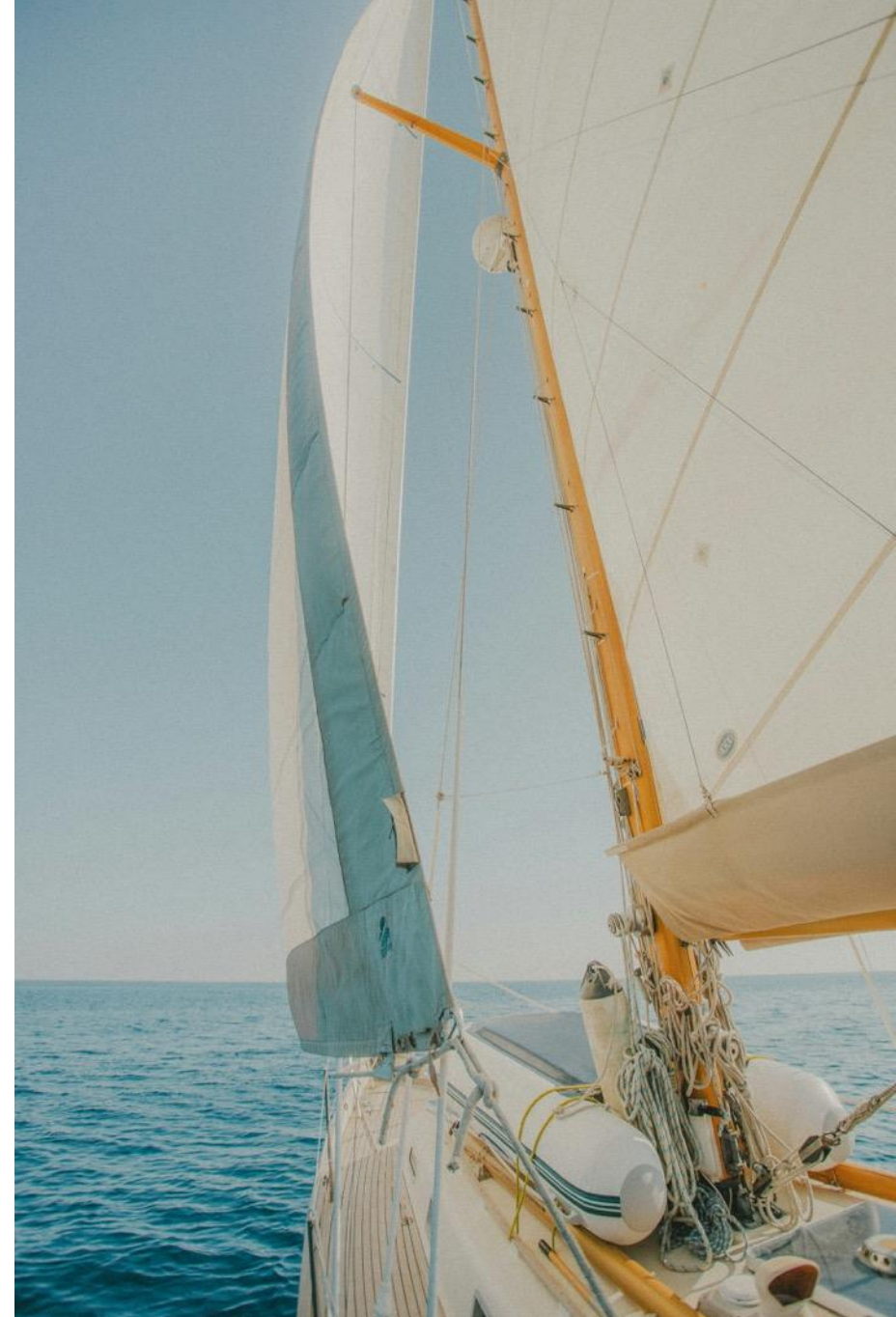
- These AP strengths lend themselves to the step change we want to see in **making movement around water accessible for ALL**.
- You will see through this Playbook that there are lots of brilliant organisations – **charities, sports clubs, community groups, strategic organisations & more** – already doing incredible work to make more movement happen in our blue spaces.
- What's often been lacking to-date is a **co-ordinated approach** that makes greater change happen faster to bring about real step changes in who can access our waters, how often, where, with what kit and how confidently.
- This initiative aligns with Sport England's investment into **Place Partnerships**, in which APs nationally are playing a crucial role to create the conditions for change.
- We're inviting **all APs** to play a role in this vital transformation.
- **To create Blue Health for everyone** – for our waters, for our communities, for our physical health & mental health, for future generations.
- The AP Network has **tackling inequalities** embedded in its core which is important when it comes to unlocking access to movement in water for **EVERYONE**.



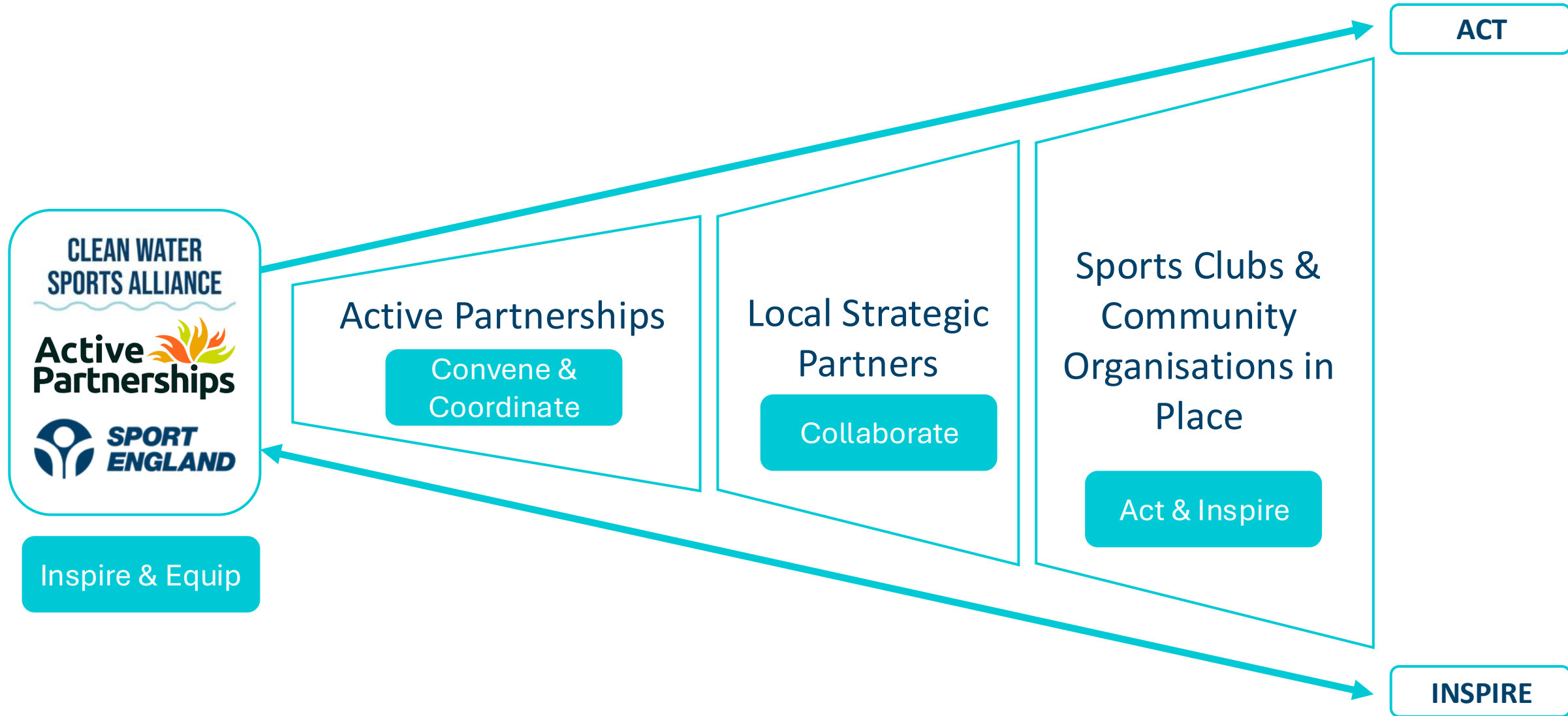
ROLE OF SPORTS CLUBS

Closer to communities, clubs are often already experts in place, people, water and sport. Ready to collaborate, club insights and leadership are essential for opening up blue spaces to more people.

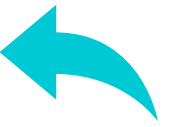
- Many clubs are already improving access and protecting their local waters — this Playbook helps **amplify and build** on that work.
- By coming together across sports and places, clubs can **tackle shared challenges**, remove barriers, and advocate for healthier, safer, more welcoming waters.
- Working collectively can unlock **stronger funding bids, shared resources, and bigger impact**.
- Collaboration across sports helps **widen participation** — especially for communities who've historically been **excluded or under-represented** in blue spaces.
- Clubs can **learn from one another**, share what's working, and inspire others through their action and innovation.
- Many clubs will work closely with **venue operators** who will also hold important influence on the quality of & access to our blue spaces.
- To get more people moving in water, we need **clubs, their leaders & their sustainability champions** to keep shining a light on our **brilliant blue spots**.



HOW WE ALL COME TOGETHER TO DRIVE PLACE-BASED CHANGE



KEY TAKE-AWAYS: INTERCONNECTING ROLES



1

Role of the CWSA: The Clean Water Sports Alliance (CWSA) was recently formed (2024) and has been working as a collective of National Governing Bodies to influence nationally for healthier blue spaces. Partnering with Sport England and the Active Partnerships Network, the CWSA will continue working at the national level but also at a more local level, supporting clubs to be closer to the conversation and action.

2

Role of Active Partnerships: As natural conveners and coordinators of networks, with a rich understanding of the needs of people in their place and a deepening commitment to the natural environment that facilitates every movement, Active Partnerships play a central role in the mission to get more people moving in water.

3

Role of Sports Clubs: Whether it's water sports clubs or clubs based in proximity to blue spaces, this is where the action's at, as already proven by numerous great case studies and champions. Now all we need to do is inspire and facilitate even more of this.



4. BARRIERS TO MOVEMENT IN BLUE SPACES

- Challenges to water quality – industrial & human pollution
- Barriers to accessing blue spaces for all

WATER QUALITY & POLLUTION – A CRITICAL BARRIER TO MOVEMENT IN SOME UK WATERS



Sewage



**Agricultural
Run Off**



Chemicals



Plastics



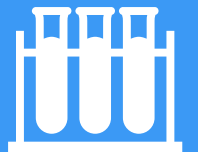
**Invasive Non
-Native Species**



Lack of confidence in water quality



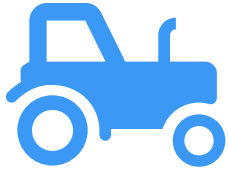
Need for water quality testing



WATER QUALITY & POLLUTION CHALLENGES IN NUMBERS



- Only **15%** of English Rivers have been deemed to be in **good ecological health** (1)
- In 2024 there were nearly **1 million sewage discharges** – one every 30 seconds (2)



- Agricultural run off causes increases in **phosphates, nitrates & ammonia levels** in our waterways
- Agriculture accounts for **87% of all ammonia emissions** in the UK (4)
- The Government's SAGIS modelling shows **agriculture as the dominant source of nitrate pollution** in most rural river catchments (5)



- **Toxic mixtures** identified in over **1,600 river, lake and groundwater sites** across England. More than half of sites contained 3 or more of the 5 **chemical cocktails** investigated (1)
- Up to **101 chemicals** were identified in river samples, with the Mersey, Stour, Colne, Thames, Trent, Yare, Irwell, Medway, Humber and Avon with the highest numbers of chemicals (1)



- 2019 Greenpeace survey of **13 UK rivers** found that they all contained plastic pollution. Scientists found **microplastics** (measuring <5mm) in 28 out of 30 locations tested (3)
- **80%+** of the polymer types found were polyethylene, polystyrene & polypropylene, used to make a variety of plastic products like **food packaging, milk, water bottles & carrier bags**



- Over 2,000 plants and animals have been introduced to GB from all over the world by people - known as **non-native species**. Around **10-15% spread** and become invasive non-native species which harm wildlife and the environment, are costly to the economy and can even impact on our health and way of life (4)
- One common example is **floating pennywort**
- These INNS (invasive non-native species) then block out the sunlight and create rapid growth of **blue-green algae**, suffocating our water ways

ACCESS - A COMMON BARRIER

TO GROWING OUR ACTIVITY IN BLUE SPACES FOR EVERYONE



No **nearby inclusive & accessible blue spaces**, particularly in areas of deprivation.



People often **don't know about** nearby blue spaces to get active in.



No **nearby healthy blue spaces** to get active in.



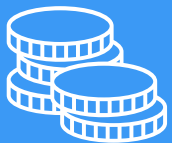
Not everyone feels **safe** in blue spaces. Lack of **education** around water safety.



Water recreational activities aren't **permitted** in some blue spaces.



Confidence in water.



The **cost** of accessing paid blue activity spaces or the equipment required to get active in it prevents water activities being for everyone.



Lack of **belonging** in blue space.

ACCESS BARRIERS IN NUMBERS



- Most of England's **4,500 km of inland waterways** are in the South East, East & Midlands (4)
- Many regions such as the **North East, South West & North West** have little to no access to any statutory navigations (4)
- **20%** of people cannot use **Public Rights of Way** because of mobility issues, a result of unnecessary barriers on the network such as gates and stiles (6)



- Just **15%** of English river stretches reach **good ecological health** (1)
- **0%** of England's rivers are in **good chemical health** (1)



- **1 in 4 people** do not know where they can walk, increasing to over **1 in 3 for disabled people** - A lack of easily available public information, concerns around getting lost, and a lack of signage are real barriers for many (7)



- Of the total 57,602km of rivers in England, less than **3.5% have a statutory public right of navigation** (2)
- **Water recreation** reports found in only **one third** of the surface waterbody catchments in England (4)
- The Ramblers & Natural England have been campaigning since 2004 to establish the **England Coast Path** as the world's longest continuous national coast trail of 4,345Km (7)



- **1 in 4 children** leave primary school unable to swim 25m (5)
- **95% of black adults** in England **do not swim** (3)

KEY TAKE-AWAYS: BARRIERS TO MOVEMENT IN BLUE SPACES



1

There are **2 key barriers** to getting more people moving in water: **Quality & Access**

2

Challenges to water quality come from either **human pollution** (plastic & invasive non-native species) or **industrial pollution** (sewage, agriculture & chemicals).

3

A **lack of inland bathing waters** means few inland locations are officially tested for bacteria which could impact on human health, leading to **limited meaningful information on water quality**, leaving sports clubs having to rely on **volunteers** to fill the gap by doing their **own water quality testing** . More robust **legislation** is required to protect public health in all recreational waters.

4

Barriers to **accessing blue spaces** can be **physical & social**, with too many people unable to access safe, confident & happy movement in healthy, affordable & open blue spaces near them or simply unable to feel a genuine sense of belonging in these spaces.

5

Together, we can **remove all of these barriers** to create access to healthy blue activity spaces for everyone. Ultimately, everyone should feel they **belong** in all blue spaces.



5. UNDERSTANDING LOCAL BARRIERS

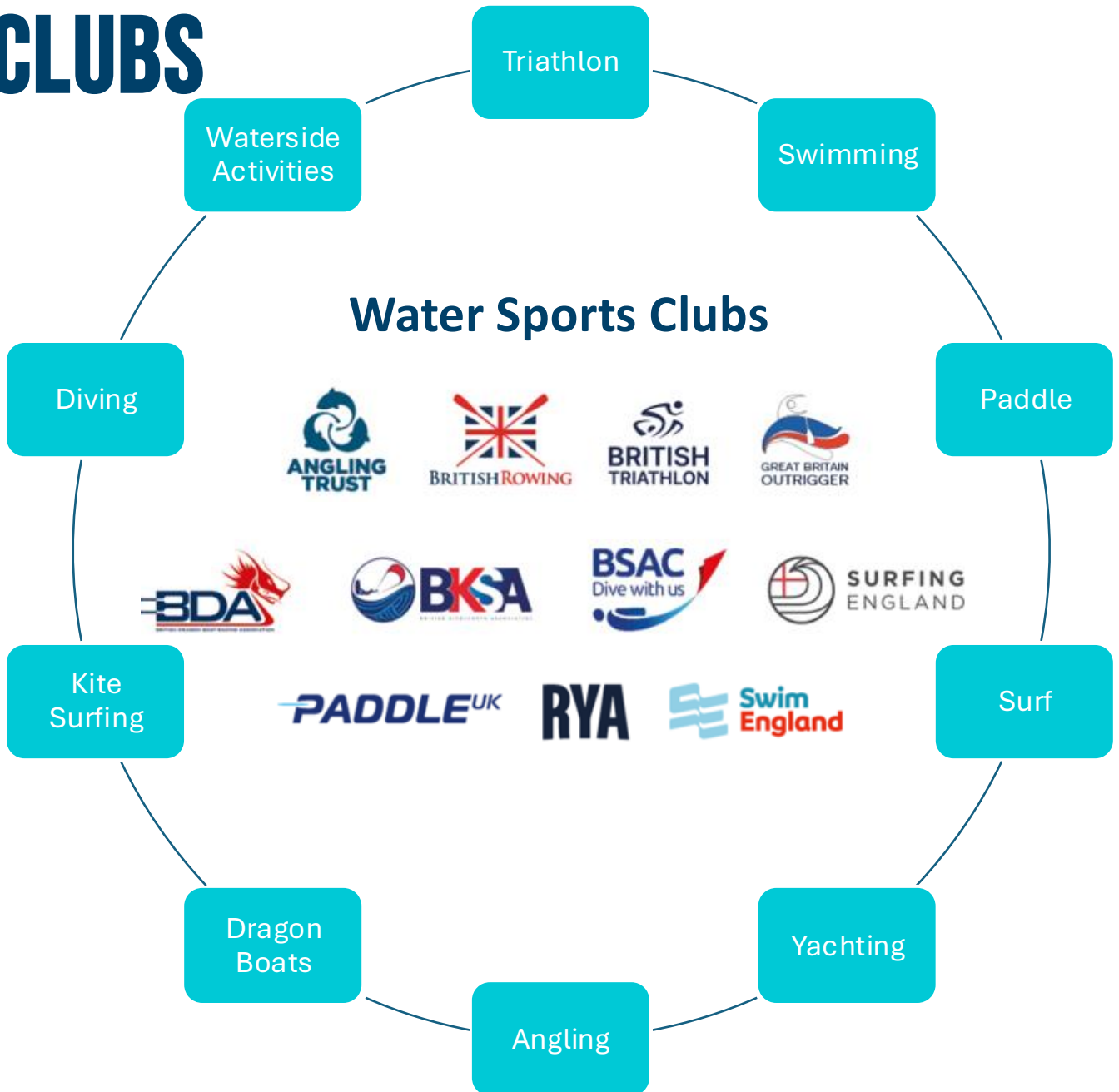
- Data on industrial pollution
- How to test water quality
- Data on human pollution
- Data on understanding participation

START WITH LOCAL SPORTS CLUBS

We're pretty confident you won't need to start from scratch to understand the barriers to water-based activities in your place.

Start by **chatting with local water sports clubs**. They're likely to have a good handle on **water quality** in the area & recreational locations & may even be **testing** already. They will also likely have strong existing relationships with **venue operators**.

Clubs will also likely have a good handle on who participates in their blue spaces but you may have to ask **who's not participating**.



DIGGING INTO A BIT OF DATA - IF YOU WANT!

Data can be overwhelming! So if you look at the next few pages & they're not for you, don't worry. Active Partnerships are rooted in the **strength of their networks**. If you want to simply start by working with your network to better understand barriers to participation in blue spaces in your area, then please do dive right in!

For others, we know you might want to do a bit of your own **groundwork**, either before speaking to clubs & strategic local organisations or to build on what others in your network share with you.

So the rest of this section is dedicated to sharing some of the **resources** out there to help you understand:

- **Water quality** in your area
- How to **test water quality**
- **Plastic & invasive non-native species pollution** in your area
- What **blue activities** are happening in your place

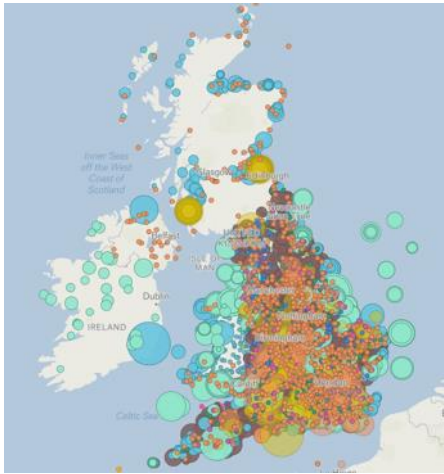


CHECKING WATER QUALITY IN YOUR AREA – AVAILABLE DATA

If you want to do some digging on water quality in your area, here's some helpful sources to take a look at. Hover over the images for links to resources.



Industrial Pollution



Watershed Pollution Map:
Collating multiple pollution datasets in one interactive map - search by postcode (River Action UK)

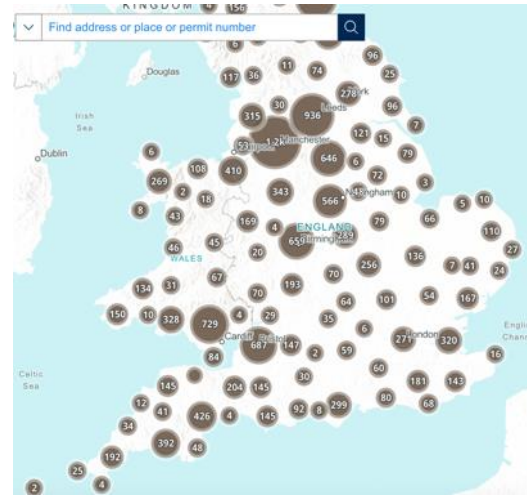
Explore catchment data
Explore and download information about the water environment in your area and access river basin management plans.

Search Catchment Data Explorer

Search by water body, catchment, place, national grid reference, latitude and longitude (for example '51.451,-2.604') or easting and northing (for example '358125,172619').



Catchment Data Explorer:
Info on attributes, pollution & protected areas - search by place (Environment Agency)



Sewage Map:
Checking for sewage pollution in your area & by water company - search by address (The Rivers Trust)

Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs | Data Services Platform

Environment Agency | Bathing Water Quality | Find | Get the data | Glossary | Help | Web site

Swimfo: Find a bathing water

Swimfo allows you to look up details of a designated bathing water by name or location. To get an overview of multiple bathing water locations, or to download data extracts, see the [data page](#).

Water quality at designated bathing water sites in England is assessed by the Environment Agency. From May to September, samples are taken to measure water quality, and at a number of sites daily pollution risk forecasts are issued. Annual ratings classify each site as excellent, good, sufficient or poor based on measurements taken over a period of up to four years. Information about bathing water quality in other countries in the UK can be found here: [Scotland \(SEPA\)](#), [Wales \(NEMW\)](#), or [Northern Ireland \(DAERA\)](#)

Name, county, district or postcode:
Manchester

Bathing waters near to Manchester, closest first

River Ribbles at Edleston Bridge	Ribble Valley	2025: poor
Southport	Sefton	2025: sufficient
Widnes	Wirral	2025: good
Arncliffe	Sefton	2025: sufficient
Wharfe at Cromwell Bridge	Bradford	2025: poor

Bathing water data

Please select one or more bathing water locations below

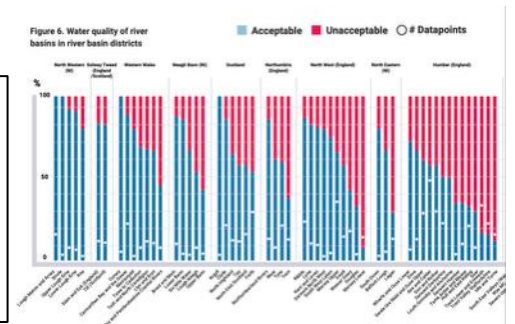
[compare sites](#) [pollution risk forecast history](#) [pollution incidents](#) [sample history](#) [download data](#)

Swimfo:
Bathing water quality assessments dating back to 2015 - search by 451 locations (Environment Agency)

Safer Seas & River Service App & Map:
Latest pollution alerts for over 450 UK locations - search by location (Surfers Against Sewage)



The Great UK Water Blitz:
Volunteer based freshwater quality reads x2 per year with data by county & river basin (EarthWatch Europe, The Big River Watch & The Rivers Trust)

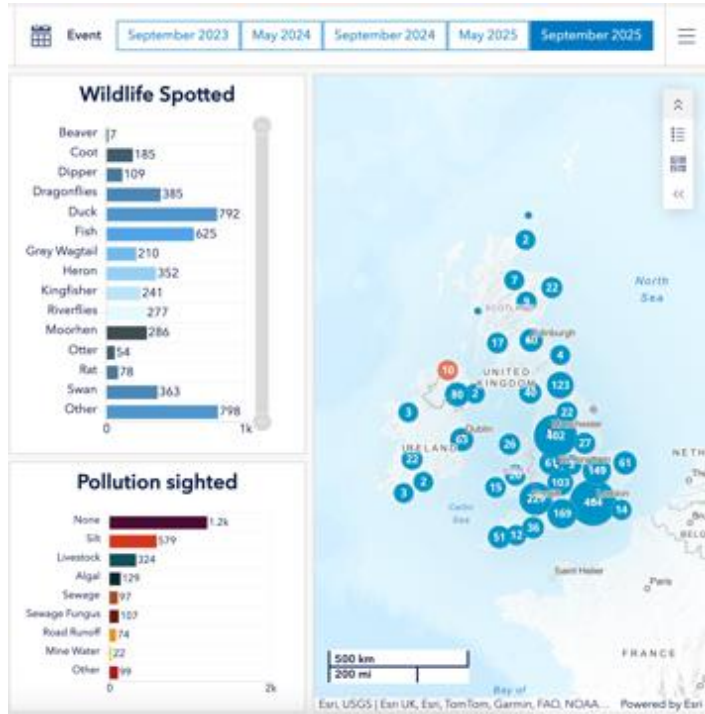


CHECKING WATER QUALITY IN YOUR AREA – VOLUNTEER TESTING



Industrial Pollution

The Environment Agency test the 451 bathing waters of the UK but often not frequently enough and that still leaves nearly 3,000 water recreation locations untested for water quality unless volunteers step in.



Testing for Phosphates & Nitrates

How rowing clubs can help monitor nutrients

Citizen science can be an important way to help us understand the health of our rivers and identify pollution sources. The data you gather is 100% useful when the testing takes place regularly, and the information gathered is shared with a wider group. This way, your data can become part of a nationwide picture of river water quality, and feed in to wider conservation and monitoring plans.

To set your club up to deliver ongoing phosphate and nitrate (P/N) testing, and to access guidance, support and testing equipment, consider joining Earthwatch's FreshWater Watch (freshwaterwatch.org). The membership typically costs £400 and includes access to their nationwide database, an online portal and app for recording your results, support from their in-house scientists and a testing kit for checking nutrient levels and turbidity. If you are interested in occasional testing, join the Green UK WaterBlitz (greenukwaterblitz.org). To receive free N/P phosphate tests (events run every Spring and Autumn).

Why is P/N testing important?

Phosphates and nitrates are found in agricultural fertiliser, animal waste, and sewage. Excess runoff and leaching through peat banks mean that dangerous high nutrient levels are an increasing occurrence across fresh rivers and waterways.

Identifying the presence of high phosphate and nitrate levels is an essential start to preventing their catastrophic effects on rivers, allowing us to locate sources of pollution.

Phosphates and nitrates are important nutrients in rivers, used by plants and wildlife to build proteins and photosynthesize. However, in large amounts, these nutrients have detrimental effects on water quality and ecosystem health.

High nutrient levels can lead to vast algal blooms. These algal blooms produce toxins, as well as use up the available oxygen and block out sunlight to other river flora and fauna in the river - a process known as eutrophication. Consequently, these nutrients can be a threat to other river organisms.

Partners: [earthwatch](http://earthwatch.org), [RIVERACTION](http://riveraction.com), [The Rivers Trust](http://theriverstrust.org)

The Big River Watch: Volunteer based visual monitoring of wildlife & pollution reported twice a year – April & Sept (The Rivers Trust)

The Great UK WaterBlitz: Volunteer based freshwater testing with kits twice a year – April & Sept (EarthWatch Europe & The Rivers Trust)

Testing for Phosphates & Nitrates: Volunteer based on-going UK testing with support, tracking & benchmarks for £400 membership (Fresh Water Watch Org)



CHECKING WATER QUALITY IN YOUR AREA – HUMAN POLLUTION

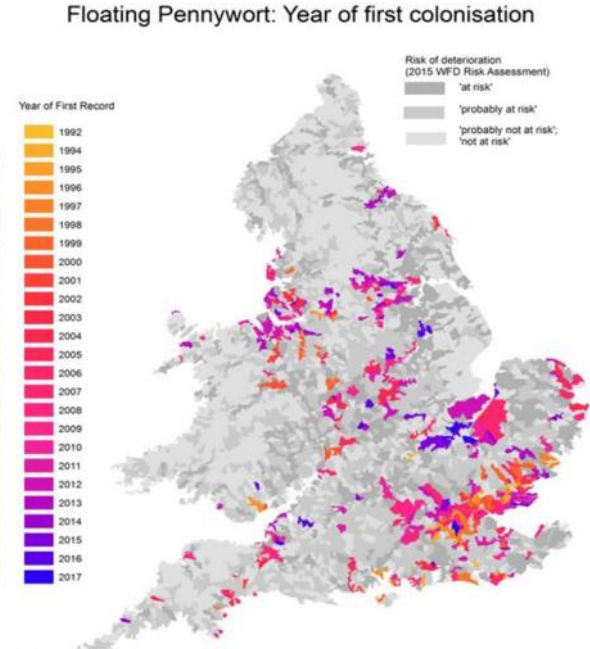


Human Pollution

Human pollution in the form of plastics, litter, micro-plastics, non-native invasive species like the floating pennywort & blue green algae are all too common in England. Here's some help to try to spot them in your area.



Microplastics in UK Rivers Survey, 2019:
Survey of 13 UK rivers - found that they all contain plastic pollution
(Greenpeace) (1)



Floating Pennywort Distribution Map :
Intensity map of floating pennywort distribution in England & Wales
(Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland) (2)

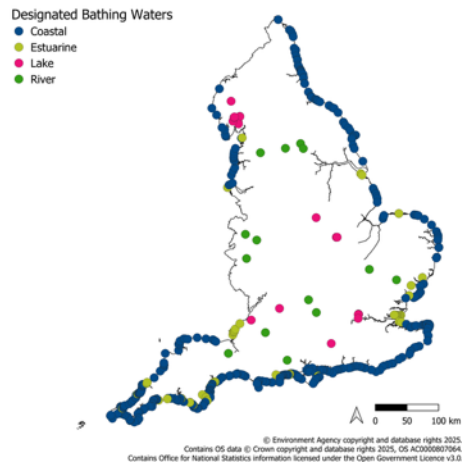


Bloomin' Algae App:
How to identify & notify blue green algae through an app
(UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology) (3)

ONE KEY DATA SOURCE FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING BLUE ACTIVITIES

IN YOUR PLACE Environment Agency: Exploring Recreational Water Use in England Report.

Find out more: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/exploring-recreational-water-use-in-england>



Location ID	Recreation location	River basin district	Waterbody salinity	Recreation zone area (km ²)	Number of recreation reports	Number of report types	Number of data sources	Activities	Recreation indicator types	Data sources
03025	Poole Harbour & Bournemouth West	South West	Saline	21.0	111	14	12			
03304	Falmouth Bay & Inner Harbour	South West	Saline	7.1	51	12	12			
01107	Colwick Country Park & River Trent	Humber	Freshwater	9.7	116	12	11			
00181	Derwent Water	North West	Freshwater	7.3	43	11	11			
03190	Paignton & Torquay South	South West	Saline	10.9	75	11	10			
02930	Portsmouth Harbour to Eastney	South East	Saline	15.3	70	11	10			
03144	Teignmouth & Shaldon	South West	Saline	3.5	29	11	9			
03224	Plymouth	South West	Saline	11.8	91	10	11			
00057	Tynemouth & South Shields	Northumbria	Saline	7.0	32	10	11			
03115	Swanage	South West	Saline	2.4	31	9	11			
02871	Summerleaze & Crooklets	South West	Saline	2.8	24	9	11			
03267	Bigbury-on-Sea	South West	Saline	3.9	23	8	12			
03193	Newquay & The Gannel	South West	Saline	9.8	70	8	11			
00310	Coniston Water	North West	Freshwater	6.6	27	8	11			

Activities

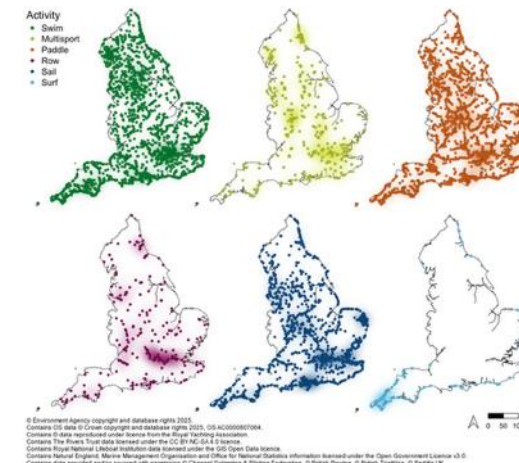
- Swimming
- Multisports
- Paddling
- Rowing
- Sailing
- Surfing
- Unspecified water recreation

Recreation indicator types

- Channel swim site
- Designated bathing water
- Lifeguard unit
- Marina
- Multisport events
- Open water venue
- Paddling club
- Paddling events
- Paddling launch
- Recreation site
- Rowing club
- Rowing events
- Sailing club
- Slipway
- Surf school
- Swimming club
- Swimming events

Data sources

- British Rowing
- British Triathlon
- Channel Swimming & Piloting Federation
- Environment Agency
- Marine Management Organisation
- Natural England
- Paddle UK
- Royal Life Saving Society UK
- Royal National Lifeboat Institution
- Royal Yachting Association
- Surfers Against Sewage
- Surfing England
- The Rivers Trust
- TimeOutdoors
- Water Buoy Ltd
- 2000 Wild Swims by Rob Fryer



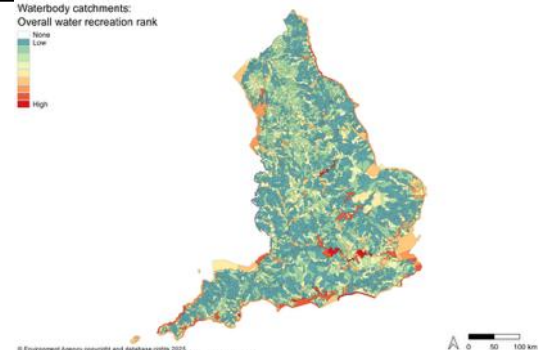
Map of designated bathing waters

Top 14 water recreation locations in England

A map of which blue activities happen in your place

River basin district	BWs as of 2024	Recreation locations						Recreation Any activity	Recreation reports
		Swim	Multisport	Paddle	Row	Sail	Surf		
South West	203	342	31	271	29	162	64	506	2,309
Humber	24	298	48	295	23	149	1	619	1,741
Thames	18	246	41	240	49	173		507	2,574
Anglian	45	224	42	310	30	198	3	524	1,960
North West	33	196	28	166	20	105	2	382	1,034
South East	83	159	25	160	22	135	11	273	2,155
Severn [†]	9	122	20	170	29	88	1	305	906
Northumbria	34	95	19	69	15	41	5	160	573
Solway Tweed [†]	1	39	2	18	2	6		54	141
Dee [†]	1	5	3	7	1	8		14	104
seaward area*		1						3	3
Total	451	1,727	259	1,706	220	1,065	87	3,347	13,500

[†] The Solway Tweed RBD sits mostly in Scotland and the Dee RBD sits mostly in Wales. The Severn RBD also extends into Wales. Only water recreation in England was considered in this study.
* Three seaward locations were outside the RBD boundaries but inside the Environment Agency public facing area.



Water recreation ranks across water body catchments, creating an overview of various water recreation metrics

Waterbody	Number of recreation locations	Waterbody	Number of recreation locations
Navigable rivers:	799	Navigable canals:	391
River Thames	68	Grand Union Canal	52
River Great Ouse	40	Leeds and Liverpool Canal	32
River Severn	33	Grand Union Canal - Leicester Arm	20
River Nene	29	Basingstoke Canal	16
River Trent	25	Chesterfield Canal	15
River Wharfe	20	Lancaster Canal	14
River Medway	20	Oxford Canal	13
River Tees	19	Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal	13
River Tyne	18	Kennet and Avon Canal	12
River Wye	17	Ashby Canal	12
River Avon (Warwickshire)	16		
River Wey	16	Intersecting river & canals:	73
River Lee Navigation	14	Leeds and Liverpool Canal; River Aire	12
River Derwent (Derbyshire)	14		
River Avon (Bristol)	14		
River Kennet	13		
River Stour, Kent	13		
River Wear	12		

Number of recreation locations by navigable river & canal

Number of designated water bathing points & water recreation locations in each river basin district

UNDERSTANDING & ENSURING WATER SAFETY IN PLACE



Every activity, every blue space & every individual has different safety & support requirements. As we encourage more people to get more active in and around water, ensuring this is done safely is paramount. There are already some excellent guidelines out there to follow. Here are a couple of examples from British Rowing & PADDLE UK.



#PADDLESAFE

- ✓ Always wear a buoyancy aid
- ✓ Tell someone where you're going
- ✓ Carry a mobile phone
- ✓ Check the weather
- ✓ Know your limits

PADDLE^{UK} Lifeboats

KEY TAKE-AWAYS: UNDERSTANDING LOCAL BARRIERS



1

Start by talking to local **water sports clubs** to see what they already know about **water quality** in the area & any **barriers to access**. Also talk to them about **who's using** your blue spaces & who's not.

2

If you want to do some more digging into the data, **top resources** to look at include:

1

One stop shop resource from The Environment Agency on activities in blue spaces: [Exploring Recreational Water Use in England Report](#).

2

[The Watershed Pollution Map](#) by River Action UK for a holistic overview on multiple pollution sources.

3

[The Sewage Map](#) by The Rivers Trust, specifically on sewage issues.

4

[The Great UK Water Blitz](#) by Earth Watch Europe, The Big River Watch & The Rivers Trust – Local water testing data & something to get involved in through volunteer-based testing.

5

[A guide to spotting invasive floating pennywort](#) by the Environment Agency & Keep Britain Tidy.

6

[Bloomin' Algae App](#) by UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology.



6. TACKLING INEQUALITIES AT OUR CORE

- Why this matters
- 3 focus areas for impact
- Inclusion case studies



“Water is a universal element. Yet access to it, representation within it and the opportunity surrounding it remain deeply unequal.”

UOCEAN 2050

TACKLING INEQUALITIES IS AT THE CORE OF ALL ACTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORK

As this excerpt from the Sport England Every Move Sustainability Strategy demonstrates, **participation, environmental sustainability & tackling inequalities** are tightly interwoven, overlapping & co-dependent. We can't deliver our vision for movement in water without a focus on inequalities.

Connecting participation, inequalities and environmental sustainability

Poor water quality

Micro-plastics

Air pollution

Biodiversity crisis

Changing climate (flooding, drought, heat)

Greenhouse gas emissions



Taking action to improve ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Active travel
- Clean air and water
- Access to green space

WHERE WE WANT TO BE

- Clean air
- Connection to nature
- Climate justice
- Access to kit

Taking action to increase PARTICIPATION

- Physical health
- Mental and emotional wellbeing
- Local opportunity

Taking action to improve INEQUALITIES



Poor access to green space

Rising energy costs

Closure of facilities



Limited transport options

Social inequalities (low income, poor health)

Discrimination

Disability

OVERLAYING INEQUALITIES DATA WITH BLUE SPACES TO MAP FOCUS AREAS

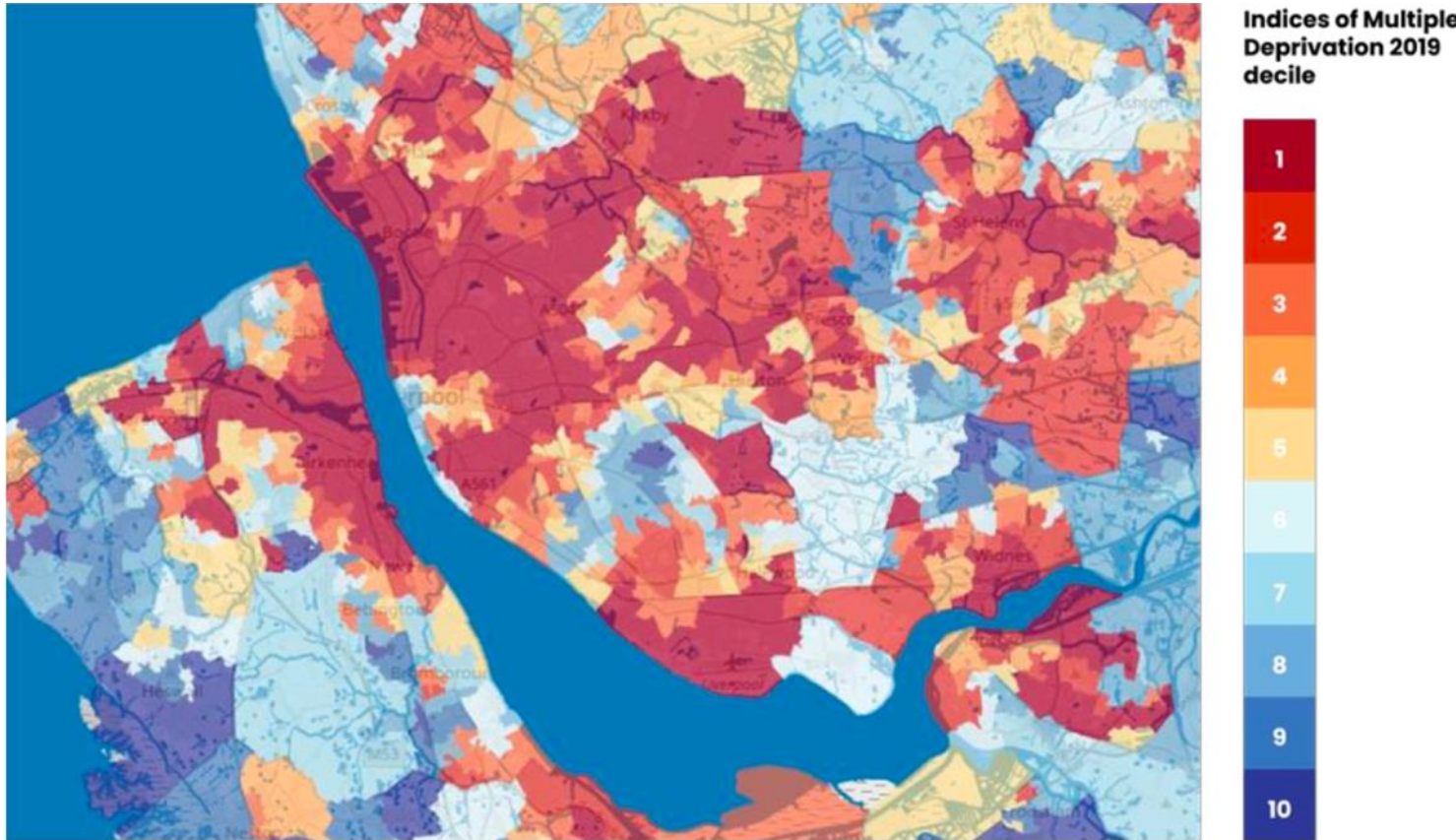


Figure 2: Deprivation and blue space in urban areas of Liverpool City Region (Natural England, 2024)

Excerpt from **The University of Liverpool Report** ‘The well-being potential of urban blue space – Lessons from Liverpool City Region’ (Jan 2025):

“There is substantial evidence that living close to the coast is associated with better health and wellbeing (White et al.,2020).

And yet, in England, **coastal communities are some of the most deprived** across all domains including health (Whitty, 2021).

There is both need and opportunity for coastal areas: while they may have greater health inequalities to address, their **coastal location can be an asset** in doing so.

The potential for blue space to have a **positive impact** has been less appreciated.”

WHERE CAN WE HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT?

There are 3 under-represented groups we know can especially benefit from increased access to blue spaces. Projects & programmes designed to support these groups are making a meaningful & measured difference.

Disabled people



Image Credit: The Activity Alliance

53% of disabled people say the government isn't doing enough to help them **be active or access nature** (1)

Young people



Image Credit: The Wave Project

Only **24%** of schools provide daily opportunities for **children to experience nature** (2)

Ethnically diverse groups & communities



Image Credit: Open Minds Active

95% of black adults in England **do not swim** (3)

11 CASE STUDIES FOCUSED ON TACKLING INEQUALITIES

Will you add to this list of incredible initiatives giving those with less representation more opportunities to get more active in your blue spaces & increase their blue health? Hover over each image for a link to find out more.



Fulham Reach Boat Club: 3 rowing programmes supporting under-represented groups



Bell Boat Programme (Young People & Ethnically Diverse Groups): summer programme

Fleetwood Beach Wheelchairs (Disabled People)



The Wave Project (Young People): changing young lives through surf therapy



Learn To Swim Programme (Ethnically Diverse Groups): for global majority women



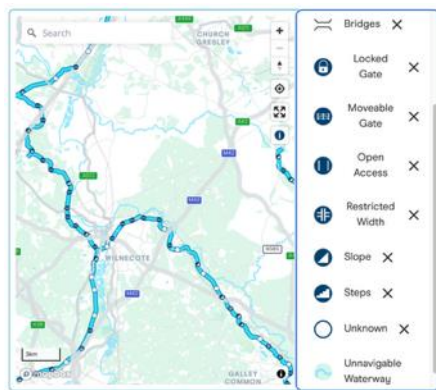
Explore Kent & AGE UK: free River walking groups



Inclusive Paddle Boarding (Disabled People): bespoke kit & disability inclusive sessions



Birmingham Community Paddle Sport Project (Ethnically Diverse Groups): opening communities to the canals



Canal & River Trust Accessibility Map (Disabled People): highlighting barriers & enablers to access towpaths

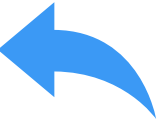


Activity Alliance 'Access For All' Guide (Disabled People): considerations for making blue spaces accessible for all



Wetwheels Foundation (Disabled People): barrier-free boating so everyone can safely access the water

KEY TAKE-AWAYS: TACKLING INEQUALITIES AT OUR CORE



1

“Water is a universal element. Yet access to it, representation within it and the opportunity surrounding it remain deeply unequal.” UOCEAN 2050.

2

We need to acknowledge and support the critical interdependence of movement, tackling inequalities & environmental sustainability.

3

Explore data in your place that might highlight correlations between areas of deprivation and blue spaces to focus investment for impact.

4

With a focus on the 3 under-represented groups where we can make the biggest difference in blue spaces:

1

Disabled people

2

Ethnically diverse groups & communities

3

Young people



8. TAKING ACTION

- 3 different approaches
- 4 step linear process with templates
- Speedy short cuts
- Sport England Maturity Matrix

TAKING ACTION YOUR WAY

We know that every AP has a lot on their plates, with limited time, capacity & resource. We can see so many opportunities for APs to support more movement in water but we don't know what's right or what's possible for your place right now. So we're suggesting you choose an approach that works for you right now. You might switch to another route further down the line. We don't believe this is about perfection but about progress - every step forward counts.



1. Linear: Follow our 4 step process to more movement in your place, starting with some place-based research to unearth new opportunities for movement in blue spaces to prioritising & planning action. Use this section to help guide you.



2. Messy: Follow your nose. Start some conversations. Do what's natural to APs and convene a network. We know the energy will take you to places of impact. Use this guide for inspiration.



3. Short Cuts: Check out our cheat sheet for some ideas on lighting some small fires & seeing what happens ([P52](#))

PREPARE: UNDERSTAND YOUR NETWORK

Before you get stuck in, do what APs do best and begin by exploring your network. Who within your network or maybe currently outside of it, might you want to consult on this project? Who might have info that could help? Who might not yet be represented in your network and could help highlight barriers to accessing blue spaces?



Local sports clubs & water sports clubs, alongside blue space venue operators & other community & faith groups & organisations

Local authorities & councils; local water companies*; universities; local businesses

National not-for-profit organisations operating at a local or regional level

Core Active Partnerships Team

*Please note the Water Companies represented here with logos are a sample of the 19 water companies across England

EXAMPLE: NETWORK ENGAGEMENT

Here are a few starter for 10 examples of relevant blue space contacts that may already be in your network or easy for you to add to your network & who you might want to partner with on this journey to get more people more active in blue spaces. If you complete this template for your AP, who will you add?

	National not-for-profit organisations operating at a local or regional level	Local authorities & councils – connecting to place-based strategies; local water companies	Local clubs & organisations
ACTIVE PARTNERSHIP	Clean Water Sports Alliance	Local government & authorities, connecting to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water Management Plan - Local Nature Recovery Plan - Waste Management Plan - Net Zero Plan - Regeneration Plans - Catchment Partnerships 	Local water sports clubs
	Natural England		Local activity & non-water based sports clubs, eg walking, around water
	Forestry England		Faith groups
	Canal & River Trust		Community groups & organisations
	The Wildlife Trusts		Blue space venue operators
	Friends of the Earth	Regional Water Companies	
	National Trust		
	The Rivers Trust		
	Surfers Against Sewage		

4 STEP PROCESS TO IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES IN PLACE

If you like a bit of structure, follow this linear process to identify, prioritise, define & plan opportunities for more movement for more people in blue spaces.



1

Follow the **stepping stones matrix** to identify opportunities in your place, enabling you to complete the spreadsheet.



2

Use the **prioritisation grid** to assess your opportunities according to impact & ease.



3

Define each of your opportunities according to the Job To Get Done **template**.

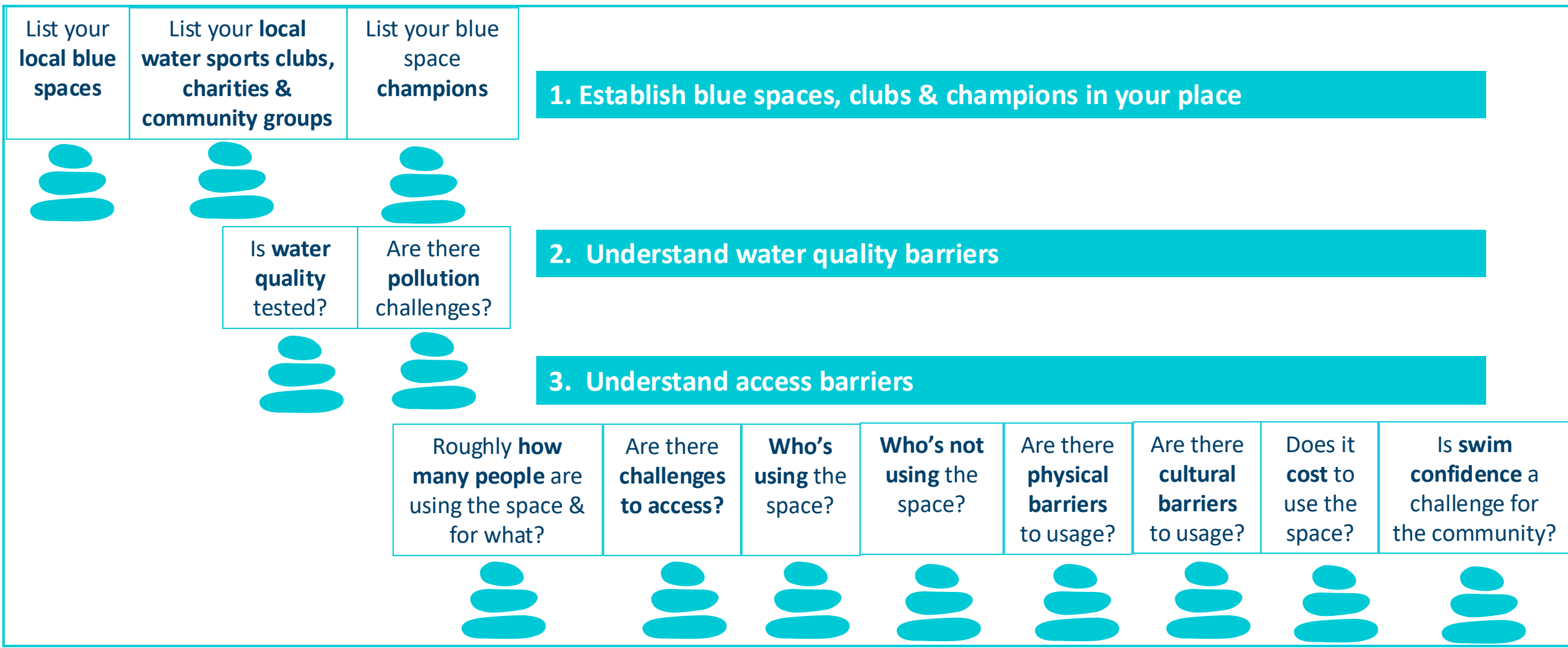


4

Consider the **new or existing contacts** you may need to deliver your opportunity.

OPPORTUNITY FINDER: STEPPING STONES MATRIX

This is likely to be the most intense stage of the 4 step process, as you take the time to cast the net out wide to look for opportunities in your place. You may want to look at this with key strategic partners & / or sports clubs or kick start this on your own. The subsequent page offers you a table to manage these questions. Once you've thrown the net wide, subsequent stages will help you narrow down to priority opportunities.



OPPORTUNITY FINDER MATRIX

Use this template as a start point to list what you know already about the blue spaces in your area, how they're being used & how they could be used more. If you don't have the knowledge, some of your local water sports clubs will! Or check out some of the data sources in the section 'Understanding Local Barriers'. If the task seems too big, just start with one local blue space you're interested in.

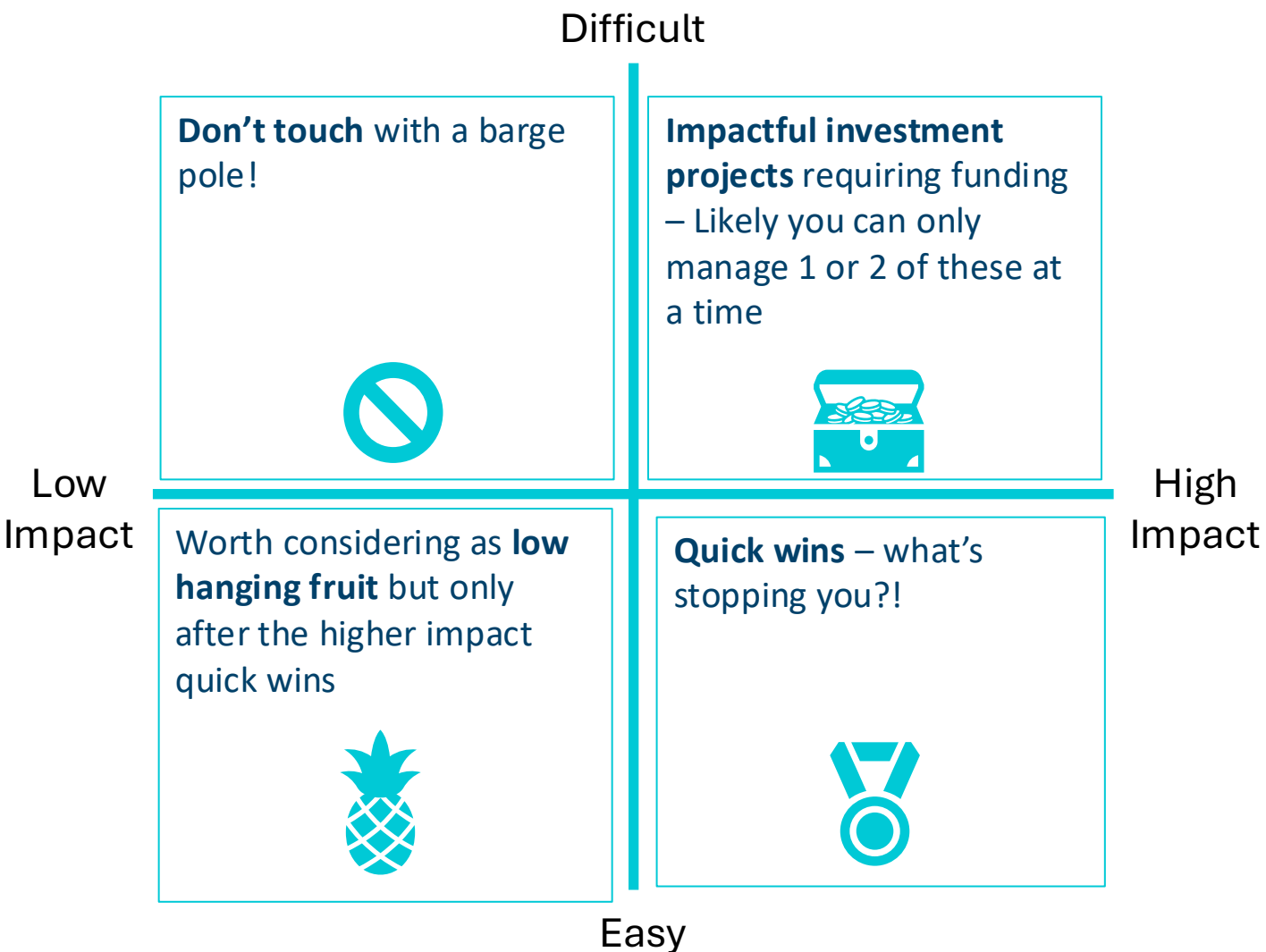
For each of the blue space locations, what do you know about them already or can you easily find out through your network?													
TYPE OF BLUE SPACE	LOCATION	CLUBS, CHARITIES & COMMUNITY GROUPS	CHAMPIONS	QUALITY TESTING	POLLUTION	ACCESS	USAGE NUMBERS	USERS	NON-USERS	PHYSICAL BARRIERS	CULTURAL BARRIERS	COST	SWIM CONFIDENCE
Which blue spaces do you have in your area?	Name the ones you know	Name the water sports clubs, charities or community groups active in this blue space	Name any leaders in this space who could be key to your blue space network	Is the area tested for water quality? If so, by who & how often?	Is there past & present evidence of pollution? If so, do you know which type?	Are there challenges to access?	Do you know how many people are using the space?	Do you know anything about who's using the space?	Conversely, do you know who's not using the space?	Are there physical barriers to use by everyone?	Are there cultural barriers to use by everyone?	Is there a cost barrier to entry?	Do you have any data on the swim confidence of the local community?
Coastal & Estuarine													
Lake													
River Canal													
Reservoir													



Traffic light green where you can see opportunities for more movement in water



PRIORITISATION TOOL



2

- Use the **prioritisation grid** to assess your opportunities according to impact & ease.
- Grab a piece of **flip chart paper** & start mapping your opportunities onto the grid.
- You may have some **data** to back up where you map opportunities or it may be more on **gut feel** and that's ok – you can always validate later.
- The ideal outcome is **some quick wins** to go after with high impact & low effort (bottom right).
- Plus **one or two impactful investment projects** which require more effort & resource but could drive **systems change** impact (top right).
- You can also add some **low hanging fruit** to your plan with lower impact but limited resources required to deliver (bottom left).
- Watch out for any **red herrings** (top left) on the grid – hard to do with limited impact – stay away! **It's as helpful to know what you're not doing, as it is what you are doing.**

DEFINING EACH JOB TO GET DONE

Once you have your priority opportunities, you need to define them.

We like to think of them as Jobs To Get Done!

Get **WHO** in my Active Partnership or network to get **WHO** in the community to use **WHICH** blue spaces to do **WHAT** type of activity by removing **WHICH** barriers?

SOMEONE in my Active Partnership or network will get **WHO** to use **WHICH** blue spaces to do **WHAT** type of activity by removing **WHICH** barriers?

CHECK & CHALLENGE WITH THE SPORT ENGLAND MATURITY TOOL

Sustainability maturity tool

Select topic:

Carbon emissions

Circular economy

Blue-green environment

Biodiversity gain

Tackling inequalities

Enabler

1 Starting

Internal action

- **Basic knowledge** of the importance of blue-green environment quality
- Owned outdoor spaces are designed to be accessible
- Potential pollutants are still routinely used, e.g., single use plastic (incl. packaging), pesticides, herbicides, fertilisers

External action

- Learning from others
- Minimal involvement with blue-green environment quality improvement initiatives in the sector or locally

2 Progressing

Internal action

- **Assessed organisational impact** on, and the relevance of, blue-green environments (and opportunities to influence)
- **Targets/goals set** to enhance the quality of blue-green environment
- Owned outdoor spaces are designed to be accessible, inclusive, and consider nature
- Initial pollution reduction actions, e.g. reduced or switched to less toxic products, plastics, paints, fertilisers

External action

- **Beginning to raise awareness** for blue-green environments quality improvements, e.g. pollution reduction campaigns

3 Sustainable

Internal action

- Owned outdoor spaces are designed to enhance nature, water, and wildlife
- Potential pollutants are carefully managed to reduce harm to people and the environment

External action

- **Involved in initiatives** to improve the quality, access, inclusion, and nature of blue-green environments in the sector or locally in your place/community

4 Restorative

Internal action

- **All decisions actively consider benefits** to the natural environment within operations, network, and supply chain
- Potential pollutants are avoided
- Beginning to understand the interconnections between the blue-green environment and other sustainability themes

External action

- **Initiated and delivered projects** to improve local blue-green environments which engage the wider community and actively enable greater connection with nature

5 Regenerative

Internal action

- **All actions enable positive outcomes** for the natural environment within operations, network, and supply chain

External action

- **Sector leadership and working in partnership; driving innovation and positive outcomes** in the blue-green environment for people and nature
- Actions across themes are interconnected (rather than done in silos) which enables positive social, environmental, and economic outcomes
- Positive impacts are quantified, communicated widely, and replicated by other organisations



Blue-green environment

Improved access to quality blue and green spaces where physical activity takes place

Use the **Sport England Maturity Tool** on **Blue-Green Environment** as an additional means to **check & challenge** your blue space ideas.

Where do your opportunities sit on the **maturity line**?

Are they **progressing** you from Starting > Progressing > Sustainable > Restorative > Regenerative?

Does the tool generate any **new ideas** you might not have seen before?

NETWORK ACTION

Who within your network or maybe currently outside of it, can help **deliver** this project?

Who has the right contacts, insights & expertise?



Local sports clubs & water sports clubs, alongside blue space venue operators & other community & faith groups & organisations

Local authorities & councils; local water companies*; universities; local businesses

National not-for-profit organisations operating at a local or regional level

Core Active Partnerships Team

*Please note the Water Companies represented here with logos are a sample of the 19 water companies across England

SPEEDY SHORT CUTS TO ACTION

If the 4 step process to taking action is just too much to handle right now (we get it!), here are some options for short cuts to quick actions or at least kick starting the journey. What could you do to just dip your toe in the water?

- Agree with a team member who works most closely with **local clubs** to bolt on some questions around who's using their blue spaces & what the barriers are to more people using them.
- Build a **quick survey** to send out to local water sports clubs to build some more awareness & start conversations.
- **Convene** a meeting for local water sports clubs to start understanding the blue landscape.
- Add blue space accessibility to conversations with **under-represented groups**, including CYP, disabled people & those from ethnically diverse groups and communities.
- Find a great **case study** in your area & shout about it.
- Brief the team to **get out and about in local blue spaces** & report back what they find.
- Follow the **Clean Water Sports Alliance** & support their policy asks locally.
- Book a **team meeting** in a blue space & enjoy a **team activity** in or around water.
- Start one **new relationship** with the local representatives of a blue spaces not-for-profit, eg The Wildlife Trust or National Trust.
- **Convene strategic partners** working in place to see who wants to work with you, as MSP has done.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS: TAKING ACTION



- 1 **Take action your way**, whether that's via a linear process, messy & instinctive progress or speedy short cuts.
- 2 **PREPARE:** By looking at who within your **Network** could help & support you in blue spaces.
- 3 If you're going the **4 step linear route**:
 - ① **STEP 1:** Use the stepping stones matrix to **find your opportunities**.
 - ② **STEP 2:** Use the **prioritisation tool** to decide which opportunities are worth progressing.
 - ③ **STEP 3: Define the Job To Get Done.**
 - ④ **STEP 4:** Review **who might be inside & outside your AP Network** that might be able to help deliver this opportunity.
- 4 If this is all too much right now, just start with some **bite-size actions**, whether that's a blue space team meeting venue or adding blue spaces to existing conversations.



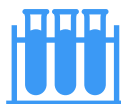
9. INSPIRING ACTION: CASE STUDIES

- Full library
- Improving access
- Improving water quality
- Inspiring champions
- Tackling inequalities

CASE STUDY CONTENTS

All the 32 detailed case studies can be found in the separate Case Study Booklet.

12 water quality case studies



1. Protecting From & Removing Invasive Species:

- British Sub-Aqua Club Invasive Weeds Volunteering in Snowdonia
- Broxbourne Rowing Club floating pennywort clean up crew
- Check, Clean, Dry Programme
- Northwich Rowing Club invasive species grant & project
- Stratford Upon Avon Boat Club Sustainability Workshop for Juniors

2. Volunteer Plastic Clean Ups:

- Fulham Reach Boat Club Monthly River Clean Ups
- iDive (Ipswich) Marine Champions Coastal Clean Up
- The Big Paddle Clean Up
- UOCEAN 2050 Volunteer Plastic Clean Ups

3. Volunteer Water Quality Testing:

- Fulham Reach Boat Club On-going Nitrate & Phosphate Testing
- British Rowing & River Action Call for Testing

4. Nature Restoration & Regeneration:

- Bracknell Scuba Champion Marine Conservation

11 tackling inequalities case studies



- Activity Alliance Access For All Guide
- Birmingham Community Paddle Sport Project
- Canal & River Trust Accessibility Map
- Fleetwood Beach Wheelchairs
- Fulham Reach BC Programmes Supporting Under-Represented Groups

20 access case studies



5. Guidance & Safety:

- Active Black Country Water Safety Programme
- Activity Alliance Access For All Guide
- Beyond Swim Venue Accreditation
- Canal & River Trust Accessibility Map
- Open Minds Active Learn to Swim Programme for Global Majority Women
- The Paddlers Code
- Ramblers Walking on Access Land Guide, including coastal margins

6. Inclusion First Blue Spaces:

- AGE UK & Explore Kent: Free River Walking Group
- Birmingham Community Paddle Sport Project
- Fleetwood Beach Wheelchairs
- Fulham Reach BC Programmes Supporting Under-Represented Groups
- Holiday Activity Food Bell Boat Programme
- Inclusive Paddle Boarding
- Wetwheels Foundation: Barrier-free Boating for All
- The Wave Project – Surf Therapy for Young People

7. Urban Access:

- EU Blue Health Guide for Urban Planners & Designers
- Swimmable Cities Alliance
- Urban Blue Space Walking
- University of Liverpool Project: Well-being Potential of Urban Blue Space

8. Low / No Cost:

- FindOar Blade Matching Service
- Holiday Activity Food Bell Boat Programme
- Inclusive Paddle Boarding
- Learn to Swim Programme for Global Majority Women
- Open Minds Active Learn To Swim Programme
- The Wave Project: Surf Therapy for Young People
- Wetwheels Foundation: Barrier-free Boating for All

CASE STUDY LIBRARY 32

Water Safety Programme



Broxbourne Rowing Club: Floating Pennywort Volunteer Clean Up Day



British Sub-Aqua Clubs Invasive Weeds Volunteering



Bracknell Scuba Champion Marine Conservation



Canal & River Trust Accessibility Map



The Big Paddle Clean Up



Learn to Swim Programme for Global Majority Women



Northwich Rowing Club: Grant to remove invasive species



Fulham Reach Boat Club On-going Phosphate & Nitrate River Testing



UOcean Volunteer Plastic Clean Ups



Ramblers Walking on Access Land Guide, including coastal margins



Beyond Swim Venue Accreditation



The Wave Project: Surf Therapy for Young People



Birmingham Community Paddle Sport Project



British Rowing & River Action Call for Testing



Urban Blue Space Walking



Fulham Reach Boat Club Monthly River Clean Ups



Check, Clean, Dry Programme



Inclusive Paddle Boarding



Holiday Activity Food (HAF) Bell Boat Programme



Swimmable Cities Alliance



Blue Health Guide for Urban Planners & Designers



FRBC Rowing Programmes Supporting Under-Represented Groups



The Paddlers Code



FindOar Blade Matching Service



Stratford Upon Avon Boat Club Sustainability Workshop for Juniors



Wetwheels Foundation: Barrier-free Boating



Activity Alliance Access For All Guide



Age UK & Explore Kent: Free River Walking Group



University of Liverpool Collaboration on the well-being potential of urban blue space





Protecting from
& removing
invasive species

Check, Clean,
Dry Programme



BSAC Clubs
Invasive Weeds
Volunteering



Floating Pennywort
Volunteer
Clean Up day



Grant to remove invasive
species



Sustainability
Workshop for
Juniors



12 WATER QUALITY CASE STUDIES



Volunteer plastic
clean ups

The Big
Paddle
Clean Up



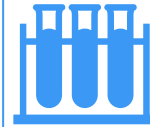
UOCEAN
Volunteer Plastic
Clean Ups



iDive Marine Champions
Coastal Clean
Up



Fulham Reach Boat Club
Monthly River
Clean Ups



Volunteer water
quality testing

On-going
Phosphate & Nitrate River
Testing



British Rowing & River
Action Call for Testing



Nature restoration
& regeneration

Bracknell Scuba
Champion
Marine Conservation





Guidance & safety

Water Safety Programme



Learn to Swim Programme for Global Majority Women



Beyond Swim venue accreditation



The Paddlers Code



Activity Alliance Access For All Guide



Canal & River Trust Accessibility Map



Ramblers Walking on Access Land Guide, including coastal margins



Inclusion first blue spaces



Surf Therapy for Young People



Wetwheels Foundation: Barrier-free Boating



Inclusive Paddle Boarding



Fleetwood Beach Wheelchairs



Birmingham Community Paddle Sport Project



HAF Bell Boat Programme



Rowing programmes supporting under-represented groups



Age UK & Explore Kent: Free River Walking Group



20 ACCESS CASE STUDIES



Urban Access



Swimmable Cities Alliance



Urban Blue Space ` Walking



Blue Health Guide for Urban Planners & Designers



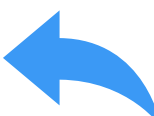
University of Liverpool Collaboration on the well-being potential of urban blue space



Low / No cost



FindOar Blade Matching Service





9 CHAMPION CASE STUDIES – LIST & LINKS

As is so often the case, there's always a passionate individual or group who step forward & make great things happen. Here are just a few of those blue space heroes, both at a community & sporting level. Who would you add? Hover over their name or see the next page for links to their inspiring stories.

Champion case studies

- [Will Behenna](#), Inclusive Paddle Boarding
- [Andy Train MBE](#), Founder of Birmingham Community Paddle Sport project & Olympic Canoeist
- [Etienne Stott](#), Olympic Canoeist & Climate Activist
- [Chris Desai](#), Founder of UOCEAN 2050
- [Sustainability Working Group](#) at Stratford Rowing Club
- [Imogen Grant MBE](#), Olympic Rower & Sustainability Champion
- [Matthew Arris](#), Marine Champion at Bracknell Sub-Aqua Club
- [Adam Freeman-Pask](#), CEO of Fulham Reach Boat Club & Environmental Steward



9 CHAMPION CASE STUDIES - LINKS

As is so often the case, there's always a passionate individual or group who step forward & make great things happen. Here are just a few of those blue space heroes, both at a community & sporting level. Who would you add? Click on the image of each champion to find out more about their journey.

Inclusive Paddle Boarding



Will Behenna, Founder & full time wheelchair user

UOCEAN Volunteer Plastic Clean Ups



Chris Desai, Founder of UOCEAN 2050

Bracknell Scuba Champion Marine Conservation



Matthew Arris, Marine Champion



Birmingham Community Paddle Sport Project



Andy Train, MBE, Founder of BCPSP

Sustainability Workshop for Juniors



Sustainability Working Group, Stratford Rowing Club

Climate Activist



Etienne Stott, Olympic canoeist

Ambassador for The Rivers Trust



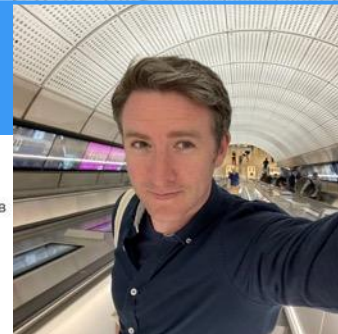
Imogen Grant MBE, Olympic Rower, working to improve sustainability within rowing



On-going Phosphate & Nitrate River Testing



Adam Freeman-Pask, CEO of the charity Fulham Reach Boat Club



11 CASE STUDIES FOCUSED ON TACKLING INEQUALITIES

Will you add to this list of incredible initiatives giving those with less representation more opportunities in your place to get more active in blue spaces & increase their blue health? Hover over each image for a link to find out more.



Fulham Reach Boat Club: 3 rowing programmes supporting under-represented groups

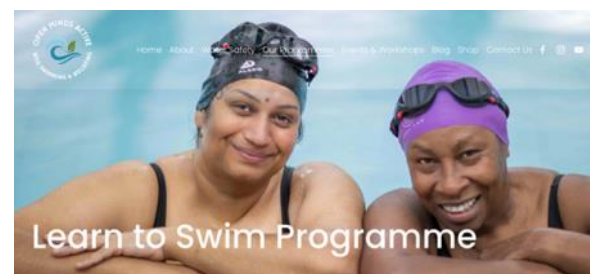


Bell Boat Programme (Young People & Ethnically Diverse Groups): summer programme

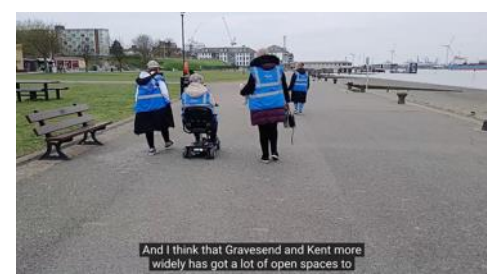
Fleetwood Beach Wheelchairs (Disabled People)



The Wave Project (Young People): changing young lives through surf therapy



Learn To Swim Programme (Ethnically Diverse Groups): for global majority women



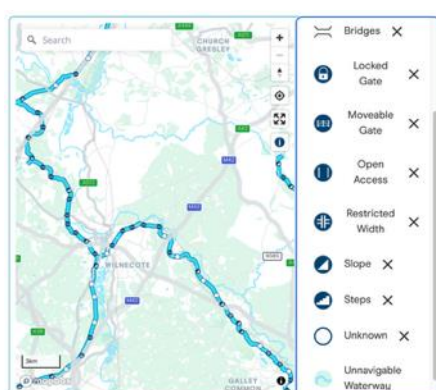
Explore Kent & AGE UK: free River walking groups



Inclusive Paddle Boarding (Disabled People): bespoke kit & disability inclusive sessions



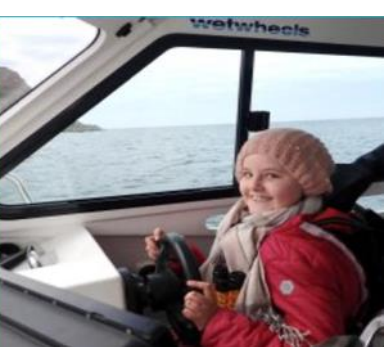
Birmingham Community Paddle Sport Project (Ethnically Diverse Groups): opening communities to the canals



Canal & River Trust Accessibility Map (Disabled People): highlighting barriers & enablers to access towpaths

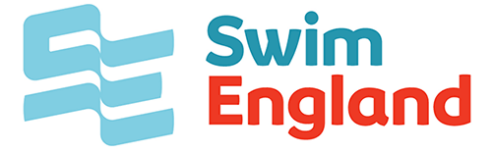


Activity Alliance 'Access For All' Guide (Disabled People): considerations for making blue spaces accessible for all



Wetwheels Foundation: barrier-free boating so everyone can safely access the water

EXAMPLE CASE STUDY FROM THE SUPPLEMENT



Learning how to float



Learning about beach flags



Identifying hazards around rivers



Demonstrating how to reach & rescue



Learning how to stay SAFE



Exploring what could be used to aid flotation

Active Black Country Water Safety Programme

- 80% of people in the Black Country live **within a mile of open water**
- Nearly 8,000 primary school leavers in the Black Country are **NOT able to demonstrate safe self-rescue**
- Programme designed to support families, carers, community groups and educators to **talk about water safety with children**
- With the right water safety education, accidental drownings are preventable – everyone can **enjoy water safely**
- The Black Country **Water Safety Resource Hub** provides a range of lesson plans, practical activities and interactive videos to support the delivery of water safety education
- Active Black Country in partnership with the **Royal Life Saving Society UK, the Canal and River Trust and Swim England**

Find out more:

<https://www.activeblackcountry.co.uk/water-safety-programme/>

KEY TAKE-AWAYS: INSPIRING CASE STUDIES



- 1** **32 inspiring case studies** from across England & a variety of sports.
- 2** **12 water quality case studies** testing the water, restoring water quality, removing invasive non-native species & plastic.
- 3** **20 access case studies** giving guidance & safety, establishing inclusion first spaces, creating urban access & removing cost.
- 4** **9 inspiring case studies of blue space champions.**
- 5** **11 case studies to remove barriers to inclusion** for disabled people, young people, people in prison, older people & people from ethnically diverse groups.



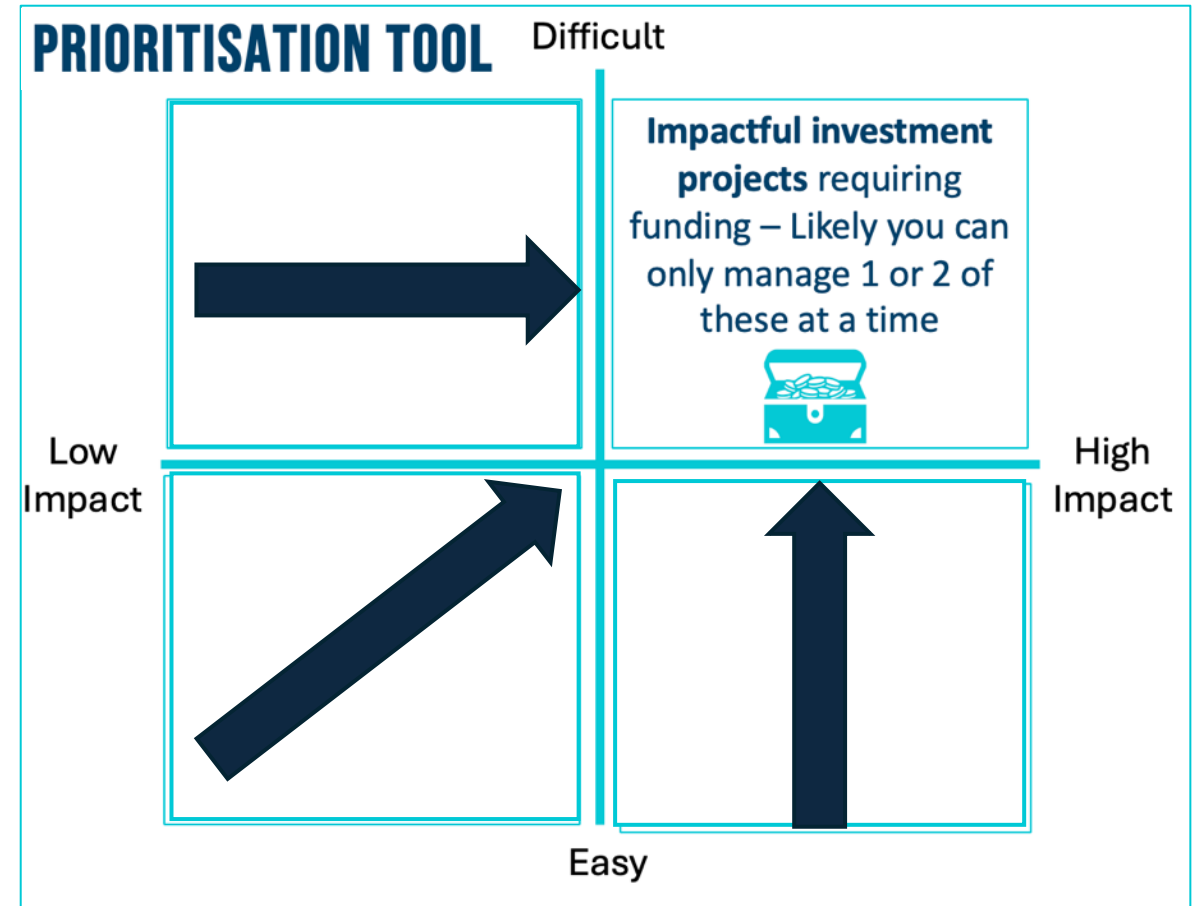
10. USEFUL RESOURCES

- [Movement Fund](#)
- [Calendar moments](#)
- [Resources list](#)
- [Video links](#)

MOVEMENT FUND

If you've spotted a great opportunity to get more people moving in blue spaces, why not consider applying to the Sport England Movement Fund?

- Grants or pledges from **£300 to £15,000**.
- For **physical activity projects in the community**.
- Projects can run for **up to 12 months**.
- The focus is on **people who face barriers** to activity and projects designed to help them join in.
- No submission deadline.
- Apply at least **12 weeks before** you want to start activity or spend any money.
- You'll usually get a **decision within six to eight weeks**.



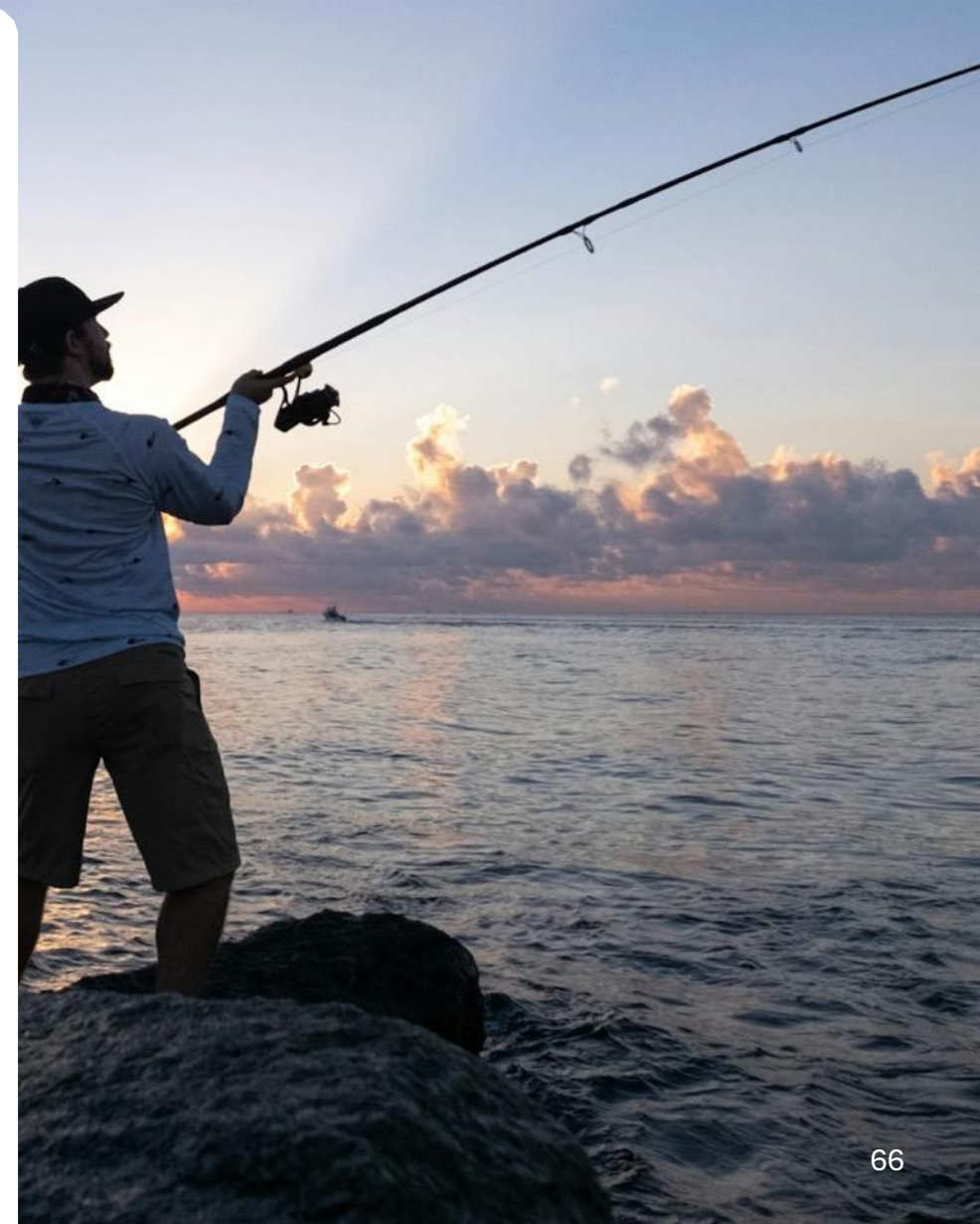
2026 BLUE SPACE CALENDAR MOMENTS

- **2026 Great UK 5th Waterblitz in April:**
https://earthwatch.org.uk/greatukwaterblitz/?utm_source=RiversTrust&utm_medium=Link
- **The Big River Watch: 23-29 April :** www.theriverstrust.org/take-action/the-big-river-watch
- **2026 Great UK 6th Waterblitz in September:**
https://earthwatch.org.uk/greatukwaterblitz/?utm_source=RiversTrust&utm_medium=Link

earthwatch
EUROPE



The
Rivers
Trust



USEFUL RESOURCES

- The Big River Watch Wildlife Identification Guide: <https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.therivertrust.org/Documents/BRW-Wildlife-Identification-Guide.pdf>
- Great UK WaterBlitz Autumn 2025 Report: https://earthwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Great-UK-WaterBlitz-Report-Autumn-2025_SPREADS_LR.pdf
- Check, Clean, Dry Guidelines for Anglers, Boaters & Rowers, Paddlers & Paddleboarders, Clubs & Event Organisers: <https://www.nonnativespecies.org/what-can-i-do/check-clean-dry>
- Environment Agency: Exploring Recreational Water Use in England, July 2025: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68a04a161fedc616bb133aa1/Exploring_recreational_water_use_in_England_-_report.pdf
- British Rowing: How To Water Testing Guide: <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/British-Rowing-Phosphate-and-Nitrate-Water-Testing-Guide.pdf>
- Pennywort Alert – A Guide for the Public: <https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/Pennywort%20Guide.pdf>
- EU Blue Health Initiative Toolbox: <https://bluehealth2020.eu/resources/toolbox/>
- All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Outdoor Recreation & Access to Nature Report: <https://outdoors.inparliament.uk/outdoors-all-report>
- Islandeering by Lisa Drewe: <https://www.islandeering.com/about-lisa-drewe>
- The University of Liverpool: The well-being potential of urban blue space – Lessons from Liverpool City Region’ (Jan 2025): <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/heseltine-institute/projects/utilisation-of-blue-space/>
- Water safety recommendations: <https://www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/2026-RowSafe-changes.pdf> & <https://paddleuk.org.uk/paddlesafe-with-paddle-uk-and-the-rnli-this-summer/>
- UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology – Bloomin’ Algae App: <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/our-science/projects/bloomin-algae>
- Canal & River Trust: Identifying & notifying Blue Green Algae: <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/support-us/our-campaigns/safety-on-our-waterways/blue-green-algae-what-you-need-to-know>



LINKS TO FIND OUT MORE

Many of these resources are duplicates of those found in the Resources List but if you find a picture or a logo more appealing, then check these out. If you're viewing this digitally, you'll be able to click on the links on each visual.

The collage features several key elements:

- earthwatch EUROPE** logo.
- The Rivers Trust** logo.
- Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs** logo.
- Environment Agency** logo.
- Bathing Water Quality** text.
- Swimfo: Find a bathing water** text.
- RIVER RESCUE KIT** by RIVERACTION logo.
- BlueHealth Toolbox** Resource, featuring the text: "The wellbeing potential of urban blue space. Lessons from Liverpool City Region. Joanna Hayes and Dr Charlotte Lyddon. Series 3 Briefing 19. January 2025." Below this is the text: "The BlueHealth Toolbox is designed to help planners, designers and decision-makers deliver health-promoting urban planning and design."
- Environment Agency** logo.
- PENNYWORT ALERT A GUIDE FOR THE PUBLIC** poster.
- Environment Agency** logo.
- Exploring recreational water use in England** poster.
- Chief Scientist's Group report** July 2025.
- Islandeering** logo with text: "PADDLE • WALK • SWIM Find your next adventure".
- Testing for Phosphates & Nitrates** poster.
- How rowing clubs can help monitor nutrients** text.
- Why is P/N testing important?** poster.
- Phosphates and nitrates are important nutrients in rivers...** text.
- High nutrient levels can lead to vast algal blooms...** text.
- water@earthwatch.org.uk**, **info@riveraction.com**, **info@theriverstrust.org** contact information.
- appg** logo.
- The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Outdoor Recreation and Access to Nature** text.
- Outdoors** text.

10 VIDEO RESOURCES - LIST

Videos are a great way to deep-dive into case studies or engage new audiences on the challenges & opportunities of blue spaces. Here's just a few we've found. See the next page for direct links to each video on the list.

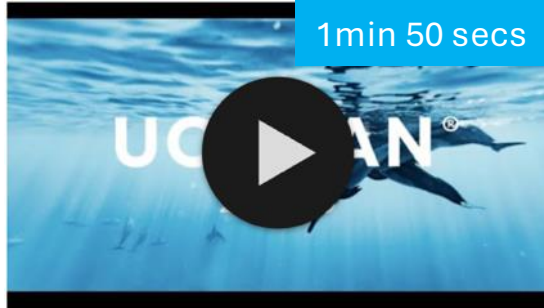
What would you add?

• <u>UOCEAN</u> Water clean up initiatives	<2 mins
• <u>Check Clean Dry</u> advice from Paddle UK & NNSS	<2mins
• <u>The Rivers Trust</u> : State of Our Rivers Report	<2mins
• <u>Fleetwood Beach Wheelchairs</u> : Volunteer insights	<15mins
• <u>Fulham Reach Boat Club</u> – Sport England case study	
on environmental stewardship & action	<4 mins
• <u>Inclusive Paddleboarding</u> documentary	<9mins
• <u>Open Minds Active</u> Learn to swim case study	<5mins
• <u>The Paddlers Code</u>	<7mins
• <u>AGE UK & Explore Kent</u> : Walking River Group	<2 mins
• <u>Jo in the Water</u> cinema trailer	<3 mins

10 VIDEO RESOURCES - LINKS



Videos are a great way to deep-dive into case studies or engage new audiences on the challenges & opportunities of blue spaces. Here's just a few we've found. Hover on the image for the link to watch. What would you add?



UOCEAN water clean up initiatives



Check Clean Dry advice from Paddle UK & NNS



The Rivers Trust: State of Our Rivers Report



Fulham Reach Boat Club environmental focus in blue spaces case study



Inclusive Paddle Boarding



Open Minds Active Learn to Swim Programme for global majority women



The Paddlers Code



Age UK Kent: Free organised walking group along the Thames



Fleetwood Beach Wheelchairs: An insight from volunteers



Jo in the Water cinema trailer: the fight to save our rivers, lakes & oceans, in cinemas from March 2026



11. WRAP UP

- Next steps
- Contacts
- Our hope

NEXT STEPS

- 1 Your **feedback** so we can keep iterating & improving.
- 2 Review the **Case Study Supplement** of all 32 inspiring action stories.
- 3 Access the separate Taking Action Template to support your journey.
- 4 If you have a great blue space opportunity in your place, apply to the **Sport England Movement Fund**.
- 5 Playbook to be shared at the **BASIS Conference** in **May/June** in Manchester & with Active Partnerships at the **November Annual Environmental Sustainability Conference**.



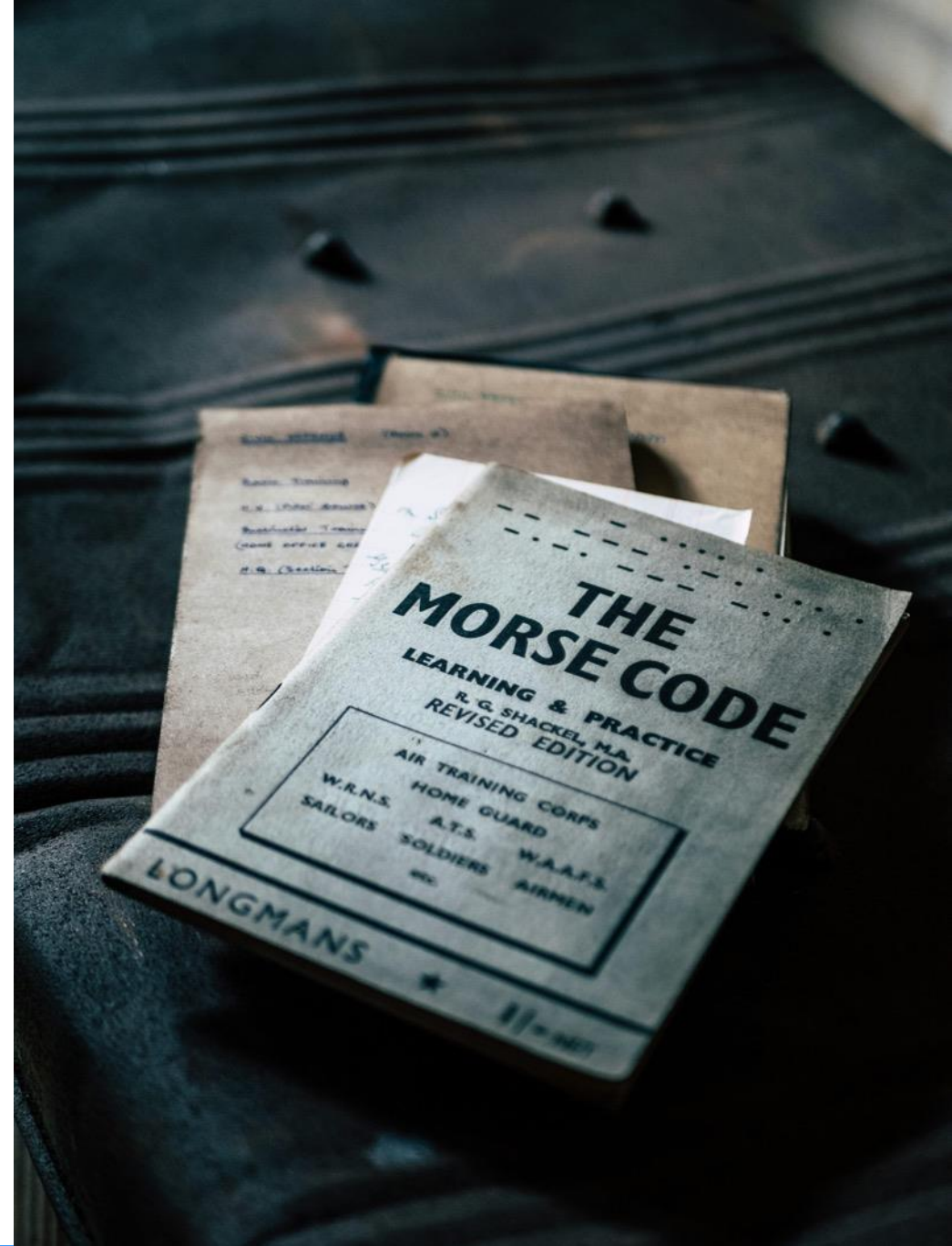
CONTACTS

1

Clean Water Sports Alliance:
EveJoseph@BritishTriathlon.Org

2

Active Partnerships National Organisation:
NCouzens@ActivePartnerships.Org





OUR HOPE



More people
With more diversity
Move more
More often
Through more access
To more blue spaces
Nearby
Of better quality
With the right equipment
And bucket loads of confidence
With a sense of community
With less plastic & less poo
With less floating pennywort
With nutrients balanced & as nature intended
With less cost
Always feeling like we belong
Where people & nature move together
Flowing in harmony



THANKYOU

Building healthy nature-rich blue spaces together across England for everyone to enjoy movement in water. March 2026

CLEAN WATER
SPORTS ALLIANCE



Active Partnerships

↑ 🌿 ❤️
PLANS WITH PURPOSE