

### New bathing sites

Dan Norris (NE Somerset & Hanham, Ind) has asked what steps are being taken to support new bathing sites in the west of England. The response from Emma Hardy is that consultations are being undertaken on 13 new bathing sites nominated in England, none in the southwest. If successful, pollution levels will be measured and if too high a bathing water designation will be removed.

Jim Shannon (Strangford, DUP) asked about reducing agricultural runoff into rivers and waterways. Hardy advised that the EA hope to reduce agricultural nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment by 40% by 2038. Action taken includes doubling of funding for farm inspections

### Developments on the bank


A Parliamentary Written Question by Kerry McCarthy (Bristol E, Lab) about waterway access for recreation has brought the usual reply from Hardy about use of licensed larger rivers and about nine new river walks in England, of which the first has been revealed as the Mersey between Stockport and Manchester, seemingly following the line of the M60 around Manchester.

Mary Creagh announced that a competition will be run this year to name others. Baroness Hayman of Ullock said that 3,235km of the King Charles III England Coast Path, the world's longest coastal path, is now open with 895km being established and a further 126km waiting for the Government to decide. £5,500,000 has been spent upgrading the Coast to Coast walk around northern England.

Creagh stated that 22km<sup>2</sup> of new woodland was planted in 2024/5 with 70% public access, the Government to spend £1,000,000,000 on tree planting during this Parliament.

All of this contrasts with the claims of successive Governments that finding any legislation taking away the public right of navigation on rivers in England and Wales for boat users would not be good use of public money.


### Question



**Kerry McCarthy** >


Labour

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Bristol East  Commons

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps she is taking to improve the safety and availability of public access to waterways for recreation and wellbeing.


### Answer



**Emma Hardy** >

Labour

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Kingston upon Hull West and Haltemprice  Commons

### Answered on

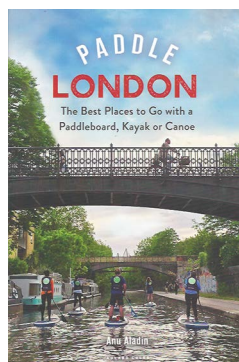
4 March 2026

The Government recognises the importance of providing access to the outdoors for people's health and wellbeing and is working to ensure that this access is safe and appropriate. As part of this, Defra has committed in its new Environmental Improvement Plan to create 9 new National River Walks, one in every region of England. The Mersey Valley Way will be the first of those nine new walks.

Public access onto around 3,400 miles of our regulated inland waterways, including several of the larger rivers, is available through the licensing regimes of the navigation authorities that own or manage them. Defra is considering its approach to improving access onto unregulated inland waterways and is committed to working with stakeholders as this develops.

The Environment Agency has [published advice](#) on how to stay safe while visiting waterways.

### Paddle London



Anu Aladin  
 Adlard Coles  
 978 1 3994 1680 1  
 2026  
 230 x 160mm  
 208 pages, paperback  
 £18.99

Despite the title, waters covered may be up to an hour out of London by public transport, the author being a paddleboarder with an inflatable paddleboard but not a driver, willing to walk the better part of half an hour or take a quarter hour taxi ride to get from a railway station to her launch point. London guides do not usually feature

Hertford, Reading, Basingstoke or Godalming.

The subtitle talks of paddleboards, kayaks and canoes but this is clearly by a paddleboarder for paddleboarders. The book is extensively illustrated yet all but one of the 40 sections produce only three pictures between them including canoes or kayaks, with or without users.

The book is divided into three sections, the River Thames, the canals (which include the Lee Navigation but not the Basingstoke Canal) and the others. A location map would have been helpful as sections of routes are not always consecutive and may be in opposite directions or might be out and back. Section sketch maps do not have scales, which appear to differ from one to another, although the text gives distances, which vary considerably, some being respectably long.

The exception to the sections is the Thames from Battersea to Greenwich. Paddleboarders are heavily restricted on the Thames in central London so this section is done as part of a kayak group in touring double kayaks with the London Kayak Co. It does not fit in well with the rest of the book, is not a good summary of the Port of London Authority's 132 page *Tideway Code*, which suggests sea kayaks are best for this route and should be read before paddling here, and would have been better omitted.

There are occasional references to canoes and kayaks such as using the boat rollers on the River Ember, referencing clubs that are providers and pointing out the Lee Valley and Dorney Olympic courses. Some useful information not usually seen are the heights of carpark barriers, toilet locations and where duckweed, wind, runners or anglers are likely to make progress difficult.

Interestingly, 'The engineered channel of the Ember is private, but Paddle UK members have an agreement that allows them to use this stretch.' Some years ago I received an anonymous leak from BCU HQ of a policy document that said access agreements should not be made unless they gave members an advantage over non members, ie disadvantaging non members was more important than improving things for all canoeists, an attitude I do not know of any other governing body adopting. This brought a response that the policy had been discontinued but that appears not to be the case.

Each section gives its difficulty, water type, portages, licences, parking and a brief history. Start and finish points are given as What3Words but the text explains where these are. A sample of wildlife, positive or negative, is introduced for each section. Places to obtain food and drink are located without their menus being detailed. Generally, this book reads better than some other recent guidebooks and canoeists can learn from it.

However, following on from King's Meads Nature Reserve on the Lee Navigation at Hertford, we are told 'you might spot a sign inviting you to explore a naturist spot. Newcomers are warmly welcome.' Is that a typo somewhere or a misunderstanding?