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**A Strategic Plan for Water Related Recreation in the East of
England**

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The preparation of this plan was managed by a steering group comprising representatives from British Waterways, Environment Agency, Natural England, Sport England, GO-East, Naturally Active in consultation with East of England Regional Development Agency (EEDA) and East of England Regional Assembly

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NOTE: Water related recreation activities are defined in this plan as those that make direct use of natural and artificial outdoor water resources (coastal and inland). Therefore we have not set out to assess or provide priorities for meeting the demands of a range of land based activities, such as walking and bird watching, where water is used as a backdrop. However, we do recognise the joint opportunities that exist for extending the benefits of waterways to meet the wider needs of society. In addition, the plan does not include activities conventionally practiced in swimming pools, such as competitive swimming and water polo.

For the purposes of this strategic plan, the East of England region is considered to be that covered by the East of England Plan (2008), which covers the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. Consistent with the East of England Plan (2008), reference is also made to the eastern edge of the Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy (2005).

Purpose and Vision

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is to provide a set of clear and succinct priorities for the protection and development of water related recreation in the East of England, within the context of the current legislation. The vision can be summarised as:

Subject to the UK Framework for Sustainable Development, everyone who wishes to participate should be given the opportunity to enjoy (safely, responsibly, sustainably and with confidence) and benefit from the full range of legal water related recreation on inland and coastal waters in the East of England

The Strategic Plan

The strategic plan has been developed through a procedure that explored:

- the **demand** for water related recreation, informed by a range of evidence including projections about social change in the East of England, the economic, social and health benefits of water related recreation, and relevant national and regional policy drivers;
- the **supply** of water and facilities for water related recreation, based on an inventory of the water resources that exist in the East of England and their current and proposed recreational uses;
- the **gaps** between the **demand** for water related recreation and the existing and proposed **supply** of resources and facilities;
- the **strategic priorities** required to address the gaps in provision; and
- the **strategic opportunities** that would supplement the priorities and improve provision for water related recreation in the region.

Following a summary of the strategic priorities and opportunities that have been identified, the strategic plan will set out the evidence available on demand and supply, and will identify the gaps in provision that currently exist. A full description of the priorities and opportunities to address these gaps will then be given, followed by an indication of how they can be delivered.

Summary of Strategic Priorities and Opportunities

Strategic Priorities	Strategic Opportunities
<p>SP1: Improving existing provision. There are a number of initiatives to be undertaken to improve the existing stock of resources available for water related recreation. These include: a review of public provision and management; opportunities to deliver smarter investment and strategic provision through a number of mechanisms; improvements to access and infrastructure, such as slipways and car parking, to improve the quality and range of doorstep recreation opportunities.</p>	<p>SO1: 'Access East'. A high proportion of the region's waterway network is underused and underdeveloped. Major investment in small links to connect to the national waterway network are key to stimulating regeneration, growth and commercial investment across much of the region. Significant investment could also provide major green infrastructure opportunities for healthy living and sustainable transport to serve growth areas.</p>
<p>SP2: Addressing gaps in the provision for some watersports. The audit conducted for this plan has endorsed and widened the scope of the regional sports facilities plan, to cover the need for new provision for most sports in at least some parts of the region.</p>	<p>SO2: Development of sports villages within new housing provision, to cater for water recreation as an integral part of 'home life' (this has been identified in the plan for the Cambridgeshire sub-region, and could be piloted in the Cambridge hub)</p>
<p>SP3: Developing a network of water related recreation hubs. There is a need for a range of large scale facilities and opportunities to be made accessible to large numbers of people, throughout the region. This can be addressed through developing hubs in each of the region's Growth Areas, each capable of offering a range of opportunities, and each having the facility to host national and regional events in specific activities.</p>	<p>SO3: The provision of health villages within new housing developments, incorporating water recreation as part of the range of opportunities used for health programmes and palliative care</p>
<p>SP4: Integrating water related recreation into 'green infrastructure' planning in urban and peri-urban areas: There is a need to supplement work on sub-regional green infrastructure planning to include specific guidance on the planning and use of water resources for recreation. Of particular significance here is the opportunity to provide green corridors and hub sites, to safeguard waterfronts for sustainable uses and to deliver multiple social opportunities and benefits.</p>	<p>SO4: To encourage greater participation in inland and coastal activities through the public transport network, including fast light rail, to encourage people out of urban settlements to participate in a range of recreation activities.</p>
<p>SP5: To develop demonstration sites to pilot and test a range of approaches to improve the quality, range and benefits of water related recreation in the region. Examples include: a tourism-based voluntary payment scheme for environmental improvements; new forms of river basin canoe agreement; demonstrating the potential benefits of widening access to many water activities to tackle social inclusion and anti-social behaviour; establishing climate change monitoring sites and areas, with provision for a range of interventions to protect and enhance water related recreation activities and provision.</p>	<p>SO5: A necklace of green, local gateway sites along the waterway network. The waterway network provides the opportunity to develop a network of local green spaces or gateway sites to serve local towns and rural communities, with shared facilities such as parking, toilet & shower facilities, starting points for health walks & cycle rides, canoe trails, fishing, bird watching, picnic & barbeque areas etc. A 'necklace' of regularly spaced sites could help increase participation in healthier lifestyles and outdoor recreation, tackling people's concerns and lack of confidence in using linear outdoor resources.</p>
<p>SP6: Better provision of information to improve understanding and use: Not all current opportunities for water related recreation are well used or understood, resulting in congestion at popular locations and under-use elsewhere. An information system is required (either stand alone or linked to current local authority and tourism information systems), to raise awareness of the water related recreation opportunities available and encourage more effective and responsible use of these resources.</p>	<p>SO6: The development of 'wild water parks' as havens for wildlife that are accessible, under certain conditions, to water craft and for water-related activities. There are particular opportunities to provide sustainable transport links for visitors to some of the most important wetland sites in the region via the waterway network (water taxis, moorings, cycle routes etc)</p>

<p>SP7: Improved estuary and coastal management: Estuary management involves regulating conflicting uses often in highly significant ecological environments. Current management approaches vary, meaning that there is a need for more integrated and environmentally aware approaches, informed by best practice.</p>	<p>SO7: Best practice in environmentally friendly recreation. In addition to the Wild Water Parks initiative, there is a need to develop and disseminate good practice in environmentally sensitive and sustainable recreation management. It should be a priority to ensure that the initiative is taken by the Broads or a similarly appropriate authority to provide the lead on how recreation and conservation can be co-ordinated to produce 'the best of both worlds'.</p>
	<p>SO8: Developing 'Hydrocentres': The concept of a 'Hydrocentre' comprises boat storage, servicing and chandlery in a mixed residential (mainly holiday lets or timeshare, with some affordable housing for permanent occupation), leisure and shopping environment, with visitors and locals able to access the centre by sustainable means, thus minimising their carbon footprint.</p>

1. Demand and Supply

1.1 The Value of Water Related Recreation

The provision of WRR opportunities has a number of positive outcomes, including health benefits, social inclusion, environmental protection and economic benefits.

1.1.1 Health benefits

Physical activity is one of the most undervalued interventions in improving public health. It is closely associated with better physical and mental health and reduced mortality. There are also psychological and personal development benefits, including improved self-esteem and lower risk of depression. Most of the potential health benefits in adults can be achieved through a total of 30 minutes of moderate activity on at least five days per week (Department of Health, 2002¹). Water related recreation activities are an ideal way of achieving this target, especially swimming, rowing, canoeing, dinghy sailing and other activities that require sustained physical exertion². For example, the Start Up Exercise Referral Scheme in Cambridge includes referrals to the local rowing club (nearly 300 referrals were made in the year commencing April 2006)³.

1.1.2 Social inclusion and quality of life

The social benefits of participation in outdoor recreational activity have now been clearly established (Policy Action Team 10, 1999⁴). Social benefits for the individual include having fun, developing social networks, acquiring knowledge and skills, and gaining a sense of achievement. These benefits contribute to social inclusion. Communities also reap rewards as people take part in common activities and some individuals are diverted from crime and antisocial behaviour. Many single water sports have developed social inclusion programmes, such as Canoe Paddability and 'Get Hooked on Fishing', although more needs to be done to monitor or assess the qualitative benefits to individuals from these schemes. There may be a particular opportunity develop and assess a broader initiative for a number of water sports, with the intention of providing a cost-benefit argument to widen an application of this approach, and assist a step change in the delivery at a number of inland and coastal locations where tackling deprivation and social inclusion is a high priority.

1.1.3 Environmental protection and reducing the region's carbon footprint

The natural environment is central to the character of the region, with one-quarter of it lying below sea level. The region includes the Broads, with status equivalent to a National Park, four AONBs (Norfolk Coast, Suffolk Coast & Heaths, Dedham Vale and part of the Chilterns) which account for 6% of the region's land area, over 500 SSSIs

¹ Department of Health (2002) *Addressing the health agenda: a new role for sports activity – health*. London: Department of Health.

² Department of Health, SPRITO & Fitness Industry Association (2001) *National Quality Assurance Framework for Fitness Referral Schemes*. London: DoH.

³ See Cambridge City Council (2007) *Start up exercise referral scheme annual report*.

⁴ PAT 10 (1999) *National strategy for neighbourhood renewal*: Policy Action Team Audit: Report of the Policy Action Team 10: The contribution of Sport and the Arts. DCMS. London.

(more than 10% of the total for England), and nearly 50 National Nature Reserves (over 20% of the total for England) including the Blackwater and Colne Estuaries, the Wash, a number of broads and substantial sections of the Norfolk and Suffolk coast. The region also has 14 European Marine Sites (SACs and SPAs) and 26 RAMSAR sites, which include most of the Essex estuaries and large sections of the Norfolk and Suffolk coast. There is recognition that climate change is likely to have profound impacts on the region's coastal and inland water resources, and that steps need to be taken now to protect these environments⁵, particularly from inappropriate recreation and other developments⁶. The potentially negative impacts of water related recreation on vulnerable habitats and species has led many sport governing bodies to develop stewardship initiatives and environmental strategies. One example is the Royal Yachting Association's *Boating for Life strategy*. In many parts of the region, local authorities, the Broads Authority and other organisations successfully manage a high level of water related recreation activity in very sensitive environmental sites using a wide range of tools such as permits, short closures and codes of conduct. Well managed water related recreation can contribute to significant environmental improvements. For example, angling organisations, landowners and private sector operators have all worked in partnership with the Environment Agency to contribute to a significant increase in the availability and quality of riverine game fish habitat.

1.1.4 Economic benefits

Sport related economic activity in the region generated £ 1.9bn in 2005, equivalent to 1.8% of total value added. Consumer spending on sport-related goods and services is equivalent to 2.5% of consumer spending in the region, with £136 million of this spent on boats. Some 56,500 people were employed in sport-related jobs in the region in 2005, which corresponds to 2.1% of total employment in the region. 77% of employees were employed in the commercial sector, 12% in the voluntary sector and 11% in the public sector (These figures do not include the self-employed)⁷. Tourism in the East of England contributes approximately 8% to the regional economy⁸ (the size of the regional economy is approximately £89 billion – the region contributes over 8% to the national economy). Tourism employs approximately 167,000 in the region. In addition, there is a range of organisations that are dependent upon the environmental assets of the region; these include the RSPB, British Trust for Ornithology, the Wildlife Trusts, and environmental sciences at the University of East Anglia. These organisations contribute primary and secondary economic benefits to the regional economy.

1.2 Policy Priorities

1.2.1 National Policy

The key policy drivers influencing this strategic plan at the national level revolve around the core values of water related recreation set out above. The recognition of the physical and mental health benefits of sport are given particular prominence by

⁵ See, for example, the Broadlands Flood Alleviation Project

⁶ HM Government (2005) *One future – different paths. The UK's shared framework for sustainable development*. London: Defra.

⁷ For more information, see Roger Tym & Partners (2007) *Regional Economic Strategy for the East of England: Draft RES evidence base*. London: Roger Tym & Partners.

⁸ Visit Britain (2006) *UK Tourism survey 2006*. London: Visit Britain.

the Department for Culture, Media and Sport,⁹ which has set a target that 50% of the population will be reasonably active by 2011, and 70% by 2020. This is supported by Sport England's Framework for Sport¹⁰, which sets out an agenda to get people to start, stay and succeed in sport at every level. Swimming, canoeing, sailing and rowing are identified as UK-wide priority sports. A further priority is to deliver better access to the countryside, through partnership work with Defra and Natural England. The Environment Agency's strategic plans for water-based recreation¹¹ and for angling¹², offer a similar focus, on improving access for all sectors of society, promoting the outdoors, and making recreation sustainable. The UK's Framework for Sustainable Development¹³ makes it clear that all provision for recreation should be sustainable and should not take place at the expense of the environment.

In addition to this agenda, there is a national priority to promote sport and recreation as a means of improving people's quality of life. This is reflected in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's focus on liveability¹⁴, the creation of greener communities through improvements in the quality of planning and design, and in the management of public spaces. This has more recently been articulated by a group of agencies led by Arts Council England¹⁵, which aims to make cultural and sporting activity and infrastructure a larger part of people's lives. This emphasis is reflected in national planning guidance, with *PPS 1: Delivering Sustainable development* requiring development plans to take account of the needs of the whole community, to promote health and well being by making provisions for physical activity, and to provide land and improved access for leisure and recreation.

1.2.2 Regional Policy

The recently published East of England Plan¹⁶ contains the revised spatial strategy for the region. Policy SS2, the overall spatial strategy, directs most strategically significant growth to the major urban areas where: strategic networks connect; and public transport is at its best and has potential for expansion. New development will therefore be expected to contribute to sustainable communities (in terms of supporting strategic networks and the effective use of public transport), particularly in terms of improving quality of life, community cohesion and social inclusion. There is also a target that 60% of new development will be on land that had previously been subject to development. The key drivers that inform this strategic plan for water-related recreation are:

1. *Economic Development*. Given the planned provision for new homes and population in the region, it is clear that economic development is a cornerstone of regional policy, with specific emphasis on harnessing the

⁹ Department for Culture, Media and Sport/Strategy Unit (2002) *Game Plan*. London: DCMS.

¹⁰ Sport England (2004). *Framework for sport in England*. London: Sport England.

¹¹ Environment Agency (2005) *A better place to play: a strategy for water-based recreation*. Bristol: Environment Agency.

¹² Environment Agency (2006) *Fishing for the future: angling in 2015*. Bristol: Environment Agency.

¹³ HM Government (2005) *One future – different paths. The UK's shared framework for sustainable development*. London: Defra

¹⁴ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2002) *Liveability: cleaner, safer, greener*. London: ODPM.

¹⁵ Arts Council England, Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, English Heritage, Museums, Libraries and Archives, The Regional Cultural Consortiums, Sport England, DCLG, DCMS (2007) *Living Places: stronger communities through culture*. London: Arts Council England.

¹⁶ *East of England Plan: the Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy* (May 2008). London: TSO.

region's economic strengths in areas such as science and R&D allied to an objective of improving the skills base of the population¹⁷. However, the sustainable development agenda is significant, with a wish to decouple economic growth from increases in the use of natural resources such as energy and water, and a broader desire to move towards sustainable consumption and production. Water-related initiatives such as green infrastructure planning, green tourism and the development of the coastal economies can clearly contribute towards the achievement of this driver. The Olympics and Paralympics 2012 represent a major opportunity here, both in terms of the economic impact of the games themselves, and in terms of their legacy. Better linkage with the national waterway network would inevitably bring a significantly higher level of boating visits to the region, adding to current demand for moorings and facilities and providing a catalyst for the growth of the boating industry and related service sectors across the whole Ouse system. Unlike a number of sensitive coastal and inland locations, the Ouse system is one of the few water resources in the region where significant growth may not be at odds with ecological value, and it currently has the physical capacity to cope with major growth and demand.

2. *An active and healthy population.* The cornerstone of this objective in the East of England is to promote wellbeing through community cohesion and social capital. This is allied to measures to achieve health and income equality, and to promote sustainable lifestyles. While the East of England Plan is largely silent about the potential of outdoor sport and recreation to contribute towards this objective, other policies, notably the East of England Plan for Sport (2004-2008)¹⁸ and the recently published Sports Facilities Strategy¹⁹, make a clear connection between physical activity and addressing health issues such as obesity and heart disease. Sport England Strategy 2008-2011²⁰ maintains a commitment to get 1 million more people to participate more often in sport by 2012-13. The East of England is well placed to provide new opportunities and entry into a wide range of water-related sports, particularly to serve areas planned for major growth. The challenge is that in many areas, growing interest and demand often outstrips supply, particularly for thrill sports. Governing Bodies for Sport are developing 'Whole Sport Plans' to assist entry and aid progression through a range of sports across the country. A more proactive response to provide suitable sites to meet strategic priorities could result in the region becoming a major hub for water activities such as rowing, canoeing, sailing, sub-aqua and wakeboarding. Along with additional sites, more and better information and communication about recreation opportunities is required if this potential is to be realised.
3. *Social inclusion.* The key objectives in East of England in this regard are to reduce levels of poverty and exclusion through the provision of a range of interventions including effective social infrastructure and services, and

¹⁷ Roger Tym & Partners (2007) *Regional Economic Strategy for the East of England: Draft RES evidence base*. London: Roger Tym & Partners.

¹⁸ Sport England (2004) *The East of England Plan for Sport (2004 – 2008)*. Bedford: Sport England

¹⁹ East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA.

²⁰ Sport England (2008) *Sport England Strategy 2008-2011*. London: Sport England

decent and affordable homes for all²¹. Provision for outdoor recreation and sport is referred to, with water-related activities able to contribute towards the provision of effective services. This is recognised, for example, in the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan, which sets out a strategy for accommodating the development of 47,500 new homes in the Cambridge Sub Region, including the provision for enhanced sport and recreation facility provision²². The East of England Plan for Sport (2004 – 2008) suggests that sporting activities have a specific part to play in reaching isolated rural communities, particularly through dual and multiple use of education premises and facilities.

4. *Accessibility*. In accordance with the sustainable development agenda at the core of the East of England Plan, there is an emphasis on reducing greenhouse gasses and minimising transport growth (although ensuring that the economic benefits of the international gateways to the region are captured). One of the ways of achieving this is to create, conserve and enhance distinctive local communities where there is good access to a range of local recreation and sport facilities, including provision for water-related sport and recreation. In particular, the East of England Plan aims to promote an effective and sustainable transport system. One example of this is the strategy for the Thames Estuary East²³, which has a vision of “Creating a high quality, multi-functional well-connected network of river-related spaces that are accessible to all, and are managed and maintained to the highest standards for people and wildlife.” Similar strategies exist elsewhere in the region; for example, development in the Bedford–Marston Vale area will support a series of water resources within a broad mix of housing, economic, sports and tourist driven growth²⁴.
5. *Environmental protection*. This objective relates to a mix of social interventions, such as encouraging better use of natural resources, the minimisation of waste and improved recycling, and broader policies relating to the protection of the East of England’s natural and built heritage and adaptation to the impacts of climate change. An example of this is the planned strategic use of the proposed Bedford and Milton Keynes waterway for surface water management²⁵, as a means of creating green travel options and as a significant part of a series of measures to create carbon neutral communities. The recently announced Rural Development Programme for England²⁶ also contains a range of environmental protection measures, such as financial support for the development of high water flow abstraction irrigation reservoirs (which could also have recreation and conservation benefits).

²¹ See, for example, ODPM (2005) *Creating Sustainable Communities in the East of England* and Cultural Consortium for the East of England (2006) *A Better Life. The Role of Culture in the Sustainable Development of the East of England*.

²² Cambridge Horizons (2007) *Cambridge Sub-Region Long Term Delivery Plan* and Cambridge Horizons and Sport England (2006) *A Major Sports Facilities Strategy for the Cambridge Sub-region*

²³ Thames Estuary Partnership (2005) *The state of the Thames*.

²⁴ East of England Regional Assembly (2004) *Draft East of England Plan*.

²⁵ Bedfordshire County Council (2006) *Marston Vale Surface Waters Plan*

²⁶ EEDA (2007) *Rural Development Programme for England [RDPE] 2007-2013: Prospectus and guidance on the use of Axis 1 and 3 in the East of England*. Histon, Cambs: EEDA (www.eeda.org.uk/rdpe)

1.3 Participation and demand

1.3.1 Participation and demand by residents

Over a quarter of the UK adult population (13.8m) now spend some of their leisure time in ways closely linked to coasts and inland waterways²⁷. The participation rates are 12.2% for coastal walking, 11.3% for general leisure time at the beach, 10.3% for outdoor swimming and 6.7% for 'any boating activity'. Coastal walking, sea angling, outdoor swimming, general leisure time at the beach, canal boating, motor boating/cruising, surfing and kite surfing, are increasing in popularity. For most other activities in the UK participation is static or declined slightly. For some activities, this decline in participation is accompanied by a significant increase in the average number of times each year people are participating. Examples include canoeing, rowing, waterskiing and windsurfing. For most water related recreation activities, participation rates are higher for men compared to women, younger age groups compared to older ones and AB groups compared to the other socio-economic groups. Although there is a regional dimension to these data, the East of England is included with London, and the South and South East of England, with no possibility of disaggregation.

The Active People Survey²⁸ provides participation data on a number of the main water related sports, as well as overall participation rates for those active in sport. The proportion of the East of England population who participate in sport or physical activity for at least 30 minutes, at least 3 times per week, is 20.5%, which is slightly under the national average of 21% (interestingly, East of England women are slightly more active than the national average, whereas East of England men are slightly less active). Table 1.1 gives the participation rates for those sports covered by the Active People Survey:

Table 1.1 Participation by Sport

Sport	Regional participation (%age of population)	National participation (%age of population)	Regional national v
Swimming	14.40%	14.18%	+0.22%
Yachting and sailing	0.30%	0.34%	- 0.04%
Canoeing	0.30%	0.27%	+ 0.03%
Rowing	0.20%	0.20%	0.00%

Using a number of sources, not all from the East of England, it is possible to postulate some trends in water related recreation participation. These are summarised in Table 1.2

²⁷ BMF, MCA, RNLI, WYA (2006) *Watersports and leisure participation survey 2006*. Guildford: Arkenford Market Research; see also East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA, for a good overview of regional sports participation.

²⁸ Sport England, East Region (2007) *Active People Survey: East Region Bulletin*, March 2007. Bedford: Sport England.

Table 1.2 Current and/or predicted participation in selected activities²⁹

Activity	Trends
Canoeing	Slow growth predicted but not quantified (with some disciplines such as sprinting and polo increasing more rapidly). Note here that there appears to have been a recent decline in canoeing in the East of England
Sub-aqua diving	Growing fast, from a small base, especially in the East of England and London area
Personal watercraft	following a period of growth, participation is static and expected to decline
Kite surfing	Steady growth
Rowing	Rapid growth
Dinghy sailing	Static but likely to increase
Course angling	Slow continued growth predicted (based on Rod Licence sales)
Sea angling	Static, with recent decline in clubs and members; however, angling from the beach is continuing to grow in popularity
Surfing	Steady growth in the UK; not a major activity in the East of England. NW Norfolk coast does attract some interest regionally and nationally when conditions are right.
Wind surfing	Modest future increase
Motor cruising & Narrow boating	The number of hire craft has declined, with a shift to the ownership of more luxurious craft. Few of these craft spend as long cruising as the hire craft used to. This has led to long waiting lists for marina berths and moorings throughout the region (coastal & inland).
Water skiing and wakeboarding	Following a period of decline, waterskiing is now becoming more popular, especially when complemented by wakeboarding (there is a possibility that wakeboarding using cable tows could be an Olympic sport by 2016)

1.3.2 Tourism demand

Tourists also create demand for water sport and recreation activities. In 2006, there were over 6.4m holiday trips to the region, accounting for over 21.5m person nights of accommodation³⁰ and a spend of nearly £800m. Of these visitors, approximately 20% visited the seaside, with a further 26% visiting the countryside or a village. There are no data available on the number of day visits for water related recreation made by those living outside the region.

1.3.3 Potential Drivers of Change in Outdoor Recreation

There are some significant demographic drivers that will affect future demand for outdoor recreation in the East of England. These are well articulated in the Framework for Sport in England and the Henley Centre work for Natural England³¹. They have been distilled into five major drivers that will affect the East of England:

²⁹ Sources include: BMF, MCA, RNLI, WYA (2006) *Watersports and leisure participation survey 2006*. Guildford: Arkenford Market Research; Sport England, East Region (2007) *Active People Survey: East Region Bulletin*, March 2007. Bedford: Sport England; Hyder Consulting (2006) *Welsh Coastal Tourism Strategy*: technical data.

³⁰ Visit Britain (2006) *UK Tourism Survey 2006*. London: Visit Britain.

³¹ See Sport England (2004) *The framework for sport in England*. London. Sport England, and Henley Centre (2005) *Potential Drivers of Change in Outdoor Recreation to 2020: A Report for Natural England's Outdoor Recreation Strategy*

1. *High population densities in some areas, with further growth planned.* Traditionally, much of the East of England has had a low population density, comprised of mainly rural settlements. However, the proximity of the region to London has led to rising demand for new homes, particularly in the Thames Gateway – South Essex and the Stansted - Cambridge - Peterborough corridors and in the Bedford and Milton Keynes growth area. Government plans to site a further 500,000 homes in the region will increase population densities and the demand for recreation opportunities, particularly from the young families and single households that will take up the bulk of the new houses. It should be noted that many of those living in urban areas currently have low rates of participation in sport and physical activity³².
2. *Age polarisation and reconfiguration.* The existing resident population is ageing, with more 65 years than 16 year olds predicted by 2014. In contrast to traditional views of ageing, this population demonstrates an increasing interest in wellbeing, associated with both physical activity and mental health, along with a psychologically enriching connection with nature ('retuned to nature'). In contrast, many of the in-migrants to the new housing will be younger, less affluent and – critically – time constrained and less inclined to participate in active sport and recreation, especially outside the home. This implies a growing polarisation around issues of physical activity, health and wellbeing, as set out in the Sports Facilities Strategy for the region³³.
3. *Absolute and relative deprivation.* In general, England's population is becoming increasingly affluent, with a greater focus on the 'experience economy' where people will pay for services and experiences rather than material goods. However, this affluence is unlikely to spread to all areas of the East of England, with absolute and relative deprivation affecting many of the coastal towns and the inner Thames Estuary. Some of these people will find work in the 'experience economy', but it will predominantly be low skilled and low paid, while the cost of living – especially housing and transport – will be governed by the affluence of other parts of the region. For Sport England, a key driver in this respect will be the level of investment in sporting facilities, to provide opportunities for all to participate.
4. *Variations in access.* With 43% of its population living in rural areas, the East of England remains one of the most 'rural' regions in England. It will continue to have a substantial rural population, even allowing for the new housing growth in urban and suburban areas. However, this rural population will increasingly be an ageing one that is dependent on private transport and poor access to health, sport and other services. In contrast, the newer residents are likely to live in accessible but congested suburban locations (or 'rural' locations with strong commuter ties to London, Cambridge, Peterborough and the other major employment centres), with a need to commute for significant times and distances to work. The rural population is thus likely to be time rich but income and access poor, in contrast to the urban and suburban population, which will be time poor and not necessarily income or access rich.

³² East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA.

³³ East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA.

As the *Framework for Sport in England* identifies, one of the keys here will be unlocking the potential of local facilities, such as those connected to schools and colleges.

5. *Changing education and employment patterns.* Rural areas such as the East of England have traditionally enjoyed a relatively high level of employment in primary and secondary industries (particularly farming and food processing in the case of the East of England). However, this is declining as the economy restructures towards the service sector. While this affords new job opportunities to incomers in the accessible urban and suburban parts of the region, there are indications that the service economy is unlikely to be particularly buoyant in the more remote parts of the region. With the general shift towards service employment, there is likely to be an influx of better-educated people, with a greater predisposition towards sport and physical activity (a point made in the *Framework for Sport in England*). However, time and other pressures mean that fewer of these people are likely to be tempted into volunteering in sport, which could compromise the capacity of the sector to deliver a full range of opportunities, particularly in the more remote rural parts of the region. In addition, career routes into sport as a profession remain 'under-sold', adding further to the potential constraints on expanding sports provision to meet the changing needs of the region's residents.
6. *The potential impacts of climate change.* It is becoming increasingly accepted that climate change will have a profound impact on the East of England and its water resources. A detailed study on the potential impacts of climate was conducted for the East of England Regional Assembly and the East of England Sustainable Development Roundtable by Land Use Consultants in 2003. This qualitative study predicts that 'longer summers with less rain could make the East of England a much more attractive destination for main break holidays, and the warmer weather may see domestic holidays substituted for overseas trips... some schemes designed to adapt to climate change (such as realignment of coastal flood defences, creation of wetlands for flood risk management) may offer significant tourism attractions. Watercourses with significant tourism or leisure value may be increasingly prone to more severe winter flooding (e.g. the Broads) or low summer flows (e.g. the Cam).' (Land Use Consultants 2003), with greater risk of weed growth and algal blooms across all inland waters. Low flows could also exaggerate the effects of pollution incidents, restricting recreational use.

These changes could benefit the East of England due to increased visits as some areas experience a longer summer season and regularly achieve temperatures of 29C which it is claimed is the optimum temperature for tourism activities in Mediterranean regions (Bolluned and Perry). Equally the UK Climate Change Impacts Programme (UKCIP) notes that generally in the UK changes in visitor patterns could lead to overcrowding in some locations or increased competition from other resorts in the UK or Scandinavia. There could also be other indirect impacts leading to increasing demand for water recreation, such as potential rises in the cost of flying thus encouraging people to holiday 'at home' within the UK. At inland locations in the East of England reductions in water supply during summer months could affect the use of rivers for recreation but it may also lead farmers to build more dams and reservoirs to store water which could provide new recreational spaces.

Greater demand on the resource is predicted as temperatures rise and reducing cloud cover during summer months, this could have a negative impact on health with increased risks of skin cancer and sunstroke. High temperatures may tempt more people to attempt swimming in many non-traditional swimming spots. Increasing demand for a wide range of water-related tourism products is likely to put greater pressure on infrastructure, services and the resource.

A further study on the East of England was conducted by Atkins in 2007 for the East of England Climate Change Partnership and this built on the Land Use Consultants (2003) previous work by quantifying the impacts of climate change. Importantly, both studies indicate that climate change will have uneven geographical impacts on the East of England. Changes in sea level will have greatest impacts on vulnerable coastal, fenland and estuarine areas but temperature increases are predicted to be higher in the eastern parts of the region. Identifying climate change adaptation options for water-related recreation will need to take account of the uneven geographical impacts of climate change. Hopefully these differences will be more evident through UKCIP08 scenarios.

1.3.4 Overall participation and demand trends

Overall, the participation data and trends suggest that, whilst some activities have static levels of participation, others have experienced recent growth that is likely to continue in the future. Demand for water related activities from residents is likely to show modest increases in the future. Demand for 'doorstep' opportunities will be greatest where there are concentrations of population and where specific growth is planned. However, there is a need to consider how to engage the young and increasingly hard-to-reach members of society, to ensure that they experience the benefits of water related recreation³⁴.

1.4 The supply side: water bodies and current use

1.4.1 The physical resource

Table 1.3 and Map 1 indicate that the region is well supplied with water resources, although there is a south west-north east 'spine' where there are few major rivers or other waters. The Broads and Brecks dominate the north eastern part of the region, while the Essex estuaries are a dominant feature further south. The physical environment means that there are few fast flowing waters in the region, although there are many major rivers flowing out into the key estuaries. There are few canals (included in Table 1.3 with artificial water courses) in the region, with almost no connection to the national waterways network. There are natural lakes (and broads), ex-mineral workings and some reservoirs, mainly in a north-south corridor on the western boundary to the region.

³⁴ See East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA.

Table 1.3 Water Bodies in the East of England

Coastal Waters	
Coast length	483 km
Estuary area	58,646 ha
Inland waters	
Artificial water courses	383 km
River lengths (rivers are main rivers defined by Environment Agency) (includes over 800km of navigable waters)	3,532 km
Enclosed waters area (inc. lakes, reservoirs, gravel pits 0.1ha or greater outside urban areas or of any size within urban areas)	6,243 ha
Enclosed waters (number)	1064

1.4.2 Water related recreation activities on East of England waters

Although coastal waters can be difficult for a number of activities³⁵, nearly 90% of it is used for at least one water related recreation activity. The main issue encountered by many users is access to the water. Many slipways are in poor condition and are unsuited to contemporary uses; many access points on the coast are controlled by commercial marinas and boatyards, which are often congested and can charge high fees; and there are often limited parking opportunities for vehicles and trailers close to access facilities. In contrast to the use of coastal waters, only a little over half the area of the estuaries and lakes is used for water related recreation, and just less than half of the artificial water courses. The data indicate that rivers have the lowest usage, with just over a third of the total length being used for at least one activity.

Some 19 activities take place on coastal waters, of which the most popular are sea angling, sailing, motor cruising and canoeing. More activities take place on the estuaries (24), with sailing, motor cruising, angling and canoeing being the most popular. The most popular resource, in terms of the number of activities catered for, are lakes and reservoirs, which are used for 29 different activities. The most popular of these are coarse angling, sailing, windsurfing and canoeing. Coarse angling is also the most popular activity on rivers and artificial water courses, with motor cruising being popular on the navigations and canals. Canoeing does not occur that frequently on rivers, but is a major use of the artificial water courses.

1.4.3 The supply of strategic waters and resources

A number of current waters in the East of England have such strategic significance that their value needs to be recognised in this strategic plan, either as a result of the need to protect the sites from over-use, or in order to ensure that they are incorporated in any planned changes or development of provision for water related recreation activities. These are shown in Table 1.4.

³⁵ Much of the East of England coast is particularly difficult for smaller craft, with shifting sandbanks, strong currents and, in Essex and Suffolk, a lot of commercial shipping traffic.

Table 1.4 Strategic Waters

The Broads	Environmental designations; significant tourism, navigation and recreation resource
Norfolk Coast and the Wash	Environmental designations; significant sea activity resource, for powered and unpowered craft. Also provides coastal access to major river navigations. Growing popularity for wind based activities, particularly kite surfing around Hunstanton
Lowestoft	Power boating & sea angling
Suffolk Coast	Environmental designations; major international gateway; significant tourism and recreation resource
Essex estuaries	Environmental designations; significant and heavy recreation use, particularly for motor cruisers and sailing; the Thames is a major international commercial gateway; the Crouch is significant for water skiing
Wicken, Great Fen & other major wildlife sites	Environmental designations; contribution to eco-tourism and healthier lifestyles; potential to create major informal recreation and conservation areas close to large centres of population
Lee Valley and Broxbourne	Provision for a range of water related activities close to London; site for the Olympic white water course
Bedford	Strategic significance for most water related recreation activities, including rowing, canoeing (including increasing white water potential), sailing, canal and river cruising. Water skiing and wakeboarding are provided on the eastern edge of Milton Keynes (WakeMK) and at Box End Park, south of Bedford, which currently has the only cable tow in the region
Peterborough	Canoeing, rowing, windsurfing, motor cruising, game and coarse angling
Norwich	Canoeing, rowing, triathlon, sailing & outdoor swimming. Whitlingham Country Park provides best practice example of multi-use site for inland water.
Cambridge	Rowing, sailing, canoeing, punting
River Waveney	Canoeing & angling
Alton Water	Sailing, windsurfing, canoeing and coarse angling
Grafham Water	Sailing, canoeing, windsurfing, nature conservation, coarse and game angling
Basildon, Southend on Sea & Canvey Island	Sailing, windsurfing, motor cruising, personal watercraft, power boating, training and taster centre for many coastal watersports
River Great Ouse	Motor cruising, angling, canoeing
Chelmsford	Canal boating, motor cruising, canoeing, angling
Hanningfield & Abberton Reservoirs	Angling & nature conservation

1.4.4 The supply of water bodies and travel accessibility

The supply of inland and coastal water available for residents and tourists wishing to take part in water related recreation activities is also determined by travel accessibility, which is a measure of the travel time to water bodies from residential locations. Long journeys are undesirable environmentally and will limit the use of water bodies as people will not be willing to travel to use existing opportunities, although it is widely claimed that people living in the Eastern region are used to travelling to access any service. As the maps indicate, access to the coast is a function of how far west people live; despite having a relatively short coast, just over 90% of the region's population can get to an estuary or the coast within one hour.

In terms of access to inland water resources, most people can reach a major water body, water course or river within 20-30 minutes travel. The exception to this is a south west – north east spine of land where rivers rise, but where there is little availability of resources suitable for recreation. In addition, throughout the region access to some rivers and water bodies is prevented through restrictions imposed by land and riparian owners.

An analysis of the accessibility for selected activities of current water bodies has been completed. This suggests that most parts of the region have relatively easy travel access to coastal or inland angling opportunities where the inland waters are open to all by payment to a private or public body. For some other activities travel accessibility is more problematic and the results of the accessibility analysis for these activities are shown on the maps. The maps have been generated using network analysis based on car travel times. In some parts of the region and in certain conditions travel times will be slower than the norms assumed. Also in many locations journey times will be much longer by public transport. The maps also show the proportion of the population in the region and in the most deprived wards in the region that are within certain travel time intervals. The key conclusions that can be drawn from the maps are shown in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5 Access to Different Activities

Activity	Evidence
Canoeing	There is a shortage of white water due to topography (no white water sites in the centre of the region). There is reasonable access to canoeing along the coast, in estuaries and on the Broads, although not along the North Norfolk coast. There are some good touring opportunities available in the north west of the region (e.g Great Ouse & Nene navigations), although these are shared with larger motorised craft. Provision for non-touring canoe disciplines is currently poor, while access to any canoe activity in the centre of the region (around Bury St Edmunds and Stowmarket) is also poor.
Sailing	There is extensive use of all the coast and most of the estuaries for sailing. There is also a range of inland provision, from large scale opportunities on The Broads and Grafham Water (and Rutland Water), to smaller clubs – located on mineral pits and reservoirs around the region, as well as on navigation sections of many of the rivers. There are no major gaps, although there is a need for better provision to assist access (e.g slipways).
Sub-aqua diving And snorkelling	Sub-aqua training takes place in swimming pools around the region. Diving takes place along the coast, although in many cases there is a lack of facilities to support the sport (e.g changing facilities, somewhere to eat, tractor to get diving boat out beyond the mud flats). The only large scale inland water facility serving the region is at Stoney Cove in Leicesterrshire, with Gildenburgh Water, another smaller facility, near Peterborough. There is a need for greater inland provision, particularly as the latest statistics reveal participation in sub-aqua in the region is growing significantly. There is a specific demand from commercial operators for inland sites around the Thames gateway.
Angling	Sea angling is widespread along the coast and estuaries. There are no major areas of coast or estuary that are not used for sea angling. Coarse angling takes place on all major rivers in the region. There is a comparative lack of coarse fishing in central parts of the region, particularly around Saffron Walden and Newmarket. Despite the region's topography there is widespread

	<p>game angling throughout most of the region. Most of the game angling opportunities occur inland where the rivers rise (e.g around Saffron Walden and east of Cambridge, around Fakenham and the upper reaches of the Broads Rivers). There are also game fisheries on some of the major water bodies, including Grafham Water and Hanningfield. There are fewer game angling opportunities in the east of the region from Diss south to Ipswich and Sudbury.</p>
Power-boating and PWCs	<p>Power boating and jet ski-ing take place along the North Norfolk coast, especially at Sea Palling; on the river near Basildon and around Canvey Island. There is good provision outside of the region near Boston, at Tallington Lakes, which is well-used by many participants from throughout the region. One of the main issues here is that many of the key sites for these activities are those with European Marine designations (the Essex estuaries, for example), meaning that there is likely to be a need to find new locations to alleviate existing conflict and meet demand in the future.</p>
Rowing	<p>There are a number of rowing venues in the region, with major sites in Bedford and Cambridge, and smaller club locations in a number of towns including Broxborough, Ely, Norwich, Woodbridge, Peterborough and Lowestoft. However, there is a lack of large scale competition and training facilities across the region. This may be addressed by proposed developments at Bedford or from commercial operators in Cambridge, but other opportunities are required. There is Gig rowing on the Thames, near Canvey Island, but the club does not currently have facilities or a base. Depending upon the future management regime for the waters at Canvey Island, there is potential to develop a gig rowing club there. Other opportunities exist at several other coastal towns, if sufficient interest can be generated.</p>
Motor Cruising	<p>There is good access for motor cruisers and other craft in the region, on the Broads and on the major navigations. Connection to other waterways remains a big issue limiting expansion and development. With the exception of the Lee & the Stort, there is a lack of suitable waterways in the south and east of the region, which limits water-related access to these areas.</p> <p>Better connections have the potential to stimulate a significant increase in use, but improvement of infrastructure and facilities are required at towns across the Ouse system and at the Lee & the Stort, to provide boaters with impetus and confidence to visit. The same is true for the coast where, often, limited visitor moorings and facilities restrict longer trips around the region.</p>
Water skiing & Wakeboarding	<p>Water skiing and wakeboarding currently occur on a number of estuaries and navigations, including sites on the Broads. However, increasing regulation appears to be discouraging these uses. There is a modest range of opportunities in the north, south and east of the region, with the west of the region able to access venues outside the region, such as Tallington Lakes in Lincolnshire. Cable technology allows both sports to be concentrated into reasonable small areas of water, with easy access for beginners through to international competition. However, the only cable tow site in the region is on the western boundary, south of Bedford</p>
Surfing and Windsurfing	<p>When the atmospheric conditions are appropriate, surfing takes place off the Norfolk and Suffolk coast. However, the waves are not as good as those found in the South West of England and on much of the Welsh coast. Windsurfing is well catered for, both at the coast and inland, with significant resources such as Alton Water and Grafham. There is also a dedicated windsurfing lake just out of the region (the 220 acre Brogborough Lake in Bedfordshire). The central area of the region is least well provided for, but this is a matter of topography, with few suitable resources available.</p>

1.4.5 Synthesis

There are six key resource drivers that will affect the capacity of the region to meet future demand for outdoor recreation:

1. *There are many opportunities for water related recreation, but too many of these are poor quality or in poor repair.* The East of England is widely identified as a water environment; many of its long term residents have grown up with water related recreation (principally boating and angling) and commonly make informal use of the local waters. Yet, the population active in water related recreation is (just) below the national average, while the quality and quantity of facilities available for water recreation activities are poor. In particular, there are limited (and congested) access points in estuaries and on the coast; there are insufficient coastal and inland marina berths to accommodate demand and the shift from hire cruisers to private ownership; there are large gaps in the formal provision for some sports, particularly in the south east of the region; and only one non-navigation river has a canoe access agreement. Prior to major investment in new infrastructure, there is clearly a need to address these quality issues. The potential impacts of climate change (see below) could further impact on this, particularly as water levels rise (possibly rendering many current resources unusable).
2. *Protected areas and the impacts of climate change will limit resource capacity.* The East of England has a number of major protected areas, particularly the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads and coasts and the Essex estuaries. In addition, green belt policies have maintained some semi-natural areas close to conurbations. However, much of the region has been subject to centuries of drainage and intensive farming, which has damaged its biodiversity. Initiatives, such as the Great Fen project, Wicken Fen and Wallasea Island, for example, aim to return large tracts of land to their former salt and fresh water marsh status. While these schemes offer some potential for informal land-based recreation such as walking and birdwatching, without significant consideration they may limit or exclude opportunities for water-based recreation (water taxis, visitor moorings for visitors, circular canoe loops etc). Added to this is the managed re-alignment being contemplated along much of the region's coastline, in the face of rising sea levels. Rising water levels in the estuaries could render much current recreation provision redundant. This is likely to be compounded by the fact that many changes are likely to enhance and extend opportunities for conservation interests, which could further marginalise water-based recreation, particularly for motorised craft. The same is sometimes the case with the extension and provision of reservoirs and the re-use of aggregate sites, where an initial balance between conservation and recreation interests often becomes balanced in favour of conservation value. This can limit the range, frequency and opportunities for the growth of water-based activities. There are also questions about how far regulation of the water environment (especially the European Marine designations and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive) will allow artificial structures – such as moorings, platforms and jetties – to be placed in or near moving waters. The net result is likely to be a continuing loss of capacity for many forms of water-related sport and recreation.

3. *There is a limited diversity of topographic features in the region.* Much of the region is flat or gently undulating. While this has offered unrivalled inland sailing and cruising on the Broads, and good cycling terrain throughout the region, it does limit the potential of the region to meet all demands for water-related recreation from its natural resources. In particular, there is little natural white or fast flowing water available, which limits the potential for game angling and some paddle and raft sports. There is little scope for addressing the angling deficiency. However, some artificial provision can be made for paddle sports, particularly through the managed release of water at weirs and sluices owned by the Environment Agency. Equally, where there are topographic variations, such as at Brogborough Hill, near Bedford, the potential exists to consider developing pumped white water facilities, although the sustainability of this approach requires further consideration.
4. *Urban and peri-urban land is at a premium for built development.* Although many Eastern region towns and cities have rivers and other waters within their administrative areas, the need for 'doorstep' recreation opportunities means that steps will have to be taken to protect these resources from non-recreation development. Planning agreements will be an important tool and new planned developments may create new blue spaces e.g. flood balancing lakes. Green Infrastructure Planning in some areas is already encouraging landowners and developers to believe that the incorporation of water resources will be a significant factor in both creating the conditions in which planning permission may be granted for housing and economic development, and in providing the mitigation for such developments. However there is currently little guidance on water space requirements, meaning that local planning authorities have little information upon which to base development plan and control decisions. Along with large scale growth in the region comes a requirement for more water resources and new aggregate sites. Where these resources are planned (including reservoirs for irrigation, expansion of water drinking supplies or new aggregate sites) early consideration of potential strategic recreational or conservation value is needed to ensure that the highest added value is derived from public investment in these new resources. In contrast to the predominantly localised and opportunist approaches currently used, this may actually lead, for example, to the provision of a major sub-regional hub for motorised and non-motorised water activities to serve urban centres, or to the designation of a significant conservation resource in close proximity to protected areas.
5. *The region has a large land area, concentrated areas of population and poor transport infrastructure.* With congestion, overcrowding and fierce competition for land in urban and peri-urban locations, there is a need to provide green transport solutions to get people to a mix of sport and recreation resources and places. However, the region has poor public transport infrastructure away from urban centres and commuter routes, while its road system is already congested by the number of private cars using it. In planning new water-related recreation schemes, planners should therefore be aware of the need to provide innovative transport solutions that can link people and recreation places without the need for private transport. Combining green and blue infrastructure planning in new developments is a key part of this process. Existing waterways, coast and inland water also provide a basic resource on which new sustainable links can be developed,

including for example, waterway taxis to avoid congestion in urban areas, commuter cycleways etc.

6. *Tourism offers potential for economic development of remote and deprived areas of the region, but this may conflict with broader environmental and conservation aims.* Great Yarmouth could develop opportunities to receive large sea cruisers (that cannot be easily accommodated elsewhere along the East Coast) and is due to open a ferry port. With the Harwich port already successful, the region therefore welcomes a lot of foreign tourists in addition to being a popular destination for domestic tourism. While many tourists head for the Broads, or the cities of Cambridge and Norwich, there is potential to develop a new rural tourism offer that might attract people to stay in the region for longer, as well as diffusing current tourism pressure. However, development of suitable facilities – particularly near the coast – may conflict with environmental protection policies, as well as introducing another factor into decisions about the managed re-alignment of the coast.

2: Gaps in Provision

2.1 Gaps

1. *Poor facilities and regulatory provisions restrict the use of some waters.* It is necessary to put into good repair many of the facilities and services currently provided for water related recreation. This includes modifying slipways to meet current and anticipated health & safety requirements, improving moorings where possible and identifying locations where additional accesses can be made to waters with existing uses. It is interesting to note, for example, that around half the estuary area in the region is not currently used for any recreation activity. While some of this may be related to water conditions and environmental designations, it seems that lack of access may equally be an issue. There are also regulatory issues, with increasingly ineffective estuary bylaws constraining the work of harbourmasters. The demands made on estuaries are clearly changing, with faster craft often gaining access from inappropriately sited marinas or boat dealers, more craft remaining static, causing congestion in key areas, and new uses (especially jet skis) adding new management issues. Against this background, harbour and estuary bylaws – for smaller estuaries like the Crouch and Blackwater – have not changed sufficiently to allow harbour masters to carry out their jobs effectively. This is largely with respect to the difficulties encountered in regulating and policing speeding and access to restricted areas (often associated with conservation designations). The Port of London Authority, Thames Estuary and other partners are working to improve the management and self regulation of personal watercraft, particularly near areas of high conservation value. As new approaches are developed these should be shared more widely with other estuarine locations in Essex.
2. *A shortage of good quality major regional water-related sport recreation facilities.* There are some good resources and facilities for water-related sport and recreation in the region; examples include Grafham Water (sailing), the Nene (with good quality white water canoeing and rafting), the River Waveney (touring canoeing), the River Crouch and a number of Broads rivers (water skiing), Whitlingham, Norwich (canoeing and rowing). However, not all sports and recreation activities have even one established centre, while the size of the region means that many residents are too far from centres to benefit from them³⁶. This is particularly the case in activities including diving, coastal sail cruising, rowing, some canoe disciplines and jet skiing. Gaps in provision thus occur in the following areas:
 - Outdoor swimming and canoe touring routes;
 - Grade 2+ white water sites for slalom and other canoe disciplines;
 - Dive sites, particularly to serve high demand in south Essex/Thames Gateway;
 - Inland water provision for water skiing and wakeboarding (both cable and boat tows), power boating and jet skiing;
 - Inland water for sail sports in the western areas of the region;

³⁶ This is corroborated by the sports facilities strategy (East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA), which notes shortfalls in the provision for canoeing and rowing.

- Transit marina and harbour facilities for sail and motor cruising between the Crouch estuary and Great Yarmouth, Great Yarmouth and Wells, and possibly Wells and Kings Lynn;
 - Inland navigation links between the East of England and the national waterway network;
 - Provision for rowing (including gigs), particularly in Suffolk and Essex. The regional sports facilities strategy³⁷ also notes a lack of provision for rowing in a corridor from Peterborough to Thurrock;
 - Provision for canoe sprint and training in Essex, Suffolk and South Bedfordshire³⁸;
3. *Gaps in doorstep opportunities and recreational routes.* There is a lot of inland water in many of the urban areas in the East of England, but relatively little provision for or encouragement of activities related to them. This reflects a lack of understanding on the part of the local authorities, particularly of the extent to which some water-related activities are attractive to target population segments. This could be addressed by the development of supplementary planning guidance to help local planning authorities make more informed resource allocation decisions.

The lack of provision also reflects a risk aversion in which local authorities (and other resource owners and managers) are increasingly unwilling to encourage activities that are potentially dangerous and could lead to liability issues in the event of accidents. This risk aversion is compounded by the emergency services, which are wary of activities that take place in inaccessible or dangerous locations, or which encourage young people, in particular, to take unacceptable risks when not under adequate or appropriate supervision.

The navigation network and many rivers have the potential to combine the needs of water-based interests (boaters, canoeists, anglers) with local aspirations for healthier lifestyles through the development of regular safe and well maintained green spaces and gateway sites, with shared facilities such as parking, toilet & showers, circular walks & cycle rides, health walks, canoe trails, fishing facilities, picnic & barbeque areas etc. Waterways in the region are also under-exploited in providing public infrastructure on which to provide major long-distance walks and rides or cycle routes between towns and villages.

- 4 *Gaps in the provision for easily accessible multi-sport opportunities:* It is apparent that, while the rural and coastal populations have some access – often of variable quality - to water-related resources, few people in the western and southern urban areas have access to good facilities that offer the potential for a range of uses. It is not just a lack of availability, but in some key areas of deprivation, a lack of participation can often be attributed to cost, competition or lack of confidence. In many instances those resources that do exist are congested at peak times or when the tide is right for boating activity. There is scope for a number of sub-regional facilities that can cater for a range of activities, either through additional activities being provided at

³⁷ East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA.

³⁸ See East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA.

existing waters, or by new provision. There are particular shortages in the following areas:

- *Thames Estuary*: there is limited provision for a range of marine activities at Wat Tyler Country Park (Basildon), Benfleet, Canvey Island, Leigh and Southend. However, most of this provision is congested, with conflict evident between different users competing for limited space (both on the water and launching). There is also a general lack of ancillary facilities which limits the potential utility of the area. It should also be noted that environmental designations are likely to limit future dredging operations to maintain even this level of provision;
- *Cambridge*: there is a lot of water in and around Cambridge, but much of this is congested, particularly at the height of the season. It also has limited scope for a broad range of activities. There is thus a requirement for a major sub-regional facility close to Cambridge that is capable of accommodating a range of uses, particularly canoe sprint and training and rowing (a 2km course is required)³⁹. Proposals for the Cambridge Sports Lakes and the CamToo Project (see below) will address this gap;
- *Great Yarmouth/Lowestoft*: there are some lower-grade facilities here, particularly connected to the wide range of tourism opportunities found locally. However, relatively few activities are specifically catered for, while the quality of provision is currently too low. There is a particular need for canoe and rowing provision here⁴⁰;
- *Bedford*: there is a lack of connectivity and accessibility to local and national waterways, which prevents them being utilised to their full potential. The proposed Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway and waterway parks, allied to appropriate developer led economic and housing development, will create a more accessible and better developed range of water based activities with associated development of green space and corridors to serve growth in the area. There are also specific shortages of provision for canoeing (white water) and rowing that could be addressed by proposed developments at Cardington (see below);
- *Norwich*: although being part of the Broads, and with a major navigation running through it, Norwich currently makes relatively little use of its water resources, forcing residents to go elsewhere for water related recreation. The development of Whitlingham Outdoor Centre is the exception that addresses this to some extent and provides a best practice example to other enclosed waters in the region by accommodating a wide range of watersports on one site, but there is potential to make more use of the city's water resources;
- *North and east London commuter belt*: the Lea & Stort Valley is an important water resource, and will become more significant with the development of the Olympic White Water centre at Broxbourne. However, there is a need for more and better facilities to entice boaters to navigate both spurs from London; initiatives to develop and meet rowing and canoeing demands in towns such as Leighton Buzzard, Welwyn, Harlow and Bishops Stortford, where a more vibrant use of the water

³⁹ East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA.

⁴⁰ East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA.

environment could provide a positive focus for regeneration and a catalyst for outdoor activities⁴¹.

- *Peterborough*: There are good facilities in Peterborough, but better foresight could have made them considerably more adaptable and useful to the local population. For example, a rowing lake was provided with grant funding, but is now only used for short periods each day. On this site, an extra 20 metres width and a cable system could have meant that the site was shared with wakeboarding & waterskiing. Both could have easily been allocated their own time on the water, while sharing facilities would have also brought additional value from the public investment and ensured greater sustainability through doubling use, sharing costs and management of the site. This situation – and many like it – need to be addressed to ensure that the best use is made of all public investment.
- 5 *Insufficient understanding of the health and therapeutic benefits of water related recreation*: The national priority is to tackle growing obesity levels (especially amongst children) and other health issues, with a target of raising participation levels in sport and physical activity by 1% per annum. Yet 1 in 2 adults take no part whatsoever in any form of sport or physical activity⁴². While water related recreation activities form a minor part of the participation that does take place, they have the potential to attract those who are not currently active, particularly younger and older people. And the East of England has a lot of water resource that is suitable for use. As the regional sports facilities strategy makes clear, whilst the provision of facilities is not a single solution, suitable facilities – and a clear progression through levels of facility - are important elements of a portfolio of interventions that can stimulate and facilitate greater participation. In addition, there is a need for better and more targeted information about where people can go, what they can do and what health benefits they will gain from participation.
- 6 *Insufficient appreciation of wider social benefits of access and opportunities to participate*: 'Get Hooked' and other water-related sports have provided a focus for targeting and tackling social inclusion in deprived communities and some instances anti-social behaviour (Birmingham & Durham), engendering confidence, a sense of self worth and developing life skills and more positive attitudes towards others and the environment. Unfortunately participation programmes to date in the East of England have been developed upon targets of numbers of participants rather than quality, often located in places that only the socially mobile can access. There is therefore an urgent need to take work undertaken in other parts of the country a step further by developing, monitoring and providing evidence of how such programmes can positively contribute towards changing the lives of participants, particularly in areas of deprivation and in tackling anti-social behaviour. This may be a particularly good opportunity to pilot programmes around inland and coastal resources in areas scoring highly on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (e.g. Peterborough, Lowestoft, Clacton & Southend on Sea, Bedford etc). Through sufficient pilots

⁴¹ East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA

⁴² East of England Development Agency (2007) *Creating active places – sports facilities strategy for the East of England*. Cambridge: EEDA

it may be possible to provide a cost benefit analysis of public investment in this approach.

- 7 *Uneven approach to managing fragile environments for sustainable water-related recreation.* There is considerable demand for access to informal activities in environmentally sensitive areas. This can be for bird watching, for angling in the best managed fisheries or for quiet recreation (walking and cycling). In some cases angling, guided canoeing or even moorings for visiting craft or water taxis from local urban areas could provide very sustainable and powerful ways of providing high quality visitor experiences in areas of high conservation value, if developed and managed at an appropriate scale and under specific thresholds and timings (e.g. self-guided canoe routes developed on estuaries in Northern Ireland could provide a template for some estuaries in the East of England). While there are good practice examples of some opportunities being made available (the Essex Wildlife Trust centre at Hanningfield Reservoir, for example), management practice is variable and there is little dissemination of good practice. As a result, there are gaps in provision that could be addressed at relatively minor cost.
- 8 *Limited response to the changing nature of marine tourism:* the shift away from hire boats on the Broads has been noted. It may be part of a wider trend towards fewer people participating in marine touring, although limited access and mooring capacity could mean that there is no room for growth and that participants with access are just spending less time on the water. Certainly the increasing ownership of luxurious and expensive craft has contributed towards a trend where the status of owning a boat is often more important than regular participation, with more craft spending much longer periods in marinas and on moorings. This is resulting in a growing physical capacity on the water and the demand for moorings has thus changed, from swing and bank moorings to marina berths (where most of these craft remain for most of the time). In addition to permanent marina berths, there is also a demand for transit berths along the coast and up major estuaries, to allow passage for these craft. In addition to this trend, there are also trends towards the ownership of smaller – but powerful - power boats (again used sparingly for estuarine and off-shore outings). In all cases there is currently a gap in the provision of suitable berths, docks and other types of storage. This has the effect of driving custom away from the region (for the larger craft), or enforcing participants to trail their craft to the coast (where there are few accessible public slipways) whenever they want to use them. There are similar issues on inland water, where a lack of confidence in reaching suitable moorings, refuelling, water points and other boating facilities is a major factor in deterring wider exploration of the waterway network by boaters already within the system, who rarely venture beyond known local waters where they are confident of finding the resources that they need. This is compounded in some areas by tidal influence, where navigation is dependant on small windows during the day, and where high levels of sediment can often reduce this time even further.
- 9 *Insufficient is known about the potential impacts of climate change on water related recreation:* It is apparent that climate change could have a profound impact on water related recreation resources and activities, throughout the area. Studies have been conducted into what some of the impacts of climate

change might be, and where they will be felt, but there has been no work specific to water related recreation. There is currently therefore a very uneven and partial approach to preparing for change in terms of planning new leisure and recreation facilities and managing public perceptions of the future. The UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) suggests identifying adaptation options and scenarios are an important element in planning for climate change and has developed the Base for Research, Adaptation, Impacts and News (the BRAIN) to bring together intelligence on climate change impacts, responses and adaptations. Developing an information base on the options and scenarios for water recreation in the East of England will need to be linked to a process that is relevant to the whole leisure and tourism sector in the region. Options and scenarios will also need to take account of the geographically uneven impacts of climate change on the region. The UKCIP08 data should allow climate change scenarios to be developed for local areas and this could be used to inform future scenarios and options for water related recreation.

2.2 Current Proposals and Initiatives to Address the Gaps

1 Poor facilities and regulatory provisions restrict the use of some waters

As part of its 20-year flood alleviation programme, the Broads Authority is taking the opportunity to replace and upgrade facilities such as slipways and moorings⁴³. The Environment Agency is similarly undertaking improvements to the main navigations⁴⁴, while also developing catchment flood management plans⁴⁵ for rivers such as the Nene and Great Ouse where more significant high flow events, and an increased risk of low flow events is likely to effect boating, angling and other activities. As part of its development of the capacity of the Abberton Reservoir near Chelmsford, Essex and Suffolk Water will improve the provision for conservation, but as a result of conservation interests there is little consideration of how this strategically important site (the second biggest reservoir in the region) could provide water-based recreational opportunities to meet the growing needs of communities in this part of the region.

2 A shortage of good quality major regional water-related sport and recreation facilities

There are a number of proposals for developing major facilities in the region. In infrastructure terms, the two most significant are the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway (BMK) and the Fen Waterway Link (FWL). The proposed BMK waterway (joining the River Great Ouse at Bedford to the national inland waterway network near Milton Keynes) will not only provide the first major new build of a waterway for generations, but it will also fulfil an ambition first mooted in 1810 to link the Grand Union and eastern waterways. Furthermore, it will also link together and develop a range of water sports venues stretching from Willen Lake in Milton Keynes (powered water sports) through Brogborough and Stewartby Lakes (sailing, canoeing and the

⁴³ Broadland Environmental Services Ltd (2005) *Broadland flood alleviation project* update. Norwich: BESL.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Environment Agency (nd) *River Great Ouse Waterway Plan*.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Environment Agency (nd) *River Great Ouse catchment flood management plan*.

potential for white water provision), rowing on the Great Ouse, to a potential new rowing lake north east of Bedford. There would also be a link to the national waterway network, providing a gateway to the East of England navigations. The BMK waterway proposal enjoys high level support, including recently a DCLG secondment and interventions by Ministers to help secure the route. It will mitigate the further housing growth inevitable in the area, has the potential to create and regenerate a range of water based sports and travel options, and could fundamentally transform the character of Bedford and many other market towns along the Ouse (St Neots, St Ives etc). In addition it now finds itself at the centre of ambitious, but deliverable, plans to develop the Marston Vale and is already a key component in the further growth of Milton Keynes. The fact that it will tie in with the creation of a world leading freshwater research centre and visitor attraction, sited in an area with existing water sports activity and untapped potential only serves to emphasise this further.

The proposed Fen Waterway Link, connecting the cities of Lincoln, Peterborough and Ely and a number of market towns such as Boston, Crowland and Kings Lynn, has the potential to open up 240 km of waterway (80 km of new waterway and increased access to 160 km of existing waterway). The proposed Link will create a new circular waterway for recreation and tourism throughout the Fens. The new waterway will be able to accommodate 5000 additional motor cruiser movements per annum and sustain at least 600 new cruise boats, bringing a tenfold increase in the number of cruising boats and hire craft in the region. This fits well with the regional sports facilities strategy, which identifies the area around Kings Lynn as in need of new water sports provision, particularly for rowing (this is in addition to the proposed Nar-Ouse Link near King's Lynn).

The current selection and acquisition of land in the Fens to compensate for habitat loss from coastal re-alignment provides very significant potential to deliver the remaining short channel sections required to provide the links remaining in the waterway network that forms the Fen Waterway Link. The excavation of these sections could be easily incorporated, at low cost, along the boundaries of areas being restored to wetland communities if there was sufficient desire to maximise public gain from investing in conservation across the Fens.

There are also plans to develop regional-level water recreation facilities in Cambridge, as part of the sub-regional plan for Cambridgeshire. These plans include the Cambridge Sports Lakes, to the north of Cambridge, which will include provision for rowing, canoe sprinting and training, and for triathlon. The lakes will connect to the River Cam, and could provide additional visitor moorings for those wishing to visit Cambridge, facilitate touring canoeing and, potentially, cater for outdoor swimming. There are also plans in Cambridge (the CamToo Project) to improve facilities for rowing and canoeing. Further south, the Broxbourne Olympic white water venue will create a major new paddlesports site which, in conjunction with the existing provision in the Lee Valley, will provide for a range of water related sport and recreation activities. In the north, developments in Norwich – specifically at Whitlingham Broad – provide for a range of sports including canoeing, sailing, rowing and triathlon. Proposals to develop a white water venue at New Mills in the centre of the city could enhance this provision.

3 *Gaps in doorstep opportunities*

Natural England has been the lead organisation in promoting green infrastructure planning in urban and peri-urban locations⁴⁶, following the development of accessible greenspace standards⁴⁷. These initiatives have been utilised in a pilot study of green infrastructure planning in the region, based on the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Growth Area.⁴⁸ All the approaches to green infrastructure planning have included water resources as a form of green infrastructure. However, reference to water as a resource is largely limited to its aesthetic potential as a backdrop for land based recreation, or as part of a green corridor for wildlife and biodiversity. There thus remains a gap for guidance that informs planners and others about the recreation potential of water resources and sites.

4 *Gaps in the provision for easily accessible multi-sport opportunities*

The examples given above, of the proposed B&MK Waterway, the Cambridge Sports Lakes and the Broxbourne Olympic site all qualify as multi-sport opportunities. However, there are few similar proposals elsewhere in the region.

5 *Insufficient understanding of the health and therapeutic benefits of water related recreation*

Sport England and the East of England Development Agency have been taking steps to improve the flow of information on the benefits of sport and physical activity, particularly through the recent publication of the sports facilities strategy for the region. The local sports partnerships are also getting involved in encouraging people to get active. There are also good referral schemes in Cambridge and elsewhere. An interesting development in this regard is the new settlement scheme at Cambourne, near Cambridge, where there is a focus on securing excellent sport, leisure and health facilities, together with a broad range of housing options, as a core part of the development plan.

6 *Insufficient appreciation of wider social benefits of access and opportunities to participate:*

The Environment Agency is to pilot a 'Get Hooked' approach to targeting quality participation in free angling programmes by all groups in areas of high deprivation and social exclusion. To begin with it is proposed that Peterborough is used as the first pilot area, before extending the programme to other inland and coastal communities with the most to gain from participating in water-related sports. The programmes should be developed so that the difference to individuals through these schemes can be tracked and the range of activities widened to include opportunities such as canoeing, sea angling, rowing, sailing, windsurfing, wakeboarding etc.

⁴⁶ Natural England, 2007, *Green infrastructure and the urban fringe: learning lessons from the Countryside In and Around Towns programme*. Cheltenham: Natural England.

⁴⁷ English Nature, 2003, *Accessible natural green space standards in towns and cities: a review and toolkit for their implementation*. Report No 526. Peterborough: English Nature.

⁴⁸ The Milton Keynes & South Midlands Environment & Quality of Life (EQOL) Sub Group, *Planning sustainable communities: a green infrastructure guide for Milton Keynes and the South Midlands*. Available from the Environment Agency, Trentside Region