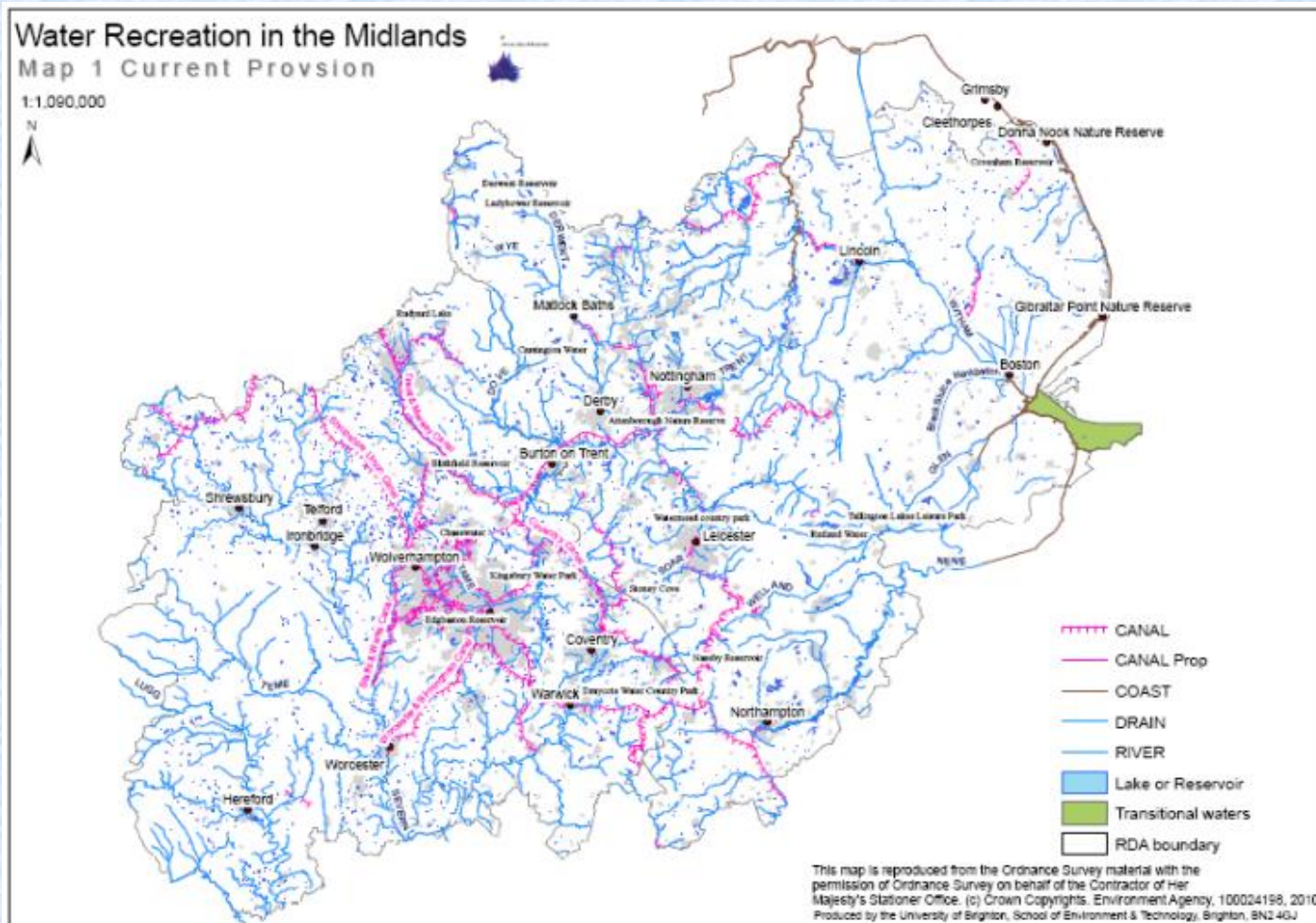


ENJOYING WATER IN THE MIDLANDS



Strategic Priorities for Water Related Recreation in the Midlands 2011 - 15



A full copy of 'enjoying water in the Midlands' can be downloaded from www.brighton.ac.uk/waterrecreation

Purpose of the strategic priorities

The aim of these strategic priorities is to maximise the economic, environmental and social benefits of water related recreation in the Midlands. 'Enjoying water in the Midlands', the strategic priorities for water related recreation in the Midlands, has been developed by the University of Brighton and Plumpton College for the Environment Agency in association with a steering group drawn from Advantage West Midlands, British Waterways, East Midlands Development Agency, East Midlands Regional Assembly, Environment Agency, Government Office for the West Midlands, Natural England (East Midlands) and Sport England (East and West Midlands).* The strategic priorities offer an approach to maximising the recreational potential of inland and coastal waters, encouraging sustainable and responsible opportunities for everyone who wishes to participate, now and in the future.

**This steering group was responsible for seeing the work through to the consultation stage (summer 2010). Since this time some of the agencies and organisations have been abolished, while others have been given revised remits. The Environment Agency has supported the work throughout and has overseen the publication of the strategic priorities*

Introduction Recreational use of the inland and coastal waters of the Midlands provides major economic, environmental and social benefits

- Over 16m tourist visits and 40m tourist nights are spent in the Midlands each year. More than 1.5m tourist visits were for angling, making the Midlands one of the top angling destinations in the UK. Tourists enjoy activities related to inland and coastal waters, plus visits to the Peak District National Park, Ironbridge Gorge and major centres such as Birmingham and Nottingham. Tourism generates over £2bn spend per annum.
- Nearly every resident in the Midlands lives within 5km of a body of inland water that supports some form of water related recreation. Most of this activity is coarse angling, although there are also many opportunities to sail, row, waterski, scuba dive and windsurf. Some of the major waters, including Rutland Water, Carsington Water, Watermead, Covenham Reservoir, Draycote Water, Edgbaston Reservoir, Kingsbury Water Park, Chasewater Reservoir, Rudyard Reservoir, Blithfield Reservoir and Stoney Cove, attract many people from outside the Midlands, especially for competitive activities.
- The Grand Union Canal links the Midlands to the north and south of the country. Completion of the Fens Waterway Link and the Bedford and Milton Keynes Waterway could generate over 100,000 extra boat movements per annum between the Midlands and the East of England.
- The Central Rivers Area (Rivers Trent and Tame) and the Nene Valley demonstrate how former mineral workings can be developed into a wide range of water related recreation facilities that cater for all.

- The major river corridors (the Trent, Severn, Herefordshire Wye, Avon, Witham, Welland, Nene and Derwent) and the canal network are highly significant for all forms of water related recreation: there are over 30,000 powered craft registered in the Midlands, many using the extensive Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire waterways network as well as the Birmingham Canal Navigations and the Black Country canals network; the Rivers Trent, Severn and Herefordshire Wye offer the longest canoe touring routes in England; the Peak District rivers offer some of the best game angling in England; and the extensive network of canal towpaths offers many opportunities for walking, cycling and coarse angling.
- Adult participation in water related recreation is below the national average. More and better facilities are needed to support increased participation. Improving access and facilities next to the major rivers and inland waters could also encourage more tourists to visit the Midlands



Using inland and coastal waters for recreation

The Midlands has an abundance of inland waters and some coastal waters. Its industrial heritage means that it has a particularly extensive network of canals, navigable rivers and drains (over 1,000km of canals alone). While concentrated on the Birmingham city-region, there is also an extensive network in Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire, linked to the Fens waterways. The inland waterways network offers a range of water related recreation experiences, including long distance touring on the canals, with links north and south as well as within the region. The Eastern waterways have improving links to the Fens Waterways, as well as to the sea, via the Humber and the Witham. Development of the Bedford to Milton Keynes Waterway would add significantly to the utility of the network, by joining the Grand Union Canal to the River Great Ouse navigation. The extensive river network and diverse topography of the region provide some high quality waters for angling, canoeing and other water related recreational activities. The Rivers Trent, Severn and Herefordshire Wye all offer long distance touring potential, while the Central Rivers Area (the confluence of the Trent and Tame) and the Nene Valley are fast developing into water resources of national significance. Lakes and reservoirs are numerous, with many formed by the after-use of mineral workings. All these enclosed waters offer great potential for all forms of water related recreation, especially angling, sailing and bird watching. They are also well used by motorised sports and for model boating. There is relatively little coast and it is remote from the main population centres, although it remains a popular destination for some marine water activities.

Demand for water-based recreation

Nearly 40% of the adult population now spend some of their leisure time enjoying water related recreation. The most popular activities are walking, swimming and visits to the beach. Boating, angling and other water recreation activities are increasing in popularity, with nearly 10% of the adult population now participating regularly.

There has been a significant growth in participation in water related recreation in the Midlands, with 1.5m people involved in 2009. The most popular activities are coarse angling, walking, open swimming and visits to the beach. There are indications that participation in motor boating (narrow boats and cruisers) will increase as facilities improve. Participation in most water related recreation activities, particularly canoeing, is expected to grow further.



This will be underpinned by continuing social change, including:

- *Improving people's quality of life:* there is an ethnically diverse and ageing population in the Midlands, with levels of obesity that are higher than average, and lower than average levels of physical activity. This is associated with exclusion from many social and cultural activities, especially among the young, the elderly and migrant populations. Access to high quality sport and cultural activities is an essential component to promoting the improved health and quality of life that is central to sustainability and resilience.
- *Economic growth and technological change:* the impact of globalisation on an area with a strong manufacturing tradition is keenly felt, and is a key driver of change. There is a need to raise productivity, largely through innovation, enterprise and business support and the improvement of learning and skills. A key driver of change is 'renaissance', of both urban and rural economies: urban renaissance is achieved by encouraging local councils and their communities to develop the major settlements in such a way that they can increasingly meet their own economic and social needs in order to counter the unsustainable outward movement of people and jobs facilitated by previous strategies; rural renaissance involves addressing more effectively the major changes which are challenging the traditional roles of rural areas and the countryside.
- *Climate change and protection of the natural environment:* the key driver is the impact of climate change and a consequent need to recognise the value of natural capital in supporting peoples' quality of life and wellbeing, and in economic functions such as environmental protection, food and energy production, flood storage, carbon and heat sinks and the retention and attraction of businesses. This has major implications for land use, particularly in focussing on the development of economic networks linked to principal urban centres and rural sub-regions.



Where people like to go

Many people attended workshops, meetings and discussions to tell us about their experience of water related recreation in the Midlands. Most felt that the Midlands has some wonderful water resources, but very few people – even locals – know about them. Some of their favourite places are:

- *The Birmingham Canal Navigations*: an explorer's paradise consisting of just over 100 miles of 'liquid history.' The BCN now provides a source of recreation for thousands of people each year, including pleasure boaters, anglers, towpath walkers and cyclists. Much landscaping and towpath improvement work has been carried out together with the renovation of existing waterside buildings and the development of new buildings and facilities. See <http://www.bcn-society.co.uk/thebcns.php>
- *Blithfield Reservoir*: a 300 hectare reservoir near Rugeley, owned by South Staffs Water, with a popular education centre, waterside walks and a thriving angling club. See http://www.blithfield.com/blithfield_reservoir_construction.asp
- *Colwick Country Park, Nottingham*: a large park adjacent to the River Trent, offering angling, open water swimming, other watersports, cycling, walking and horse riding, all accessible by public transport from the city of Nottingham. See <http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=6056>
- *The River Witham*: 36 miles of flat water navigation between Lincoln and Boston, with links to the River Trent (via the Fossdyke) and the East of England waterways (via the Wash). Boaters can also explore the Witham Navigable Drains, an intricate network of navigations. Apart from cruising on the water and cycling and walking next to it, there are rowing and canoe clubs. See <http://www.waterscape.com/canals-and-rivers/river-witham>
- *Kingsbury Water Park*: situated in north Warwickshire, just to the east of Birmingham, Kingsbury Water Park has 15 lakes situated in 600 acres of countryside. Activities include walking, cycling, horse riding, a children's farm, angling, waterskiing, power boats, jet skis, model boating, sailing and birdwatching. See http://www.northwarks.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=79
- *The River Severn*: the longest river in Britain, famous for its tidal bore. Most water related activities can be found somewhere on the river, including angling, powered cruising, canoeing (including flat and white water paddling), rowing, camping, walking, cycling, railway rides and visiting historic houses and gardens. See <http://www.waterscape.com/canals-and-rivers/river-severn>

Gaps in Provision

There are several strategic 'gaps' in provision that act as constraints to achieving the full benefits from water related recreation in the Midlands. These are:

- *A lack of good information about where people can go and what they can do.* There are adequate water resources in the Midlands to meet current and future demand. However, best use is not currently made of these resources because people do not know about them. There is thus a need for an inventory of resources, including accessibility and facilities, to ensure that recreational pressure is spread in the most effective and environmentally sustainable way possible.
- *A lack of co-operation, consistency and innovation between regulatory and resource owning bodies.* Many people are frustrated by inconsistencies between navigation authorities, and between different jurisdictions within individual authorities. This includes needing different lock keys for different authorities and encountering different regulations relating to the use of different waterways. There is also a perceived lack of communication and joined-up thinking in some authorities.
- *Poor distribution of facilities for, and access to, some water related sport and recreation activities, and a general shortage of centres of excellence and competition.* While there is sufficient water to accommodate all demands, there are currently constraints to gaining access. These include a lack of day tickets for some activities, including game angling and sailing, a lack of landing stages, services and camping sites for other activities, including powered and unpowered cruising and touring, and the uneven distribution of waters available for powered activities, especially waterskiing and wakeboarding.
- *A lack of good water activity centres close to where people live.* Although there are water activity centres in many urban areas, they are often poorly maintained or are hard to access by public transport. There is a need to upgrade facilities and resources, and to ensure that all forms of water related recreation activity are considered in green infrastructure planning.
- *There is a lack of provision for inland swimming and informal 'beach' activities.* Unlike many parts of England, people living in the Midlands have limited access to the coast, beaches and the sea. Yet, despite there being many suitable waters, there are few inland alternatives available where individuals and families can spend a day out involving open water swimming.
- *There is insufficient provision for water related recreation in the Peak District National Park.* Despite the range of waters found in the Peak District National Park, few are currently used for anything beyond angling, birdwatching and sightseeing. There is a particular gap for unpowered touring by canoe, kayak and rowing craft, while there is also a need for waters for other activities such as competitive rowing and sailing. The National Park Authority recognises, and is investigating, this gap.
- *A need to reduce recreational travel.* In many activities there is a net outflow of water related recreation participants from the Midlands. It is an economic and sustainable development priority to reduce this imbalance by developing facilities of sufficient quality that people no longer have the need to travel so often to destinations outside the region.

Priorities

- **Addressing the environmental protection and climate change issues impacting on water related recreation:** safeguarding the environment is critical when developing new water related recreation opportunities. This can be achieved by: incorporating water related recreation within catchment management plans; developing good practice in undertaking environmental impact assessments of water related activities; considering the recreation impacts of low head hydro schemes; considering the water quality requirements for inland swimming and other water related recreation activities; and controlling invasive weeds.
- **Embedding water related recreation in strategic planning:** Water related recreation has considerable potential to support the delivery of a broad range of local and sub national benefits. This must be highlighted to the Local Enterprise Partnerships, particularly green infrastructure and the London 2012 legacy. Steps must be taken to identify and protect key sites, and to support the Peak District National Park Authority develop water related recreation provision.
- **Using water related recreation to improve people's quality of life:** there is a need to foster inclusion and equality through developing better access to high quality local water resources, initiating schemes that generate stronger connections between people and their local water resources, and rolling out Natural England's Blue Gym concept across the Midlands.
- **Providing better information:** there is an urgent need for better information for a range of different uses, including: helping potential participants find out where they can go and what they can do; providing comprehensive on-line river and sea level information for anglers, paddlers and others; providing high quality information and support to facility owners and managers; and providing local planning authorities, local enterprise partnerships and others with information about what water resources and associated services are required for different activities.
- **Taking steps to reduce recreational travel:** there is a need to reduce the nation's carbon footprint by ensuring that water related recreation facilities are available locally, to reduce people's need to travel to suitable venues. This should include free fishing in all suitable urban areas, provision for storing equipment close to water; promoting better shared use of water resources and providing more water-borne transport such as water taxis.
- **Using water related recreation to support economic regeneration:** water related recreation has considerable potential to contribute to local economies in the following ways: by developing more and better multi-activity touring routes (on water and on the banks) along the main navigations - these should include suitable access and egress sites, local services and overnight camping sites; developing economic models of the potential impacts of water related tourism developments; supporting regeneration at the coast; and improving learning and skills in water related activities.
- **Raising awareness of the diverse cultural and environmental significance of water:** the Midlands is culturally diverse, which raises tensions between established and emerging practices that need to be addressed, as well as raising new issues for the owners and managers of water resources to consider. These include: developing suitable education and information materials to promote culturally and environmentally sensitive understandings of water related activities and promoting a cultural shift among owners and operators, from risk aversion to risk management.

- **More people doing more activities:** increasing participation in physical activities has economic, health, inclusion and diversity benefits. It can be achieved by: researching how to overcome constraints to participation; extending 'get hooked on fishing' schemes; encourage communities to develop multi use facilities.
- **Improving angling:** Angling is the most popular water related sport in the Midlands and has the capacity to grow further, subject to a number of actions being taken to improve provision. These include: supporting the introduction of the Environment Agency's angling strategies, particularly on urban and accessible waters; encourage more fisheries clubs and representative bodies to introduce day tickets for game fishing, particularly in the Peak District National Park where it could support an extended tourist season; open new waters close to where people live; and create a new top quality venue for coarse match fishing, possibly at the Lea Marston Lakes in north Warwickshire.
- **Provide more opportunities for inland swimming and sub-aqua:** there is a particular need in the Midlands to develop inland sites for a number of activities that happen at the coast in other parts of England. This should include developing guidance for suitable inland swimming and sub-aqua sites and undertaking feasibility studies for a number of potential venues, including Naseby Reservoir, Much Wenlock Quarry and former mineral workings in the Trent Valley.
- **Addressing gaps in provision for unpowered water sports and water related activities:** there are gaps in provision for unpowered activities, including all forms of paddlesport, sailing, competition rowing, walking, cycling/horse riding next to water, bird watching and nature conservation. Priorities should include developing the potential of the existing navigations to cater for more activities, ensuring that new green infrastructure include provision for all.
- **Addressing gaps in the provision for powered activities:** there is a priority to develop more provision for powered boating (both narrow boats and cruisers) to cope with the likely increase in demand. There is some scope for new navigations, but in the main the priority should be to improve the facilities of the existing waterway network, especially close to Birmingham and on the Rivers Nene and Witham. There is also a priority for more waterski and wakeboarding venues, and for more enclosed waters suitable for radio controlled model boats. This is exacerbated by the temporary closure of Chasewater Reservoir. Consideration should be given to the potential for Kingsbury Water Park and Lea Marston Lakes to accommodate more powered activities.
- **Addressing poor and inadequate physical access to water resources:** there is a widespread need for more and better public slipways, platforms, landing and steps, on all navigations; there is also a need for better portages around in-river structures, especially on the upper reaches of navigations and on the River Lugg; and there is a need to improve the environment around water resources, to encourage more people to visit the waters and participate.
- **Developing sporting destinations:** in order to achieve the Midlands' potential to become a national destination for water related recreation, there is a need for a series of hubs to be identified where visitors know that they will be able to access suitable information, equipment and supporting services. There is a particular priority to develop the regional water park concept, recognising the success already achieved by the River Nene Regional Park, and to consider how to encourage people to visit areas where there is capacity for new activities, including Lincolnshire and the Shropshire Meres and Mosses.

Looking forward

These strategic priorities provide a broad direction for the delivery of more and better water related recreation opportunities in the Midlands and outline the scope of what can be achieved. In engaging with the big society, they should promote collaboration with current and potential partners. The strategic priorities must be seen as part of a 'living' document reflecting activities and initiatives which will evolve and change over time. They initially cover a five year period (2011-15), with continual review as priorities are completed. Overall success depends on:

- Key regional agencies and community organisations working together to take forward the strategic priorities, encourage their implementation and help identify and target resources;
- Partnership working with groups directly involved in the provision of water related recreation, especially those encouraging participation in outdoor recreation activities;
- New ways of working, guidance and best practice need to be developed to lead the way forward;
- The recognition that projects and initiatives, whether cited in the strategic priorities or developed subsequently, do not impose any commitment on the partners at this stage. Rather, they will be based on case by case justification to assess how they deliver against the overall priorities and against other criteria set by partners (eg funders, environmental impact assessments, local planning authorities and other interested groups).



Case Study 1: River Nene Regional Park

The River Nene Regional Park brings together Northamptonshire's local authorities, the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Natural England and other partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors. All of the partnership's projects fit into one or more of its five core themes, which include developing a sense of place, championing green infrastructure and addressing climate change. The Regional Park is developing a green infrastructure network of environmental projects in Northamptonshire, with multi-functional green spaces and inter-connecting links between the growth settlements of Daventry, Towcester, Northampton, Wellingborough, Kettering, Corby and Peterborough. Since 2004, the partnership has secured £12 million for projects that enhance the county's rural and urban environment. There is a large range of water related recreation opportunities within the regional park, including Nene Park, which stretches for 6 miles along the River Nene, west of Peterborough, and is managed by Nene Park Trust. Ferry Meadows Country Park is at the core of the Nene Park, and offers a range of outdoor recreation activities.



Case Study 2: the Central Rivers Initiative

The Central Rivers area is a 13 mile stretch of the river Trent and the river Tame in Staffordshire, between Burton on Trent and Tamworth. Due to its location and the presence of sand and gravel, the area has experienced considerable pressure from industrial development, housing and quarrying. It also has significant recreation, landscape and ecological value, particularly as a substantial part of the area is within the National Forest and is home to the National Memorial Arboretum. The Central Rivers Initiative was created in 1997, by a partnership of local authorities, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations and others, to ensure that future planning and management of the area would make the most of these values. The partners have developed a strategy that identifies a core area, based around the National Memorial Arboretum, which will be a focus for recreational activity, including major new water sports facilities based on existing and new lakes created by mineral working. Passing through the core, the rivers themselves offer opportunities for river restoration work to enhance their landscape, nature conservation and fisheries value. They will link the core via large blocks of reedbed, wet grassland and other wetland habitats, created through the restoration of mineral workings. Outside the core area there will be a series of attractions including Burton Washlands with its public open spaces, sculpture trail and the Burton Mail Centenary Woodland.



Case Study 3: Get Hooked on Positive Activities North East Lincolnshire

Get Hooked on Fishing is a national scheme that works with local communities to create opportunities for young people. It delivers training around the sport of angling to give participants confidence and to demonstrate that there are alternative pathways and better opportunities available to them. The scheme also trains and develops peer mentors and encourages young people to take an active part in how local schemes are run. The North East Lincolnshire scheme was set up in 2007 with funding from Shoreline Housing Partnership and North East Lincolnshire Council, with additional contributions from Immingham Town Council and the Environment Agency. The scheme is based at Homestead Lake in Immingham and also utilises other local venues including Cleethorpes Country Park. Following three successful years, with 800 registrations, the scheme became 'Get Hooked on Positive Activities' (GHoPA) as a means of attracting new funders and establishing a permanent base for the scheme. Unlike the national scheme, young people can stay on the GHoPA programme as long as they need, while they can also join the Pilgrims AC, an angling club established by GHoPA and consisting of coaches, mentors and anyone who has been on the GHoPA scheme. There is much enthusiasm to replicate the scheme in other North Lincolnshire towns, such as Brigg



Acknowledgement



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Government Office for the West Midlands, Natural England (East Midlands) and Sport England (East and West Midlands).*

Endorsement of the framework is without prejudice to any comments members of the steering group may make as part of any statutory approval process for a project. Whilst the Environment Agency and members of the steering group cannot pre-endorse investment in any projects suggested or otherwise in the document, *'Enjoying Water'* is expected to help inform the selection and assessment of projects where this is consistent with their own corporate priorities and funding criteria.

**This steering group was responsible for seeing the work through to the consultation stage (summer 2010). Since this time some of the agencies and organisations have been abolished, while others have been given revised remits. The Environment Agency has supported the work throughout and has overseen the publication of the strategic priorities*

Thank you to British Waterways, the Environment Agency and Ashmead Price for the photographs used in this document.