



## All Party Parliamentary Group for the Waterways

### Access to Blue Spaces for Health and Active Travel

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2026

1. **Apologies:** Received from Karen Bradley MP, Helen Morgan MP, Lee Dillon MP, Wendy Morton MP.  
**Present:** Lord German, Baroness Jenny Jones, Eleanor Musgrave (assistant to Wera Hobhouse MP), Alice Gibb (DEFRA), Ben Seal (Paddle UK), Paul Twocock, Walk Wheel Cycle Trust), Joanna Richardson (British Marine), Polly Maton (Disability Rights UK), Charlie Norman (IWA), Amy Tillson (IWA).

2. Welcome and introductions

3. Matters Arising from previous meeting (Residential Boating):
  - Charlie Norman gave an update: Wendy Morton MP's Written Question on residential mooring provision in the National Planning Policy Framework has been submitted but is still awaiting answer from the relevant Minister. (post-meeting note: the Written Question has been answered here: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2026-05-13/228>)

4. Speakers and Roundtable

Ben Seal, Head of Access and Environment at Paddle UK, outlined the recent growth in paddle sport participation: an estimated 7.5 million people paddle annually across the UK, this means water sports participation now exceeds that of popular sports such as football or rugby.

The group heard how waterways contribute significantly to both public wellbeing and the economy. Paddle UK referenced the Sport and Recreation Alliance's "[Reconomics 3.0](#)" report, which found that water sports support around one million jobs, contribute billions to the economy as well as preventative health savings to the NHS.

However, concerns were raised about threats facing waterways and those who use them with water quality a major issue. Representatives warned that



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pollution and the corresponding negative publicity are discouraging participation

The APPG also heard evidence about the positive environmental contribution volunteers and community groups make. Paddle UK gave the example of the removal of 11 tonnes of invasive floating pennywort by paddlers. This helped save navigation authorities significant costs, as well as citizen science schemes supporting water quality monitoring and public accountability.

Paul Twocock, Executive Director of Strategy and Engagement at the Walk Wheel Cycle Trust, outlined the charity's work to improve walking, wheeling, and cycling access across the UK. Around 500 miles of these routes run alongside canals, with a further 600 miles along rivers.

He also described partnership projects delivered with CRT (Canal & River Trust), Scottish Canals, and local authorities, including towpath improvements along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal and lighting upgrades on Edinburgh's Union Canal. He also discussed challenges associated with balancing shared towpath use in busy urban areas such as London's Regent's Canal.

Accessibility was also a major theme throughout the session. Polly Maton from Disability Rights UK emphasised why it is important that waterways and water sports are accessible to disabled people, noting that access to the water's edge can be just as important as access onto the water itself.

There was discussion of future policy opportunities, including the proposed Clean Water Bill, the Government's forthcoming Access to Nature Green Paper, and proposals for new river walks announced in Labour's manifesto.

The roundtable concluded with parliamentarians acknowledging both the social and environmental value of waterways, and the importance of improving access, water quality, and infrastructure to support growing participation across a wide range of activities.



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