

Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme, then that would be really helpful. Once the flood alleviation scheme has all the permissions required to proceed, we will be re-engaging with the local community and various stakeholder groups, including canoeists and kayakers, to ensure that we make the most of any opportunities for safe recreation where this will not compromise the functioning of the scheme.

Kind regards

Sarah

Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme

Some more bathing water sites

The last Government announced 27 new official bathing sites in May, mostly on rivers. This means they have to be tested for pollution between 15th May and the end of September, considered to be the bathing season. There is no testing in the winter. Of 423 official sites in England in 2023, 18 failed to reach the minimum required standard, those rated Poor rose to the highest level since 2015 and there was a decline in those rated Excellent. Test results have to be made available within 24 hours of sampling. If a site is rated Poor in five successive years it loses its designation and testing stops.

Of 89 designated bathing waters around Scotland 98% were at least Sufficient with 84% at least Good.

The Government have been carrying out a consultation on changes to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013. Consideration is being given to including other water activities than just swimming, including kayak paddlers, removing the season cutoff dates and stopping automatic undesignation in the event of any shortfall. Central to all of this should be clarification of the existing legal right to use our rivers, not just about hotspots. In 2023 there were 404 incidents where riparian owners were referenced by the EA. There were no prosecutions at all.

Effluent spills have been a fashionable media subject for some time, often promoted by badly informed journalists. One of the more balanced presentations this year has been by Selaine Saxby (N Devon, Con), introducing the Bathing Waters (Monitoring & Reporting) Bill, who took a more informed approach and did not mince her words over the approach of Surfers Against Sewage.

Fighting rural crime

Rural farmers are fighting rural crime gangs. It has long been said that if you keep people away from private land the honest ones will go but the crooks will return. The locals and honest public who see what is going on are the countryside's eyes and ears. Having the public turn up unexpectedly, not least by river, can make life difficult for crooks. I have upset poachers on occasions. The approach of the Country Landowners' Association is part of the problem.

More of the same

Faced with Parliamentary Written Questions on countryside access, the new Government are pursuing the tactics of the previous one and the one before that in talking about green spaces only although they are proposing nine new riverside walks in England. As ever, they talk about local access agreements for rivers without producing any legal basis for their requirement. Given a similar question about angling, they can produce a long and enthusiastic list of what they are doing.

A tidy sum

CRT have retained Green Flags from Keep Britain Tidy for 1,273km of their canal and river network, about a third of their distance. In addition, seven stretches received a Green Heritage Site Accreditation for the management of historic features, supported in England by Historic England. These are the Huddersfield Narrow Canal East, the Shropshire Union Canal from Middlewich to Audlem and Barbridge Junction

Question



Grahame Morris

Labour

Easington

Commons

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he has made a recent assessment of the potential merits of granting rights of access to rivers to (a) kayakers and (b) swimmers.

Answer



Emma Hardy

Labour

Kingston upon Hull West and Haltemprice

Commons

Answered on

7 October 2024

Inland waterways such as canals and rivers are categorised as regulated (mostly canals and some larger rivers, owned by a navigation authority) and unregulated (mostly smaller rivers and no canals, owned/managed by riparian landowners along their length).

If the waterway is owned or managed by a navigation authority, access can be obtained through the navigation authority's licensing regime. If the waterway is unregulated then access should be negotiated with the relevant landowners through local voluntary access agreements, to ensure the interests of all parties concerned are considered. Legislating on this issue is not (currently) Government policy.

To formally designate a site as a bathing water, an application must be submitted to Defra. Defra welcomes applications for both coastal and inland waters such as lakes and rivers. Local authorities, groups and individuals can apply for sites to be designated. Defra encourages this by writing to local authority Chief Executives, and stakeholders like Swimming Associations.

Question



Freddie van Mierlo

Liberal Democrat

Henley and Thame

Commons

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will amend the criteria relating to bathing water designation to include the (a) use of (i) non-motorised boats and (ii) paddleboards and (b) holding of (i) the Royal Regatta, (ii) events organised by Swim Henley and (iii) other such events.

[^ Hide full question](#)

Answer



Emma Hardy

Labour

Kingston upon Hull West and Haltemprice

Commons

Answered on

18 October 2024

Ministers continue to consider possible changes to the Bathing water system. In light of this, applications for designations for the 2025 bathing season which were closed by the previous administration, remain closed.