



Safety Framework

This document sets out the Deben Canoe Club's formal safety framework, as current from the date stated in the footer.

Application – the principles applied in this framework should be adopted by all paddlers during all club activities. The framework is a work-in-progress and will grow and adapt over time. It therefore represents a sufficient standard but not an absolute standard. All paddlers must use their own skills, training, experience and judgement to apply such further safety principles as seem appropriate in any and every practical situation. This applies particularly during the early stages of the framework's development.

Personal responsibility – all watersports, including the various paddlesports practised at our club, involve some degree of physical risk, including risk of injury and death. We believe these risks can be minimised, but not completely eliminated, by participating in organised group activities under the supervision of appropriately qualified and experienced leaders. Nevertheless, each paddler on the water must take personal responsibility for their own safety, while also doing what they can to create a safe environment for everyone in the group.

It is a condition of membership of the club that you read this framework, and follow it during all club activities.

Leaders (including coaches) – leaders are expected to fully comply with all of the principles set out in this framework. However, the club recognises that all paddles have their own specific circumstances, and nothing in this framework should be construed as requiring a leader to act in a way which contradicts their own judgement of the safest course of action in any particular situation. On the contrary, the club and its members rely on our leaders to use their skills, training, judgement and experience to deliver the safest and most enjoyable experiences possible out on the water.

Legal liability – neither the Deben Canoe Club, nor its officials, leaders, coaches and members, accepts any liability for any damage or injury suffered by any participant or bystander during any club activity or otherwise. All participants in any club activities agree that they do so entirely at their own risk.

DCC: constituents of the Safety Framework

The following documents are included within the club safety framework:

- DCC Code of Conduct
- DCC Safety Principles for Paddlers
- DCC Principles for Independent Peer Group Paddling
- DCC Health and Safety Policy
- DCC checklists for leaders and coaches
- DCC risk assessments
- DCC Standard Operating Procedures (governing leaders and coaches)
- DCC Safety Officer's annual review
- DCC descriptions of the river Deben and other local rivers

DCC: Code of Conduct

The club has adopted Paddle UK's model code of conduct T3 dated 16 January 2020, with minor amendments as set out below.

It is the policy of the Deben Canoe Club that all paddlers, volunteers, leaders, coaches and parents show respect and understanding for each other and conduct themselves in a way that reflects the principles of the club.

The aim is for all paddlers to improve performance and have fun. Everyone involved in the club should abide by all club policies.

Paddlers:

- take care of all property belonging to the club, centre or club members
- treat other club members with respect at all times — on and off the water — treat other paddlers as you would want to be treated yourself
- control tempers and avoid behaviour which may affect or upset others
- co-operate and listen to your leaders, coaches and club officials

Club officials, leaders and volunteers

- consider the wellbeing and safety of paddlers before the development of performance
- develop an appropriate working relationship with club members, based on mutual trust and respect
- make sure all activities are appropriate to the age, ability and experience of those taking part
- display consistently high standards of behaviour and appearance
- follow Paddle UK and club guidelines and policies
- hold the appropriate, up-to-date qualifications and insurance
- encourage paddlers to value their performance and not just results
- never condone the use of prohibited substances

Parents / guardians

- help your child to recognise good performance, not just results
- never force your child to take part in sport
- never punish or belittle a child for losing or making mistakes
- publicly accept officials' judgements
- support your child's involvement and help them to enjoy the sport
- use correct and proper language at all times
- set a good example by applauding good performances of all paddlers

DCC: Safety Principles for Paddlers

The purpose of the Deben Canoe Club is to share enjoyable paddles in a friendly environment under the guidance of experienced leaders. Safety is paramount. Participants must take responsibility for their own safety and that of others.

In this section of the club safety framework we set out some general guidance which we hope ordinary club members will find useful.

The first principle for safe paddling is to operate in a cooperative and supportive environment. Always act in accordance with the club's code of conduct. The club has zero tolerance for any form of harassment, abusive behaviour, bullying or bigotry. Any club member or guest who witnesses such behaviour should report it as soon as possible to the event leader, the club welfare officers, or to any other member of the club committee.

Safety principles for group paddles

- have a change of clothing either in your boat or at least at the get-out, for example in the clubhouse or in your car, so that if you do get wet and cold you can get warm again as soon as possible
- do not paddle if you have any open cuts or wounds which may be exposed to river water – only paddle if such cuts are covered with a secure waterproof dressing to minimise the risk of water borne infection. (See the note on Weil's disease, below)
- similarly, avoid swallowing any river water if you possibly can
- wash your hands as soon as possible after completing a paddle, and certainly before eating or drinking. Wash the rest of yourself when practical
- do not paddle if you feel weak or unwell
- do not paddle if you are unsure if you are fit and skilled enough to complete the proposed paddle – the leader will explain what is planned before the group approaches the water
- you must follow the club's alcohol policy, see below
- always wear a properly fitted and secured buoyancy aid – this is mandatory on all club paddles
- check your own boat, paddle and other equipment carefully before approaching the water
- if you have any doubts or uncertainties about your equipment, discuss with a leader as soon as possible, ideally long before the group approaches the water. Experienced paddlers may also be able to provide reassurance – conversely, please do not attempt to provide advice to other paddlers unless you are absolutely sure your advice is correct
- dress for the expected conditions, and for all possible adverse conditions. Layers are good. If there is any chance of rain or cold, then take a cagoule in your boat even if you don't want to wear it at the outset. A cagoule will keep you warm, or at least warmer, if you do get wet and cold. Dress for yourself – don't be misled by others going out in a thin short sleeved t-shirt when you would be more comfortable in three warm layers! Don't overlook the impact of the change of seasons – once we move into autumn it can be much colder at the end of a paddle than the beginning

- make a decision on whether to dress for the possibility of immersion – don't wear clothes which will be heavy or chafe when wet (for example, jeans)
- footwear should be designed to protect toes and stay on while walking through deep mud – flip flops and flimsy 'wet shoes' are not suitable
- make sure any of your valuables which would be damaged by water are secure in waterproof bags
- always follow the instructions of leaders, coaches and club officials, both on and off the water. Wilfully ignoring such instructions may lead to a report to the club committee, who may impose sanctions up to and including expulsion from the club
- if you observe anything on or off the water that you think the leader should know about, then tell them as soon as practical
- offer to help others getting in or out of the water, but only if you are sure you can help and not hinder
- be considerate of others in the group – try not to crowd their boats or impede their paddles, try not to splash them, etc.
- when paddling in a group, stay together with the rest of the group! If you are at the head of the group please check regularly to see if the group has become spread out a long way behind you. If so, then slow down. If you find yourself falling behind the group, shout out for the group to slow down – this should be rare, since the leaders will be alert to this and should slow the group down themselves before it becomes a problem
- remember, the further you are from the group, the slower leaders will be able to assist you in an emergency
- do not move out of sight of the rest of the group. If there is an incident and you are out of sight, then the leaders will be slow to attend and assist, with potentially very serious consequences
- if you find yourself struggling to maintain the pace then let a leader know as soon as possible. Any of us can paddle a surprisingly long way, provided we go slowly enough. Conversely, pushing yourself even slightly beyond your comfort zone can quickly lead to exhaustion. Leaders are always happy to slow the group down if you need it, and much prefer that to learning that you are too exhausted to continue when they are a long way from the planned exit point
- in the event of an incident on the water, don't panic. If you are not directly involved, and are unconfident of your ability to help, then move aside and form a close group with the others, which should turn to face into the elements. If necessary, shout to make sure leaders are aware of the problem
- if you are directly involved in an incident, don't panic. Shout for assistance. If you find yourself in the water, keep calm, exit from your boat, and if possible use your boat as a float. Once you are back in control, consider if it would be safe to check to see if you can actually touch the river bed with your feet! Leaders and other experienced paddlers will assist as soon as they can
- if you find yourself in difficulty, don't panic. Try to avoid creating difficulties for other paddlers. For example, if you are capsizing, resist the urge to wildly grab at another paddler, lest you should pull them over into the water too. Literally nobody wants that

- if someone else is in difficulty, do what you can to help, but do not impede leaders on the spot. Collecting stray equipment which is floating away is always useful and rarely inappropriate
- always report any issues or problems with club equipment or boats, either during or at least at the end of the paddle
- always seek to improve your paddling skills and knowledge, by discussion with leaders, coaches and experienced paddlers, and by participating in formal training courses
- practise recovering from a capsize regularly at a club pool session. There is little to fear from going for a swim when you are part of a group, provided you know what to do and so don't need to panic
- if you have any concerns about any aspect of the club, whether safety, welfare, equipment, behaviour, whatever, please report them to any club official so that we can take action

Additional safety principles for independent paddles

At the start of your paddling adventures, the club strongly recommends paddling in a group led by suitably qualified and experienced leaders. This minimises the risk of incidents and minimises the adverse consequences of any incidents.

As your skills and experience develop, we recognise that members can and do wish to paddle away from the club on occasion and offer the following suggestions for your safety.

Of course, the club does not accept any liability for any loss or injury when paddling, however caused, and whether or not you are following this advice:

- it is recommended not to paddle alone. A group of three is safer than a group of two, and a larger group is even better
- always take an appropriate safety kit – consider: spare paddle, mobile phones (in waterproof bags!), tow rope, knife, whistle, first aid kit, survival bags, group shelter, repair kit, change of clothing in waterproof bags
- tell someone else where you are going and when you are expected back. This won't help if someone is drowning, but could be very useful if, for example, you all find yourselves stuck on a remote mudbank on a falling tide as night falls!
- on a paddle with the same get-in and get-out, ideally paddle against the strongest element, wind or current, on the way out. It makes the return easier
- have a plan, and make a risk assessment. The club's safety framework includes detailed advice on risk assessment
- consider the club's checklists for leaders and coaches in the club's safety framework, these should also be useful for anyone else planning or leading a paddle
- be cautious even in water you are very familiar with
- be much more cautious on water you are less familiar with – what are the additional hazards which you do not usually encounter?
- what is the weather forecast? What is the worst weather that could happen? Do not hesitate to abandon a paddle if the weather is (or could be) too bad

- what will you do if something goes wrong? Where can you make an emergency get-out if you have to? What will you do then?
- if someone gets wet, how will they stay warm?
- is the proposed paddle achievable by the least experienced paddler? What if the weather changes or currents are stronger than anticipated?
- what will you do if the most experienced paddler gets into difficulty?
- what will you do if any paddler can't continue?
- if you do have to summon help, from friends or the emergency services, you need to be able to accurately identify your location – for example OS Locate, 'what three words'
- learn how to send locations by text from your own phone, in case mobile phone reception is poor

Weil's Disease (leptospirosis)

Weil's Disease is a bacterial disease that affects both humans and animals and is caught by exposure to water contaminated with the urine of infected animals. It is most prevalent in slow moving water and canals, particularly after heavy rains when the animal's urine gets washed into water courses. It can be contracted through the skin, especially the eyes or nose, or through broken skin. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache, chills, muscle aches and vomiting; and may include jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), red eyes, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, or a rash. If not treated the patient could develop kidney damage, meningitis, liver failure and respiratory distress. The patient can become sick anywhere between two days to four weeks after exposure. Illness is confirmed by laboratory testing of a blood or urine sample.

Paddlers are most at risk if they have open wounds or cuts or if they swallow lots of water. Prevention is by coverage of breaks of skin with a waterproof plaster or wearing a nose clip if practising capsizing drills or rolling. If any member is ill after paddling with the symptoms described above, they should seek medical attention explaining that they may have had contact with the *Leptospira* bacteria. If the doctor does not offer one, demand a blood test.

Club alcohol policy

The following rules apply to all participants in club on-the-water events:

- for formal coaching sessions no alcohol is to be consumed before or during any session
- no alcohol is to be consumed before or during any paddle under Moderate or Advanced Water conditions
- no alcohol is to be consumed before or during any paddle by any participant under eighteen years of age

For social club paddles under Sheltered (or Very Sheltered) Water conditions the following rules apply to all participants over the age of 18:

- paddlers may consume alcoholic beverages on the water, during meal breaks and also at rest stops where there is a pub
- any alcoholic beverage brought onto the water is to be declared to the leader-in-charge at the pre-paddle briefing
- paddlers are to ensure that they remain within drink drive limits, cognisant that factors like weight, age, metabolism, food consumption and other individual factors can influence how quickly alcohol is processed by the body.
- paddlers are to ensure (and leaders are to monitor) that they remain properly hydrated throughout the paddle and that alcoholic beverages are not their only form of hydration during full day paddles, paddles on hot days or if paddling conditions are arduous. The leader-in-charge has the authority to prevent the consumption of alcohol if, in their opinion, the paddler's hydration strategy is insufficient to allow them to consume the alcohol without adverse effect to their paddling ability
- notwithstanding any of the above, any leader-in-charge may stipulate that no alcohol is to be brought or consumed on their particular on-the-water event, either within the trip instructions and / or on the day

DCC: Principles for Independent Peer Group Paddling

On some regular club paddle evenings, the club recognises that some experienced paddlers may wish to paddle in an independent peer group, without a coach. The club is content for such independent paddles to be organised on the margins of a regular club paddle subject to some conditions. (For the avoidance of doubt, the club recognises that members may paddle however they like away from the club).

The principles for independent peer group paddling are:

- independent peer group paddling should be restricted to members of the club who have successfully completed club beginners' and intermediate level courses, hold a Paddle UK 'explore' level award (formerly 2* award), or who are recognised by the senior leader or coach for that evening as an equivalent standard
- members paddling in an independent peer group must recognise that they are doing so entirely at their own risk and that the club, its officials, and its leaders and coaches accept no responsibility or liability for any incidents arising on an independent peer group paddle
- **members paddling in an independent peer group must complete the register in the usual way**
- members paddling in an independent peer group will normally use their own equipment. However, they may use club equipment as usual if this is practical. Each member is responsible for checking that all equipment used is in good working order and safe
- members paddling in an independent peer group must nominate an organiser from among the group for the paddle
- an independent peer group must take with them a mobile phone, a first aid kit and a towing system, and any other appropriate safety equipment (for example, a throw line, flares, and / or a knife)
- the organiser for the independent peer group must:
 - inform the senior leader or coach of the members of the peer group
 - inform the senior leader or coach in general terms of the intended route and activities of the proposed independent peer group paddle
 - confirm to the senior leader or coach that all members of the group have confirmed that they are members of the DCC
 - confirm that s/he has explained to each and every member of the peer group that they will be paddling without a coach and entirely at their own risk
 - confirm that s/he has confirmed with each member of the peer group that they meet the experience standard
 - inform the lead coach of every piece of club equipment which is being used
 - confirm that each participant of the peer group has checked the safety of all of the equipment they intend to use
 - confirm that a first aid kit and towing system will be taken, that someone has a working mobile phone, and discuss any other safety equipment which might be required

- agree with the lead coach a time for the peer group to return to the club house, to coincide with the completion of the regular club paddle
- the senior leader or coach, having considered all of these circumstances, may wish to make further suggestions or recommendations to the participants of the independent peer group. The participants must follow any such instructions
- on the completion of the independent peer group paddle, the organiser of the group must confirm to the senior leader or coach that all of the participants have returned to dry land safely, that all club equipment has been returned to the clubhouse, and / or report any incidents which have arisen
- in case of any incidents or problems, the senior leader or coach must act appropriately and also report the details to the club committee as soon as practical

The safety of members is the club's top priority. Any member acting in any way which might jeopardise their own or other people's safety should be reported to the club committee and may be sanctioned.

DCC: Health and Safety Policy

The Deben Canoe Club is committed to encouraging our members to take part in paddlesport activities, but the health, wellbeing and safety of each individual is always our paramount concern. We recommend the level / nature of training and activities to be dependent on age and ability, and expect our members to participate within these boundaries.

We are committed to the following duties:

- undertake regular, recorded risk assessment of our use of the club premises and all activities undertaken by the club. (Note that the ultimate responsibility for safety at the centre falls to the DWSC Committee)
- create a safe environment by putting health and safety measures in place as identified by the assessment
- ensure that all members are given the appropriate level of training and engage in activities commensurate with the individual's ability depending on age, maturity and development
- ensure that all members are aware of, understand, and follow the club's health and safety policy
- appoint a competent club member to assist with health and safety responsibilities in the role of club Safety Officer
- ensure that normal operating procedures and emergency operating procedures are in place and known by all members
- ensure access to adequate first aid facilities, telephone and a qualified first aider at all times during club activities
- report any injuries, accidents or near misses sustained during any club activity or whilst on the club premises and keep a record of all such incidents
- ensure that the implementation of the policy is reviewed regularly and monitored for effectiveness

As a club member you have a duty to:

- take reasonable care for your own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by what you do or not do
- cooperate with the club on health and safety issues, respect club rules and policies
- correctly use all equipment provided by the club
- not interfere with, or misuse, anything provided for your health, safety or welfare

Health and Safety Officer: the club Safety Officer also covers Health and Safety issues.

Location of first aid facilities: first aid kits are stored in the DWSC and carried on every club paddle.

Location of telephones: all leaders and coaches present on every club paddle are carrying a mobile telephone.

Identity of first aiders: all leaders-in-charge on every club paddle have current first aid qualifications.

DCC: checklists for leaders

The Deben Canoe Club has produced a checklist for leaders, to assist their management of club paddles. The club committee expects leaders-in-charge of club paddles to comply with the principles underlying these lists, but recognises (or rather, requires) that leaders should always apply their own judgement in every situation, adopting such additional practices as seem appropriate, and dis-applying any policies and principles which are not appropriate given the actual situation in front of them.

In advance of the paddle

- create a plan:
 - where are you going?
 - which other leaders or coaches will provide support?
 - who can attend?
- consider generic risks having regard to the club's written risk assessments
- consider if specific risks require a further written risk assessment for this paddle
- if not leaving from the centre (or taking place in the pool) seek approval from a Lead Coach
- advertise the paddle on Spond – including difficulty level and type of boat required, appropriate clothing and any personal equipment which the paddlers must bring, including food and drink, sunglasses, sunscreen etc.
- the Spond event details should also state the leader-in-charge, other leaders and coaches present (ideally set to be Hosts), as well as tide conditions, expected wind conditions and intended route / direction of travel
- consider which group safety equipment is appropriate to the paddle: phone / radio; tow-line and or tape / sling with karabiner; survival bag; group shelter; spare clothing; whistle; first aid kit; repair kit; spare food and drink; map / chart; knife; throw line; spare / split paddle; compass; notepad and pencil
- the day before the paddle consider the updated weather forecast and its effect on the paddle; make a go / no-go decision; advise the paddle group accordingly with any amendments to the plan or to the kit to bring. For the avoidance of doubt, the official Met Office forecast for wind speed should be used for planning purposes and for checking leaders' remits.
- for paddles from the DWSC, arrive early and check the centre for slippery floors and steps, any other obstructions or hazards, etc.

Record keeping on day of paddle

- check that the attendance register on Spond is complete (all Hosts can see contact details for all participants)
- update the On Water Leaders WhatsApp group to record:-
 - "xxx Group Leaving. @leadername @helpers + x Paddlers in kayaks (or x in kayaks, y in canoes etc.) Heading towards <Methersgate/Wilford Bridge>, expected to turn around at xxx. Expect to be off the water by hh:mm."

- When the group returns reply to original post "xxx Group Returned. <and comments / summary / learning points>"

Before approaching the water

- do a dynamic risk assessment taking account the specific conditions and circumstances on the day
- final briefing for the other leaders
- check that a full safety kit, appropriate for the paddle, is being taken. This must include an appropriately stocked and checked first aid kit and a towing system
- ensure other leaders know who is carrying what and where it is stowed
- identify any novice paddlers and any newcomers – welcome accordingly and check kit as necessary
- consider the need for a formal warm-up exercise
- brief the participants

If paddling outside home water

- appropriate spare clothing
- appropriate spare food and drink
- full voyage plan, with timings, group information, craft types and description, must be left ashore with a responsible person (On Water Leaders WhatsApp group)
- notification if no second leader or competent adult paddler is present.
- briefing on action to be taken in event of an emergency or if the group leader does not report in within an agreed time limit
- identify nearest A+E department

After the paddle

- check everyone has returned safely
- update leaders' WhatsApp group to confirm paddle completed
- provide a brief summary to the club committee

Checklist for the pre-paddle briefing

- consider the size and composition of the group and tailor your briefing accordingly
- welcome all participants
- introduce yourself
- introduce all of the other leaders by name
- introduce all of the committee members present by name
- describe the paddle – destination, pace, any stops, etc

- describe the conditions – tide, current, wind, weather, etc
- stress the usual hazards
- stress any novel hazards
- state the group plan, that is, who will be at the front, who will be at the rear, etc
- state the main plan for dealing with any paddler in difficulty (typically, the leaders and coaches will come to you)
- state the difficulty level and check that all participants are sufficiently experienced and able to complete the paddle today
- comment on other river traffic, reminder that generally we simply move out of the channel and avoid other river users (yachts, motor boats, rowers, etc.)
- remind the participants about open cuts
- remind the participants that if anyone has any medical issues the leader should know about, have a quiet word before we start
- remind the participants that if anyone might need any medication on the paddle they need to have it with them and accessible
- advise the participants on appropriate clothing, including hats and sun cream
- remind the participants that buoyancy aids are mandatory and comment on spray decks
- check that everyone is happy with their boat and equipment
- if novices are present, remind them about left handed paddles
- on hot days, comment on advisability of taking a water bottle (for one-off events, this should be explicitly included in pre-paddle email to participants)
- ensure that everyone is paired up or can otherwise get their boats to the water
- state who should launch first and last
- If only one leader is present, brief the group on what emergency equipment is being carried and where it is stowed; particularly the exact location of the means of communication to be used in emergency, with emergency contact numbers and any pre-prepared location codes for emergency egress points (What3Words, etc.)
- if going above Wilford Bridge, brief on possibility of debris in the river
- conduct a warm-up if appropriate

Checklist for post-paddle review

The post-paddle review should be short and concise. It will usually include brief descriptions of:

- the route
- the conditions
- the participants
- any incidents
- a conclusion

The committee expects that the conclusion for nearly all paddles will be along the lines “all aspects of the paddle seemed satisfactory and there were no incidents”. For some paddles, and particularly for those away from the Deben, the committee hopes that leaders will find something of interest to report, to give us pointers for improvement and growth.

Any material accidents or incidents must be reported to Paddle UK through their incident reporting system.

DCC: risk assessments

All club activities **MUST** be preceded by a risk assessment made by the leader-in-charge that day. The leader-in-charge **MUST** discuss this risk assessment with any supporting leaders present. Significant risks **MUST** be covered in the pre-paddle briefing to all participants.

For all club activities away from the river Deben or Deben Leisure Centre Pool, the leader-in-charge **MUST** discuss the risk assessment, in advance, with one of the club's Lead Coaches.

When making their risk assessments, leaders and coaches must be familiar with all sections of this safety framework. All of the policies and procedures set out in the framework are informed by our objectives to minimise necessary risks and completely eliminate unnecessary risks. All other club members should also be broadly familiar with this safety framework. Realistically, leaders will recognise that not all club members will have paid as much attention to the framework as they should.

Leaders should also use their own judgement to perform a dynamic risk assessment for the specific circumstances of their particular paddle, shortly before leading their group onto the water. This dynamic risk assessment should be discussed with the other leaders present. The leaders should continue to monitor dynamic risks throughout the paddle.

The main steps of any risk assessment are:

- the leader-in-charge shall consider all of the potential risks involved in the proposed paddle
- if necessary, the leader-in-charge will draft a written record of any particularly serious or novel risks which need to be acknowledged formally in advance of the paddle
- the leader-in-charge will discuss his assessment with the other leaders on the paddle, and with a Lead Coach as necessary or appropriate
- the leaders' discussion should identify all risks which need to be communicated to the other participants, either in advance or during the pre-paddle briefing

Requirement for written risk assessments

The club generally does not need additional detailed written risk assessments. This safety framework covers the vast majority of all points which might usefully be recorded in a risk assessment, and it is unnecessary and even counter-productive to divert time and energy to duplication. This safety framework is informed by generic risk assessments for, for example, the river Deben and the Deben Leisure Centre swimming pool. Leaders should familiarise themselves with these generic risk assessments. We expect that generic risk assessments for other water will be produced when the club next visits – this will provide a sound basis for leaders' dynamic risk assessment on future visits and avoid unnecessary duplication.

The key components of the management of risk are:

- the leaders thinking about the risks in advance, for their specific paddle
- the leaders establishing in advance their plan for dealing with unavoidable risks and any incidents

- the leaders delivering an effective safety briefing to all of the participants
- the leaders continuing to monitor and address developing risks on the water

An additional written risk assessment is only helpful at the second point above, and only then if it helps with the leaders' planning and / or provides reassurance to the Lead Coaches and club committee that particularly serious or novel risks are being addressed.

It follows that if a written risk assessment is needed, it should be formatted so as to be most effective. That might be a traditional analysis of risk by likelihood, severity, consequences and mitigations. Or, it might just be a bullet point list of risks and mitigations.

Formal review of generic risk assessments

The club maintains a number of generic risk assessments, for example, for events on the river Deben and for pool sessions. These are expected to be formally reviewed and reissued on a broadly annual basis. Typically, they should be reviewed over the winter, in say January to March, and should then generally be valid until the 31 March of the following calendar year.

Paddles on the Deben

It will rarely be necessary to produce a new written risk assessment for any paddle on the Deben (above Waldringfield). All our leaders and most of our members will automatically be following safe practice at all times, simply by familiarity and repetition, including familiarity with this safety framework. The club has produced (and will regularly review) a generic risk assessment for the Deben which all leaders must familiarise themselves with. The key risks specific to home water are therefore:

Risks on the Deben

Complacency in leaders

Mitigations

Yes the Deben is a generally safe environment and yes our leaders and members are very familiar with it, so most risks are automatically minimised.

However, it is far from risk free, so leaders must do dynamic risk assessments and safety briefings on even our most routine paddles from the centre.

Risk assessment will generally focus on those aspects of a paddle which are subject to variability, despite being on home water. That is, weather, tides, participants, equipment, other river traffic, etc.

Leaders will still always need a plan for dealing with 'routine' incidents, for example the occasional capsize.

Risks on the Deben

Complacency in participants

Mitigations

We want all our paddles to be fun for the participants. Nevertheless, leaders should be alert to sloppy behaviour arising from complacency, and address accordingly. Leaders should lead by example, and gently correct errant behaviour.

Regular, effective safety briefings are key to maintaining a good attitude towards optimal safe practice.

Leaders should ensure good group discipline on the water, in particular discouraging paddlers from racing ahead or otherwise leaving the group.

Inexperienced participants

Our regular home paddles are where novices first venture out on the river. Leaders should make sure that they have identified the weakest paddlers in the group, and tailor the paddle to meet all their needs.

Longer paddles

If a longer paddle than usual is envisioned, leaders should carefully consider the safety implications, and make sure that all participants have also thought about it. Issues include participants' stamina, appropriate clothing and equipment, appropriate leader ratios, etc.

Does a longer paddle introduce any participants to novel conditions for them? For example, overhanging vegetation at the Ufford end, choppy water towards Waldringfield. Brief appropriately.

Risk factors for all paddles

Many risk factors are common to most if not all paddles. A checklist is given below. Some mitigations are listed. In general, most risks will be effectively mitigated by the leaders having a plan and communicating it in the pre-paddle safety briefing.

Risk factor	Mitigations
Participants	Identify leader-in-charge and supporting leaders Identify experienced paddlers and consider possible supporting roles for them – allocate explicitly Identify novice paddlers and target specific support for them Identify other paddlers with any relevant medical or fitness issues Monitor the ‘mood’ of the group throughout the paddle Control pace Control spacing of group Particular care is needed if we are deploying multiple groups, or if we are sharing water with other paddler groups – have a plan
Equipment	Cover in safety briefing Check novices’ equipment directly Leader to manage the movement of boats to minimise risk of injury, including briefing on safe handling of equipment
Route	Needs to be consistent with participants’ experience and ability Can be abandoned at any time, and group return directly to the get-out Identify alternative get-outs for emergencies Include rest stops – pause on water for short paddles, land on suitable get-outs on longer trips
Weather	Wind force and direction and its effect on the paddle, rain, sun, etc. Hats and sun cream are often advisable
Tide and currents	Consider interactions between weather and tide, including impact of possible changes to weather and any expected change of tide Brief accordingly

Risk factor**Mitigations**

Sunrise / sunset

Additional planning and processes for any period of darkness.

Careful assessment of participants' experience.

Tight group discipline – regular checks that everyone is still present

Carrying of white torches shown to prevent collision after sunset

Losing participants

Initial head count and regular monitoring

Consider need to number participants and do regular roll calls on the water

Leader must control the group and keep group together

Only the leader(s)-in-charge can take the decision to split (or merge) groups on the water

Addressing the most common incidents

Incidents should be rare, however some do come up infrequently, and all need to be planned for. Planning is key. It is critical to know before the incident:

- which leader will do what
- how will other participants be organised or self-organise
- if necessary, how will external support be summoned

For small groups with a single qualified leader, the planning must include provisions for an incident affecting the leader. This plan must be explained to all participants in the safety briefing.

Risk factor**Mitigations**

Capsize

Nearest leader to assist

Other participants know what to do – safety framework and safety briefings

Capsize – paddler unable to recover in place

Leaders' plan has identified safe get-outs

Appropriate leader to tow paddler to nearest safe get-out. (This is why you must have a tow system on all paddles)

Minor injury

This is why we carry a first aid kit. And why we identify emergency get-outs in advance.

Serious injury / incapacity

Leaders must have a plan.

Groundings

First response is to try to back out.

Can the grounded paddler be towed out by a leader? (This is why you must have a tow system on all

	paddles)
	Must the grounded paddler get out and pull their boat to deeper water? Is it safe to do so?
Exhausted participant	Can a leader tow the participant home? (This is why you must have a tow system on all paddles)
	Otherwise, nearest get-outs, and plan for recovery from isolated get-outs.
Boat failure	Identify get-outs, and plan for recovery from isolated get-outs.
	Carry repair kit when appropriate
Loss / failure of paddle	This is why we carry a spare split paddle.
Wet paddler temporarily stranded at isolated get out	This is why we carry an emergency blanket.

Paddles away from the Deben

Paddles away from the Deben may have their own risks. Good planning and effective safety briefings are critical.

Risk factor	Mitigations
Unfamiliarity	Participants, and even leaders, may be less familiar with risks which are not present on home water. Plan ahead. Stress unfamiliar risks in safety briefing. Consult the club's generic risk assessment for this water. If no generic risk assessment (within the last twelve months) is available, then produce one.
White water, fast water, underwater obstacles	Any water which includes an elevated risk of injury, and particularly head injury (compared to the Deben) must be covered by a new written risk assessment. Detailed planning is necessary. Helmets may be necessary.
Overhanging vegetation, sub-surface vegetation	Many club members have limited exposure to fast moving water with overhanging vegetation, and to sub-surface vegetation. Leaders to have a plan for capsizes in vegetation and paddlers trapped in vegetation.
Sea paddles	Must be covered by a detailed new written risk assessment.

Weirs

Weirs should be addressed individually in the written risk assessment for each paddle.

A dynamic risk assessment should be conducted by the leader-in-charge on approach to each weir, either from the water or from the river bank.

Any weir which is beyond the remit of the leader-in-charge, or which may be beyond the capability of individual paddlers, is to be portaged.

Pool sessions

The pool is a generally safe environment where many of the usual risk factors are not present. However, the pool itself brings some of its own risks.

Risk factor

Mitigations

Pool environment

All usual swimming pool rules apply.

Identify DCC coaches to the pool supplied lifeguard.

Restricted space

Leaders to monitor crowding in the pool, emphasise need to space out and take care with sudden movements.

Leaders to stress risks around pool edge – risk of injury from crashing or falling into the hard edge of the pool.

No free swimming.

No stand-up paddleboards.

No seal launches.

The club has produced (and will regularly review) a generic risk assessment for pool sessions, which all leaders and coaches attending a pool session must be familiar with.

~~As at the time of publication of this version of the safety framework, the club is in active discussion with the pool management on pool safety. It is possible that further / amended guidance will emerge from this.~~

DCC: Standard Operating Procedures (governing leaders and coaches)

The club safety framework is set by the club committee having considered the advice of the club Safety Officer and the Lead Coaches. (Lead Coaches are appointed by the club committee and for the purposes of this safety framework and standard operating procedures automatically include the Safety Officer, provided that the Safety Officer is also a Club Coach or Club Leader).

Day to day delivery of the operation of the club safety framework is delegated to the club leaders (that is, the Club Leaders and Club Coaches as defined in the club's policy for leaders and coaches) and in particular to the Lead Coaches.

Where any paddle would normally require the involvement of a Lead Coach, but neither is available, then the committee will make such ad-hoc arrangements as seem appropriate.

Definition of home water

In the club safety framework, 'home water' means the river Deben from the limit of navigation around Ufford to the beach at Waldringfield, just downstream of the Maybush Inn.

For the avoidance of doubt, even within home water the leader-in-charge of a paddle must ensure that the paddle stays within safe bounds. The further a group of paddlers travels from the centre, the greater the potential risk.

For formal coaching sessions, the group will generally stay between Robertson's Boatyard and Troublesome Reach. Once the competence of the group has been established, the coach-in-charge may extend the range to between Wilford Bridge and Methersgate Quay (including Martlesham Creek). No coaching group can go beyond these ranges without explicit prior approval of a Lead Coach.

Scope of club activities

It is necessary for a paddling activity to be recognised as a formal club activity that it be run by a qualified leader in accordance with the club committee's policies, including this framework and its written policies in respect of leaders and coaches more generally.

The significance of this is that only formal club activities are covered by the club's insurance.

Leaders must ensure that they are approved by the club committee in respect of any club activities they plan to lead or support. Such approval will be conveyed by a Lead Coach, who will monitor that all leaders are deployed in line with the club committee's policies and that they are operating within their remit.

The club recognises that in some situations club members may choose to paddle together without a club leader or coach. Where such paddles originate from the Deben Watersports Centre or involve the use of club equipment then the club's policy for Independent Peer Group Paddling (30 May 2022) will apply. Provided that the formal club policy is followed, then such paddles are treated as formal club activities and are covered by the club's insurance.

Activities away from the river Deben may only be treated as a formal club event if explicitly approved in advance by one of the club's Lead Coaches. The Lead Coach will verify that the planning and risk assessment for the activity is suitable for all the proposed participants.

Deployment of qualified leaders

Club members with leadership qualifications (including coaching qualifications) are deployable in line with the club's policy for leaders and coaches.

In general, members with leadership qualifications who have been designated as Club Leaders or Club Coaches can self-deploy to lead any recreational paddle (that is, any paddle which is not a formal coaching session) from the Deben Watersports Centre which remains within home water, subject to their remits as set by the Lead Coaches on behalf of the club committee. Any such paddles must be notified to the members in good time (using Spond), and recorded in the club's online calendar. The organiser must check that the date and time does not clash with any other event at the centre, by referring to the centre's online calendar. Regular paddles on Wednesday and Thursday evenings and on the first Sunday of the month are automatically assumed to be satisfactory.

Any paddle which is not in home water must be discussed and approved by a Lead Coach before being advertised to members.

Any paddle which is to be advertised as being part of a formal course of training, must be approved by a Lead Coach and the club committee before being advertised to members. Such courses will have an identified coach-in-charge who is responsible for ensuring the course is run in line with the club safety framework.

Any other paddle must have an identified leader-in-charge who is responsible for ensuring the paddle is run in line with the club safety framework.

Deployment of Assistant Coaches

Assistant Coaches may be deployed by the club in support of Club Coaches on formal training courses and in support of Club Coaches / Leaders on general club paddles. Unfortunately, the nature of the river Deben precludes Paddlesport Instructors from being deployed without direct supervision because there is no Very Sheltered Water for them to do so, in accordance with their qualification remit.

Leader ratios

For formal courses, the ratio of coaches to students will be no less than one coach for every eight other boats.

For recreational paddles (that is, not formal courses) under sheltered water conditions, the ratio of leaders and coaches to inexperienced paddlers is recommended to be no less than one leader for every eight other paddlers. Experienced paddlers do not count against leader ratios in this case.

In this context, an experienced paddler is one who, in the opinion of the leader-in-charge, has previously clearly demonstrated sufficient skills to be able to complete the proposed paddle independently. Conversely, a novice paddler is one who might not be able to safely complete the paddle independently, but can participate as part of a group.

Whenever a leader-in-charge relaxes paddler ratios to reflect experienced paddlers, they must also consider the safety of the group as a whole, given the number of experienced paddlers present, and may still need to limit numbers on the water if that seems appropriate.

For tandem canoes the recommended ratio is one leader to six other boats.

~~Recognised Coaches will act as an assistant leader during any club paddles which they choose to join in and, in particular, will be treated as coaches for the purpose of leader to paddler ratios.~~

For all paddles, but not formal courses, the ratios above (given as suggestions by the British Canoeing Awarding Body for Sheltered Water) refer to newly qualified and less experienced coaches and leaders. Therefore, the leader-in-charge must consider from the outset:

- their experience as a coach / leader;
- the individual group members' ages, competence and experience;
- the ever-changing environment and the environmental classification of the water to be paddled on and its effect on leader / paddler ratios.

Higher or indeed lower ratios may be set, dependent on the criteria above.

~~For events other than on sheltered water, the club will follow the ratios set out in Paddle UK's guidance (currently published with the Environmental Definitions).~~

Alcohol policy

Leaders, coaches and club officials should monitor and encourage compliance with the club's alcohol policy during club events. The club's alcohol policy is set out in the club safety framework in the section Safety Principles for Paddlers.

Reporting

The leader-in-charge of an event is responsible for reporting (to the committee):

- attendance at the paddle, by means of a copy of the sign-in sheet
- a brief summary of the paddle, and
- any incidents (and serious near misses)

in accordance with the procedures set by the committee from time to time.

Social events

Care must be taken when organising social events. The club's health and safety policy should be followed in all cases. The advertising should explicitly state that participants attend at their own risk and that the club does not accept any liability for injury, loss or damage at the event.

Social events held at the DWSC may be treated as club activities (and so would be covered by the club's insurance) provided all of the club's safety policies are followed, and in particular that the event is covered by a written risk assessment.

Identification of qualified leaders and coaches

Under the club's current policy for leaders and coaches, club members with relevant qualifications and credentials are grouped into the following main categories: ~~Recognised Coach~~, Assistant Coach, Club Leaders and Club Coaches.

Members are allocated to these categories by the club committee having considered the advice of the Lead Coaches. Leaders and coaches may then be deployed in line with the policies set out in the safety framework. Day to day deployment decisions where there is any element of discretion are taken by a Lead Coach.

A Lead Coach will maintain records to check that all leaders and coaches in the club are:

- in compliance with Paddle UK's requirements for the relevant role as set out in the Standards for Deployment policy
- in compliance with any additional requirements set by the club
- in compliance with any additional requirements set by the DWSC
- for the avoidance of doubt, this will include any requirements required for safeguarding purposes (including training, credentials, criminal records checks, etc.)
- have clear remits set for leading club paddles

The club committee will regularly review these records to ensure it is content with the allocation of qualified leaders and coaches to the various categories, and to confirm that all of the relevant requirements are being met.

Insurance

As a club which is affiliated to Paddle UK (strictly Paddle England) we are covered by Paddle UK's insurance for affiliated clubs. This is a material benefit for the club and we need to always act so that this insurance cover is effective.

The main principle is that only formal club events are covered by the club's insurance. To be a formal club event, the event must

- have been advertised as a club event to the members through the club's usual communications channels
- be led by club leaders and coaches working under our standard operating procedures and safety framework, and
- in particular, have been properly risk assessed

Risk assessments is covered in detail in another section of the safety framework.

Formal courses

All formal training courses should be run in accordance with best practice as specified by Paddle UK and as covered in the coaches' own training and any additional Paddle UK guidance.

A Lead Coach should review each course with the relevant coaches once the course has been completed, to identify any issues or learning points.

The Lead Coach should then discuss with the Safety Officer, so that any changes to the club's practice or guidance can be implemented, keeping the committee informed as appropriate.

Compliance with the club safety framework

All club members are required to be familiar with the club safety framework. Accordingly, the annual membership renewal form includes a link to the safety framework and requires applicants to confirm that they have read it.

All club members who request to be treated as qualified leaders or coaches also confirm that:

- they understand the club safety framework and agree to follow it at all times at all club activities and events
- that they are in compliance with their obligations under Paddle UK's Standards for Deployment and agree that the club committee can verify this from Paddle UK's online database

Annual review of club boats and equipment

The committee will organise a comprehensive review of all of the club's boats and other equipment at least annually, to ensure that everything is safe and satisfactory.

Review of the club safety framework

The club committee will do a detailed review of the club safety framework and associated generic risk assessments at least annually, typically over the winter, so that evolving best practice can be reinforced at the start of each spring paddling season.

DCC: Safety Officer's Annual Report

Each year the club's Safety Officer will present a report to the club committee. This should be prepared after the end of the main summer paddling season. Ideally, the Safety Officer will report to the club committee at its last meeting before the Annual General Meeting of the club.

The report should briefly cover:

- any developments at Paddle UK which relate to paddle safety
- a summary of the club's paddling activities, on the Deben, in the pool, and elsewhere
- an overview of incidents, broken down between:
 - trivial incidents, which might nevertheless suggest changes to our practices and policies
 - minor incidents, including all capsizes which do not lead to injury
 - any more serious incidents, including any which lead to injury, however minor
- confirmation that all serious incidents were reported to Paddle UK
- suggested learning points for the club, for either general safety practice or formal courses specifically
- confirmation that all of the club's boats and equipment have been checked within the last year, and repaired / maintained / discarded as appropriate
- confirmation that the club is following its Health and Safety Policy effectively
- any recommendations they wish to make to the committee, to improve the safety of club activities or otherwise

The annual review of the club's safety framework is separate from the Safety Officer's annual report.

DCC: description of the river Deben

This is not an all-encompassing paddling guide to the river Deben but a description written from a safety perspective. That said, much of this document can be used to provide information for planning and enjoying paddling on the river.

Your attention is also drawn to the club document 'Tidal Rivers – Staying Safe' available on the DCC website under the tab >FAQs & Safety>Safety Notes>Tidal Rivers.

Overview of the Deben

The navigable stretch of the river Deben flows between the limit of tidal navigation near Ufford to the river mouth near Bawdsey / Felixstowe Ferry. It is a wonderful river and one of the jewels in the crown of East Anglian paddling, popular with all types of leisure craft and some tour boats. This description will cover the area from Ufford down to the ferryboat jetties at Felixstowe Ferry as the limit of the club's aspirations for paddling on the river. It does not cover the fresh water part of the Deben from where it rises at Debenham down to Ufford. It will cover some descriptive points about general safety on the river and then break it down into sections heading first upriver from the Water Sports Centre and then down river.

Classification for paddling purposes

The river Deben is classified (for DCC paddling purposes) as:

- Sheltered Water from Ufford to Ramsholt, when the wind is below Force 3 (that is, up to 12 mph)
- Moderate Water from Ramsholt to Felixstowe, or when the wind strength is Force 4 (that is, up to 18 mph)

This is consistent with Paddle UK's environment definitions:

Sheltered Water is "ungraded sections of slow moving rivers where the group could paddle upstream against the flow (not involving the shooting of, or playing on, weirs or running rapids). Areas of open water (for example, lakes and lochs) where the paddlers are no more than 200 metres offshore and the wind strength does not exceed Beaufort force 3, avoiding the group being swept / blown out of the safe working area. Slow moving estuaries (less than 0.5 Knots)."

The club can (and does) paddle against the flow at all states of the tide and paddlers can always get out of the flow at the side of the river if its getting too much. Paddlers are never more than 200 meters from a bank. The limiting factor between "Sheltered Water" and "Moderate Water" is the wind speed - force 3.

Moderate Water (Inland) is "large areas of open water that exceed the sheltered water definition, where the paddlers are no more than 500 metres offshore and in wind strengths that do not exceed Beaufort force 4."

Note that the definitions do not include any stipulation regarding access. The Deben has a lot of mud along the banks that would be difficult to cross, so in normal circumstances access is restricted to the main access points which are about one mile (or less) apart from Ufford to Ramsholt. Between Ramsholt and Felixstowe / Bawdsey access is significantly restricted by salt marsh and is likely more than one mile at some points.

Tides

The Deben experiences two high waters and two low waters per day (semi-diurnal). Utilising the tides in your favour will make your paddle much easier and enjoyable and allow visiting the parts of the river that you wish to explore without getting muddy or disappointed. High Water Spring tides occur in the early afternoon and small hours of the morning and High Water Neaps occur in the early morning and evening. Paddling with the tidal flow is most beneficial in the main channel while, if you must paddle against the flow, this is best achieved away from the channel, in the shallower water nearer to the bank. Beaches, landing points and some stretches of the river become inaccessible towards low water and these issues will be highlighted in the sectionalised description of the river.

Tide tables, various apps and websites will give tidal information but be aware that the tidal flow will often still be ebbing up to an hour beyond the published Low Water time. Tidal flow either side of High Water is always accurate. There is no Tidal Stream Atlas or Tidal Diamond information for the river Deben.

If inexperienced and in doubt, plan your paddle to take place between four hours before High Water and two hours after and you won't go far wrong. For the remainder of this section these timings will be referred to as 'Half Tide'.

Wind

The most variable factor for a planned paddle is the strength and direction of the wind. The river is quite exposed with some stretches worse than others and local wind effects coming into play. Even though the wind may be forecast to be blowing from the side of the river, the banks and local topography bend the wind around so that it will often be either blowing up or down certain stretches of the river. Paddling into wind can be significantly harder than paddling into the tide, particularly for stand up paddleboards, solo open canoes, and high-sided open canoes.

Wind and tide

When wind and tide are travelling in the same direction conditions can be relatively calm but once the tide turns, generating a wind against tide situation, conditions can very quickly become quite choppy, particularly at the highest rate of tidal flow in the main channel. Paddling into the wind and waves will be hard work and it is usually best to move out of the channel to avoid the worst conditions. Paddling with the wind and waves in this situation will be much easier but be aware that if the wind is strong enough and if the boat starts to surf, the waves can try to turn the boat broadside on where capsize becomes a possibility. Spray decks on kayaks are essential in exposed wind over tide conditions to prevent the boat filling up with water.

Air temperature

Aside from the wind, other weather factors need to be taken into account. High temperature will dictate how much water to consume during the trip, along with consideration of sun hats, sunscreen and appropriate clothing. Low temperatures will dictate waterproof clothing to cover exposed skin, a layered approach to dressing in man-made fibres and consideration of wind chill factor in the prevailing wind and whether to take extra clothing (or a complete change of clothing) in the boat or not. Spray becomes particularly chilling during winter on a cold windy day.

Water temperature

The water is cold all year round but particularly so in winter. During the spring the air temperature may well be rising but the water doesn't even begin to warm up until around late April. Careful consideration needs to be made on whether paddlers dress for the conditions, of a warm day, or dress for immersion in the still cold water, depending on their skill level and ability to keep the boat upright.

Mud

The Deben is characterised as having a muddy bottom which becomes exposed as the tide goes out. The mud is difficult to stand up in if you wish to empty a boat, let alone make ground across and it can be up to waist deep or deeper in places. Known solid landing places only should be used.

Banks

Most of the banks are low lying but are edged by the riverbed mud making access and egress difficult. The further up river you go the banks become steeper sided, with some man-made riverbank defences, making egress more difficult, or impossible, even if you can successfully get out of your boat.

Fog

On calm, still days in autumn and winter or whenever colder air is sitting over warmer river water, mist or fog can develop, making navigation difficult and can lead to disorientation. This is coupled with a drop in the temperature as the damp chill sets in while the sun is obscured.

Buoyage

Navigation on the Deben is not like driving your car down a well-lit motorway. The main channel is often tortuous and can follow a seemingly nonsensical meandering route. The passage into the river, over the bar from the North Sea, is maintained by buoyage covered by Trinity House to mark the route through the ever-shifting shingle bank at the entrance. The route upriver from there is marked by channel markers (unlit single port or starboard hand buoys) but only from the channel off the beach known as the Rocks running upriver to the vicinity of the boatyards just below Wilford Bridge. The channel off Felixstowe Ferry / Bawdsey and along Ramsholt Reach is marked by the boat moorings. This can be difficult to discern at slack water when the moored boats will be lying head to the wind, which may well be coming from across the river.

The channel buoys are single, they do not come in pairs to give you an extremity both sides of the channel to aim through. Green starboard hand buoys should be left on your starboard side when travelling upriver, that is, pass them on the left when going upriver, right going downriver. Red port hand buoys should be left to port, that is, pass them on the right when going upriver; left going downriver. This buoyage is not maintained by Trinity House but the local fairway committees or boatyards who run the moorings on that stretch of the river. Some of them are not laid in particularly deep water. Martlesham Creek is a case in point where the buoys positions are maintained by a person wearing waders and armed with a shovel because all the navigational marks dry out at low water springs. Further detail of which buoys to give a wide berth to will be given in the individual river sections below. If you wish to learn the river, you wouldn't go far wrong by going for a paddle on a sunny summer's evening at low water springs and looking at how much mud there is between adjacent channel markers, where the islands are and which buoys are completely high and dry at that time.

Emergency Services

The relevant emergency service for any tidal river, including the Deben, is to dial 999 and ask for the coastguard or ambulance service depending on the situation.

If you are on a non-tidal river, lake or reservoir dial 999 and ask for the fire and rescue service or ambulance service.

Launching from the Club

Immediately from launching adjacent to the club, the channel is just the other side of the boats on their moorings. The channel gets particularly busy around high water with yachts motoring to and from the Tide Mill Yacht Harbour. Some will be unfamiliar visitors to the river and others will be busy calling the marina on the radio so they may not be paying much attention for paddle craft nosing out from between the moorings. A good lookout and care need to be exercised and when crossing the channel do so quickly, at right angles to the traffic and avoid impeding it.

Paddlers should also proceed with caution if there are races starting at the Deben Yacht Club. Sailing dinghies will manoeuvre unexpectedly and violently while jockeying for position. They are best completely avoided until the race has started.

Identifying the banks

To avoid confusion, throughout this guide the Melton-Woodbridge-Waldringfield-Felixstowe Ferry side of the river will be referred to as the western bank and the Sutton Hoo-Ramsholt-Bawdsey side as the eastern bank.

Clubhouse to Wilford Bridge

This is one of our usual club paddles.

Access Points

The western (Woodbridge) bank of the river has a public footpath running the length up to Wilford Bridge. There are not continual landing options though because there are stretches of metal shore defences protecting the riverbank, which are too tall to allow egress.

The eastern (Sutton) bank has some get outs but access to them from further inland is severely limited over farm and National Trust land.

There is a concrete slip in front of Whistock's which marks the top of the old Sutton Hoo Ferry hard which runs all the way down to the tall Port channel marker post. The hard still exists but on the western shore is now under about a foot of very soft mud. The concrete slip is accessible around three hours before high water and an hour and a half afterwards. Emergency vehicle access is possible here. On the eastern shore the ferry hard is still solid and free from mud. This is because the ebb tide runs quickly around the outside of the bend under Ferry Cliff and keeps running fast over the hard, which is at the end of the wooden jetty. This is a handy place to stop to make adjustments to boats or if skegs have become jammed before going further up river.

North (upstream) of the Tide Mill Yacht Harbour, Robertson's Boatyard slipway has access at half tide. Emergency vehicle access is possible here.

A further 200 metres upstream is another slipway adjacent to the concrete jetty amongst the houseboats, giving access to the footpath. There is no public vehicular access. This is a half tide slipway,

On the eastern bank where the channel turns hard left towards Melton is what is known locally as 'Honolulu' beach. It has a good sandy landing and is a great stopping off point up to a couple of hours after high water when the sand gives way to fairly firm and stony mud.

There is a set of stone steps set into the western riverbank about 50 metres downriver from the HMS Vale Deben Café, giving access to the footpath. These are accessible at the top of the tide but the approach is hampered by reeds growing in the mud.

In an emergency the Melton Boatyard pontoons on the western bank could be utilised at all states of the tide, with emergency vehicle access possible via the boatyard.

Landing at the old river wall, which has been breached enabling the salt marsh beyond to become a floodplain, is actively discouraged. This is a nesting and migration stop off point for some quite large and feisty birds such as Canada Geese.

The western side of Wilford Bridge is a good access point, popular with all types of paddle craft and wild swimmers. There are stone stepped riverbank defences here and towards the top of the tide launch and recovery is possible direct from the riverbank. Emergency vehicle access is possible here.

Local Hazards

The further upriver you go the more susceptible you become to running out of water. There is one particularly shallow patch around the curve in the channel adjacent to the houseboats upriver of Robertson's Boatyard, in the vicinity of number 29 (green Starboard) and 30 (red Port) buoys, where there is insufficient water for at least an hour either side of low water.

The large open area between the Marina and Honolulu beach is very open to the elements, particularly if the wind is from the North where there is little to slow it down as it comes over the salt marsh free flood area. It can get particularly choppy here when the wind over is against the tide.

Also beware at high water springs of the ebb coming off this free flood area. It flows unhindered directly over the top of the remains of the river wall and meets the main flow through the channel up river of Honolulu beach, where you can be swept unexpectedly sideways into the channel markers.

There are also a large number of submerged hazards, such as masonry and wooden stakes embedded in the riverbed, in the vicinity of Wilford Bridge at low states of the tide. At the top of the tide, there can be limited headroom under Wilford Bridge – for a brief period after the tide turns there can be a strong current pulling you down under Wilford Bridge, with limited headroom and consequent risk of head injury or capsize.

Wilford Bridge to Ufford

Wilford Bridge is a good launch and landing place with a small unmarked parking area on the Melton / Woodbridge side of the bridge.

Access Points

The river changes character here and gets increasingly more sheltered, becoming narrower and surrounded on both sides of the river by reed beds, which are particularly deep on the eastern shore. There is a public footpath which runs along the top of the river wall on the western bank as far as the railway bridge, where getting out is possible but tricky because of the steep sides, away from the reeds.

There is a get out on the eastern side 500 metres upriver from the bridge, after the first S-bend in the river, leading to a small car park owned by Suffolk Wildlife Trust for their local nature area. Launching and landing is generally prohibited here because of its popularity during lockdown causing the bank to be eroded, but it could be used in emergency and provides emergency vehicle access.

Upriver from the railway bridge the river turns sharp right and runs alongside the railway line.

There are a couple of tributaries leading towards the Mill House which can be explored but will not be described here as they are surrounded by private land with no access.

After paddling alongside the railway line for about 400 metres there is a footbridge leading to the railway line crossing. A little way further along is a get out into a farm field. Depending on the tide here it can be quite deep and is easier from a canoe or paddleboard than from a kayak. An alternative is to immediately take the left hand tributary and about 30 metres upriver is a ford linking the farm fields which is an easier get out. A public footpath runs through the field from the footbridge up to Ufford Hole. This can be portaged if you wish to paddle on the fresh water Deben.

Paddling further upriver from the ford is possible but it is hampered by overhanging bushes with thorns and fallen trees in various states of decay preventing easy progress.

Hazards

The main issue up here is running out of water and getting stuck so stick to half tide and keep a close eye on the time.

At the highest spring tides, 4.5 metres, the footbridge by the railway line is a squeeze to get underneath. At that high a tide it is possible to get out onto the bank before the bridge, as the river will actually be flooding the lower part of the field.

The other issue at high water springs is that rafts of dead reeds will be flushed out by the higher water. These should be paddled around as many of them will have formed around dead branches and logs which you can't see but will stop you in your tracks if you try to paddle through them.

Clubhouse to Methergate Quay

This is one of our usual club paddles.

Access Points

After launching from the club there is an immediate get out (or alternative launch point) at the Deben Yacht Club ramp when going downriver which is accessible at half tide. On the opposite bank and almost adjacent to No16 (red Port) buoy is a small sandy beach if needed in emergency a couple of hours each side of high water. It is on private land with no access inland.

Kyson Point has a hard which is available at all states of the tide running down from the small boathouse. The beach is also accessible at higher states of the tide and emergency vehicles could make their way down the track from Kyson Hill to just above the northern end of the beach.

Martlesham Creek runs west from Kyson. It has public footpaths on both sides of the creek but the banks are surrounded by low lying mud and are not easy to get out onto – you can only get to them at half tide. There is a half tide concrete slipway at Martlesham Creek Boatyard where emergency vehicle access is possible.

South of Loder's Cut there is only a footpath on the western shore with no links to roads. The next access point is by Methergate. The Quay itself is fenced off but there is an all-tide concrete slipway on the northern side, leading to trackways which emergency vehicles could make their way down.

Hazards

Loder's Cut is navigable through half tide and beyond. It is inaccessible at low water springs with the drying mudbank blocking the entrance from the north. At high water springs the land on both sides of the Cut is submerged and you need to navigate between the wooden poles, called Withies, to stay in the narrow channel.

Following the main channel around the island towards Kyson Point, a wide berth needs to be given to number 13, 11 and 9 (green Starboard) buoys. At low water springs the mud spit from the island extends as far as No13 buoy and there is mud visible between 11 and 9 buoys. The deep water is further over towards Kyson Point and the entrance to Martlesham Creek.

Below the Cut and running east/west is Troublesome Reach. To the south of this there are low lying mud islands, which is why the channel runs over to the eastern bank. The mud is passable at half tide but outside these times, it is best to back out the way you came in if running into too shallow water; turning towards the channel, rather than going back, can lead you onto the even more shallow island marked by number 12A and 14 (red Port) buoys.

Methersgate Quay to the Rocks

The Club will often paddle down as far as Waldringfield.

Access Points

Public footpaths run along both banks for the duration of this section but roads are set much further back from the riverbank.

On the eastern bank the Hams is the first access point with a firm sandy beach at half tide and which marks the northern point of a crescent shaped bay overlooked by Cliff Farm. At the other end of this bay is the Tips, which again has a good sandy beach at half tide but quickly falls away to deep and particularly smelly, dark mud.

Stonner Point has a good half tide sandy beach facing back up the river. It marks the entrance to the natural channel behind the island opposite Waldringfield.

Waldringfield has a sandy beach and is accessible at all states of the tide, with a pub and car parking and also the Waldringfield Sailing Club. There is also a concrete slipway between the pub and boatyard which is available about an hour either side of high water. There is emergency vehicle access here.

Travelling further downriver there is a large, part sandy beach known as the Rocks, which is backed by sandy cliffs with a tree line which provides good protection. Towards the north easterly end of the beach, the sand goes all the way down to the waterline even at low water springs and this is the best (and most popular) landing point. Be aware though that at high water springs the beach is virtually completely underwater, with only a small landing point by the track leading up to the footpath and farm cottage.

Hazards

The river south of Methersgate is wider and the banks low lying and more exposed in the prevailing wind. The effects of the wind feel more pronounced here because there is less tree coverage on the western side to slow it down and more open water for it to run across unhindered.

There are shallows off both the Hams & Tips and also the opposite bank, marked by Nos 8 & 10 (red Port) buoys.

The channel through the island opposite Waldringfield is inaccessible at low water for both neaps as well as springs. The shallowest water is to the north of the actual channel itself and is charted at drying 1.2 metres above Chart Datum. It is navigable at half tide but if you find yourself going into shallow water outside these times, the best thing to do is go back out the way you came and paddle around the channel.

Although Waldringfield is a great beach, there is a large expanse of very soft mud running from the slipway in front of the pub, well down into the area where the yacht tenders are beached. Landing almost as far down as the Harbour Master's hut is advised. Although sandy, the beach also contains many small stones which are a perfect size for jamming skegs.

While the Rocks beach is relatively sheltered, the off-lying stretch of water is not. The river runs NE/SW here and is exposed to prevailing south westerly winds. This becomes an issue at the height of the ebb tide with the water flowing around the outside of the bend by Shottisham Creek and then giving wind over tide conditions to a south westerly wind. It can become particularly choppy here and the more sheltered route is to hug the inside of the bend (easterly bank) heading down towards No2A (red Port) buoy off the Rocks.

The Rocks to Bawdsey / Felixstowe Ferry

Leaving the Rocks and rounding Prettyman's Point the river begins to change character yet again going down Ramsholt Reach. The only tree cover is on the eastern side and there are no more channel buoys until the Bar beyond Bawdsey / Felixstowe Ferry. At Ramsholt the channel can be found in between the moorings, which are in two rows either side of it.

Landing is possible in Kirton Creek around two hours before and up to an hour after high water. There is a small sandy patch in the south west corner of the creek, but this is only a stopping point giving access to footpaths which are 1.2 km from the nearest road.

Ramsholt beach has a sandy top and mud before that. It is accessible round about half tide but there is also an all-tide concrete slipway here for the tenders to the many boats moored up and downstream. The section of beach between the slip and stone quay has firmer landing ground for longer than the main beach. There is the pub and parking available here, as well as emergency vehicle access.

South of Ramsholt any tree cover completely disappears and the banks are characterised by low lying arable and marsh land which offers scant protection from the wind in any direction. There is no footpath on the eastern bank between Ramsholt and Bawdsey.

Falkenham Creek is on the western bank and is fun to explore but it is a bit of a maze of small inlets through the salt marsh which should only be attempted around high water. There is no direct access to the riverbank, just the salt marsh in its vicinity. Again, the riverbank only leads to the riverside footpath and is a 2 km walk from the nearest farmhouse.

Falkenham Creek also marks the end of the moorings until getting into the vicinity of Bawdsey / Felixstowe Ferry. Rounding Green Point the river is an unmarked expanse of water, open to the elements, defined by either the river or mud banks, dependent on the state of the tide.

Falkenham Creek also marks the beginning of the speed unrestricted area, which runs down as far as Kingsfleet. This is where the water skiers and wakeboarders have free rein to practise their skills. There is a pontoon jetty on the western bank, half way along Blackstokes Reach but this is the private property of the East Suffolk Wakeboard and Waterski Club. There will sometimes be a jumping ramp set up near the jetty. The jetty itself only leads to the riverside footpath which is at least a 1 km walk to the nearest road. The water-skiers make their way here in their tow boats. There is a small stretch of shingle with a couple of wooden picnic tables at the top of the jetty.

The boat moorings begin again in the approaches to Bawdsey and Felixstowe Ferry. This is in the area of Kingsfleet where the speed unrestricted area ends. The moorings encircle a sandy island in the middle of the river which dries at every low water called Horse Sand. It can be passed on either side of the river but the main, deep-water channel is on the eastern, Bawdsey side. Bawdsey beach can be landed on at any state of the tide but has firm mud in the inter-tidal zone leading up to fine, clean sand on the beach itself. There is also an all tide concrete slipway leading up to the Boathouse Café. Clean landing can also be achieved on the shingle bank below the foot ferry jetty but be aware that the shingle is very steeply shelving and the tidal stream runs very quickly along here. There is car parking, public toilets and emergency vehicle access.

There is a shingle beach on the Felixstowe Ferry side, with cafes, car parking, a pub and emergency vehicle access.

Hazards

Paddling on the river to the south of the Rocks must be done consciously with due consideration of all the factors which may come into play on the paddling party. The river is completely exposed to the elements once beyond Ramsholt with precious little opportunity to find shelter. Choppy conditions can quickly manifest themselves and access points are few and far between.

That said, in the right weather conditions and by choosing the right launching point to use the elements in your favour, there are some fabulous paddles that can be had on the lower half of the Deben.

DCC Safety Framework drafting notes

These notes do not form part of the DCC Safety Framework, but provide some context for it. The British Canoeing document 'Paddlesafer' (we have referred to version 6a – dated 12 October 2023 for the first version of this framework) sets out the governing body's main views on paddle safety. It sets out some requirements, which are presumably mandatory for affiliated clubs. These include:

Paddle UK requirement

page 7 section 1.4

Clubs must produce and maintain a club risk assessment that covers all club activities

Publish the club safety policy

Club paddling rules for appropriate behaviour

Annual safety review

Written risk assessments for events

Report all accidents and incidents via the British Canoeing incident reporting system

page 9 section 2.1.1

Keep records of annual equipment checks

page 21 section 3.2.1

generic risk assessments must be in writing

page 22 section 3.2.3

dynamic risk assessments are critical

page 24 section 3.6.1

DCC compliance

The club safety framework contains a detailed section on risk assessments

The club safety framework will be:

- published on the club website
- emailed to members after major updates
- referred to in the annual membership form

Covered by the sections Code of Conduct and Safety Principles for Paddlers

The club Safety Officer will make an annual report for discussion by the club committee

Leaders and coaches are required to consider the adequacy of the generic risk assessments before each paddle, and to produce an additional written assessment whenever that would be appropriate (see section Checklists for Leaders)

See section Checklists for Leaders

Added to the club's schedule of annual action points

See section Risk Assessment

See section Risk Assessment

Paddle UK requirement

Clubs should have a Health and Safety policy

page 27 section 3.10

Clubs must have a Safety Officer

page 27 section 3.11

Additional risks for night paddles

section 30 section 4.1.2

First aid requirements

page 34 section 4.5

Clubs must consider pre-existing medical conditions

DCC compliance

Included in safety framework

The club has a Safety Officer

See section Risk Assessment

The club only deploys leaders-in-charge of club paddles who fully comply with the first aid requirements

The club's annual membership form includes a section on pre-existing medical conditions. This data is provided to all leaders-in-charge of club paddles

DCC safety framework version control

Version

15 Feb 2025	First published version. To be followed by all club members and officials from date of issue.
4 August 2025	Updated to reflect: • withdrawal of DWSC SOPs • incorporate peer group paddling policy • incorporate alcohol policy • add text on Weil's disease • introduction of Spond and implications for record keeping • formal classification of the river Deben for paddling purposes • minor typographical errors corrected
19 May 2026	Changes: • remove references to Recognised Coaches – no longer relevant • added reference to non-sheltered water for paddler ratios • added a process for reviewing generic risk assessments