

a better place to play



Our strategy for water-related
sport and recreation
(2006–2011)

We are the Environment Agency. It's our job to look after your environment and make it **a better place** – for you, and for future generations.

Your environment is the air you breathe, the water you drink and the ground you walk on. Working with business, Government and society as a whole, we are making your environment cleaner and healthier.

The Environment Agency. Out there, making your environment a better place.

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Environment Agency
Rio House
Waterside Drive, Aztec West
Almondsbury, Bristol BS32 4UD
Tel: 0870 8506506
Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

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Foreword



People are drawn to water and watersides for all sorts of activities. Who can blame them? Water offers life-changing experiences, inspiration and discovery for millions of people of all ages, from all walks of life, with interests ranging from dog-walking to kite-surfing. The Environment Agency wants to make these even better places for everyone to play.

We are well known for the effort we put into improving the quality of our environment. Our work helps to improve people's quality of life. Thanks to regulation and investment, the quality of the environment is improving. We have cleaner air, rivers and beaches. Many wetland habitats have been restored, and more people enjoy time on or near water. At the same time, we have to recognise that we can achieve so much more with the support and involvement of others.

Working in effective partnerships we can increase participation, help governments achieve their targets, and maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits of water-related recreation.

I hope you will join us and help us make sure that we all have the opportunity to enjoy our waterways and coasts, the most beautiful, varied and ever-changing environment available to us.



Barbara Young
Chief Executive
Environment Agency

Barbara Young



courageing

Our vision . . .

. . . is for a better place for people and wildlife in England and Wales, for present and future generations. We want people to have peace of mind, knowing that they live in a clean and safe environment, rich in wildlife and natural biodiversity – one they can enjoy to the full and feel motivated to care for.

One of the priorities in our Corporate Strategy for the next five years, under the theme of creating ‘a better quality of life’, is that we will play our part in encouraging more people from all walks of life to enjoy and care about their environment. One way to achieve this is by providing more, and better, opportunities for them to enjoy the countries rivers and coasts.

Why do we want a better place to play?



Water and watersides are within easy reach of many of us. They can therefore provide opportunities that cut across social divides, including deprivation and race. Everyone needs the chance to play, whether in rural or urban locations. Water crosses all boundaries. Our recent research (February 2005) indicates that nearly half the population of England and Wales enjoyed time on or near water in the previous 12 months.

The benefits – social, cultural, educational, economic and health – of recreation are considerable. It also has a key role to play in regeneration, as the catalyst for improvements to local environments. Community recreational opportunities and facilities generate value and a sense of local ownership. There are spin-off benefits for employment and the economy in both the town and country.

Economic benefits – Canolfan Tryweryn

This centre in North Wales provides white water activities on a river we manage. The users have contributed almost £3 million to the local economy. Eighty thousand visitors come to the site each year, and this is set to increase with more of the river now available for canoeing. This is an example of how a single site can benefit the local economy. When the benefits from all sites are put together, they become nationally significant.

Health benefits – game plan

A report by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the No 10 Strategy Unit identified that the economic burden of physical inactivity, and resulting impacts on health, cost around £8.24 billion. The potential health and economic gains resulting from just a five per cent increase in the levels of activity would produce estimated savings of £300 million each year. Creating opportunities and promoting recreation on or near water will help.

Social benefits – *Get Hooked on Fishing* and angling projects

Angling is easily the nation's favourite pastime – enjoyed last year by around four million people from all sectors of society. We know that as many people again want to try it out.

The £3 billion spent each year on angling provides important economic and social benefits to rural and urban communities. Angling can provide opportunities for life-long learning and a first contact with the water environment for many people. It appeals to all ages and does not discriminate against gender, race or athletic ability. As well as the collective social and economic benefits of so many people going fishing, specific projects, such as *Get Hooked on Fishing*, have demonstrated a significant and cost effective role in addressing social issues among young people. Results include reductions in truancy, antisocial behaviour and offending, as well as increasing self-esteem, all of which helps pupils to do better at school.

Multiple benefits – Boston washbanks

This scheme to provide flood defences for local homes also created 12 hectares of brackish and freshwater lagoons and 80 hectares of saltmarsh, providing valuable habitat for wildfowl and wading birds. Improvements were made to the access within the nature reserve at Frampton Marsh, including disabled access paths, cycle routes, bird hides and a car park. Interpretation panels, leaflets, an education pack and website, as well as the appointment of two RSPB officers to promote the area and manage farmland bird conservation, have made a huge difference. Visitor numbers increased by over 76,000 during the first year, with an associated increase in the use of local pubs and overnight stays.



Our role



A major part of the Environment Agency's role is to create a quality of environment that people will be able to enjoy for many different reasons. But this enjoyment has to be sustainable.

Through strategic planning, we can also enable others, such as landowners and local communities, to create recreation opportunities on the ground. By fostering such partnerships and working together, we can achieve the maximum economic, social and environmental benefits for all.

In doing this, we need to help balance the issues around competing recreational interests – on the water between canoeists, anglers and boaters for example,

and on banksides between cyclists, horse-riders and walkers. We will also need to manage the conflicts of interest between conservation, biodiversity and access, to get the best results for all. Our integrated approach to environmental management includes recreation activity and emphasises its importance as part of the integrated management of river basins and the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

We have a statutory duty to promote recreation on or near inland and coastal waters, make the best use of the sites we own for recreation and access and take amenity and access into consideration in all of our work. We are the Navigation Authority for a number of waterways, and also have specific guidance in relation to the value of angling. Because of our range of responsibilities for activities that take place on the coast, we are in a unique position to integrate the management of the environment on land with that of our estuaries and coastal waters.

Our Access Policy

We will promote increased access where it does not adversely impact upon existing use and users, or the economic and conservation value of the site and associated area. We will encourage access where managed solutions can be found to remove adverse impacts, resources allowing.

We are helping to achieve the Government's aims for quality of life in many ways. We are doing this in particular by providing 'green lungs' within communities – creating clean, safe and attractive environments in which everyone can enjoy their leisure time close to where they live.

Natural surroundings and a high-quality environment are proven to positively boost health and reduce stress. We contribute, by controlling risks, such as exposure to pollution, and by promoting outdoor recreation. Our report "Better environment, healthier people" sets out our priorities and how we help to keep England and Wales fit and healthy.

We will need to achieve much of this through partnerships. While we manage almost 1000km of waterways in England and Wales, other waterways and most of the surrounding land is privately owned by, for example, farmers and water companies and public bodies such as local authorities. Any recreational opportunities need to be developed with support, and help, from these owners whilst having regard for their other activities and objectives.

We have a number of key partners that we need to work with and influence. These include the Countryside Council for Wales and from October 2006, Natural England (the merged Countryside Agency, English Nature and The Rural Development Service) who have duties to promote recreation on land, some of which is associated with water. Partners also include the Regional Development Agencies and Local Authorities that work through Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks in England and the Wales Spatial Plan and Local Development Plans in Wales; together with Sport England and Sports Council for Wales. Many activities have representative bodies, including the Amateur Rowing Association, Royal Yachting Association, British Canoe Union, Welsh Canoeing Association, Inland Waterways Association and National Angling Governing bodies, with whom we also actively work.

Helping to achieve the aims of the Governments' agenda

Some of the policies we contribute to through our recreation activities:

Delivering the essentials of life: Defra five year strategy

Recognises 'clear' evidence of the benefits of access to green space.

Environment Strategy: Welsh Assembly Government

Setting draft objectives relating to recreation and access to green space in Wales.

Catching the Wave and Climbing Higher: Welsh Assembly Government

A water-sports tourism action plan and a strategy targeting an increase in participation in outdoor activities from 36 to 60 per cent of the population of Wales.

Liveability/Cleaner, safer, greener (Oct 2002): Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

'Creating cleaner, safer and greener communities by improving the quality of planning, design, management and maintenance of public spaces'.

Environment Agency's section four guidance issued by Defra and Welsh Assembly Government

To protect or enhance the environment in a way that takes account of economic and social considerations, including promoting the recreational use of inland and coastal waters and associated land.

Sustainable communities: Building for the future: Government Policy

The challenge: to ensure all communities have a clean, safe and attractive environment in which people can take pride.

Game plan target: Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Aims for 50 per cent of the population to be reasonably active by 2011 (for example, 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times per week).

Our objectives



Our over-arching objective is to plan and promote water-related sport and recreation to achieve the maximum economic, social and environmental benefits.

Over the next five years, there are four main areas where we can make a real difference to the quality of people's lives through creating opportunities for recreation on or near our inland and coastal waters:

1. Creating a better place to play by improving the environment
2. Improving access for all
3. Making recreation sustainable
4. Promoting the outdoors

1. Creating a better place to play by improving the environment

To make our inland and coastal waters and their surroundings a better place to enjoy, we will:

- Work with others to improve the environment.
- Manage these areas in an integrated way and promote the benefits of this to others.

Through **better regulation** we will work on pollution prevention measures, review the impact of waste disposal and work with others to reduce, for example, the impact that fly-tipping has on people's enjoyment of the outdoors.



There are important links between achieving environmental goals and securing economic and social benefits through increased access and recreation. We will look for and use these links. We will, for example:

- Recognise that the **wildlife** is often an important part of the value people place on the environments they enjoy.
- Ensure that our **strategies** are joined up and that, when we and our partners carry out work on the ground, we create green space and recreation opportunities. Examples of this include flood risk management schemes designed with multiple benefits, habitat creation schemes and involvement in major regeneration projects.

Multiple benefits from our core work

Sutcliffe Park used to be a featureless area lacking in biodiversity, home to a river – the Quaggy – running through an underground culvert. Our restoration of the river to reduce flood risk was completed in June 2004, and the park is now rich in biodiversity and wildlife habitats. The community was closely involved, and a ‘Friends of Sutcliffe Park’ group is being established.

We used the Sutcliffe Park project to look at the added benefits of this kind of work. Park visits have increased by 73 per cent; time spent in the park per person each month has increased by more than three-and-a-half hours; 66 per cent of visitors (compared to 25 per cent before improvements), visited for ‘health’ reasons, including fresh air and walking. And the number of people visiting to see the wildlife increased from two per cent to 47 per cent.



We received the Eltham Society's annual award for improvements to the built and natural environment for the Sutcliffe Park project. The award, which began in 1975, aims to recognise those who have made a considerable contribution to the community through their work on building and land in the area.

We will know progress is being made in England and Wales when:

- a. We meet our targets for achieving integrated river basin management and implementation of the Water Framework Directive;
- b. We successfully carry out our duties to conserve wildlife and habitats while creating better access arrangements;
- c. More people enjoy more wildlife.

2. Improving access for all

To improve access to water and its surroundings we will:

- Support Defra in achieving its five-year strategy targets on access.
- Support Welsh Assembly Government in delivering its access targets in the Environment Strategy.
- Support Government in implementing the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act.
- Make our land and rivers more accessible wherever we can.
- Increase access and participation for angling and boating.
- Work with others to increase recreational opportunities accessible to all.
- Where appropriate, achieve this through negotiated access agreements.

The key to providing opportunities is in planning access. We work closely with governments and their other agencies to look at how to increase access within existing legislation.

As well as access to sites, people need access to information about where they can do what, and how to do so safely and responsibly. We will continue to provide this information and guide people to its availability through our website, and the specific guides we produce, which describe, for example, where to fish, moor boats and canoe.

We are carrying out a feasibility study into how agreements might increase canoe access to rivers. Working with the Countryside Agencies, we want to boost the use of Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act (2000) to secure this access through dedication. We reviewed 600 of our own sites, where we currently provide access, to see which would be suitable for dedication. Similarly, with Natural England, we are working on how to increase access to the English coast. In Wales we are also working with partners developing both inland and coastal access.

We will continue to improve access through the wide-ranging projects managed by our local fisheries, recreation and biodiversity teams, including footpaths, angling pegs, bird hides and user guides. Our annual Conservation, Access and Recreation Reports record some of the projects we have done. The reports are available on our website.

We will know progress is being made in England and Wales when:

- a. We achieve dedication of our land for access, where we are able, under Section 16 of the CRoW Act;
- b. More people from all backgrounds enjoy water-related recreation more often;
- c. More of the land we own is open to the public;
- d. We demonstrate that access is a priority in everything we do.

3. Making recreation sustainable

To help ensure recreation is sustainable we will:

- Use strategic planning for water-related sport and recreation, exploiting links between environmental, social and economic goals.
- Implement our national Navigation Strategy and our Waterways Plans.
- Encourage more people to fish through our Angling Development and Participation Strategy Angling 2015.
- Work with others to promote sustainable recreation and minimise all the environmental impacts.
- Advise landowners and users on best practice for recreation and on how to create more opportunities.
- Achieve the maximum social, economic, environmental and heritage benefits of the rivers and harbours that we directly manage.

The challenge of making recreation sustainable is to balance economic, social and environmental objectives now and in the future. We will try to match benefits and demand, and we will try to make sure that new activities do not have an adverse effect on existing ones. We will work with Defra, the Welsh Assembly Government and at regional level, to influence planning legislation and policy, including Regional Spatial Strategies and the Wales Spatial Plan. At a local level, we will seek to influence the planning system and encourage others to make the most of the opportunities outlined in this strategy.



We will work in partnerships and will consult all those who have an interest or a role to play. For example, we will actively contribute to local strategic partnerships and the modernising rural delivery programme, helping to create sustainable communities. It is important to give communities the chance for recreation locally; this will encourage more people to get involved and keep environmental impacts to a minimum.

In urban areas, access to watersides is often difficult, for a variety of reasons. For example, health and safety concerns and development pressures have resulted in fewer local fisheries, and the loss of boatyards and the infrastructure to support boating. In London, for example, despite a population of more than six million and plenty of customers and organisers, we find it hard to run National Fishing Week events due to a lack of available fisheries. This highlights a need to create new waters with access as valued public recreational amenities, comparable to playing fields and sports centres.



Working with others, we can improve angling and boating opportunities accessible to all. Research shows that three million people in England would like to take up fishing, things that stop them include ‘nowhere to fish, no-one to go with, no information on how to fish, and no tackle’. Through our *Angling Development and Participation Strategy*, and by working with other organisations, we will give more people, from a broader cross-section of society, the chance to go fishing.

Getting more people fishing – *Angling in 2015*

Angling in 2015 is our plan to increase angling participation. It sets out our priorities and actions to enhance the social and economic benefits to communities from angling. We want more opportunities to fish, more people to go fishing and our fisheries to perform better. The plan outlines the key actions and the partners we will need to work with.

Angling 2015 supports the UK Sustainable Development Strategy ‘Securing the Future’ and the Environment Strategy Wales in particular the priorities relating to quality of life, focussing on environmental inequalities and health and linking physical recreation and access to open spaces to the public health agenda.

Our Navigation Strategy

Your Rivers For Life, our national Navigation Strategy, sets out our priorities as a Navigation Authority. The Strategy supports the UK Government policy *Waterways for Tomorrow* (2000) and contributes to the theme of improving quality of life in our own Corporate Strategy.

Our vision is to conserve and improve the quality of the river environment. Drawing people to our rivers to enjoy leisure boating and other waterside recreation will attract economic activity and community engagement. We have three main action plans – to rejuvenate the Thames, to regenerate the Fens, and to restore orderly navigation to the Wye. These will be achieved through the individual waterways plans. To support these, we will continue to improve the maintenance of the infrastructure – locks, weirs, bridges and buildings and make health and safety a priority.



Our strategies and plans that sit under this Strategy, such as our *Navigation Strategy, Angling 2015* and *A Strategy for the Recreational Fisheries of Wales*, set out the specific targets we aim to achieve. These targets are developed to create sustainable outcomes. The strategies will be reviewed and reported on to see how they are delivering the outcomes of this strategy.

We will know progress is being made in England and Wales when:

- a. The planning system at regional and local level secures more recreational opportunities;
- b. Recreation opportunities feature in Sustainable Communities plans in England;
- c. Opportunities identified in Angling 2015 and the Navigation Strategy are achieved, typically through partnerships.

4. Promoting the outdoors

To promote the outdoors, we will:

- Promote recreation to increase participation and help achieve Government targets of 50 per cent of the population of England and 70 per cent of the population of Wales to be reasonably active by 2020.
- Work in partnership with others to promote the benefits of a healthy environment and the sense of wellbeing that comes from access to it.

In the 2004 Olympics, 12 of Great Britain's 30 medals were from watersports. The 2012 Olympics in London will raise the profile of watersports further, and with it the expectation of access to water and appropriate facilities.

We will promote the opportunities available for all and encourage responsible use of water and watersides. We will advise those involved in the management of the water environment to recognise and incorporate recreation in their work. We will do much of this by working in partnership with others.



engaging

Our web recreation pages provide an information one-stop shop where users can find out everything about what to do and where to do it. This can be found at:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/recreation

Our Conservation, Access and Recreation report (CAR) is also on this site and gives details of some of our recently completed projects. It gives advice on how to provide new opportunities for water-related sport and recreation. CAR reports can be found at:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/carreport

We also produce a number of activity and location specific guides. For example, the *Canoe Guide for the River Severn* is a detailed itinerary for a trip on the river, covering all a paddler needs to know to plan and enjoy time afloat. These guides can be found on our website, and hard copies can be ordered from there, too.

Similarly, guides for boaters on the Thames cover all aspects of planning and enjoying time on the river, from health and safety to route-planning.

[Visitthames.co.uk](http://www.visitthames.co.uk)

We set up the www.visitthames.co.uk website in 2001 to promote the River Thames as a visitor destination. The site is a comprehensive guide to all recreational opportunities on the Thames. The popularity of the site has doubled year-on-year and it achieves high user satisfaction. It has been vital in improving relationships with river businesses and other partners in the River Thames Alliance, as well as stimulating activity on and around the river. The River Thames Alliance, which is a river-wide public and private partnership, now recognises the website as being the primary source for information about how to enjoy the river Thames.



The countryside for health and wellbeing

As members of the Countryside Recreation Network (CRN), we helped to fund scientific studies of the health benefits of countryside recreation across a broad range of outdoor activities. The research discovered new links to improvements in mental health and wellbeing in the UK. It also confirmed benefits found in studies undertaken elsewhere in the world.

We will know progress is being made in England and Wales when:

- a. We communicate more effectively with more people involved with recreation on or near our inland and coastal waters;
- b. Those involved in the management of water and its surroundings incorporate more recreation in their work;
- c. Our views are sought and respected in relation to recreation because of the quality of advice and information we can provide.

Next steps



We will use this strategy to guide our work to secure increased benefits for water-related sport and recreation. We will promote the strategy to raise awareness of our goals and to facilitate joint working.

We welcome your views. Please send any comments to:

William Crookshank

Recreation Policy and Process Manager

Environment Agency

Rio House

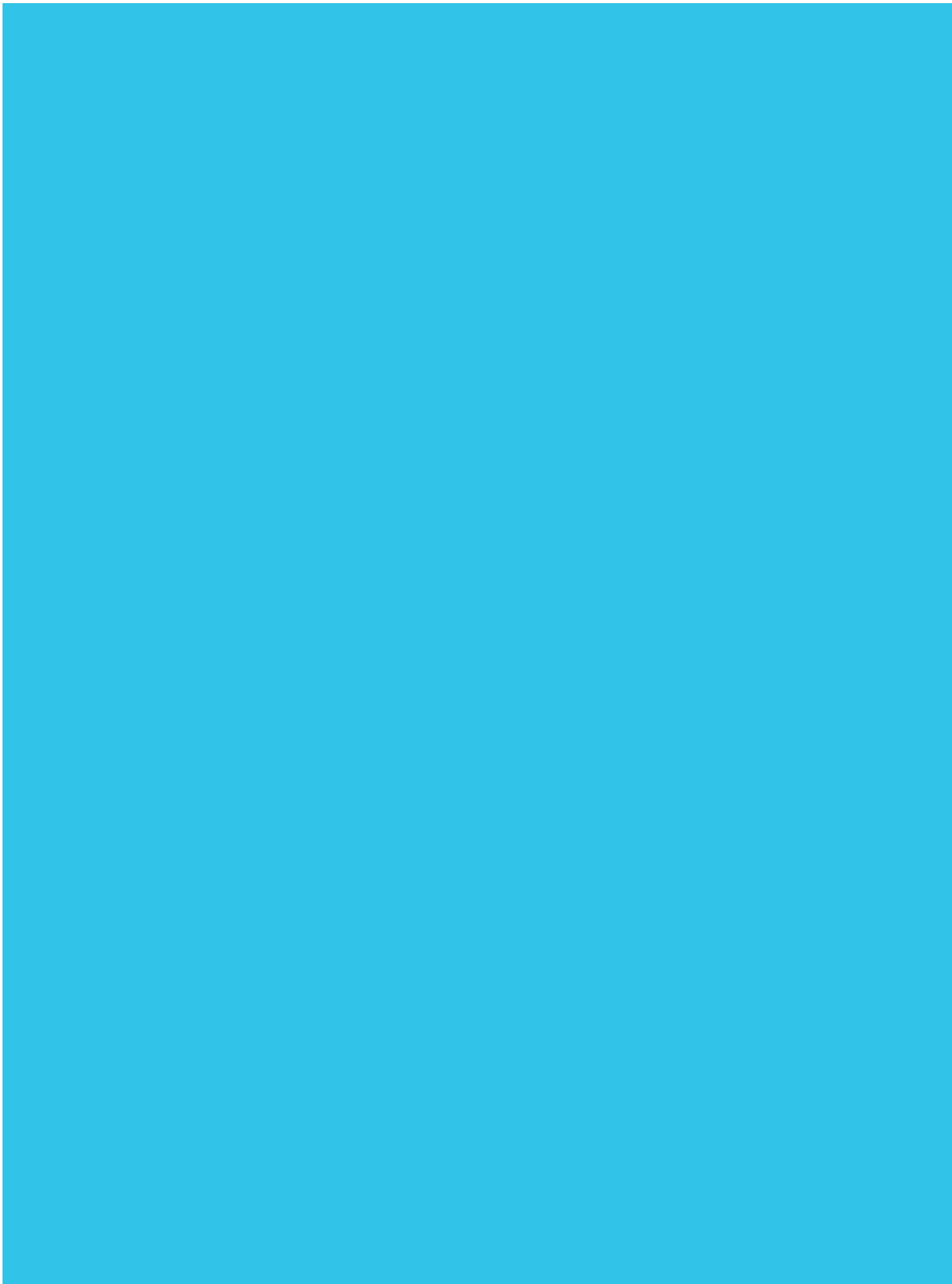
Waterside Drive

Aztec West

Almondsbury

Bristol

BS32 4UD



**Would you like to find out more about us,
or about your environment?**

Then call us on

08708 506 506 (Mon–Fri 8–6)

email

enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk

or visit our website

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

incident hotline 0800 80 70 60 (24hrs)

floodline 0845 988 1188



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