

1. Safety by the Water

Safety by the Water

Proposals for development that have a water frontage or direct access to water must address water safety. For such developments a Water Safety Plan must be produced to accompany planning applications.

The Water Safety Plan must give consideration to the following:

- a) What are the risks of someone falling into the water and who is likely to be exposed to the risk as a direct result of the proposed development?
- b) How is this risk to be minimised?
- c) What is the water depth and speed of flow?
- d) What design and safety features will be incorporated into the development to ensure that anyone in the water can get out safely? Consideration must be given to the landscape impact and the impact on any Heritage Asset of any water safety feature to be used.
- e) How will the safety features be maintained?

Reasoned Justification

Being a primarily water based area where many people enjoy being in, on or around the water, we need to consider the issue of safety by the water. Sadly, on occasion, people do die in the Broads each year in the water and many more people do fall in. On a hot day, the cool water of the Broads is often an attraction to those who want to have a quick swim to cool down. The area is also popular for organised wild and open water swimming groups. People sail on the broads using stand-up paddle boards, canoes, sailing boats and motorised cruisers. People also walk alongside waterways in the Broads as well as enjoy the many open spaces or pubs and cafes next to water. Accessible safety equipment such as lifebuoys and throw lines are essential just in case they are needed to help someone in the water. Furthermore there are also a large number of waterside buildings such as pubs and homes.

There were a total of 381 drownings and water-related deaths from accidents or natural causes across the UK in 2013¹. As in previous years, more than half of the deaths (227) in 2013 were in inland waters, such as tidal and freshwater rivers, lakes and reservoirs, while fatalities at sea, on the beach or shoreline accounted for nearly a third (115). A further 22 deaths happened at harbours, docks, marinas and inland or coastal ports. Eight deaths occurred in the bath and six in swimming pools, while three happened in areas that are not normally watercourses such as marsh and flooded land.

In the Broads over the last 15 years there have been on average 5 deaths per year, 26 of which were related to boating and 48 deaths were non-boating related. It should be noted that some of these deaths were not accidental and this policy seeks to influence accidental water related incidents. Also over the same period there were 264 near drownings/people falling in. This figure does not include

¹ Taken from <http://www.rospa.com/media-centre/press-office/press-releases/detail/?id=1276>

people engaged in water sports where they expect to enter the water. These near drowning events are those which were reported to or witnessed by the BA staff and the true figure is likely to be much larger due to under reporting.

The National Water Safety Forum has produced the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy² which aims to reduce accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by 50% by 2026, and reduce risk amongst the highest risk populations, groups and communities. A target of the Strategy which is particular relevant to this policy is to increase awareness of everyday risks in, on and around the water. The strategy asks communities to develop a risk assessment for the area and to put in place Water Safety Plans at a community level.

By submitting a Water Safety Plan with relevant planning applications, applicants will be required to consider the risks of people falling in the water as well as consider and put in place ways of helping people whilst they are in the water and ensuring there is a safe way to get out of the water.

A Guide will be produced to assist applicants in preparing a Water Safety Plan and identifying the most appropriate risk control measures and safety features for their proposed development.

For development near to Heritage Assets or in Conservation Areas, bright plastic covers on life rings for example may detract from the scenery or setting. Less visually intrusive, but equally usable and functional forms of safety equipment can be provided in such locations.

Alternative Options

- No policy – in response to the recently launched UK Drowning Prevention Strategy, on reflection of the number of people who drown locally and nationally as well as recognition that the Broads is a primarily water based area, the Authority considers that having no policy is not a reasonable option.
- A more detailed and prescriptive policy – as worded, the preferred policy gives flexibility to reflect local circumstances such as water depths and speed of flow of water as well as number and type of people likely to be at risk. Having a prescriptive policy could not reflect such local characteristics.

Comments received as part of the Issues and Options:

One comment emphasised the need for safe thinking and leading by example in relation to activity near water. Another comment supported the policy saying it is important to provide reasonable safety systems and support for incidents around the water as well as emphasise the importance of maintenance.

Sustainability Appraisal Summary

Preferred Option: xx

No policy: xx

More detailed and prescriptive policy: xx

Evidence used to inform this section

² <http://www.nationalwatersafety.org.uk/strategy/info/uk-drowning-prevention-strategy.pdf>