

Competition – 72nd Bedford Canoe Marathon

Date: 24th May 2026

Note Bedford Borough Council and Environment Agency approval is required for this event.

Method Statement (Safety Plan)

Overview

This event is held annually in Bedford on the River Great Ouse. VKC has been responsible for running the event since 1961.

Canoe marathon is a race, between 2.5 km and 26.25 km in length. For Bedford this will comprise of 3.75 km and 2.5 km laps or circuits within the designated 2.15 km section of river. This stretch of river runs through the town.

Event Layout and Infrastructure

The canoe marathon race will take place on a 2.15 km section of the River Great Ouse between Queens Park Footbridge and The Boat Slide Weir, Mill Meadows. The event will be centred around Viking Kayak Club Boathouse.

River infrastructure will be required in order to run the race, including but not limited to:

- Start line situated immediately opposite VKC (full width of the river)
- Finish line located at the end of the “swimming pool area” (5 metre wide adjacent VKC side)
- Boat Slide Turn (A)
- County Bridge Turn (C)
- Queens Park Foot Bridge Turn (B)

Bank side infrastructure will be required in order to run the race, including but not limited to:

- Borough Hall Portage (75 metre long in downstream direction)
- 4 3m x 3m Gazebo for Various event support
- Boat check/launch area pontoon

Viking Kayak Club Boat House infrastructure:

- Control and timing
- Registration
- Results display
- Prize Giving
- Competitor changing & showers

A general location map is shown in Figure 1 - Event Location Plan

River Access & Parking

Access to the river for Visitors will be via the Borough Hall car park off Cauldwell St (A5141). This costs £1 payable at the barrier on a Sunday however for 2025 the council raised the barrier for the day to allow access for trailers. The method of trailer access for the 2026 event will be confirmed with the council and published prior to the event.

Limited disabled parking will be available at the club. The riverside end of the club car park will be closed to provide an area for spectators and boats.

Viking competitors will be encouraged to use Prebend Car Park (free on a Sunday with a club sticker – a height barrier is present.)

The car parks will not be stewarded. A traffic management plan is not considered necessary.

Pedestrian access to the club from the Borough Hall car park is via Prebend St bridge (approx. 300m) and does not involve crossing any roads. Access to the river for boats will be via a temporary stage on the Borough Hall side of the river and via the stage in front of the club house. Both of these areas cross public footpaths and care should be taken by competitors.

There is very little room for storing boats at the Club House. Boats will be stored on the grass area adjacent to the Borough Hall temporary stage and clear of the portage. Care will be taken to keep boats clear of the public footpath.

Litter

Temporary litter bins will be provided by VKC in the area around the Viking Kayak Club boathouse.

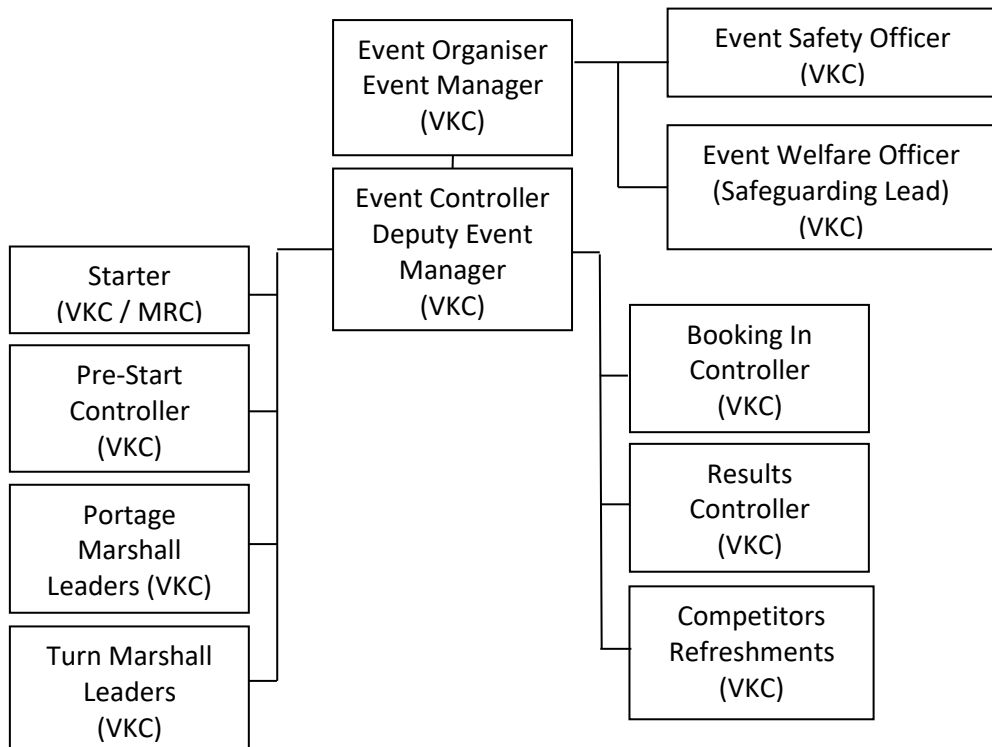
Emergency Vehicle access

There is access to the river for the majority of the course distance. If the situation arises that access is required, Viking Kayak club members wearing identification bibs will assist in keeping the access clear of competitors/spectators.

Missing people

Any child who has lost their nominated adult will be taken to control at the Club House for collection. A designated Welfare Officer will be nominated for the event and their name published.

Event Organisation



Program

Competition Day

Site Preparation

The River Great Ouse will have reduced river traffic on the upper river section by voluntary agreement with other users through the Bedford River Users Group and the published River Users Event Diary.

The Borough Hall Portage Marshals will access/egress the location on foot, with the required signs & equipment to delineate the portage, at 09:00 hrs on the day of the event. The set-up will take approximately 30 minutes and will not impede access along the adjacent footpath. The location will be marshalled for racing as follows:

- Portage 10:45hrs – 14:30hrs

The Hydro Turn Marshals will access/egress the area on foot with the required signs & equipment. The location will be marshalled as follows:

- Turn 10:45hrs – 14:30hrs

The check-in area at VKC will be open from 08:00 – 11:00hrs on the morning of the race for team leaders and competitors. Participants will start to arrive at VKC from around 08:00hrs onward. The program will run through to the prize giving at around 15:00hrs.

Racing will be divided into 2 blocks of starts so that paddlers of similar ability/race speed are on the course at any time in order to reduce the risk of slower boats in lower divisions impeding the progress of boats in the higher divisions.

The competition will start at approx 10:00hrs. The competition will run through to the prize giving at approx 15:00hrs.

After prize giving, competitors will vacate the site and VKC will remove infrastructure from site and river. This is envisaged to be complete by 18:00 hrs.

Event Communications

During the event, the following means of communication will be used between the organisers, the public, marshals, competitors and emergency services.

- Handheld Loud Hailers
 - The Starter will be equipped with a handheld loud hailer
- Mobile Telephony
 - In the case of emergency, mobile phones will be available to summon emergency services.
 - A list of contact phone numbers will be circulated.
- Verbal Briefings
 - All marshals and competitors will be verbally briefed prior to the event.

Safety

3rd Party Liability Insurance

VKC are affiliated to Paddle UK and as such are covered by up to £10,000,000. This can be found at the end of this document.

Safety Equipment

The following safety equipment will be required for the event:

- Safety boat (Geoff Sanders GSA, GSB, GSC, Open K2 and Mini K2 race)
- First Aid kits
- Throw lines
- Charged mobile phones
- Marshal check list for boats due to pass

First Aid / Incident Management

A designated first aider will be on site at all times. Their name will be displayed in control. A first aid kit is available in the Club House.

The nearest A&E is at Bedford Hospital, Kempston Road, MK42 9DJ.

In case of emergency help should be summoned in the normal way using 999. There is good mobile coverage along the length of the course. Control should be subsequently informed.

In the event of an incident the local marshals will take responsibility and escalate/report to control as necessary.

Participants

All competitors will be “booked-in” either by their team leaders or themselves at race control. The following information will be gathered from event participants: Name, Membership Number, Contact details, Emergency Contact, Relevant medical details that the organiser may need to be aware of, Activity consent, and If under 18, parental consent.

Boat numbers will be issued by race control. All competitor and boat checks will be undertaken against these numbers. All competitors require membership of Paddle UK (or CANI, SCA, WCA) in order to compete. This is checked on the day.

All competitors will receive pre-race briefings by the event organiser or designated marshal at the time given in the event information document. All marshals will receive task briefings by the event organiser or designated assistant prior to commencement of their duties.

All major course features (start, finish, turns & portages) will be attended by two or more race marshals one of which will be equipped with a mobile phone providing a direct link to race control. All marshals will wear yellow VKC identification bibs so that they are readily identifiable.

All racing will be conducted under Paddle UK Marathon Racing Committee (MRC) Rules as published in British Canoeing Racing Handbook 2025 and online at <https://canoeracing.org.uk>.

From 2023 SUPs have been permitted in Hasler Races. As these are propelled by a single blade they will be classified as a canoe.

The Borough Hall ‘false portage’, shown in Figure 2 – Borough Hall false ‘portage’, shall be fully delineated by red/white hazard tapes on each side for its entire length which runs parallel with the upper river between the footpath and a row of trees. Race marshals will be present to both monitor the racing and prevent members of the public straying onto the course portage during racing.

Novice racing divisions and the U14 races will not be required to make portages. There will be reduced other river traffic for competitors to negotiate in order to reduce the risk of collisions with other river users. (Refer to Site Preparation Above).

All paddlers in racing divisions designated “novice”, in the Paddle UK MRC Rules and the U14 races will be required to wear Paddle UK approved buoyancy aids. Paddler rankings are as published in the Paddle UK Racing Handbook unless promotion/demotion notices have been subsequently issued by the MRC.

All races will start down river. All turns will be anticlockwise except the last turn Div 1-3, 7-9, and U14. Racers may use either side of the river in the up-stream direction and use the centre of the river in the downstream direction except past the portage where they must be river right.

The marshalling area will be upstream of Prebend St bridge. The prestart line will be downstream of Prebend St bridge. The start will be opposite the club. Paddlers can enter the river at the Borough Hall or club stages and warm up upstream of the prestart line. Marshals will call paddlers forward to the prestart in division order as announced at the race briefing for divisional starts.

Warm down sessions may take place beyond the finish line but must remain clear of those still competing.

Spectators

Race Marshalls will be present at the Borough Hall Portage to prevent members of the public straying onto the course when competitors are passing over the portage. Controlled passage of the public and spectators to access the riverbank will be provided during racing when the portage is clear of competitors.

Those at risk are identified as competitors, marshals, event officials, spectators/supporters, and the public. The following measures will therefore be taken:

- All traders and caterers will have third party public liability insurance to a minimum sum of £10,000,000.
- Safe public access will be maintained at all times.
- Ensure all structures are of sound construction (visual inspection).
- All traders will have current safety/test certificates for generators where used and each operator will provide the certificate for inspection at any time on request.
- Any generator used will have residual breaker protection.
- Temporary barriers will be used during set up and, where appropriate during the event.
- Those selling hot food will provide adequate and appropriate firefighting equipment and in the eventuality of fire can use the said equipment.
- The site will be kept litter/obstruction free at all times throughout set up, delivery and breakdown and refuse bins are provided at key points on the event site.
- All event marshals will be identifiable by armbands or jackets.
- Public access to the riverbank at the Borough Hall portage will be controlled at the crossing point during all racing. This crossing point will be a designated safety zone.

Cancelling or suspension

Cancellation or any significant change to the race prior to the evening before the race will be advertised on the Viking Kayak website. On the day or during the race the race organiser will liaise with Marshals and Team leaders to ensure the safety of all paddlers and supporters. Likely reasons for cancellation of the event could include strong winds, fog/poor visibility, river in flood, fast flowing current, environmental issues or advice from outside agencies.

Maps



Figure 1 - Event Location Plan

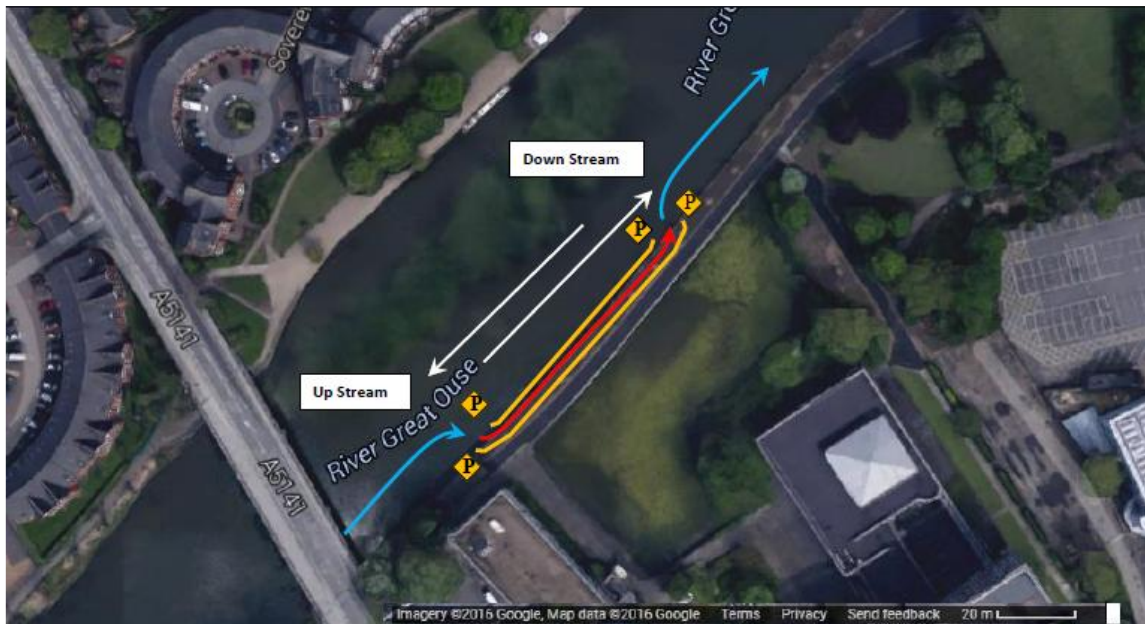


Figure 2 – Borough Hall false ‘portage’

Viking Kayak Club – Method Statement and Risk Assessment

Risk Assessment	Bedford Canoe Marathon
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Specific legal requirements		Date of Event	24 th May 2026
		Staff involved	Volunteers drawn from Viking Kayak Club membership
Appropriate Standards	Paddle UK: Marathon Racing Committee; Marathon Racing Rules 2025 Paddling UK Standards for Events Paddle UK Safeguarding Children, Paddle UK Incident Report System	Assessment by	
		Assessment date	

HAZARD	IDENTIFY RISK	Numbers exposed to risk	L	S	RV	RR	AP	Control Measures
Public navigation and river users.	Collision	100 Competitors and Safety Boaters	1	5	5	Very Low	E	Agree reduced use of the Upper river by others through voluntary agreement and co-operative with other user groups via the Bedford River Users Group and EA. Briefing pack for competitors.
Other water sports	Collision	200 Competitors	1	5	5	Very Low	E	Agree exclusive usage of the upper river through voluntary agreement and co-operative with other user groups via the Bedford River Users Group and EA. Pre-race briefing for competitors.
Fishermen	Collision	200 Competitors	1	3	3	Very Low	E	The race will take place in the closed fishing season.
Capsize/ collision in mass start	Drowning	200 Competitors	2	5	10	Low	D	There are sloping or low banks on virtually all sections of the course. Competitor's boats must be sufficiently buoyant to remain afloat and support the crew in event of capsize. All paddlers are briefed to provide assistance to other competitors in distress.
Borough Hall portage pedestrian crossing point	Collision between competitors with boats (non-competition) & the public	85 Competitors 30 Public	2	5	10	Low	D	Designated safety zone at Borough Hall portage – pedestrian flows and competitors will be controlled by marshals.

Viking Kayak Club – Method Statement and Risk Assessment

HAZARD	IDENTIFY RISK	Numbers exposed to risk	L	S	RV	RR	AP	Control Measures
Pre-start muster for inexperienced children between 8-12 years	Collision	30 Competitors	1	5	5	Very Low	E	Separate pre-start muster zones for all children paddling in U14 class races.
Inexperienced children between 8 - 12 years	Collision	30 Competitors	2	5	10	Low	C	All U14 class races will be accompanied by an appropriately qualified adult kayak which will follow the race to guide and assist where required.
Manual handling of boats	Collision between competitors with boats (non-competition) & the public	Paddlers, helpers and members of the public through collision	3	3	9	Low	D	Members to be aware of risk around the clubhouse in particular cyclists and pedestrians on the cycle path in front of the boathouse noting that there may also be vehicles and trailers in that area.
Rivers in spate	Drowning	Paddlers through changed features and fast currents, possible entrapment, strainers	2	5	10	Low	D	Paddlers will be made aware of higher than usual river levels at the pre-race briefing and must be confident of their ability to cope with fast currents. Paddlers will be made aware that features of the river (e.g. Weirs; Hydro Generation Unit) may become more hazardous. The event organiser may (rule 5) require all competitors to wear buoyancy aids; or in extreme conditions (as in 2012) postpone the event.
Water	Drowning	Paddlers through drowning	2	5	10	Low	D	The provisions of 'Rule 5 – safety' apply. All division 7, 8, 9 (novice) and Lightning paddlers must wear CE approved buoyancy aids, in accordance with rule 5 (vi). And all paddlers under 16 years of age in higher divisions will be strongly advised to do so.
Sharps in litter bins	Cuts	Helpers	3	1	3	Very Low	E	Gloves to be considered when emptying bins.
Water Quality	Risk of upset stomach, potential Weils disease, infection	Participants	3	3	9	Low	D	Competitors made aware of risks. Cuts and scrapes to be covered by waterproof dressings and cleaned. Locally published water quality test results to be considered. First Aid Kits to have wound dressing. Paddlers briefed to wash hands and face after activity.

Insurance

Public Liability Insurance / Employees Liability Insurance



Marsh Ltd
 Castlemead
 13th Floor
 Lower Castle Street
 Bristol
 BS1 3AG
 Tel: 0345 872 5060
 www.marsh.com

To Whom It May Concern

We act as insurance brokers for British Canoeing T/As Paddle UK, including British Canoeing Events Ltd, Scottish Canoe Association T/As Paddle Scotland, Canoe Association of Northern Ireland T/As Paddle Northern Ireland (including affiliated members of CANI resident the Republic of Ireland) Canoe Wales T/As Paddle Cymru, the Canoe Foundation, and all their affiliated employees, directors, officers, event safety officers, officials, committee members and clubs

Activities: All paddle sport activities recognised & authorised by Paddle UK

N.B. Cover is applicable to UK Residents only

Public and Products Liability

Period of Insurance:	01 November 2025 - 31 October 2026
Insurer:	Liberty Mutual Insurance Europe SE via Sportscover Europe Limited
Policy Number:	PLON99/0119259
Limit of Indemnity:	£5,000,000 any one occurrence and in the aggregate in respect of Products Liability

Excess Public and Products Liability

Period of Insurance:	01 November 2025 - 31 October 2026
Insurer:	Intact Insurance UK Ltd & Aspen Insurance UK Ltd
Policy Number:	YMM903581 & IOAK56M25A0X
Limit of Indemnity:	£10,000,000 in excess of the underlying limits in respect of Public/Products Liability

Please note the overall Public & Products Liability Limit of Indemnity is £15,000,000

Professional Indemnity

Period of Insurance:	01 November 2025 - 31 October 2026
Insurer:	Liberty Mutual Insurance Europe SE via Sportscover Europe Limited
Policy Number:	PLON99/0119259
Limit of Indemnity:	£5,000,000 any one occurrence and in the aggregate
Retroactive Date:	1 st November 1985



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Employers' Liability

Period of Insurance:	01 November 2025 - 31 October 2026
Insurer:	Liberty Mutual Insurance Europe SE via Sportscover Europe Limited
Policy Number:	PLON99/0119259
Limit of Indemnity:	£10,000,000 any one occurrence

Directors' & Officers' Liability and Corporate Reimbursement

Period of Insurance:	01 November 2025 - 31 October 2026
Insurer:	Liberty Mutual Insurance Europe SE via Sportscover Europe Limited
Policy Number:	PLON99/0119260
Limit of Indemnity:	£5,000,000 any one occurrence and in the aggregate.

Important information

We have placed the insurance which is the subject of this letter after consultation with you and based upon your instructions only. Terms of coverage are based upon information furnished to us by you, which information we have not independently verified.

This letter is issued as a matter of information only and confers no right upon you or any third party to whom it is disclosed, other than those provided by the policy. This letter does not amend, extend or alter the coverage afforded by the policies described herein. Notwithstanding any requirement, term or condition of any contract or other document with respect to which this letter may be issued or pertain, the insurance afforded by the policy (policies) described herein is subject to all terms, conditions, limitations, exclusions and cancellation provisions and may also be subject to warranties. Limits shown may have been reduced by paid claims.

We express no view and assume no liability with respect to the solvency or future ability to pay of any of the insurance companies which have issued the insurance(s).

We assume no obligation to advise yourselves of any developments regarding the insurance(s) subsequent to the date hereof. This letter is given on the condition that you forever waive any liability against us based upon the placement of the insurance(s) and/or the statements made herein with the exception only of wilful default, recklessness or fraud.

This letter may not be reproduced by you or used for any other purpose without our prior written consent.

This letter shall be governed by and shall be construed in accordance with English law.

Yours faithfully



Marsh Sport, Castlemead, 13th Floor, Lower Castle Street, Bristol, BS1 3AG
t: 0345 872 5060 | e: marshsport@marsh.com | w: www.marshsport.co.uk