



THE TIDEWAY CODE

A Code of Practice for rowing and paddling on the Tidal Thames

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This booklet is based on two previous Codes of Practice:

- *Rowing on the Tideway: A Code of Practice for Rowing on the Tidal Thames 2015 (Third edition).*
- *Paddling on the Tideway: A Code of Practice for Paddling on the Tidal Thames 2017 (First edition).*

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The Tideway Code:

A Code of Practice for rowing and paddling on the tidal Thames

Navigating any type of small recreational vessel on the tidal Thames, or Thames Tideway as it is also known, requires knowledge of the river and how it operates. The Tideway is by far the busiest inland waterway in the UK which, coupled with a fast-flowing tide and many bridges, piers and moorings, creates a challenging waterway on which to navigate.

This is the first edition of a combined Tideway Code – aimed at both rowers and paddlers – and follows many years of various, separate codes of practice being implemented in the Port of London. The Port of London Authority (PLA), Thames Regional Rowing Council (TRRC) and British Canoeing (BC) have produced this combined code to advise both new and existing users who plan to navigate anywhere along the tidal Thames between Teddington Lock and the Sea.

The Tideway Code is intended to be a readily available and easily assimilated user guide. It has been developed by experienced Tideway users with recommendations based on a detailed risk assessment and the requirements of local and international regulations. Its objective is to provide rowers and paddlers with a single comprehensive source of information and advice about how best to navigate on the tidal Thames.

The Tideway is a busy waterway and all users should ensure that they can cope with the expected conditions in a bustling tidal river. Activities should be risk assessed and undertaken safely, with appropriate good environmental practices and consideration for other river users. Safety will best be enhanced by the application of three fundamental principles:

- **Keep a proper lookout**
- **Know and follow the rules**
- **Show consideration for others**

Enjoy the river!

Port of London Authority (PLA)

The 95 miles of tidal Thames stretching between the estuary and Teddington Lock comes under the jurisdiction of the PLA whose role is to keep commercial and leisure users safe, protect and enhance the environment and promote the use of the river for trade and travel.

The PLA is ultimately responsible for regulating Tideway navigation and does that in a number of documents:

- Collision Regulations (Col Regs)
- Port of London Act
- Thames Byelaws
- General Directions
- Notices to Mariners (NtMs)

By its very nature, the Tideway Code must refer to and recognise these regulations. Wherever navigational regulations are quoted they are enclosed in a coloured panel, such as this one, for ease of recognition.

The PLA keeps all of its regulations under review and the latest additions can be found in their entirety on the PLA website – www.pla.co.uk

Ignorance of these regulations is not an acceptable defence in the event of an incident.

Why does this Code of Practice exist?

The Tideway Code is a special navigational concession for users of man-powered boats – specifically rowing boats, canoes, kayaks, dragon boats and stand-up paddleboards.

Its origins, known as “Working the Slacks”, are explained on the opposite page and it exists to allow for the **easiest** navigation on such a large tidal river. A study by the Salvage Association in 2004 concluded that: when used properly, these special navigation rules are also the **safest** option for small man-powered boats.

There are two Tideway Code Areas, Upper and Lower (see opposite page) where these special navigation rules apply and within which users are expected to navigate according to the Tideway Code. Outside these areas Col Regs or the starboard-side rule must be observed.

However, it must be made clear that being allowed to navigate by working the slacks, for sport and leisure, is a privilege conditional upon responsible, safe navigation, which may be removed if not adhered to. It is therefore up to the rowing and paddling communities – clubs, associations, commercial providers and individuals – to take responsibility for following the Tideway Code thus ensuring that the traditional privileges historically enjoyed in these areas are not taken away for good, to the detriment of their sports.

This Code of Practice is specifically aimed at **rowing and paddling** on the Tideway. For guidance and advice on other recreational sports and activities on the tidal Thames please see the PLA publication ‘*Tidal Thames: Recreational Users Guide*’ or visit the PLA leisure users website – www.boatingonthethames.co.uk

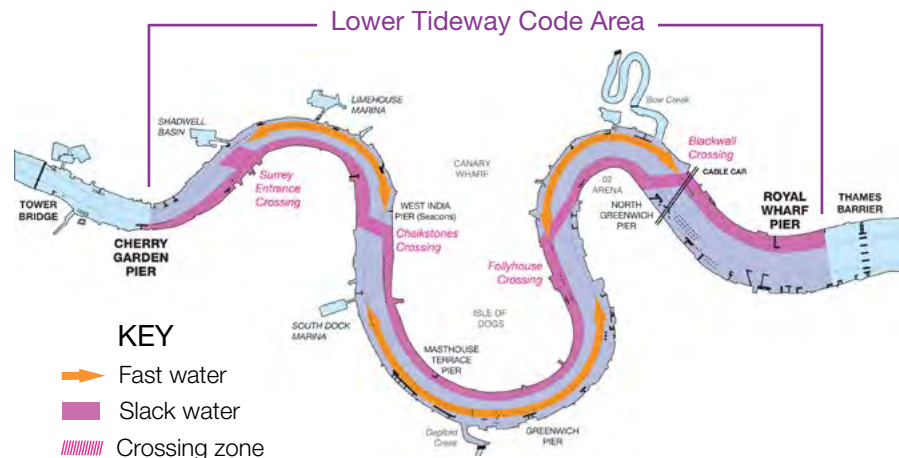
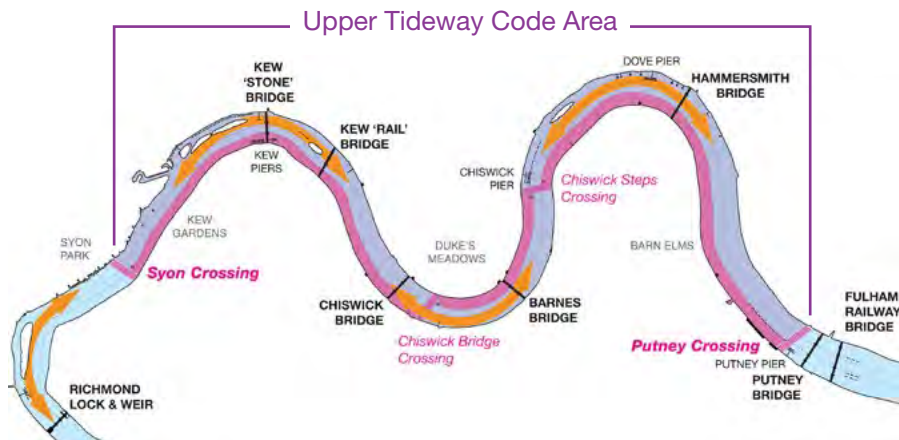
What is “working the slacks”?




Working the slacks is a navigation system historically developed by working oarsmen: to use the easier ‘slack’ water when rowing against the tide, rather than have to force their boat into a strong current.

In general, water flows faster around the outside of a bend it leaves slower or ‘slack’ water on the inside of the bend. Traditionally, oar-powered boats in transit have been allowed to break with the normal navigation rules (of staying to starboard) by rowing in this slower moving, ‘slack’ water on the inside of the bends – **but only against the tide.**

It is this practice that is known as working the slacks and it’s a little like being allowed to drive up the hard shoulder of the motorway against the flow of the traffic.

The Tideway meanders significantly so boats going against the tidal stream must swap banks to stay in the slack water. Within the Tideway Code areas, they may only do this at pre-arranged Crossing Zones.



- KEY**
-  Fast water
 -  Slack water
 -  Crossing zone

Rowing boats

For the purposes of this Code a rowing boat is defined as:

A small, lightweight, narrow-hulled boat propelled by the use of oars, where the oars are in contact with the hull and act as levers. The crew have their backs to the direction of travel

Types of rowing boat:

The types of rowing boat detailed on this page are not definitive but refer to the most common types found on the Tideway.

Rowing boats are generally made of either wood or carbon-fibre composites and there are basically two types:

- Sliding seat (fine boats).
- Fixed seat (larger boats).

Rowing is a generic term consisting of two basic techniques:

- **Sweeping** – each crew member has a single long oar which is drawn with both hands.
- **Sculling** – each crew member has two shorter oars, one in each hand.

Rowing boats can also either be coxed or coxless:

- **Coxed** – an additional, non-rowing crew member steers the boat. The coxswain (cox) may be in the stern or the bows of the boat but will always face in the direction of travel.
- **Coxless** – one of the rowing crew steers the boat, usually from the bow seat – by use of a foot steering system on larger boats. They will have their back to the direction of travel and have to look around to steer.

Fine boats (Racing boats)

These are, by some margin, the most common rowing boats found on the Tideway, particularly above Putney.

Fine boats have very long, narrow hulls with decks fore and aft, outriggers and sliding seats where crew members sit in-line. Crew numbers range from 9 people to 1 person:

- **Eight (sweep) & Octuple (scull):**
8 rowers + cox
Always coxed
- **Four (sweep) & Quad (scull):**
Coxed: 4 rowers + cox
Coxless: 4 rowers
- **Pair (sweep) & Double (scull):**
2 rowers
Almost always coxless
- **Single scull:**
1 rower
Always coxless



(Coxed) Eight*(Coxed) Four**(Coxless) Quad scull**(Coxless) Double scull*

Touring boats (Tubs)

Generally bigger, heavier and thus more stable than fine boats. Touring boats or 'tubs' also have outriggers and sliding seats. The crew sit in-line and can vary from 2 to 5 people. They can be both swept or sculled and can be coxed or coxless.

Gigs, Cutters & Skiffs

These are generic terms for medium-sized, open rowing boats. Usually more 'traditional', wooden-built boats, they have rowlocks on their gunwales and fixed seats and are much less common on the Tideway than fine boats.

Gigs are generally sea-going vessels and the most common is the Cornish pilot gig: a 6 person sweep crew who sit abreast in two rows and are always coxed.

Cutters are very similar to gigs but can be swept or sculled.

Thames skiffs, in the context of this Code, are sculled boats where the crew sit in-line and are more commonly 1 or 2 person boats, usually with coxes.

*Touring coxed four**Cornish gig**Thames skiffs*

Paddled boats

For the purposes of this Code a paddled boat is defined as:

A small, lightweight, narrow-hulled boat propelled by the use of paddles, where the paddles are held directly by the paddler who faces in the direction of travel.

Most modern kayaks and canoes are made of plastic although some older boats are often wooden as are some SUPs. Racing class boats are more often of a fibre-glass or carbon construction and inflatable kayaks, canoes and SUPs are becoming increasing popular.

Types of paddled boat:

The following examples of paddled boat are not definitive but refer to the most common types of paddled boat found on the Tideway.

Kayaks

A kayaker sits in their boat and propels it with a **double-ended paddle**. The boats generally have decks, although sit-on-top kayaks are seen occasionally. Kayaks generally have crews of 1 or 2 people (occasionally 4) who sit in-line. They come in larger, more stable touring/sea-going classes or much less stable racing classes (K1/K2) which are finer and faster.



Touring kayak



K1 racing kayak

Canoes

A canoeist may kneel or sit in the boat and propels it with a **single-ended paddle**. They are usually paddled by a crew of 1 or 2 people who sit in-line. Open canoes are often referred to as 'Canadian' canoes and are generally used for touring and recreation, whereas racing class canoes (C1/C2) have decks and are much finer and faster but much more unstable.



Touring canoe



C2 racing canoe

Stand-up paddleboards (SUP)

This is a fast-growing water sport with links to surfing and although some touring and racing boards differ in style, most SUPs are similar to a surf board. Commonly a single person maintains an upright stance on the board and uses a **long single paddle** to propel themselves through the water. SUPs are a comparatively unstable craft with little freeboard.



SUPs

Outrigger canoes (Outriggers)

Outriggers consist of a narrow main hull with smaller, stabilising outrigger or 'ama' on one side. They generally have a short fore and aft deck but are otherwise considered to be open boats which vary in size from 7m single person (OC1) to 14m 6 person (OC6). The crew sit in-line propelling the boat with a **single paddle**. Steering is done by the crew member in the stern.



OC6

Dragon boats

Dragon boats are long, open boats of varying sizes. The crew sit abreast and drive the boat along with a **single paddle** to the beat of a seated drummer in the bow. They are steered by a coxswain with a paddle who stands in the stern. Dragon boats are wider and have more freeboard than some paddled boats but are considered to be open boats.

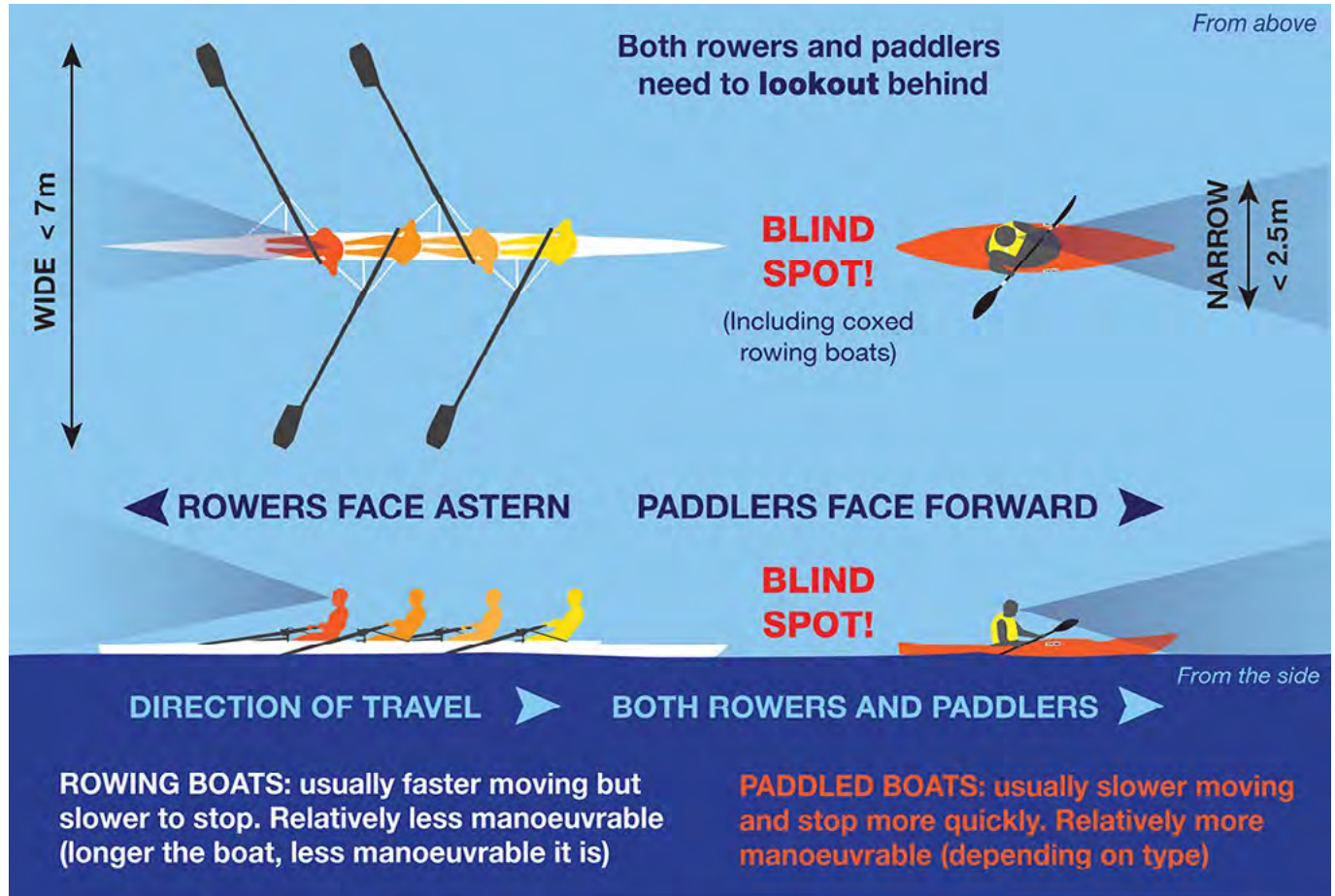


12 crew dragon boat

See the 'Equipment & Clothing' section (pp.20–33) for general advice on boat choice and suitability for certain water conditions.

There are restrictions for both rowing and paddled boats (SUPs in particular) on some areas of the Tideway (from p.74).

Rowing and paddling: the fundamental differences



Above Putney bias

Due partly to restrictions and partly to the suitability of the water, the vast majority of rowing and paddling on the Tideway happens above Putney.

It's no coincidence that the content of this Code is skewed towards the upper section of the river between Putney and Teddington, since it is by far the busiest section for both rowing and paddling and thus requires the most attention.

This concentration of small boats can lead to potential problems since they have to share the same navigation patterns. Issues can be compounded by differences in relative speed and manoeuvrability between different types of small boat and by rowers and paddlers often facing in opposite ways, despite travelling in the same direction!

Therefore all small boat users must pay particular attention to their **lookout** ([p.52](#)) as well as understand the relative nature of each others' vessels (see opposite page).

The same applies below Putney of course but in this section of the river there are far fewer small boats. Between Putney and The Thames Barrier the issues are more about dealing with large, commercial vessels and the additional danger that comes with them, particularly through the very busy Heart of London ([pp.106–109](#)).

Using this Code

In general, the information in this Code applies to both rowers and paddlers. Of course both have their own terms to describe their equipment and processes and the Code aims to use the most suitable generic language. Within this Code the following terms are used:

Small boat

Any small man-powered rowing or paddled boat.

Outing

Any training, journey or trip on the river.

Steers

Any person steering the small boat whether a coxswain, crew member or paddler.

Crew

People propelling a multi-person boat (+ coxes).

Inbound

Moving up-river/inland.

Outbound

Moving down-river/seawards.

There are occasions where the detail is specific or relevant to only rowers or paddlers. Where this occurs a small symbol identifying the relevant group is shown either alongside the heading, as a bullet point or on a diagram:



Rowing-specific



Paddling-specific

Ebb tide, flood tide and the tidal stream

The Thames below Teddington Lock is a **tidal river** and navigation is essentially based around the behaviour of the tide, which changes regularly.

The tidal rise and fall can be as much as 7m and the flow can reach 4 knots (more around bridge, piers, moorings etc.) so attention must be paid to both the direction and the strength of the tide and the stream. On the Tideway the tide will always turn first downriver (i.e. at the estuary).

Both rowers and paddlers (including coaches and group leaders) need to be especially aware of the tide direction with regard to working the slacks against the tide and how this affects navigation within the Tideway Code Areas (pp.59–62).

It is therefore vital for safe navigation that the tidal stream conditions and tidal sets (p.14) are understood and situational awareness is maintained at all times.

What is ‘the stream’?

The visible flow on the surface of the river is referred to by many Thames boaters as ‘the stream’. Although they almost always flow in the same direction, the stream’s direction can occasionally differ from that of the tide:

A less common effect, known as **swelling**, happens during periods of prolonged, heavy rainfall when there is a visible outbound flow even though there is an inbound/flood tide. Swelling usually occurs during the winter months and steers above Putney should always **navigate according to the visible stream direction** and not the *predicted* tide.

To avoid any confusion, this Code presumes the normal state of the stream and tide flowing in the same direction. This direction of flow is referred to as the **‘tidal stream’**.

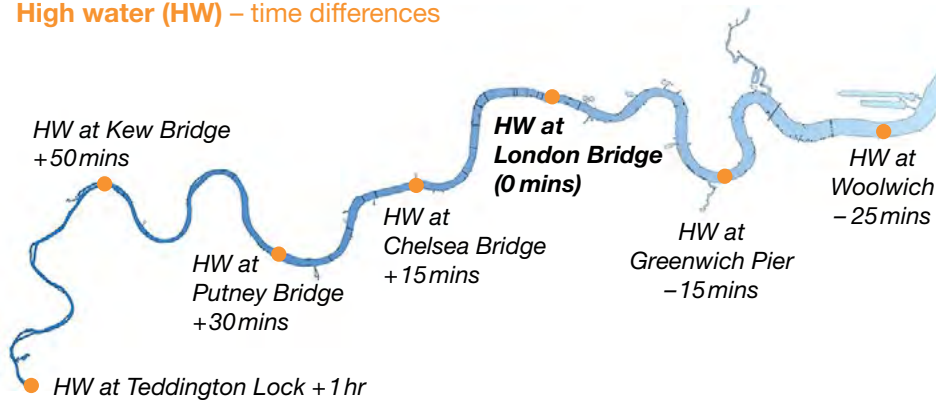
Knowing the tide direction is critical and tables of *predicted* tide times are available online at – tidepredictions.pla.co.uk/ or on the PLA smart phone app (p.16). Various other websites and apps also provide this information.

Apart from tide tables, which only give *predicted* tide times, there are several practical ways to check the tidal stream direction, although you must always allow for the strength and direction of the wind:

- Look at boats moored only at one end, they will hang downstream from their mooring.
- See what direction floating objects drift in.
- Look at which direction the water is flowing past a bridge buttress or buoy (see below).

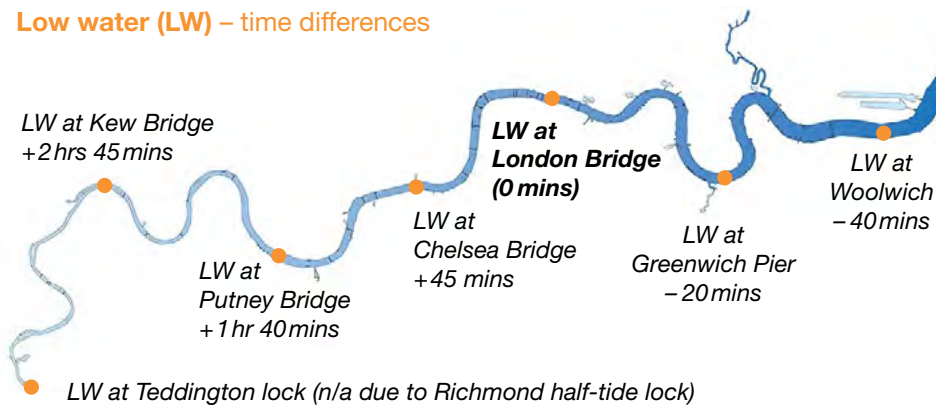


High water (HW) – time differences



These diagrams show approximate time differences between Woolwich and Teddington (based on London Bridge). Predicted tide tables are available online – tidepredictions.pla.co.uk/

Low water (LW) – time differences



▶ The ebb tide

When the tidal stream is flowing **outbound** and the water level is **falling**.

Above Putney the ebb tide takes approximately 8.5hrs to run out from high water to low water.

? Turn of the tide

At the top (high water) or bottom (low water) of the tide, as it is changing from one direction to the other, there is a period of up to 10minutes called '**slack water**' where there is no tidal stream. Slack water requires extra care to navigate on (p.73).

◀ The flood tide

When the tidal stream is flowing **inbound** and the water level is **rising**.

Above Putney the flood tide takes approximately 4.5hrs to come in from low water to high water.

Factors affecting the tidal stream

Wind

The wind can have a considerable effect on the river. If the wind is in the same direction as the tide it will speed up the tidal stream. If it is against the tide (wind-over-tide), it will 'chop-up' the top of the water and can make for very difficult conditions, especially at high tide. Sometimes a very strong wind can even give a false impression of the tidal stream direction. The Tideway meanders considerably so it is important when planning a trip to remember that wind will affect the river differently along its course.

Thames Barrier closures

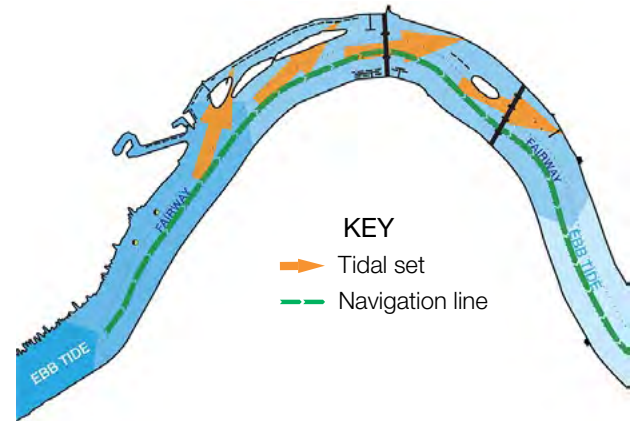
When the Thames Barrier is closed (see opposite) it will have a noticeable and confusing effect on the tidal stream (similar to swelling, [p.12](#)). It may be hard to tell in which direction the tidal stream is flowing and the flood tide may not really feature at all. If in doubt, navigate to starboard/ Col Regs ([p.58](#)) since there will be no slacks to work in!

Draw-offs (normally October – November)

The draw-off usually lasts for four weeks and is when the half-tide barrier at Richmond is left open during low water for maintenance. This allows the river to drain to its natural level, which is much lower than usual. This also has an effect on the river flow and low water level down as far as Kew Bridge and sometimes beyond.

Neap tides (weak tides with a small tidal range)

On rare occasions a particularly weak, flooding neap tide can cause similar effects to swelling ([p.12](#)).



Tidal 'set'

Small boats in particular need to be aware of the tidal set. This is caused by the tidal stream which will always 'set' to its natural course around the outside of a bend. However, the natural course of the tidal stream may not follow the correct navigational course.

In the example above, heading outbound around the bend on an ebb tide, the correct navigation is to stay on the starboard side of the Fairway, towards the inside of the bend. However the tidal set will naturally push boats towards the outside of the bend. Steers must be aware of the need to pro-actively adjust their course to correctly remain on the starboard navigational line and avoid their boat being pushed out of position (and possibly into danger) by the tidal set.

Fluvial flow and the 'Ebb tide flag warning' system

Fluvial flow is the amount of water flowing outbound (down-river) from the non-tidal Thames. There is always water flowing outbound and is the reason that the river fills up very quickly when it meets the inbound flood tide. After heavy rainfall, the fluvial flow will increase causing the outbound stream to increase in speed. When combined with an ebb tide it can make the river more difficult to navigate on – and in some cases dangerous – which is why a warning system has been put in place.

'Ebb tide flag warning' system (see pictures, right)

The PLA provide an 'Ebb tide flag warning' system which is in place to help indicate the speed of the fluvial flow to small boat users **between Teddington and Putney**. It is similar to the red and yellow board system used by the Environment Agency above Teddington but on the Tideway **it only applies to the ebb tide**.

The system is updated daily and displayed (as a widget) on the following homepages – www.boatingonthethames.co.uk and www.pla.co.uk
This widget is freely available to all Tideway clubs and should also be installed on their own websites.

All small boats using the Upper Tideway should monitor this system and use the advice provided to judge if their boat choices are suitable and crews are sufficiently experienced for the prevailing ebb tide conditions.

Other information regarding scheduled Thames Barrier closures and draw-offs are available via the PLA website, Notices to Mariners page – www.pla.co.uk/Safety/Regulations-and-Guidance/Notices-to-Mariners/Notices-to-Mariners

Ebb Tide Flag Warning



Extreme Caution –
Very Strong Fluvial Flows

The Port of London Authority advise all river users that the fluvial flows are very strong and conditions are difficult and dangerous. All man-powered vessels are advised not to go afloat on the Ebb Tide.

Ebb Tide Flag Warning



Caution – Strong Fluvial Flows

The Port of London Authority advise man-powered vessels, in particular: Beginners, Novices, Younger Junior (J15's and younger), or any weaker crews, and those that do not usually navigate on the tidal section of the river Thames not to go afloat on the Ebb Tide. All river users of man-powered vessels should navigate with extreme caution and consider whether it is safe for them to go afloat on the Ebb Tide.

Ebb Tide Flag Warning



Average Fluvial Flows

The Port of London Authority advise all river users to navigate with caution and maintain a proper lookout.

Ebb Tide Flag Warning



Caution – Low Fluvial Flows

The Port of London Authority advise all river users that the fluvial flow is less than usual and lower than predicted tides may be expected, especially around low water.

Topical information

All recreational river users should be aware of the information and guidance available regarding the Thames Tideway.

Notices to Mariners (NtMs)

NtMs are posted on the PLA website but can also be emailed on request. Sign-up via the PLA website – www.pla.co.uk

PLA online events calendar

Shows all recreational events planned on the Thames Tideway – www.pla.co.uk/Events/Annual-Events-Calendar

PLA smart phone app

All of the above and more is available via this app.



Social media

Twitter is particularly topical:

[@LondonPortAuth](https://twitter.com/LondonPortAuth) [@ChiswickRNLI](https://twitter.com/ChiswickRNLI)
[@AlanBarrierEA](https://twitter.com/AlanBarrierEA) [@TowerRNLI](https://twitter.com/TowerRNLI)
[@BritishCanoeing](https://twitter.com/BritishCanoeing) [@ocukcoach](https://twitter.com/ocukcoach)
[@Thames_rrc](https://twitter.com/Thames_rrc) [@Thames21](https://twitter.com/Thames21)
[@MrSafeT_Tideway](https://twitter.com/MrSafeT_Tideway) [@ThamesPoo](https://twitter.com/ThamesPoo)

What to check and assess

It is the responsibility of **everyone** whether afloat solo, as a crew/group member or as a coach/group leader to ensure that they have assessed all the following factors which may affect their outing.

Do not proceed if the outcome of these checks shows up a problem with your equipment, knowledge, experience or fitness.

The novice/inexperienced rower/paddler should not allow themselves to be coerced by peer-pressure, or a coach, into going afloat if they are not comfortable with any aspect of the planned trip.

Who is afloat?

Clubs and centres are advised to keep a log or sign-out board of who/which boats are afloat and when they expect to return. Members should also know what to do if a boat fails to return or is overdue – this information should be part of a club's standard operating procedures and displayed near the signing-out board.

In addition to signing-out, or in non-club situations, paddlers are advised to inform London VTS ([p.34](#)) prior to going afloat and again on their return.

Communications ([p.34](#))

To communicate with London VTS, the emergency services, or their clubs, the following should carry either a mobile phone (in a buoyant, waterproof case) or a personal VHF radio set (*Channel 14*):

- ✦ Rowing coaches, single scullers and coxless boats (particularly in the dark).
- ✦ Paddle group leaders, small groups and soloists below Richmond Lock.
 - Event organisers.

Weather conditions

Weather conditions on the tidal Thames can have a significant effect on the safety and handling of small boats. The river is often exposed and the weather can create big waves and very choppy water, especially when combined with washes from motor vessels. Conditions can become awkward and physically demanding in a matter of minutes.

Wind

Because of their low weight and minimal freeboard, all small boats must take the effect of the wind into account when planning an outing.

- Wind-over-tide (i.e. wind blowing against the tidal stream) is a serious consideration as it can create steep, standing waves and ‘choppy’ conditions.
- Wind speeds can vary and noticeably increase through and around bridge arches as well as in areas with tall buildings. There can also be [sudden] changes of wind direction since the river meanders considerably.
- The wind can have an extra chilling effect on the body which will lower the level at which cold is felt and can lead to exposure and even exhaustion, especially if wet.

Rain

Rain can very much affect the perceived temperature and it will feel much colder if a rower or paddler is wet, particularly if it’s also windy.

Rain can also seriously reduce visibility, particularly the ability for large motor vessels to spot small boats.

Temperature

Hot temperatures can be as physically demanding as cold ones so consideration should be made to both when deciding on the duration of an outing and what kit to wear.

Visibility

As well as rain causing reduced visibility, the tidal Thames is prone to fog. **Do not attempt to go afloat if the visibility is less than 200m.**

A good guide is that if the opposite bank cannot be seen clearly then do not go afloat. For example: the river is 300m wide at Greenwich, 200m wide at Putney and Hammersmith Bridges but narrower than 200m above Hammersmith.

If reduced visibility is encountered during an outing then a safe haven should be sought. Fog is often a more serious hazard than darkness and, although large motor vessels may have radar, small boats do not show-up on radar.

Correctly lighting your boat is also essential in reduced visibility, such as fog ([pp.28–33](#)).

Lightning

Lightning is potentially fatal and if experienced in your vicinity, get off the river as soon as possible.


No boat should go afloat unless 30 minutes have elapsed since the last visible lightning.


Tidal and water conditions [\(pp.12–15\)](#)

Since the Thames Tideway meanders considerably along its course, it is important to understand how this can affect water conditions on different parts of the river, especially regarding the state of the tide and tidal sets.

What is the direction of the tide and when is it predicted to change? – tidepredictions.pla.co.uk/


Will the intended course be affected by tidal sets or changing tides?

 **For rowers:** the generally accepted practice is, as far as is practicable, to row out and cover technical aspects against the tide and to row back, doing work/pieces with the tide.

 **For paddlers:** long trips are best arranged to go with the tide as much as possible. Plan return trips around the change of tide.

How high is the tide?

High tide means ‘lumpier’ water but more space. Low tide means flatter water but shallows and less space. Towards the end of an ebb tide the stream will be relatively slow.

 Getting off the river two hours either side of high tide can be difficult (particularly below Putney Bridge), as there is little or no exposed foreshore and in places there are few egress points. When planning an outing, find out where the safe exits from the river are.

Apart from the weather, will anything else affect the water? For example:

- What colour is the ‘Ebb tide warning flag’ and will it adversely affect fluvial flow?
- Is anything likely to cause ‘Swelling’ such as excessive rainfall, the Thames Barrier being shut, or a neap tide?
- Is there a Draw-off at Richmond Lock and Weir?
- Is there an event taking place or a river closure?

Time of day

There are some time restrictions which apply to both SUPs and rowing boats. See the Tideway directions sections for specific details ([from p.74](#)).

Weekend mornings and summer evenings are often particularly busy on the Upper Tideway, where there is a lot of rowing activity.

Central London is almost always busy but even more so in the summer months. Commuter services are less frequent at weekends above Chelsea Bridge but sightseeing trips still operate, from around 10.00am. The PLA therefore encourages small boats to only transit Central London before 10.00am on weekend mornings for the quietest conditions ([p.104](#)).

Rowing and Paddling at night [\(pp.28–33\)](#)

Equipment and Clothing [\(pp.20–27\)](#)

Accreditation and Qualifications [\(pp.38–45\)](#)

Previous experience

The experience of all rowers and paddlers (whether solo or as members of a crew/group) should be taken into account, particularly with regard to the water and weather conditions:

- Long distance outings may not be suitable for the inexperienced.
- For the inexperienced consider using larger or more stable boats accompanied by coaches/leaders/steers familiar with the Tideway.
- Leaders or coaches must have the necessary qualifications and experience to take a group out on the Tideway ([p.41](#)).

Outings through Central London must not be undertaken by the inexperienced in unstable boats. The Tideway below Putney should be treated as ‘exposed water’ and those using it require suitable knowledge and experience for the potentially demanding conditions.

Group briefings

For coached and group outings it is important that all steers or paddlers are briefed beforehand by the coach or leader on what to expect and the purpose of the outing. The briefing should cover all of the points detailed in this section and also include any relevant information regarding group management, becoming separated and emergency situations.

➤ Paddle group management ([also p.69](#))

A paddle group should consist of no more than 10–15 boats. If there are more participants then consider splitting them into smaller groups, each with a suitably qualified group leader.

As well as leaders having suitable qualifications, groups should have a sufficient ratio of leaders to participants which will vary depending on the experience of the group and where on the river they are paddling. Clubs and organisations should produce their own guidelines for this although SUP groups must have a minimum 1:4 ratio of leaders to paddlers.

➤ Rowing floatillas

When going out for coaching purposes, any rowing flotilla (and its coaches) must still comply with the Tideway Code, paying particular regard to:

- Positioning ([pp.58–59](#))
- Proceeding abreast ([p.68](#))
- Overtaking ([p.70](#))
- Stopping ([p.66](#))

Rowing more than two abreast in the Fairway for the purposes of ‘a competitive piece’ is forbidden and boats should remain in-line astern in the Inshore Zone.

The ratio of coaches to boats will be determined by the clubs own guidelines but realistically a coach will struggle to oversee and/or maintain proper control over more than 2 fours or eights or 4 pairs or singles.

Personal floatation devices (PFDs)

Anyone afloat in a small boat on the Tideway should be able to swim

➔ Paddling

Paddlers should wear a PFD at all times while afloat on the Tideway (see p.25 for exceptions).

The most suitable type of PFD for paddle sports is a **Buoyancy Aid** (BA). Conditions on the Tideway can vary considerably and should always be taken into account when choosing the most suitable PFD to use.



The main benefit of buoyancy aids over other types of PFD is that they are 'inherently buoyant' (i.e. they don't need to be inflated for them to do their job). Therefore, pouch or 'bum-bag' style PFDs are discouraged for use on the Tideway as they would be very difficult to don and operate once already in the water.

Paddlers who are weak swimmers or who have a medical condition that may require it, should consider a higher-rated PFD or manually-inflating life jacket.

➔ Rowing

All launch occupants and coxes **must** wear a PFD at all times while afloat on the Tideway, without exception.

The most suitable type of PFD for non-rowers is a **Life Jacket**, which are necessary as these people are generally wearing more and heavier clothing and footwear than the athletes.

It is accepted practice for athletes not to wear a PFD but all club members must prove their swimming ability before going afloat. Athletes who are weak swimmers or who have a medical condition that requires it, must wear a suitable PFD. Rowing-compatible PFDs are available.



Self-inflating (automatic) life jackets, with crotch straps and a minimum 150N rating are advised. The exception is for coxes in bow-loaded boats where manually-inflated jackets should be used because automatic jackets run the risk of inflating with the coxswain still in the boat, trapping them under the bow canvas. It is recommended that clubs use alternate coloured jackets to differentiate between self and manual inflating jackets.

All PFDs should have an EN/ISO number and be rated to support the weight of the wearer, taking their clothing into account.

Fitting

- The PFD should be worn on top of all other clothing and **must remain done-up at all times while afloat**, including the crotch strap, if fitted.
- It should be easy to put on, take off and adjust.
- The fitting should be a snug but not tight. It should let the wearer to freely move their arms and allow them to bend at the waist. *Loose-fitting PFDs could come off in an emergency so always ensure proper adjustment before going afloat.*
- The PFD should allow the wearer to swim easily in water and keep their face above the water.
- Having a whistle and light attached to PFDs is also recommended.

Maintenance

- Check PFDs on a regular basis for things such as rips or stitching coming undone, broken buckles and zips or missing ties. If you are unsure about any aspect of a PFD, do not go afloat with it and contact the manufacturer or an approved retailer for further advice.
- Have PFDs regularly serviced by an approved supplier according to the manufacturers' instructions.
- Do not machine wash or tumble dry PFDs.

Storage

- After use, rinse in clean water, hang it up and allow to dry naturally.
- When dry, store in a cool dry place ideally out of direct sunlight and away from direct heat.



Further information is available from the following websites:

RYA – www.rya.org.uk/knowledge-advice/safe-boating/look-after-yourself/Pages/buoyancy-aids-lifejackets.aspx

RNLI – rnli.org/safety/what-we-can-do-for-you

BR – www.britishrowing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Safety-Alert-February-2015-Lifejackets.pdf

Personal clothing, footwear and equipment

- **Going barefoot is not recommended on the Tideway.** Suitable water sports shoes/boots for getting on and off the water. Tideway users may need to walk on an uneven foreshore or boating hard with the risk of rocks, rubbish and sharp objects.
- Rowers and paddlers must ensure that they are wearing suitable clothing for the (forecast) conditions. A combination of water/wind proof outer items and lightweight man-made fibre sports clothing with thermal, quick-drying properties are particularly suitable.
- Peaked hats and sunglasses for protection in hot, sunny weather.
- Wind, rain and cold temperatures will require additional layers.
- Pogies to keep hands warm in very cold conditions.
- ➔ Consider wetsuits and perhaps even dry suits in the winter.

Other items that should be considered, depending on the conditions:

- Mobile phone (in a buoyant, waterproof case), especially for unaccompanied or solo outings and essential in the dark.
- Suitable and effective boat lights if afloat in the dark or in poor visibility ([pp.29–33](#)).
- Whistle (ideally attached to a PFD).
- ➔ Drinking water and snacks.
- ➔ Paddle leash and/or spare paddle(s).
- ➔ Spare clothes (in a dry bag).
- ➔ Pump. ➔ Gloves. ➔ Rigger jigger.



High visibility clothing (hi-vis)

It is recommended that all small boat crew members wear bright-coloured or hi-vis clothing to improve their visibility to each other and other vessels.

This is especially important in the dark or reduced visibility, where reflective trim is also a very useful feature.

Hi-vis hats in particular are recommended below Putney where they are especially helpful to the helm of large commercial vessels for identifying small boats.



Additional equipment

→ To be worn or carried by rowing coaches

All launch occupants **must** wear suitable Life Jackets (p.20)

- Mobile phone (in a buoyant, waterproof case) and/or a personal VHF* radio set (*Channel 14†*).
- Paddle (in case of breakdown).
- Perry buoy or life ring.
- First aid kit (+ qualification).
- Emergency clothing or foil vests.
- Spare kill cord.
- Throw line/tow line.
- Torch.
- Knife.

→ To be worn or carried by paddling group leaders (and assistants) below Richmond Lock

- Personal VHF* radio set (*Channel 14†*) and/or a mobile phone (in a buoyant, waterproof case).
- Whistle (ideally attached to the PFD).
- Spare line/tow line.
- Spare paddle.
- Spare clothing (and/or foil vests).
- First aid kit (+ qualification).
- Torch/SOS light.
- Laminated map.
- Knife.

* SUP leaders and solo paddlers **must** carry VHF radio below Putney Bridge and it is recommended that all small boats to keep a listening watch on *Channel 14* for commercial vessel activity below Putney.

† VHF may have limited range, particularly upriver and/or at low water. For more details about using VHF radio see [page 34](#).

Kill cords

Launch drivers **must always** use a suitable kill cord attached between themselves and the engine whenever the engine is running.

The kill cord serves only one, very vital purpose: to stop the engine when the driver moves away from the controls.

Failure to wear a kill cord puts the occupants and others at risk and is a serious breach of safety. Such a serious contravention may necessitate intervention by the authorities.

A spare kill cord should always be carried in the launch.



Wave height

Rowers and paddlers must be aware that the tidal Thames is categorised by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency thus:

- **Above Gravesend:**
Category C waters – expect waves of up to 1.2m in height.
- **Below Gravesend:**
Category D waters – expect waves of over 2.0m in height.

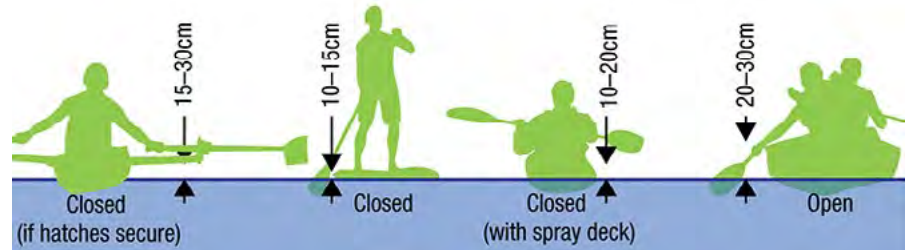


Boat suitability: for the prevailing conditions

Freeboard: the amount of hull above the waterline.

All small boats have minimal freeboard in comparison to motor vessels and this very much affects their ability to cope with rough water. Larger rowing shells such as touring boats, gigs and skiffs have a little more freeboard than fine boats but are also usually open boats (see buoyancy, opposite).

Sufficient freeboard is a vital consideration on the tidal Thames as wash and draw-off from motor vessels can be difficult to handle if it is coming from the side or unexpectedly from behind. Certain weather conditions, particularly wind against tidal stream, can also cause very rough water.



Decking: is the boat is 'open' or 'closed'?

The integral decks on a closed boat allow water to pass over the boat without taking any on board (swamping). Spray decks fitted to paddled boats will help enormously in this regard.

The integral decks in most modern rowing shells also help avoid swamping by limiting the volume of water that can come aboard. In this way, modern rowing shells should remain rowable even when partially swamped.

Fully open boats such as Canadian canoes and older (wooden) rowing shells are much more susceptible to swamping.

Buoyancy: a boat's ability to remain afloat even if swamped.

In addition to a PFD, the boat itself can also act as a useful aid in remaining afloat in an emergency situation – but only if the boat is itself buoyant.



Paddleboards have inherent (built-in) buoyancy. Most modern kayaks and outrigger canoes are also inherently buoyant due to their decks – but only if any hatches are correctly done-up. Some older paddled boats, most open canoes and dragon boats, may require additional buoyancy bags to be retro-fitted for safe Tideway use.



Since rowers don't usually wear PFDs, all rowing boats afloat on the Tideway **must** be fitted with inherent buoyancy (i.e. waterproof hatches) or be retro-fitted with suitable buoyancy bags. All buoyancy must be sufficient to allow the boat to keep the whole crew afloat in the event of a capsized.

Conclusion

Open boats (canoes or dragon boats), very narrow racing-style paddled boats, single sculls and smaller rowing boats are not well suited to rough water or big waves. Neither are SUPs, due to their almost non-existent freeboard.

Recommendations

- All open boats should be retro-fitted with additional, suitable buoyancy bags sufficient to ensure they remain manoeuvrable even if swamped.

✦ Conditions are often demanding below Wandsworth and only the more experienced paddlers should venture below this point using a suitable kayak or canoe. It is recommended that dragon boats, SUPs and particularly inflatable boats remain above Putney Bridge where water conditions are less demanding.

If a club or an experienced adult individual determines that their boat is an adequate substitute for a PFD when paddling above Richmond Lock, where the river is more benign and semi-tidal, a careful risk assessment should be carried out.

✦ In rough conditions, rowers should consider using larger boats or limiting the scope of their outing to more sheltered areas.

Note: All rowing boats **must** also have suitable, functioning heel restraints and bow balls fitted before going afloat. Both of these pieces of safety equipment are essential and potentially life-saving.

Port of London Thames
Byelaws 2012 – Byelaw 53

Vessel identification and marking

A vessel to which this byelaw applies must exhibit its name painted in letters (or numbers) of a length not less than 0.1 metres and of proportionate breadth on each side of and in a colour contrasting with that of the hull or superstructure, provided that, if the vessel is of less than 20 metres in length and compliance with the foregoing requirements is impracticable, the name or number must be otherwise exhibited in one or more positions as prominently and clearly as practicable.

→ Rowing boat identification (ID)

All rowing and coaching boats using the tidal Thames, including those visiting the Tideway for Head races or training and foreign crews, **must** display a six-character ID code comprising a three letter club code plus three unique numbers. All ID codes **must** be registered with the club they relate to.

Contact British Rowing for club codes. Tideway club codes can be found on [pages126–127](#).

ID codes can also be registered with the Environment Agency (EA) allowing them be used off-Tideway, without requiring a separate EA boating licence. The cost of registering a boat's ID with the EA is approximately half the cost of purchasing a separate boating licence.

Rowing boat ID code, specification:

Size: 50mm minimum cap height, preferably 60mm.

Typeface: Ariel, Helvetica or similar '*sans serif*' style font.

Colour: Any but must contrast with the colour of the shell and be easily legible from 30m in daylight.

Position: Ideally at the forward (bow) end of the sax board and on both sides of the boat.



➔ Paddled boat identification (ID)

Boats that belong to clubs or commercial outfits

Such boats must display a **five-character ID code** comprising a unique two digit number followed by a three letter club code. To register a club code please contact the PLA ([p.128](#)).

Personal and private boats

Boats owned by individuals are required to be marked with a **name** (see Byelaw 53, opposite). They are not specifically required to display a five-character club ID but are encouraged to do so (see panel right). Owners are also advised to display contact information on their boats, such as the ID sticker found in the RNLI's Kayaking Safety Pack.

Paddled boat ID code, specification:

Size: 40mm minimum cap height.

Typeface: Ariel, Helvetica or similar 'sans serif' style font.

Colour: Any but must contrast with the hull colour and be easily legible from 30m in daylight. A recommended option is to place the ID on retro-reflective SOLAS tape, for increased visibility.

Position: In a prominent place on both sides of the boat, ideally on the most vertical surface possible above the waterline.

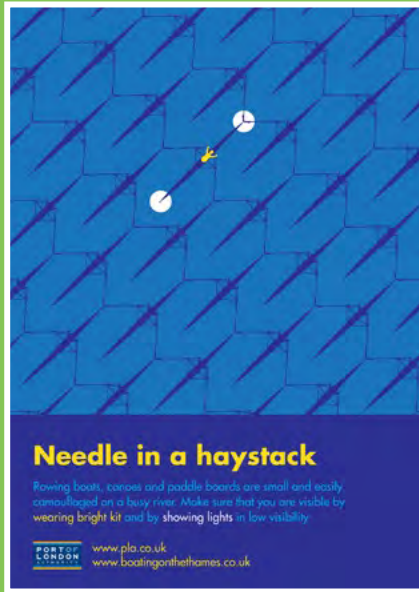


Why boat ID is necessary

Club ID codes and names allow boats to be more easily identified in an emergency or, if found unattended, returned to their owner.

If more than one group is out on the river, particularly in Central London, using the boat's ID code as a call-sign assists vessels to distinguish between the groups and to make contact via VHF.

Boat ID codes are also useful for incident reporting ([p.36](#)) and being able to identify a specific group or boat can help with incident investigation.



All small boats **must** inform London VTS (p.34) if they are out in the dark below Wandsworth Bridge, either by phone or VHF radio (*Channel 14*).

SUPs may not paddle after dark below Chelsea Bridge.

Afloat in the dark and reduced visibility

Going afloat in the dark or in reduced visibility is evidently much more hazardous than in daylight so requires additional equipment and different clothing – as well as more thorough planning and risk assessment.

- All boats must be correctly lit (see opposite and overleaf).
- As far as possible, wear high visibility clothing and hats (white or bright colours) preferably with reflective trim.
- It is essential that someone knows who is afloat. Use a sign-out board and/or inform London VTS (p.34).
- Always carry means of communication: mobile phone or VHF handset (*Channel 14*) or other means of attracting attention such as a torch and/or whistle.
- Use of reflective tape on boats and/or oars/paddles is a very effective way of improving a boat's visibility in the dark. On paddles boats the ID should ideally be applied over a reflective base (p.27).



It is recommended that rowing boats are accompanied by a launch after dark and that single scullers go out in a minimum of two boats together.



Solo paddling is not recommended in the dark (p.69) and it is preferable for paddlers to proceed in a group, as a group can be more easily seen (see opposite).

- Consider limiting the range of outings to areas of the river that are well lit from the bank.
- Sunrise and sunset times are displayed on both the Met office and BBC weather forecasts.

Boat lighting

By law, boats must correctly lit in darkness and reduced visibility. If boats do not have the correct lights when afloat then the Master of the vessel is breaking the law.

Small boats need to be as visible as possible, so lights must be displayed at all times of reduced visibility such as mist, fog, rain or snow and of course at night or in the early morning. Darkness is defined as before sunrise or after sunset.

If an evening outing is planned, even if the intention is to return in daylight, lights must be taken as daylight can fade very quickly or an unexpected delay may be encountered. **If in doubt, use lights.** For details see:

→ Rowing boats ([p.30](#)) and coaching launches ([p.31](#)).

→ Paddled boats ([pp.32–33](#)).



Reflective tape and a large group vastly increases visibility

Col Reg Rule 25

Sailing vessels underway and vessels under oars

d (ii) A vessel under oars may exhibit the lights prescribed in this Rule for sailing vessels, but if she does not, she shall have ready at hand an electric torch or lighted lantern showing a white light which shall be exhibited in sufficient time to prevent collision.

Col Reg Rule 20

Application (Lights and Shapes)

The lights prescribed by these rules shall, if carried, also be exhibited from sunrise to sunset in restricted visibility and may be exhibited in all other circumstances when it is deemed necessary.

For the purposes of this rule paddled boats are also considered to be 'under oars'.

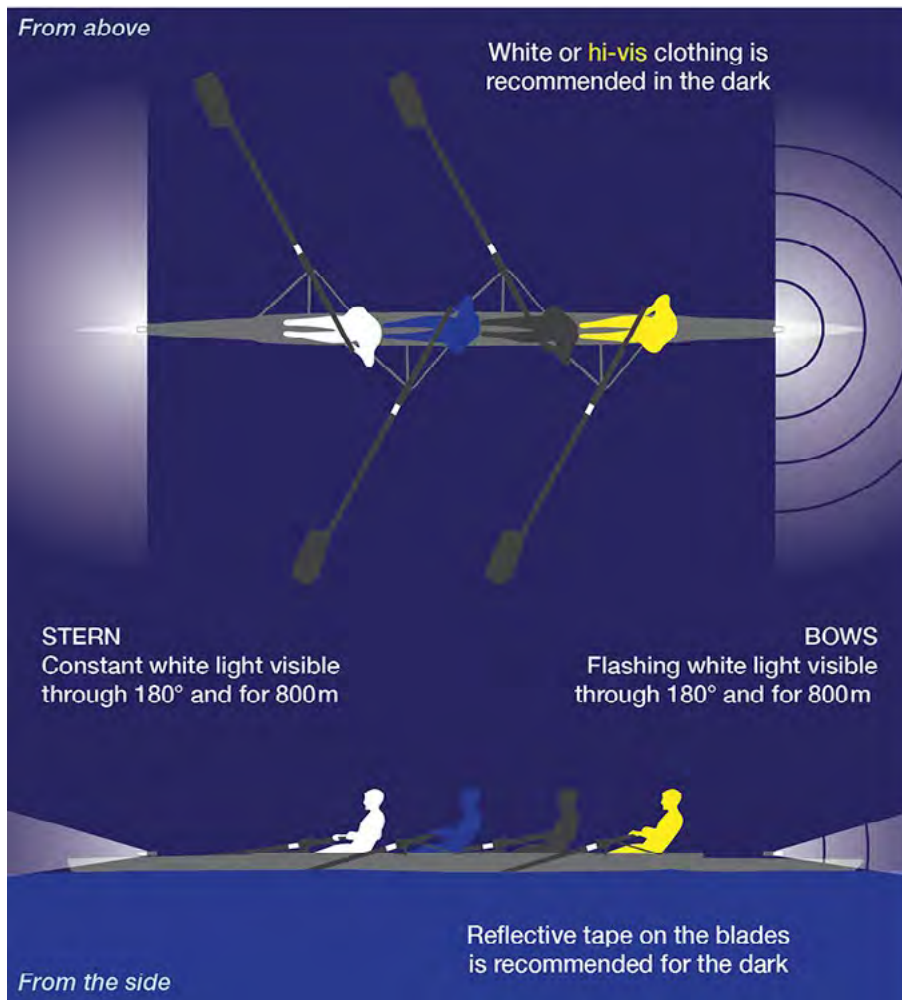
→ Lighting rowing boats

The following lights should be firmly fixed to the boat:

On the bow: a flashing white light (to determine direction of travel).

On the stern: a constant white light (i.e. not flashing).

- Each light must be **visible for 800m** and **through 180°** – the boat must effectively have lighting visible through 360°.
- Red or other coloured lights should never be used.
- Lights must have **good batteries**, be waterproof and diffused so as not to 'dazzle' other river users.
- Unidirectional lights are not permitted as they are not safe. At least one spare light should be carried at all times and *additional* lights or white LED sticks, attached to the back of the bow or cox, may be used.
- Reflective tape on the oar is recommended to help improve a boat's visibility.



→ Lighting coaching launches

At times of reduced visibility and in the dark launches must display a constant, stable masthead white light, **visible through 360° and for 800m**. This should be at least 300mm above the head of the driver with port and starboard side lights below. A back-up torch should always be carried.



If you do not have the correct lights you are breaking the law so you do not go afloat.

Col Reg Rule 23

Power-driven Vessels Underway (Lights and Shapes)

- (a) A power-driven vessel underway shall exhibit:
- (i) a masthead light forward;
 - (ii) sidelights; and
 - (iv) a stern light.
- (d) (i) A power driven vessel of less than 12 metres in length may in lieu of the lights prescribed in paragraph (a) of this Rule exhibit an all-round white light and sidelights;
- (ii) a power driven vessel of less than 7 metres in length whose maximum speed does not exceed 7 knots may in lieu of the lights prescribed in paragraph (a) of this Rule exhibit an all-round white light and shall, if practicable, also exhibit sidelights.

A cheap and effective way to arrange suitable boat lights for both rowing and paddled boats is as follows:

Take a small polythene food container, a basic LED bike light, some self-adhesive dual-lock tape (or heavy-duty Velcro/magnetic tape). Use the tape to first fix the light inside the container and then the container to the boat.

Lights with multiple LEDs and either AA or AAA batteries are best. Single LEDs and button batteries are not sufficiently powerful for Tideway use.

Lighting paddled boats

As far as possible, the following lights should be firmly fixed to the boat. On SUPs or kayaks and canoes low to the water, lights may have to be fixed to the chest and back of the paddler rather than the boat.

On the bow: a constant (not flashing) white light.

On the stern: a constant (not flashing) white light.

Note: In the Tideway Code Areas a flashing white light is required on the bows of rowing boats to help determine their direction of travel. It is not required by, and should not be used by, paddled boats.

- Each light must be **visible for 800m** and **through 180°** – the boat must effectively have white lighting visible through 360°.
- Red or other coloured lights should never be used.
- Lights must have **good batteries**, be waterproof and diffused, so as not to ‘dazzle’ other river users or members of your group.
- Unidirectional lights are not permitted as they are not safe. At least one spare light should be carried and *additional* lights such as head torches can be used to warn approaching vessels of your presence, but can also ‘dazzle’ other river users if used inconsiderately.
- White LED sticks, attached to the paddler, may be used and reflective tape on paddles is recommended to improve visibility.
- When paddling as a group, **all boats in the group must carry lights**. It is not sufficient to have a single set of lights to cover the whole group.

If you do not have the correct lights you are breaking the law so you do not go afloat.

From above

White or hi-vis clothing



BOWS *Kayaks & Canoes* **STERN**
Constant white lights both visible
through 180° and for 800m



FRONT *Stand-up paddleboards* **BACK**
Constant white lights both visible
through 180° and for 800m

Head torches or LED sticks
used as *additional lighting*



Reflective tape on paddles and kit

From the side

VHF Radio

There is constant VHF communication between London VTS (who regularly broadcast Notices to Mariners and other pertinent information), commercial and commuter vessels and London Coastguard. They all work closely together and will also coordinate any emergency response that may be required on the river.

A personal VHF handset is advised in busy commercial traffic areas where it can be invaluable for keeping a listening watch on the intentions of other vessels or to receive critical information. *SUPs must carry VHF below Putney Bridge.*

Users do not need a licence to listen on VHF but do need the appropriate licence to broadcast. Having such a licence means small boats are also able to make other river users aware of their intentions.

Many modern VHF sets also include the option of a Digital Selective Calling (DSC) button which will send a pre-defined distress signal, including your location. This is recommended for small boats.

London Vessel Traffic Services (VTS)

River section	Phone	VHF
Teddington to Crayfordness	0203 2607711	Channel 14
Crayfordness to Sea Reach 4	01474 560311	Channel 68
Sea Reach 4 to Seaward Limit	01474 560311	Channel 69

London VTS is a division of the PLA which oversees day-to-day safety and navigation across the whole of the tidal Thames, 24/7, 365 days a year. They are the shipping equivalent of Air Traffic Control and have a great deal of information to hand such as river works, arch closures and traffic movements as well as being in close contact with the emergency services. For small boats, being involved in this communication network is extremely beneficial, particularly in Central London where river traffic is very busy.

When to contact London VTS

- All small boats are **advised** to inform London VTS before navigating below Wandsworth Bridge.
 - All small boats **must** inform London VTS before navigating between Chelsea Bridge and Cherry Garden Pier (Central London).
 - All small boats **must** inform London VTS when they are afloat in the dark below Wandsworth Bridge.
 - Events organisers **must** inform London VTS that the event is about to start and again once the event has finished.
- † Rowing boats in the Lower Tideway Code Area (Below Cherry Garden Pier) *are also advised* to fly a 'Rower On The River Flag' from their clubhouse.

Emergencies: where there is immediate or potential threat to life

Primary emergency option:

Phone: **999 or 112** and ask for the **Coastguard** who will coordinate the appropriate response.

VHF: **See listings opposite for appropriate channels.**

London VTS will either alert the Coastguard, who will task the appropriate emergency service, or other vessels in the vicinity who may be able to offer even more immediate assistance.

In all cases callers will need to provide details of their location on the river and the direction of the tide. Use landmarks and bridge names to detail that position.

Secondary emergency option:

If you are unable to communicate by either phone or VHF then attempt to attract attention from other vessels nearby or people on the shore. A whistle is very effective for doing this as it carries further than a shout. You may also be able to attract attention by waving or flashing a light.

If in doubt, report it

River users are the best eyes and ears on the river and emergency services may depend on you to report an incident – don't presume that someone else has already reported it.

You should immediately report the following if:

- You see or hear someone in difficulty.
- You think someone might be in danger or is about to do something reckless – report it before it happens!
- A boat or group is significantly overdue back at your club and you are unable to contact or locate them.

Carry the kit

It is recommended that below Richmond Lock, all small boats, particularly coaches, group leaders and soloists carry a mobile phone (in a buoyant, waterproof case) or a personal VHF handset to summon help in emergencies.

Phones or radios should be carried where they are readily accessible (on a lanyard for example) and not tucked-away in a hatch or bag.

SUP leaders and solo paddlers *must* carry VHF below Putney Bridge.

Be aware that the RNLI, police, fire service or PLA may need to respond to incidents at speed, signified by flashing blue lights and/or sirens. Be prepared for wash and give them space in which to work.





Non-emergency incident reporting

All incidents on the Tideway **must be reported**:

- ➡ Paddlers: to the PLA www.pla.co.uk/incidentreport
- ➡ Rowers: to BR www.incidentreporting.britishrowing.org

Any incident should also be reported to your club/organisation's captain or safety advisor/officer, particularly if it involves damage to a boat or personal injury. This is the case for all boats using the tidal Thames whether or not they are based on the river.

- **Incidents should be reported as soon as possible and within 7 days.**
- **Any incident where the RNLI is called *must* be reported within 24hrs.**

The sorts of incidents that must be reported are:

- Capsizes caused by a third party or requiring the emergency services.
- Collisions – with other boats or vessels.
- Contact – with stationary objects (submerged obstructions, bridges, piers etc) that results in personal injury, substantial damage or shipwreck.
- Near misses and poor or unsafe navigation.
- Personal injury.
- Inappropriate or inconsiderate behaviour (see below).
- ✦ Simple capsizes – rowing boats only.
- ✦ No life jacket or no kill cord – coaching launches only.

Behaviour of motor vessels

The PLA encourages small boats to report any navigational incidents, near misses etc, as soon as possible to **London VTS**, to ensure that proactive compliance action can be undertaken (see [p.34](#) for contact details).

➔ The Tideway Code Panel

Although the PLA is responsible for controlling Tideway navigation, the **rowing** community is expected to self-regulate its member's adherence to the Tideway Code. This is done using the British Rowing reporting system. The system is essentially informative and educational and clubs should use reports to assess their safety performance. The reports also help inform the Thames Regional Rowing Council (TRRC) on any trends affecting safety and will be shared with the PLA.

Reports are assessed by the Tideway Code Panel – composed of experienced people from a range of Tideway clubs – who peer-review the reported incidents. In all cases, clubs have the opportunity to respond to any report relating to their crews.

The Panel assesses each report and make recommendations to the Chairman, who decides on appropriate advice or sanctions. Assessments are graded according to the severity of the Code infringement, which should help clubs to improve their safety.

Clubs which repeatedly flout the Tideway Code or fail to improve their safety, may be subject to intervention by the TRRC – in extreme cases, exclusion from Tideway events, or temporary loss of BR affiliation. Serious incidents will trigger intervention by the PLA.

For more details – tidewaysafety.thames-rrc.org

Port of London Thames Byelaws 2012 – Byelaw 8 Reporting accidents and incidents

8.1 Where any vessel has, whilst in the Thames:

- a) sunk or is in danger of sinking;
- b) been abandoned;
- c) become derelict;
- d) been in collision with another vessel, shore facility, the river embankment, a structure including any part of a bridge or a berthed or moored vessel or object;
- e) been damaged or caused damage to anything (including a vessel);
- f) been or is on fire or has suffered an explosion;
- g) taken the ground or stranded (not being a vessel which has intentionally taken the ground);
- h) run into, fouled or damaged any light, buoy, beacon or other aid to navigation;
- i) suffered any person falling overboard except in relation to a recoverable capsized sailing dinghy or a vessel propelled by paddles or oars;
- j) suffered any other accident normally required to be reported to the Marine Accident Investigation Branch or the Maritime & Coastguard Agency, or both.

8.2 A written report must be submitted by the vessel master to the harbourmaster, as soon as practicable after the submission of the verbal report, required by Byelaw 8.1 above. The written report must give the full details of the occurrence, in a form prescribed by the Harbourmaster.

Information distribution

All clubs organisations and providers are responsible for informing their members or clients of any information relevant to navigation and safety on the Thames Tideway.

This can be done via club notice boards, websites, email and social media.

This information could be any or all of the following issued by the PLA, TRRC, British Rowing or British Canoeing:

- The Tideway Code
- Notices to Mariners (NtMs)
- Safety bulletins
- Ebb tide flag warnings
- Advice from the Club Safety Advisor/Officer
- Advice from your sport's governing body

For details about the responsibilities of visiting, non-Tideway coxes, steers and coaches, [see p.47](#).

→ Thames Regional Rowing Council (TRRC)

The TRRC is one of 10 regional councils whose representatives sit on British Rowing's National Committees. It is responsible for the resourcing and development of rowing in the Thames region including safety and navigation on the Tideway, the busiest rowing river in the country. The TRRC also provides a link/buffer between clubs and the PLA via the Regional Rowing Safety Advisor (RRSA).

→ Rowing clubs' responsibilities

Authorised Steers Accreditation

The PLA require all Tideway clubs to have an **Authorised Steers Accreditation System** in place. Any coach, cox or steers must have completed an appropriate steering and navigation test to prove their understanding and knowledge of the Tideway Code.

For accreditation, they must prove their competence to steer and show an understanding that the Tideway is often fast flowing with strong tidal sets.

Accreditation must be given by a suitably qualified person and clubs must keep an up-to-date record of accredited steers.

More information about club steers accreditation can be found on the TRRC website – www.thames-rrc.org/safety/steers-certification

Rowing Safety Advisor

All clubs must have a nominated Rowing Safety Advisor (RSA)

The RSA's role it is to advise the club committee and captaincy on all aspects of water safety and pass on topical advice in a suitable and timely manner. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of the club Captain and other club officers to ensure that any advice and club policies are implemented and adhered to.

➤ British Canoeing (BC)

British Canoeing is the national governing body (NGB) for canoeing. It is responsible for setting the overall framework for the National Associations; representing canoeing interests such as coaching and competition at UK and international level. It also formulates standards for training programmes with certification levels and administers a range of personal performance and coaching awards for; canoeing, sea kayaking, touring, stand-up paddleboarding, rafting and racing to name but a few. For full details visit – www.britishcanoeingawarding.org.uk

➤ Responsibilities of clubs, organisations and paddle sport providers

All such responsible groups should all have measures in place for:

- Generic risk assessments.
- Standard operating procedures including identifying usable egress points.
- Up-to-date Health and Safety policies.
- Appointing coaches/group leaders and an appointed Safety Officer.
- Other conditions required for affiliation to an NGB such as British Canoeing or if operating as a commercial provider (see panel, right).

Experience (also p. 41)

Associate clubs, organisations or providers should consider producing their own guidelines based on British Canoeing Coaching and Personal Performance (Leadership and Star) Awards. These guidelines should take into account the level of competence required of paddlers and group leaders, as well what part of the river is being used and the expected conditions. It is recommended that clubs or individuals not associated with British Canoeing are guided by these award principles.

Commercial providers

Any club, individual or company which offers paid ‘tour guide’ style trips on the tidal Thames requires permission from the PLA Harbourmaster.

Detailed Passage Plans, Risk Assessments and Safety Management Systems are required for operations such as this and these need to be approved by the PLA. Kayaks, canoes and stand-up paddleboards used for commercial trips must also be licensed by the PLA.

A leader of any such commercial outfit is required to hold a **Thames Local Knowledge Endorsement (LKE)** when operating between Putney and Margaretness.

More details on the LKE can be found on the PLA website or by contacting the Harbourmaster (p. 128).

Master of the vessel

In the context of international and local regulations, the steers (paddler, coxswain or steers person) is deemed to be the “**Master of the Vessel**”.

As such, the **steers is legally responsible** for the navigation, safety and behaviour of the crew. This applies to all steers (including those under the age of 18) even where accompanied by a coach or group leader.

Therefore, all steers should be suitably authorised by their club or organisation to take a boat afloat:

→ p.38

→ p.41

New steers gaining experience *must* be accompanied by a suitably authorised/qualified [rowing] coach or [paddling] group leader until they have completed their authorisation.

Master of the Vessel also applies to coaching launches, where the driver must also hold the appropriate authorisation and endorsements.

Personal responsibility

Individual rowing crew members or paddlers are responsible for checking the boats that they are about to go afloat in, their clothing and equipment and also for assessing the environmental conditions plus their own ability and experience.

They should understand this Code of Practice and be familiar with rules, regulations and emergency procedures set out by their club, organisation or provider.

→ **Rowers** should be able to swim or wear a suitable PFD if not.

→ **Paddlers** should be able to swim and must wear a suitable PFD.

→ Paddle Group Leaders’ responsibilities

As mentioned in other parts of this Code, it’s advisable to paddle in groups on the tidal Thames. Groups should appoint a person to ‘take charge’ and take an active role to maintain the size, shape, position and route of the group in line with the guidance in this Code.

Whilst individuals are ultimately responsible for themselves, leaders are put into a position of trust by the other group members, so they have a duty of care to ensure their experience and ‘local knowledge’ are sufficient to be able to make the right decisions and dynamically risk assess the trip. Leaders are encouraged to have gained a British Canoeing Coach or Leadership Award in their specific discipline.

SUP group leaders should have gained their Level 2 Thames Skill and Knowledge (TSK) endorsement before taking groups afloat ([see table](#)).

It is recommended that group leaders hold a First Aid qualification.

➤ Paddling qualifications: experience and restrictions

All paddlers on the tidal Thames should have a thorough knowledge of this Paddling Code of Practice.

Restrictions apply (see Directions pages)	Stand-up Paddleboarding			All other paddle sports
	No ¹ TSK (minimal experience)	¹ TSK Level 1	¹ TSK Level 2	
Above Putney (p.76–99)	Recommend beginners are accompanied by a ¹ TSK qualified paddler	No restriction		Previous paddling experience* on 'exposed water' is recommended
	Not at night			
Below Putney (pp.100–109) <i>No SUP 3 hours before and 2 hours after high water (at London Bridge)</i> <i>SUP must carry VHF radio (Channel 14)</i>	Must have a minimum of 3 previous Tideway outings and be part of a group (3 minimum) led by a ¹ TSK Level 2 (1:4 ratio)	As part of group (3 minimum)	Lead a group of paddlers who have a minimum of 3 previous Tideway outings (1:4 ratio)	Previous paddling experience* on the tidal Thames is recommended
	Not at night or solo	At night (as member of a group)		
		Not solo	Solo (daytime only)	
Below Chelsea Bridge (pp.104–125) <i>No SUP between Good Friday and September 30th 11.00–18.00</i>	No paddling	Only as part of a group, led by a commercially licensed paddler	As part of group (3 minimum)	*Be guided by the British Canoeing Coaching and Personal Performance Awards (Leadership and Star) for determining required levels of ability and experience
	Not at night or solo			
Below Tower Bridge (pp.110–125)	SUP is not permitted below Tower Bridge			

¹TSK: Thames Skills and Knowledge endorsement. Contact the PLA Harbourmaster (Upper) for details on courses.

All commercial paddle sport leaders must have a LKE to operate on the Tideway (p.39).

Port of London Act 1968
(as amended) – Section 108

General rules for navigation

A master who navigates his vessel on the Thames:

- (a) without due care and attention; or
- (b) in a manner liable to injure or endanger persons, other vessels, the banks of the Thames (whether above or below mean high water level) or any structure or installation in or beside the Thames;

shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding [the statutory maximum and on conviction on indictment to a fine].

The statutory maximum fine at time of publication (2019) is £5,000.

➔ Rowing Coaches' responsibilities

These following applies to all rowing coaches, whether they are professionals or volunteers:

- Coaches *must* wear a suitable life jacket and use a kill cord at all times when afloat in a launch ([pp.20–23](#)).
- Coaches must be steers accredited at the highest level and have a thorough knowledge of this Tideway Code ([p.38](#)).
- Coaches must make a full risk assessment of equipment and conditions before they allow their crews to boat. Part of that risk assessment must be to determine the suitability of those who are under 18 or inexperienced, to act as Master of the Vessel ([p.40](#)).
- Coaches of junior/novice crews, steers and coxes have a **significant responsibility** for the safe actions of the crews under their instruction.
- Coaches of junior crews, steers and coxes are perceived as acting '*in loco parentis*'.
- As well as coaching technique, it is a coach's responsibility to teach the principles, knowledge and skills of navigation to their crews and steers.
- Coaches should never overrule a steers' correct navigation for the sake of any work or exercises.
- Coaches must always show concern for other river users, causing minimum wash and not obstructing their safe passage ([p.44](#)).
- **Coaches must not use a megaphone before 07.00hrs** ([p.48](#)).
- It is recommended that coaches hold a First Aid qualification.

Tideway Coaching Endorsement

The PLA consider that it is reasonable and appropriate for **professional rowing coaches to be registered** in the same way as all other professionals working on an increasingly busy Tideway, particularly above Putney.

This is achieved through the Tideway Coaching Endorsement Scheme, which has two basic aims:

- to raise the quality of the coaching on the Tideway;
- to ensure that everyone coaching on the Tideway understands the same basic standards of safety and navigation.

Professional rowing coaches

The Tideway Coaching Endorsement Scheme currently applies to anyone who:

- Is **employed** as a coach and drives a launch as part of that employment, whether full or part-time.
- Drives a launch when coaching as part of their activities as a teacher, even if not specifically employed as a coach, but as part of their teaching activities.

Volunteer rowing coaches

- There is currently no requirement for volunteer coaches to have the endorsement but it is recommended.
- Volunteer coaches should have suitable instruction in launch driving and the RYA Level 2 Coastal Powerboat qualification is preferred.

The Tideway Coaching Endorsement Scheme requires the following conditions to be met:

- RYA Level 2 Coastal Powerboat qualification
- The highest level of steers accreditation within their club.
- Evidence of knowledge and experience of the Tideway which is vouched for by a senior and suitably qualified member of their, or another club.

Endorsement is not club-specific, but applies to the coach, who can carry that endorsement with them if they move to another club or work between clubs.

A register is kept of endorsed coaches and the PLA has right of access to this register to check whether a coach involved in an incident is endorsed.

The endorsement can be rescinded if acceptable standards are not maintained.

Applications for the endorsement scheme should be made to the Registrar using the on-line form –

www.thames-rrc.org/homepage/news/217-faq-tideway-coach-s-endorsement-scheme-2

→ Coaching Launches

Launch positioning

A coach's first priority is the safe navigation of their launch and not the crew being coached. If alone, a coach must maintain full control and keep a proper lookout at all times (p.52).

- 1 Coaches must always show concern for other river users, causing minimum wash and not otherwise obstructing their safe passage.
- 2 Launches should not operate in the **Inshore Zone** unless directly coaching a crew. For crews in the **Inshore Zone** coaches must either:
 - 3 Be in-line astern with their crew so as to not obstruct the channel for other users by being positioned abreast of their crew, otherwise...
 - 4 Be on the opposite side of the river to their crew.
 - 5 Coaches should generally position their launch to the 'outside' of their crew to help encourage the rowing boat to stay on the correct line.
- 6 Avoid positioning the launch to the 'inside' of the crew.

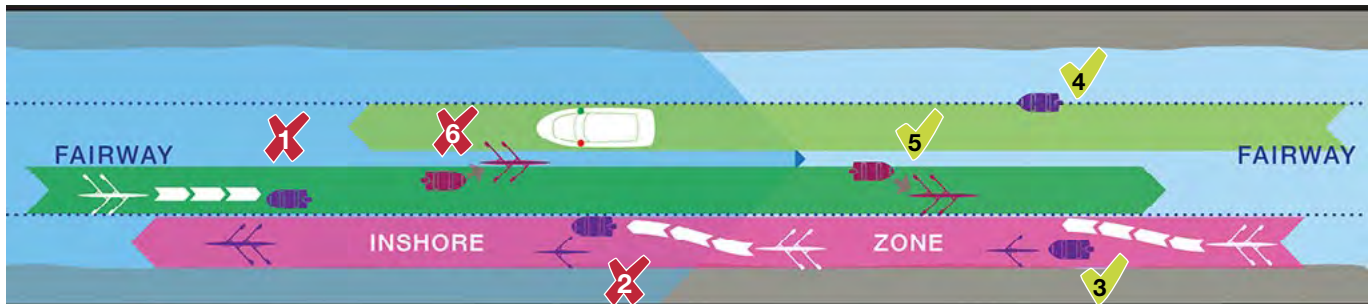
Speed limits

Rowing coaching launches have a special dispensation from the PLA to exceed the speed limit **but only when directly coaching a crew.**

At all other times coaching launches are limited to **8knots** and should navigate to the starboard side of the channel.

The speed limit applies if a coach becomes separated from their crew and they must **not** exceed 8knots when attempting to catch-up with a crew.

Similarly coaches must proceed with extreme caution and within the speed limit behind aits.



Port of London Thames Byelaws 2012 - Byelaw 16

Speed Limits

16.1 The master of a power-driven vessel navigating in a part of the Thames to which this byelaw applies must ensure that it does not exceed a speed of **8 knots** through, on or over the water, provided that this byelaw does not apply:

- (b) where a vessel, having for the purpose of this byelaw been approved by a harbourmaster as one which may exceed a speed of **8 knots** through the water, is engaged in escorting a rowing boat in training;
- (d) where the vessel has been approved by the harbourmaster to exceed a speed of **8 knots** through the water, in connection with a river event that is subject to the requirements of byelaw 9, and if it does so in accordance with such approval.

16.2 The parts of the Thames to which byelaw 16.1 applies are

- (a) the Thames above Wandsworth Bridge;
- (b–g) *All creeks below Tower Bridge*

16.3 The master of a power-driven vessel navigating **between Wandsworth Bridge and Margaretness Limit** must ensure that it does not exceed a speed of **12 knots** through, on or over the water, provided that this byelaw does not apply: if the vessel falls within the exceptions described in byelaw 16.1 a), *or*

where a vessel, having for the purpose of this byelaw been approved by the harbourmaster as one which may exceed a speed of 12 knots through the water, is engaged in:

- escorting a rowing boat in training;
- escorting a boat race or regatta.

Passengers and wash

Launches should not exceed their maximum load capacity. In most coaching launches this is usually two people, although launches may be wash-tested by the PLA and approved for carrying more than two people.

Coaching launches carrying more than **two people**, must remain below the speed limit at all times, even if they have been wash tested, to avoid creating excessive wash.

Contact the PLA (p. 128) for more details regarding wash testing.

Note: A ‘tin-fish’ style coaching launch should not be considered a ‘rescue’ vessel. Cases of coaches ‘going to the rescue’ only to add to the problem due to the unsuitability of their launch are not uncommon.

Coaches should always carry the means to summon appropriate emergency assistance (p. 35).

Port of London Thames Byelaws 2012 – Byelaw 9 Boat races, regattas, processions and other river events

- 9.1 A person must not organise or promote [a boat race, regatta, stunt, procession, exhibition, firework display, air race or other river event] on or over the Thames except with the consent of the harbourmaster.
- 9.2 Any person who proposes to organise [an event] on or over the Thames, must consult with the harbourmaster on the navigational and safety issues arising from the proposed event and give the harbourmaster at least four weeks' notice of the proposed event.
- 9.3 Every person navigating a vessel in or in connection with such an event must comply with the instructions of a harbourmaster relating to it.
- 9.4 Any person who proposes to organise or promote [an event] must provide to the harbourmaster the findings of any comprehensive risk assessment requested as a result of the consultation under byelaw 9.2 in respect of the event in question. The risk assessment must identify the relevant hazards and any suitable procedures, precautions and other risk control measures to be implemented to ensure any risk to persons or navigational safety or both is mitigated and maintained as low as reasonably practicable.

Events' responsibilities

An 'event' is classed as use of the river for anything other than normal training or recreational purposes. This includes Head races, regattas, private matches, mass paddles (30+ paddlers), races, stunts or anything with media interest. The event organiser must advise the Harbourmaster as far in advance as possible and at least four weeks beforehand.

Any event that involves more than 99 boats on the water at any one time, or if the Harbourmaster deems it necessary, would normally have a full river closure, which requires a Notice to Mariners (NtM) and a minimum of four week's notice.

The organiser must provide:

- A risk assessment and event plan.
- Proof of public liability insurance.
- A Letter of Consent from the Harbourmaster containing an indemnity for the PLA against any costs or claims arising as a result of the event.
- Details of any boats involved in the event working for hire or reward.
- Information on how to access the Tideway Code for visiting non-Tideway clubs.

Event organisers should inform London VTS that the event is about to start and again once the event has finished.

The environmental impact of an event must also be considered ([p.48](#)).

Advice on event documentation

An event can only run upon production of a satisfactory safety plan and risk assessment for the event to the relevant Authority (PLA/ Regional Safety Adviser/British Canoeing). The published event date is only provisional and the event will not be sanctioned to take place unless the requirements of these documents are satisfied and a Competition Safety Checklist completed.

The preferred timetable is listed below.

3 months prior to the event:

- Event Safety Advisor appointed.
- Drafts/updates of safety documentation.
- Advice and input to event organisation committee.

2 months prior to the event:

- Event Safety Advisor consults with the Authority for validation.
- Authority advises on “self-certification” or “full documentation”.
- Documentation finalised by Event Safety Advisor.

1 month prior to the event:

- Documentation sent to the Authority.
- Self-certification completed and returned to the Authority.

3 weeks prior to the event:

- The Authority confirms receipt of documentation.
- Clearance for event to run.

For further information regarding running events on the Tideway visit –

www.pla.co.uk/Safety/Event-Organiser-Guidance

www.thames-rrc.org/events/regattas-a-heads/organiser-information

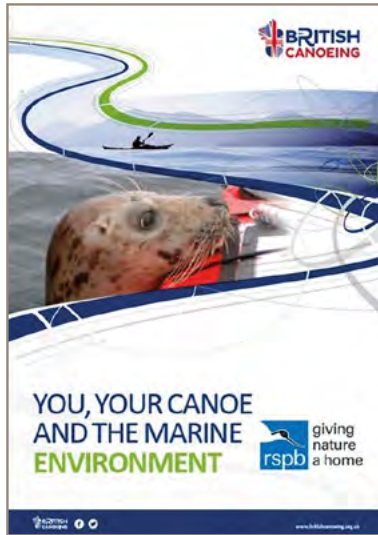
Visiting the Tideway

Non-Tideway clubs visiting the Tideway for racing and training do not have to have a steers accreditation system – but it is recommended for regular visitors to the Tideway.

Visiting clubs must therefore ensure that their coxes, steers and coaches are fully conversant with the Tideway Code before going afloat. It is the visiting club’s responsibility to seek advice from their hosts, the event organisers or the TRRC if they are unsure.

Tideway clubs that host visiting clubs for training outings or provide boating for Tideway Head races are expected to provide basic advice on Tideway navigation to their visitors if requested.

Ignorance of the Tideway Code is not an acceptable defence in the event of an incident and the same sanctions will be applied to visitors.



Pollution and health

Litter: Bin it, for a cleaner Thames!

Do not drop litter in the river, or leave it where it will be taken or blown back into the river. Plastic has been found in fish of the Thames, because they are eating broken-down litter mixed in the river bed with their food.

If organising an event, where litter is likely to collect with spectators, plan your event to minimise the litter generated and ensure event-specific items like flags or banners are secured. Plan to review the area following the event to prevent any litter ending up in the river.

Water pollution

If you see any pollution of the river, please report it to the relevant London VTS Channel by phone or VHF (*Channel 14*). Take photos if possible, but do not take samples and keep a distance as the pollutant may also be damaging to health. After heavy or prolonged rainfall, screened sewage is released into the river from combined sewage outfalls (usually at the top of the tide). Avoid boating in or near those events as far as possible.

Noise pollution

Please be considerate towards those who live on and near the river. Avoid abusive language, playing loud music or shouting during unsociable hours.

Megaphones must not be used before 07.00hrs and should at all times be at the minimum effective volume. *Failure to comply with this may result in compliance action (including fines) by the Port Health Authority.*

Health

Be aware of the risk of Weil's disease which is spread by rodents' urine. All cuts and grazes should be covered before going afloat. If a bleeding wound occurs during an outing, wash it thoroughly as soon as you return and treat it as an infection risk. Always wash your hands after an outing and before eating. If you become ill after being on the river, seek medical advice immediately.

Environmental responsibilities

Environment

Make every effort to be considerate to the river environment, including the foreshore. Take care not to disturb wildlife or damage habitat while on the water and avoid approaching seals on the banks of the river.

www.pla.co.uk/assets/thamesmarinemammalsleaflet.pdf

Invasive non-native species (INNS) and bio-security

Take steps to minimise the risk or prevent the movement of invasive non-native species which can be introduced and spread by all waterway users, often unknowingly via contaminated equipment and clothing left in damp conditions. Visitors should check their gear is clean before bringing it to the Thames from other waterways to prevent Invasive non-native species contamination. Please remember:



Check your equipment and clothing for live organisms, plant fragments, etc, particularly in areas that are damp or hard to inspect.

Clean and wash all equipment, footwear and clothing thoroughly. Boats, blades and paddles should be rinsed down with a hosepipe after every outing.

Soaking small items of kit at 45°C for 15 minutes has been shown to have caused a 99% mortality rate across all species. If you do find any organisms, leave them at the body of water in which they were found.

Dry all equipment and clothing including PFDs. Some species can live for up to 16 days in moist conditions. Ensure you don't transfer water anywhere.

Further reading

PLA publication:

www.pla.co.uk/Environment/Environmental-guidance

British Canoeing publication:

You, your canoe and the marine environment

British Canoeing Website:

www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/guidance-resources/waterways-environment/

Thames 21 website:

www.thames21.org.uk

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RNLI publication:

Kayaking Safety Pack

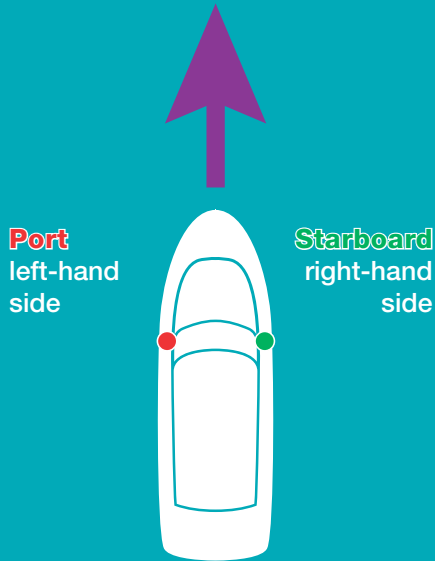
British Rowing, RowSafe:

www.britishrowing.org/about-us/policies-guidance/rowsafe/

British Canoeing safety training:

www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/courses/foundation-safety-and-rescue-training

Below Teddington Lock, the tidal Thames is classed as an international seaway. Because of this **Port** and **Starboard** are the conventions used to describe navigation, rather than left and right. They are always used in the vessel's **direction of travel**.



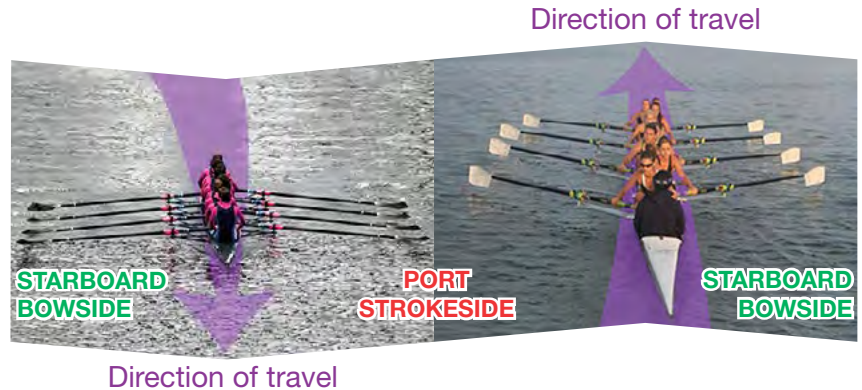
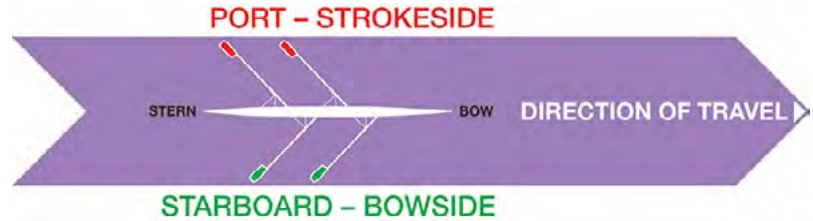
In the dark, motor vessels will display a [forward facing] red light on their **Port** side and a green light to **Starboard**.

→ Port and Starboard

Port and Starboard are not terms generally used by rowing crews in the UK but it is important that rowers and in particular, steers understand this terminology, which is used throughout this Code.

In coxless boats the steers is facing backwards which is why using left and right is avoided as it can easily cause confusion.

It helps that most oars are marked with **red tape – strokeside/port** and **green tape – bowside/starboard**.



➔ Accessing the river

River access for paddled boats is considered safest from a draw dock, slipway or foreshore as these provide a firmer footing. There are often eddies or sheltered areas of slack water around such areas which can be utilised. Avoid obstructing the tow path with boats waiting to go afloat.

- Take care not to damage any rudders or skegs the boat may have – it may be best to enter the river stern first, with caution.
- SUP should remain on knees until comfortable or in a safe area.
- Be aware of the slipping hazard especially on steps or ramps.
- Know which way the tidal stream is flowing (see panel right) and ensure there are no obstructions downstream of the launch site.
- Lookout for other traffic before entering the main flow of the river and be aware of wash.
- When getting novices afloat, make sure there are experienced paddlers already afloat to accompany/manage them.

Getting off the river two hours either side of high tide can be difficult, as there is little or no foreshore exposed and in places there are few egress points. There are a fair number of draw docks above Putney Bridge but very few below. Pontoons and piers are privately owned and should only be used to exit with permission or in an emergency. Location of recommended access and egress points should always be included in the outing plan, which should be guided by the club's procedures. Access points can be found on the interactive map available at – www.boatingonthames.co.uk as well as on the 'Recreational Users Guide' or PLA charts. Principal draw docks are also noted in the Tideway direction section diagrams ([from p. 74](#)).

➔ Going afloat

When boating on the Tideway, always have the bows pointing into the tidal stream.

Be aware that the tidal stream will **try to pull the bows out** (very quickly sometimes) and the crew will actively have to prevent this.



If the boat does accidentally get pulled round by the stream it might be safer to go with the unplanned turn than to try and fight against it.

Ensure a good lookout is maintained and do not push off in front of other boats. Also be very aware of wash and of water being drawn-off the foreshore by passing motor vessels.

Col Reg Rule 5

Lookout

Every vessel shall at all times maintain a proper lookout by sight as well as by hearing as well as by all available means appropriate in the prevailing circumstances and conditions so as to make a full appraisal of the situation and of the risk of collision.



Lookout

Keeping a proper lookout is the single most essential feature of safe navigation – on any part of the river

Failure to keep a proper lookout is, by some margin, the biggest contributory factor in collisions and near-misses, both with other vessels and with fixed objects in the river.

Listening for other boats, shouted warnings, sound signals and VHF transmissions from larger vessels are all considered an important part of the lookout process. This is known as *Lookout by Hearing* (pp.54–55).

Always when in heavy traffic, reduced visibility, at the turn of the tide or navigating in the vicinity of bridges, piers, etc. a more proactive lookout should be employed – **every stroke if necessary.**

Lookout also applies to larger vessels of course but small boats should note that just because they can easily see a larger vessel, it is not necessarily the case that the larger vessel can see them, especially if both craft are in close proximity. Small boats should always make themselves as visible as possible and should never assume that they have been seen.



Lookout → Rowing boats

Coxless

A coxless four travelling with the tidal stream could travel as far as 100m in five strokes. Steers should check over their shoulders, alternating sides, **every five strokes** (or more often). In busier situations or in reduced visibility a check every three strokes (or more often) is recommended.

Coxed

The cox's first priority is the safe navigation of the boat and not the best, quickest or racing line. A cox's vision dead ahead is restricted by the crew so they should also try to check this whenever possible.

Coaches

A coach's first priority is the safe navigation of their launch and not the crew being coached. Coaches must not impede other river users ([p.44](#)).

Note: use of a camera or phone to video rowing crews is strictly forbidden if the coach is alone and thus responsible for steering the launch. It is impossible to simultaneously keep a good lookout and video another boat – so don't do it! This practice is extremely dangerous and considered a serious contravention which will necessitate intervention by the authorities.

Lookout ← Paddled boats

Paddlers face in the direction of travel so can easily see oncoming hazards but they must also be very aware of quicker vessels that may be approaching from behind. **For paddlers it may be that the biggest risk is as likely to come from behind them as from in front.**

It is therefore essential that paddlers also check behind them at frequent intervals. It is recommended that paddle groups have one or two experienced paddlers at the rear of each group whose specific role it is to keep a lookout behind. This includes being aware of wash from behind or reflected off walls which can cause irregular wave patterns.

Motor vessels can be easily heard and may even give a sound signal on their horn. Rowing boats however are much smaller and quieter and very often the steers person is facing away from their direction of travel ([p.10](#)). Rowers will often make their presence known by means of a shouted warning ([p.54](#)).

Lookout: shouted warnings (calling)

If it is felt that a risk of collision is developing do not assume that the other boat is aware of it, so call-out in good time to warn them. Calls may need repeating, perhaps several times, before they are effective.

The conventional calls for rowers and paddlers are:

- **“Take a look”** – potential risk of collision
- **“Look ahead”** – imminent risk of collision
- **“Hold it up”** – precautionary stop
- **“Hold it hard!”** – emergency stop
- **“Stop, stop, stop!”** – emergency stop

Any of these warnings can be made more specific by also calling the type/class of boat. For example: **“Ahead four”** or **“Canoe, take a look”**.

When hearing such a call in their vicinity all steers should take a good look, including behind, to ascertain whether it pertains to them or not.

Calling other boats is particularly important where paddlers are sharing the river with rowers. Calling is common (and indeed good practice) amongst rowers and paddlers should not be inhibited about doing the same. It is better to assume that other boats have not seen you than to leave your call until it is too late.

Coaches are often in a better position to lookout and should also take responsibility for shouting warnings where appropriate. A coach’s call is often more effective since they usually carry a megaphone.

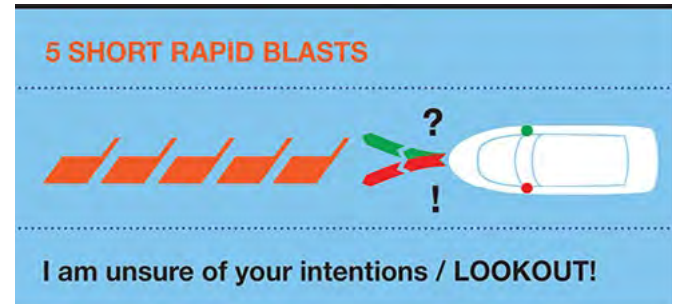
Lookout: sound signals

Motor vessels, especially the larger commercial and passenger vessels are much more likely to use sound signals than they are to shout. Therefore small boat crews must be aware of the meaning of sound signals, usually given via a horn or whistle:

- Above Putney sound signals are most likely to be used by Class V passenger vessels.
- Below Putney use of sound signals will be very common amongst the busy commercial traffic.
- Emergency vessels such as the lifeboat and police will use their siren.

✦ In addition to sound signals, paddlers are advised to carry VHF radio and keep a listening watch on *Channel 14*. Paddlers should attach a whistle to their PFD, for attracting attention in an emergency.

The most important **sound signals** for small boat crews to remember are as follows:



1 SHORT BLAST



I am turning to **starboard**

2 SHORT BLASTS



I am turning to **port**

4 SHORT BLASTS THEN 1 SHORT BLAST



I am turning 180° in the **Fairway** to **starboard**

4 SHORT BLASTS THEN 2 SHORT BLASTS



I am turning 180° in the **Fairway** to **port**

3 SHORT BLASTS



I am operating astern propulsion

1 PROLONGED BLAST



I am leaving the pier / entering the **Fairway**

Collision Regulations (Col Regs)



It is because the tidal Thames is connected to the sea that the applicable navigation rules are:

The International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea

Thankfully they are more generally known as **Col Regs**.

Col Reg (Rule 9a) essentially states that all vessels should navigate to the starboard side of any channel, so as to pass port-to-port.

Effectively the river could be said to be divided into three (unmarked) channels, with a deeper central channel called the **Fairway** and two narrower channels either side called **Inshore Zones**.

All along the tidal Thames, it is vital that steers keep both a good lookout and navigate on the starboard side of the river (or Fairway). Observe where the main river traffic flows are (particularly motor vessels) and **position yourself where you can be seen by them.**

The navigation rules only differ from Col Regs in the two sections of the Tideway, where small boats are allowed to work the slacks against the tide. These **Tideway Code Areas** are detailed on [pages 60–61](#). The only real difference with regards to navigation is how the Inshore Zones are used by small boats in transit.

Rights of Way

With regard to the rules of the river, both rowing and paddled boats are considered to be powered vessels.

- **All vessels in the Fairway have Right of Way** (including man-powered boats).
- Boats in the Inshore Zones **must** give way to boats in the Fairway when crossing, overtaking or turning.
- Small boats **must** give way to larger motor vessels in the Fairway – **even if that vessel appears not to be on the starboard side**. In a narrow Fairway larger vessels may be restricted by their draught due to the available depth and width of the Fairway. This restricted channel in turn limits large vessels' ability to deviate very far from their course.
- Small boats are also generally much more manoeuvrable than most larger vessels and their shallow draught also allows them to use more of the river (see picture right).
- When encountering a larger vessel, don't panic; take a couple of strokes to positively and obviously change direction (preferably to starboard).
- Small boats must give way to sailing boats, unless the sailing boat is crossing the Fairway.

Notwithstanding the above points, all vessels have a duty of care to avoid a collision (Col Regs, Rule 2). More details regarding avoiding collisions can be found on [page 72](#).

For the purposes of Byelaw 27 and Col Reg Rules 9 and 18, rowing and paddled boats must act as power-driven vessels and must keep out of the way of all the types of vessels listed. They must also give priority to vessels such as (but not limited to) Class V Passenger vessels, tugs and tows, large Dutch barges and sailing boats (unless the sailing boat is crossing the fairway).



**Col Reg Rule 9
Narrow Channels**

(a) A vessel proceeding along the course of a narrow channel or Fairway shall keep as near to the outer limit of the channel or Fairway which lies to her starboard side as is safe and practicable.

**Col Reg Rule 18
Responsibilities Between Vessels**

Except where rules 9, 10 and 13 otherwise require:

18

(d) (i) Any vessel other than a vessel not under command or a vessel restricted in her ability to manoeuvre shall, if the circumstances of the case admit, avoid impeding the safe passage of a vessel constrained by her draught.

**Port of London Thames
Byelaws 2012 – Byelaw 27**

**Vessels navigating above
Cherry Garden Pier** (Cherry Garden Pier is downstream of Tower Bridge) **and above
Westminster Bridge**

27.1

A vessel of less than 40m in length navigating above Cherry Garden Pier, and a sailing vessel navigating above Cherry Garden Pier must not impede the passage of:

- (a) a vessel of 40m or more in length; or
- (b) a vessel engaged in towing.

27.2

In addition to their obligations under byelaw 27.1, a vessel of less than 20 metres in length navigating above Westminster Bridge and a sailing vessel navigating above Westminster Bridge must not impede the passage of a vessel of 20 metres or more in length.

Positioning on the river: Col Regs/the starboard side rule

Along its entire length the tidal Thames can be roughly divided into three channels, which remain in place whether the water level is high or low.

The middle channel* is the main navigation channel and is called the Fairway. It is a deeper channel for larger boats and is not generally marked. Large vessels have more draught (hull below the waterline) so will usually be nearer the centre of the river, in the Fairway.

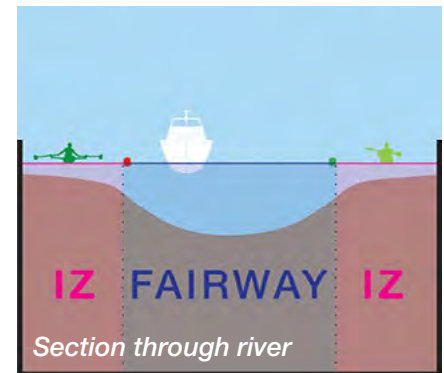
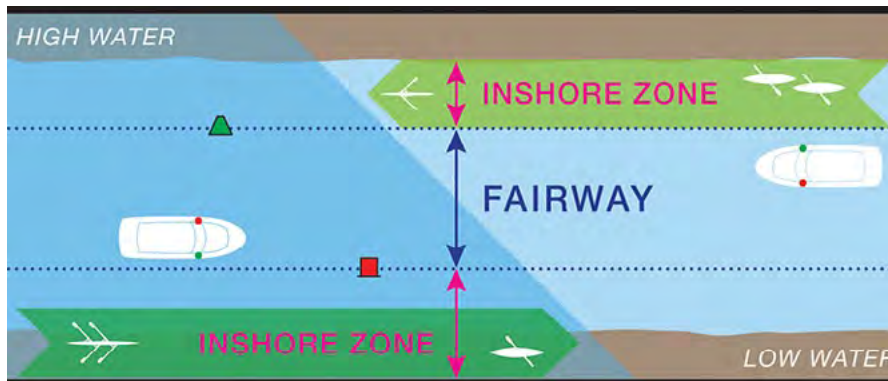
The channels either side of the Fairway (i.e. between the Fairway and the banks) are known as **Inshore Zones** or **IZ** for short.

Except in the Tideway Code Areas (pp.60–61), all small boats are encouraged to navigate outside the Fairway, in their **starboard Inshore Zone** and as close to the **starboard bank** as is safe and practicable – at all times. That is because paddled boats have minimal draught and are able to use the shallow water outside the Fairway.

All boats going in opposite directions should normally pass port-to-port.

**Note:* In places along the tidal Thames the Fairway is not always in the centre of the river. Notable examples of this above Putney are at Chiswick Bridge, Corney Reach and Barn Elms Reach.

In these examples, large vessels can appear to be in the ‘wrong’ place on the river, especially at lower tides. At such times, small boats should always give way (since they have less draught) and show their intentions early and clearly.



Positioning on the river: working the slacks

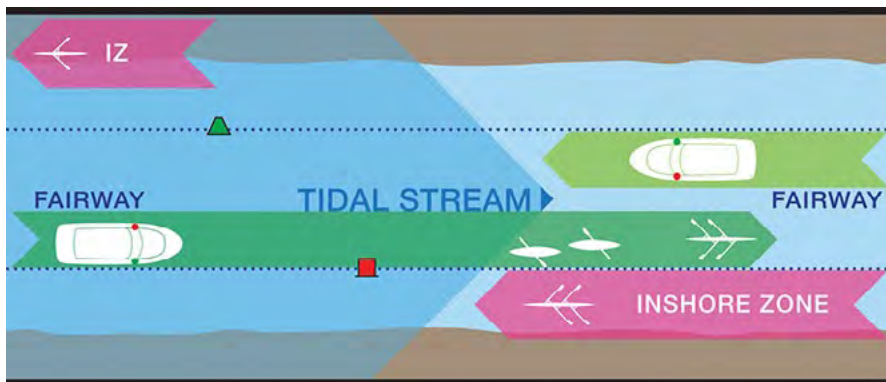
On the Thames Tideway there are only two areas where working the slacks is permitted. They are known as the **Tideway Code Areas** ([pp.60–61](#)).

Upper Tideway Code Area: between Syon Reach and Putney Pier – here both rowers and paddlers are obliged to work the slacks against the tide.

Lower Tideway Code Area: between Cherry Garden Pier and Royal Wharf Pier – here only rowers are obliged to work the slacks against the tide.

Within these Tideway Code Areas, small boats working the slacks when going *against* the tidal stream *must* use the **Inshore Zones**. When using the **Inshore Zone**, small boats should be positioned as close to the bank as safe and practicable, however high the water is.

Within both Tideway Code Areas the **Inshore Zone is only used when going *against* the tidal stream.**



Small boats going with the tidal stream should not use the **Inshore Zones** as per Col Regs, as described opposite. Instead...

When going *with* the tidal stream all small boats must be in the Fairway positioned on the **starboard side** as per Col Reg (Rule 9a).

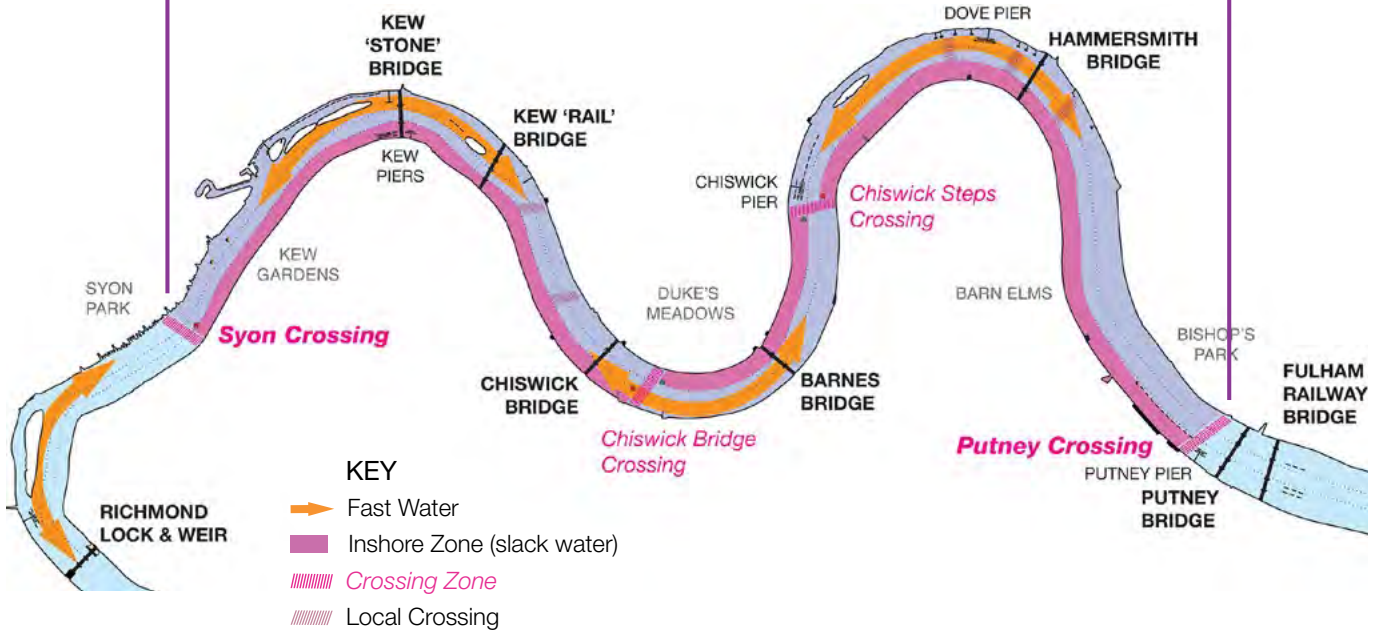
Within the Tideway Code Areas, think of the Fairway as a river within a river.

In the busier Upper Tideway Code Area the edges of the Fairway are occasionally marked with buoys in important areas (and at Crossing Zone, [p.62](#)).

- ▲ **Green** buoys are always on the Middlesex or north edge of the Fairway.
- **Red** buoys are always on the Surrey or south edge of the Fairway.

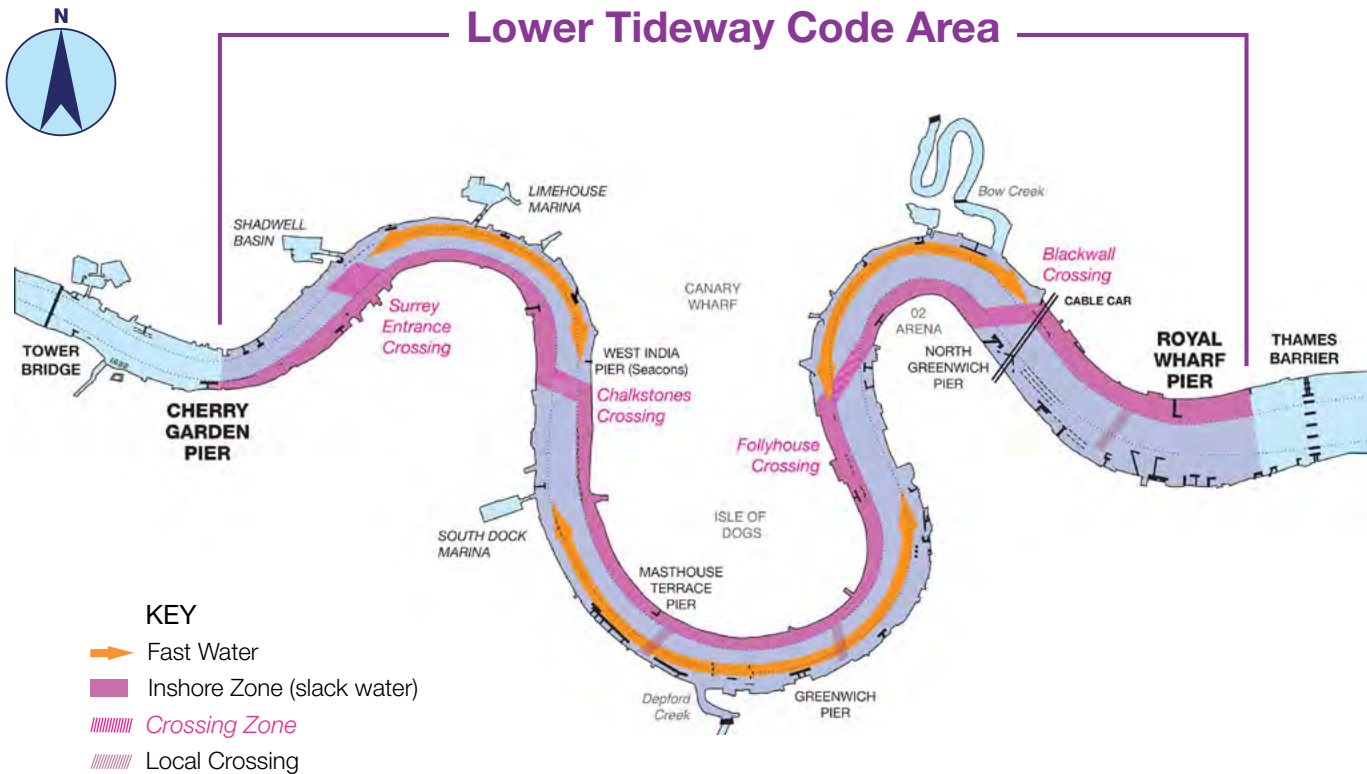


Upper Tideway Code Area



Note how the faster water is round the outside of the bends. Therefore small boats **working the slacks** on the inside of the bends must change sides to remain in the easier water. This only applies when travelling against the tidal stream, whichever direction that is flowing.

In the **Upper Tideway Code Area** there are four designated Crossing Zones ([p.62](#)) which are defined by buoys – except at Putney ([p.90](#)). Additionally there are yellow marker boards on the shore that may be visible at lower water.



In the **Lower Tideway Code Area** there are four designated Crossing Zones (p.62) which are defined by landmarks. See Lower Tideway directions diagrams for details (from p.110).

Additional Local Crossings existing in both Code areas to allow crews to cross the Fairway in order to access boathouses on the opposite bank from the Inshore Zone. Local crossings must only be used for this purpose and are not for general navigation.

Port of London Thames
Byelaws 2012 – Byelaw 24

**Modifications of
the International
Regulations for
Preventing Collisions
at Sea (Col Regs) –
Crossing**

- (a) a vessel must not cross or enter a Fairway so as to obstruct another vessel proceeding along the fairway.

For the purposes of this rule rowing and paddled boats must act as power-driven vessels.



How not to do it!

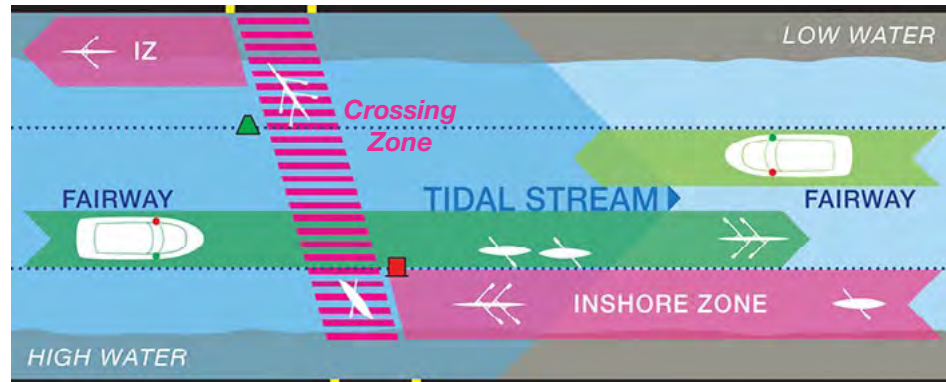
Crossing the river: Tideway Code Areas

Within the Tideway Code Areas (see previous page), where small boats are obliged to work the slacks, they are also obliged to cross the Fairway when the **Inshore Zone** switches to the inside of a bend on the other side of the river.

Crossing between **Inshore Zones** should be done at designated **Crossing Zones**. In the Lower Tideway Code Area, Crossing Zones are defined by landmarks only ([from p.110](#)). In the Upper Tideway Code Area they are defined by buoys (plus yellow marker boards on the bank, [from p.82](#)).

The rules for crossing in the Tideway Code Areas are basically the same as for elsewhere on the river (see opposite) except that boats working the slacks must cross at a designated Crossing Zone.

In addition, there are **Local Crossings** where crossing the Fairway is permitted for crews navigating between the Inshore Zone and their boathouse on the opposite bank. Local crossings are defined by their proximity to the boathouses they serve and crews using them must give way to all other vessels in the Fairway and not block the Inshore Zone if waiting to cross.



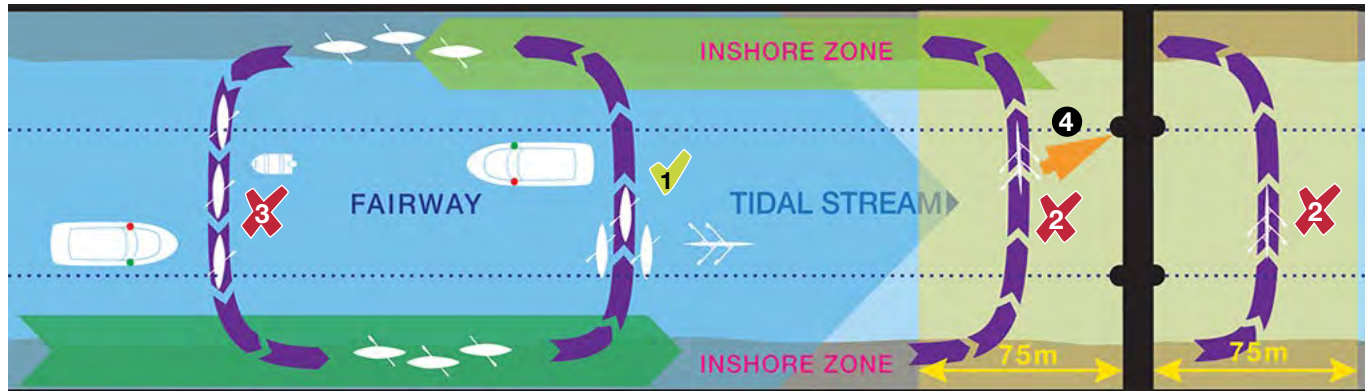
Crossing the river: Col Regs

At some point boats in the starboard Inshore Zone will have to cross the Fairway in order to commence their return journey in the opposite Inshore Zone.

Beyond **keeping a good lookout**, always consider the following in order to effect a safe crossing:

- **Any boats in the Fairway have Right of Way.** Do not cross in front of oncoming traffic and be prepared to have to wait if necessary.
- 1 Crossing should only take place if the Fairway is completely clear of traffic.
 - Cross where vessels can clearly see each other. Any intention to cross the river and the crossing itself should be made clear and obvious to other river users.

- 2 **Never cross near a bridge or other large obstruction (i.e. within 75m).**
- 3 Groups should not cross the Fairway strung-out in single file in should instead, cross in close formation or one at a time.
- Crossing should take place as quickly as is safely possible and by the **shortest possible route**.
- 4 Be aware the **tidal stream** which will push boats **sideways** as they cross.
- Boats may turn into and out of the Fairway at any point except at Crossing Zones and near bridges or other large obstructions where lookout is restricted. (See [p.67](#) for more details about turning.)



Port of London
Thames Byelaws 2012
– Rule 36 **Bridges**

36.1 When the arch or span of a bridge is closed to navigation, the person in control of the bridge must display at or as close to the centre as practicable of that arch or span, or in a position agreed with the harbourmaster:

- (a) by day, three red discs 0.6 metres in diameter at the points of an equilateral triangle with the apex downwards and the base horizontal; and
- (b) by night, three red lights in similar positions to the discs displayed by day.

Bridges

The tidal Thames has 29 bridges over the main river between Teddington Lock and Tower Bridge. The height and width of bridges are of little concern to small boats, unless where shallows occur at low tide, under the inshore arches closest to the banks. For specific details, see the Tideway directions ([from p.74](#)).

Always keep an especially good lookout around bridges, piers, buoys and moorings. The visibility of small boats can be very easily obstructed by bridge buttresses and piers where large vessels can be very limited in their ability to manoeuvre. Small boats should avoid larger vessels close to a bridge and should avoid navigating close-in to them, particularly through Central London.

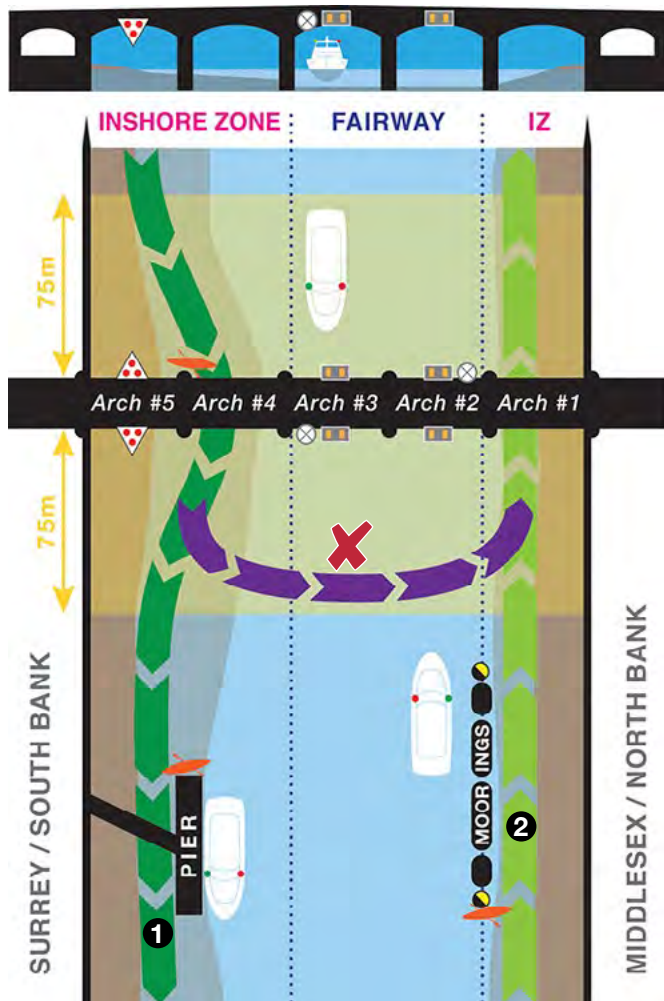
Small boats should keep well clear of all bridges except when transiting:

- Unless working the slacks in the Upper Area or otherwise directed, always use the first available arch which is furthest to starboard (nearest the bank).
- **Do not stop under or near (<75m) of a bridge.**
– unless in an emergency or going ashore at a boathouse/drawdock.
- **Do not cross, turn, overtake or paddle abreast under or near (<75m) a bridge.**
- **Do not baulk (obstruct) faster or larger vessels under or near (<75m) a bridge.**

Bridge arch numbering and marking

Arches (that span the river) are numbered from the north bank starting with Arch #1. Above Putney, rowers traditionally use 'Middlesex' for the northern-most arch and 'Surrey' for the southern-most arch.

- ▣ The Fairway is marked with two amber lights above the arch.
- ⊗ White Isophase signal lights (4 seconds of very quick flashes) indicate a large vessel approaching or using the arch. These vessels have Right of Way so not impede their passage while they transit the indicated arch.
- ▽ Closed arches are marked with an inverted triangle of three red lights or disks. Closures are announced via an NtM. **Never navigate through a closed arch.**



Piers, buoys and moorings

Similar dangers to bridges are also presented by the many piers, buoys and moorings along the Tideway. Small boats should apply the same precautions for bridges, to all similarly large obstacles and to the vessels manoeuvring around them.

Specific exceptions to the following points regarding navigating bridges, piers and moorings are detailed in the Tideway directions sections ([from p.74](#)).

Groups should remain tightly spaced rather than spread out in a long line. A compact group is easier for larger vessels to see than a line of small boats.

- ❶ **Whenever possible or appropriate** small boats are advised to navigate behind (or under) a pier. This is mostly to avoid the passenger vessels and work boats that are using the outside of the pier.
 - ❷ **Whenever possible or appropriate** small boats should navigate on the starboard/inshore side any moorings positioned on the edge of the fairway.
 - The current flows much faster around bridges and piers, drawing small boats towards them and affecting the steers ability to control their boat.
- Small boats should also be aware of the dangers of being pushed onto any man-made obstructions by the tidal stream. Once trapped on the upstream side of a fixed obstruction, it can be almost impossible to get free and there is a real risk of being pushed under by the force of the water.

Stopping (aka easy-ing)

In the Inshore Zones – against the tidal stream

- 1 ✓ Pull in as close as is safe and practicable to the bank, so as not to block the channel.
- 2 ✗ No stopping in the vicinity of Crossing Zones – unless waiting down-stream in the Inshore Zone for the Fairway to clear before crossing.
- 3 ✗ No stopping abreast of navigation buoys (Upper Area only) especially at low water.

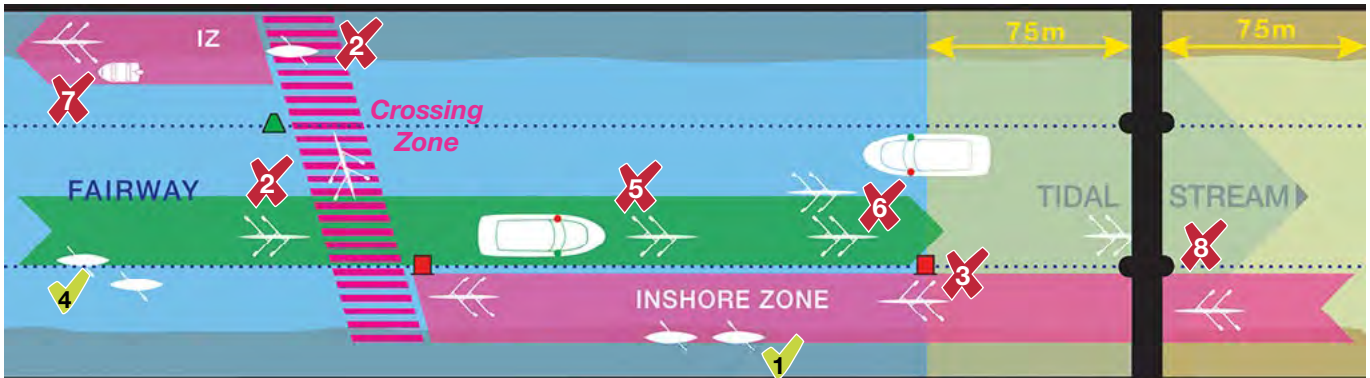
In the Fairway – with the tidal stream

- 4 ✓ Stop as close as possible to the **starboard** edge of the Fairway. If it will not obstruct oncoming traffic or increase risk of collision, pull out of the Fairway entirely.
- 2 ✗ No stopping in the vicinity of Crossing Zones.
- 5 ✗ Do not stop in front of or baulk any vessels. Large power-driven vessels proceeding with the tidal stream are severely limited in their ability to stop.

In both the Fairway and the Inshore Zones

- 6 ✗ Do not stop abreast (along-side) of any other vessels including coaching launches. Groups should always stop in line astern.
- 7 ✗ Coaches wishing to talk to a stationary crew must ensure their launch is not blocking the channel and should move out of the way of approaching vessels
- 8 ✗ Do not stop close (<75m) to or underneath any bridge or pier.

Avoid stopping close-upstream of fixed, man-made objects so as to not be swept onto them by the tidal stream



Turning (aka spinning)

Boats should never ‘spin’ on the spot. Turning should always involve moving into another channel.

Turning out of the Fairway

When turning into the Inshore Zone from the Fairway, ensure that there is enough space and that other vessels are not impeded. Boats already in the Inshore Zone have Right of Way.



Note: In this case, steers may briefly move over to the port side of the Fairway if they immediately turn out of the Fairway and into the Inshore Zone – but only if it is clear to do so. Otherwise boats must wait on the starboard side of the Fairway until both the Fairway and Inshore Zone are clear.

Turning into the Fairway

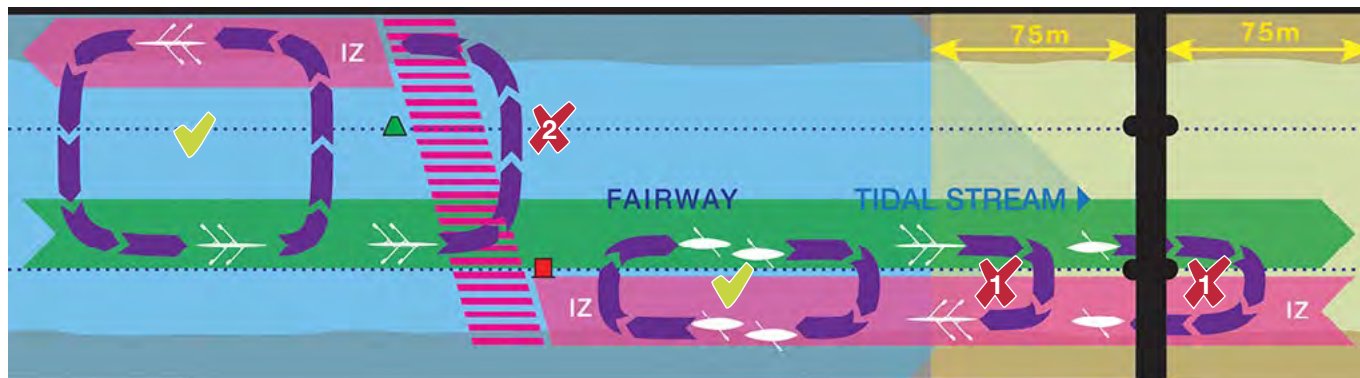
When turning into the Fairway from the Inshore Zone wait until the Fairway is clear and then turn out of the Inshore Zone and onto the correct (starboard) side of the Fairway.

Other considerations

If a turn also involves crossing the Fairway see the rules for crossing the river ([pp.62–63](#)).

-  Do not turn close (<75m) to a bridge or at points where the lookout is similarly obstructed.
-  Do not turn in a Crossing Zone. Turn either well before or well after the crossing.

Avoid turning close-upstream of fixed, man-made objects so as to not be swept onto them by the tidal stream



Port of London Thames
Byelaws 2012 – Byelaw 24

**Modifications of the
International Regulations
for Preventing Collisions at
Sea (Col Regs)**

- (c) a power-driven vessel must not proceed abreast of another power-driven vessel except for the purposes of overtaking that other vessel; and
- (d) a vessel in a fairway above Tilburyness must not overtake a vessel which is itself overtaking another vessel.

For the purposes of this rule rowing and paddled boats must act as power-driven vessels.

➔ **Proceeding abreast (aka side-by-side)**

In the Inshore Zone

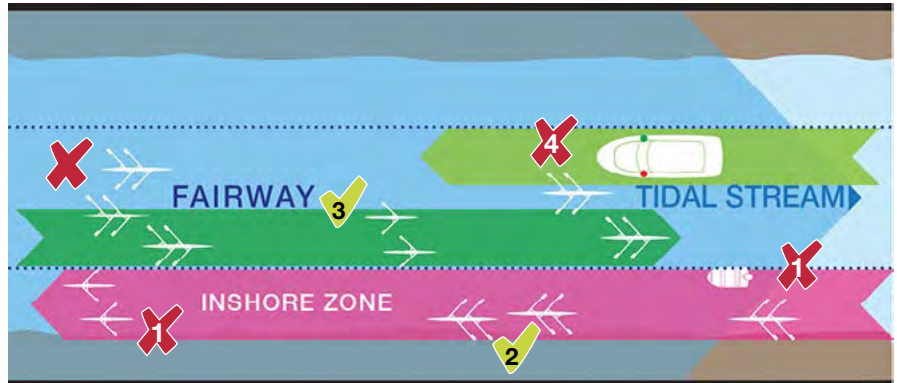
- ❌ Rowing boats should **not** proceed abreast (side-by-side) in the Inshore Zone.
- 2 Rowing boats in the Inshore Zone should proceed in-line astern. Particularly important at low water when the Inshore Zone can be very narrow.

In the Fairway

- 3 A **maximum of two** rowing boats may proceed abreast in the Fairway *but* only if there is sufficient room to do so and both boats remain on the **starboard** side of the Fairway. **This is a concession to rowers of Byelaw 24, do not abuse it!**
- ❌ Two rowing boats may not proceed abreast in the Fairway **if** they obstruct boats coming in the other direction. They must proceed in-line astern instead.

Note: The rules for proceeding abreast both in the Fairway and in the Inshore Zone **also apply to coaching launches.**

Basically, do not spread out across the river!



➔ Paddle group management

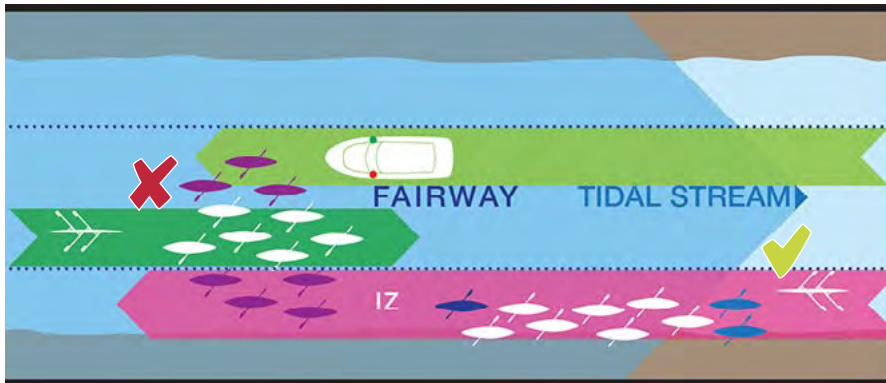
Thames Byelaw 24 does not allow boats to proceed abreast (side-by-side) but it is accepted that paddled boats are an exception to this rule as their visibility to other vessels is vastly improved as a group. Group formation also allows for easier communication.

However, it is important that paddle groups stay close together and are of a size and formation that does not baulk or impede the safe and correct navigation of other, usually faster, river users, in particular rowing boats.

✗ Group paddling does not give paddlers *carte blanche* to **spread out across the river** and groups must always consider the amount of space they take up. The **group leader** must take responsibility for maintaining a suitable group size and shape in any given situation.

✓ As well as the **leader**, paddle groups should ideally have **one or two experienced paddlers at the rear** whose specific role it is to keep a lookout behind and inform, direct or control the group as necessary.

Basically, do not spread out across the river!



Solo paddling

Paddling alone inherently carries more risk than when paddling in a group, which can rely on safety in numbers both in terms of being seen by other vessels and by having assistance on hand to cope with a problem.

Solo paddling should only be undertaken by paddlers experienced in Tideway navigation and conditions.

Soloists should carry at least one method of communication and to make sure someone knows they are afloat and what their intended plan is, including anticipated return time. That information could be left with London VTS, another club member or a friend.

Every effort should be made to be as visible as possible to other river users by means of hi-vis clothing or lights where necessary.

Solo paddling in the dark is not recommended.

General Directions for Navigation in the Port of London 2011 (as amended)

Direction 24

Overtaking Manoeuvres

- (1) Overtaking manoeuvres shall only be undertaken so that the vessels involved do not prejudice their ability to navigate safely, particularly in areas of additional constraint such as river bends and bridges.

Col Reg Rule 13

Overtaking

- (a) any vessel overtaking any other shall keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken.










Port of London Thames Byelaws 2012 - Byelaw 24

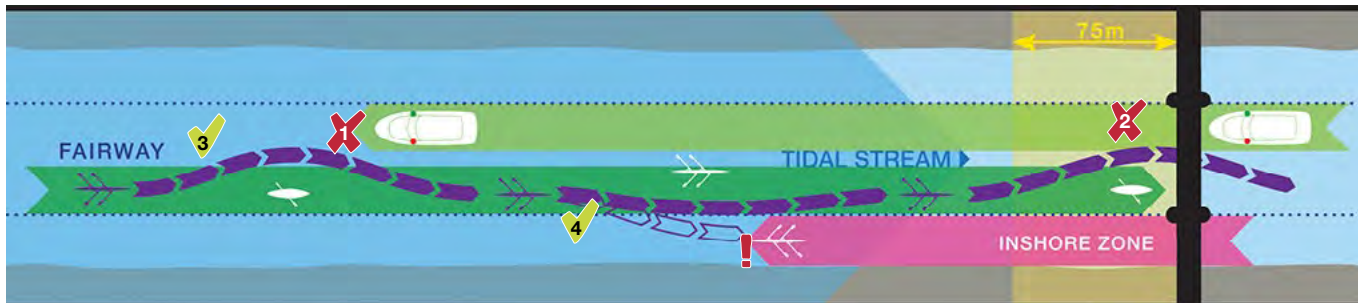
Modifications of the International Rules

- (d) a vessel in a fairway above Tilburyness must not overtake a vessel which is itself overtaking another vessel.

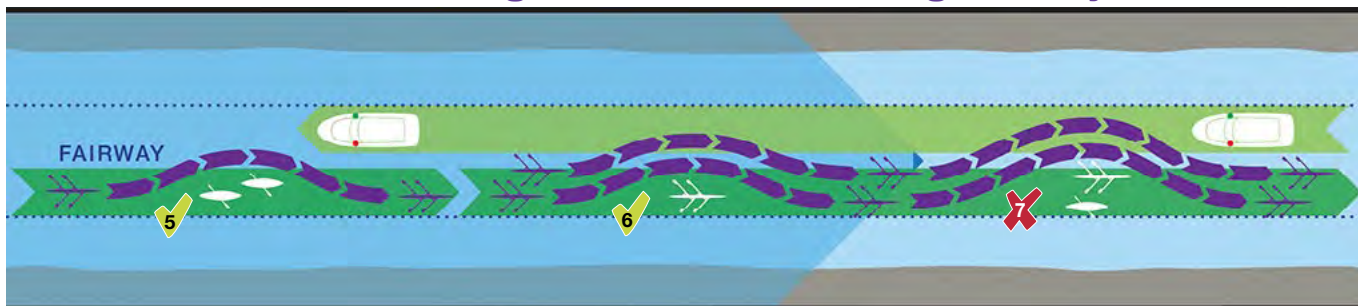
Overtaking

It is unlikely that paddled boats will be fast enough to overtake other vessels but they may have to go around stationary boats and should follow the same rules as rowing boats:

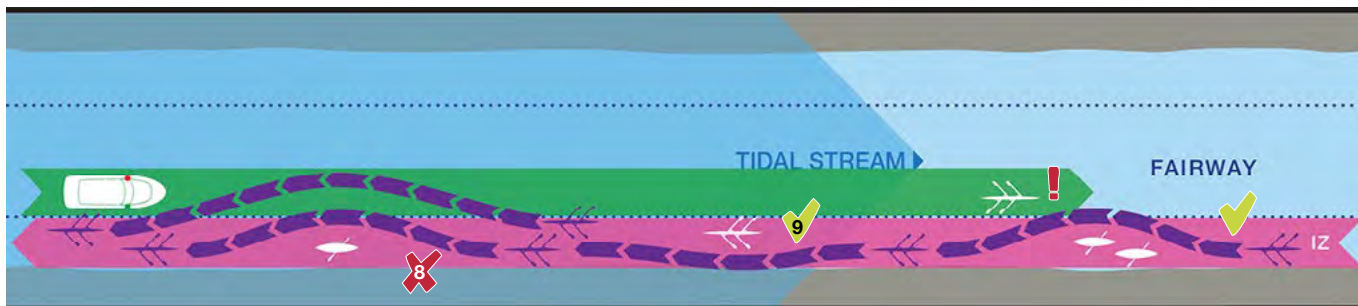
-  **The overtaking crew does not have Right of Way.** Overtaking shall not take place if it puts the overtaking boat into the path of oncoming traffic – if it's not clear then steers must wait.
-  **2** Overtaking should not take place close to bridges (<75m) or in other areas of restricted visibility or manoeuvrability.
-  **3** Overtaking should ideally be on the 'outside' (i.e. in the faster tidal stream).
-  **4** Boats may 'undertake' if the boat being passed is a long way out of position and it is safe to do so (i.e. not into the **Inshore Zone**!). Advise the steers of the boat being overtaken on which side you intend to pass. They should maintain course and constant speed as baulking an overtaking vessel is dangerous and not permitted.
- In the Fairway**
-  **5** A single boat may overtake two boats abreast, only if the Fairway is clear.
-  **6** Two boats abreast may overtake one boat, only if the Fairway is clear. Otherwise one boat must drop back and overtake in single file.
-  **Under no circumstances should two boats abreast overtake two boats abreast.**
- In the Inshore Zone**
-  **8** **A boat should not overtake a boat that is itself overtaking another boat – only one boat at a time may overtake in the Inshore Zone.**
-  **9** Boats may 'undertake' if the boat being passed is a long way off the bank, thus making an outside overtake hazardous (i.e. into the Fairway).



The overtaking crew does not have Right of Way



The overtaking crew does not have Right of Way



Avoiding collisions: head-on situations

Early avoidance is always the best option. By keeping a good lookout and making obvious course alterations in ample time, collision situations should be avoided.

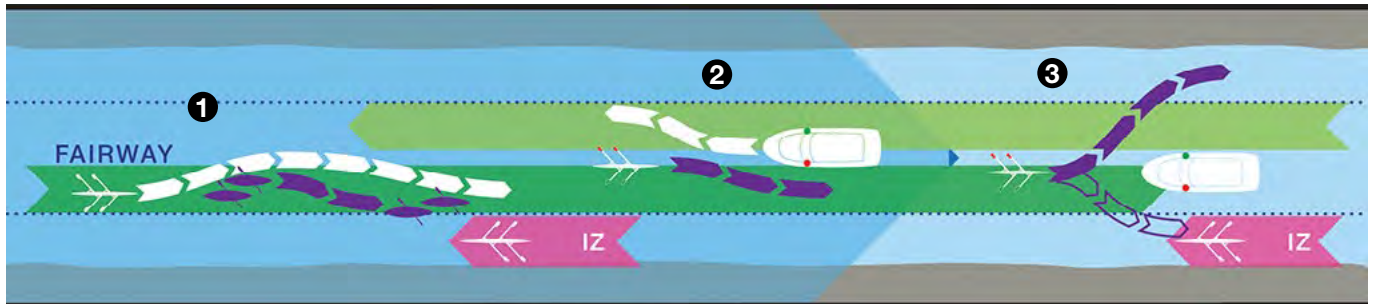
All boats should try to make their intentions obvious by means of a significant change of direction. If necessary (and there is time), stop and then move-off again on an obviously different course.

Motor vessels may use a sound signal to communicate their intentions and small boats may shout a warning ([p.54](#)).

- 1 Because of the relatively slow speed of paddled boats, the most likely danger of collision is, in fact, from faster vessels approaching from behind. In these situations paddlers should ideally steer to **starboard** and thus leave the passage clear for the faster moving vessel to overtake on their port side – but be aware of boats in the **Inshore Zone (IZ)**.

- 2 When two vessels are on a head-on course and a collision is unavoidable without immediate action, both boats should preferably steer to **starboard** (and thus pass port-to-port).
- 3 There are times however, when steering to starboard may put boats into the path of other oncoming vessels (in the Inshore Zone for example). In such situations **avoiding a collision by whatever action necessary** is better than allowing a collision to occur. This does not excuse poor navigation or positioning leading-up to an incident however and all near misses or collisions must be reported ([p.36](#)).

After any near miss, boats should always then return immediately and safely to the correct station before continuing.



Avoiding collisions: the turn of the tide

Navigating on the turn of the tide is notoriously confusing and quite often leads to collisions or near misses so requires extra consideration.

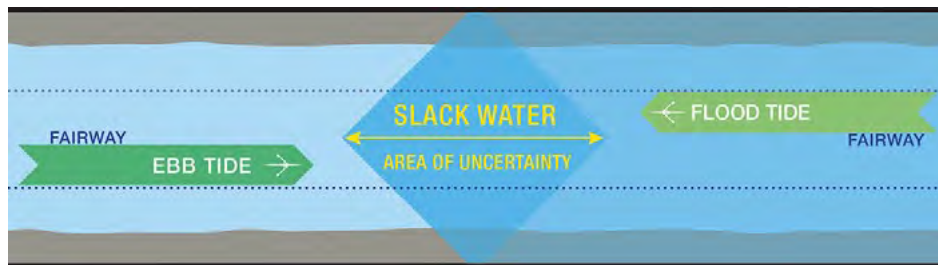
It is possible for a rowing boat to travel faster than the tidal stream is moving, so when travelling with the tidal stream rowing boats can easily overtake the changing tide.

When travelling against it, boats could easily meet the changing tidal stream as it approaches.

At the point where the tide is turning there is an obvious zone of still water, known as **slack water**. This slack water zone continually moves at the head of the turning tide and is a good indicator that steers will need to change their navigation pattern from one tidal stream to the other.

See [page 12](#) for how to check the tidal stream direction. However if in doubt:

- Navigate on the **starboard** side of the Fairway until you can be sure of the tide direction.
- Observe how other crews are navigating and communicate with them about the state of the tide – it may be different where you are now to where they have just come from.
- Only make changes to your navigation pattern once you are completely sure the tide has turned.
- Avoid racing or doing pieces when you are unsure of the tide direction.
- **KEEP A GOOD LOOKOUT**



Col Reg Rule 14

Head-on situation

- (a) When two power driven vessels are meeting on reciprocal or nearly reciprocal courses so as to involve risk of collision each shall alter her course to starboard so that each shall pass on the port side of the other.
- (c) When a vessel is in any doubt as to whether such a situation exists she shall assume that it does exist and act accordingly.

For the purposes of this regulation, rowing and paddled boats must act as power-driven vessels.

Notwithstanding the above points and other advice on this page, all vessels have a duty of care to avoid a collision (Col Reg, Rule 2).

Tideway directions

The following section of the Code as been split into three Tideway Directions sections, which provide more specific navigational information that pertains to each section of the river, starting at Teddington and working downriver:

Upper Tideway

- [Teddington to Syon.](#)
- [Syon to Chiswick Bridge.](#)
- [Chiswick Bridge to Putney Bridge.](#)

Central London

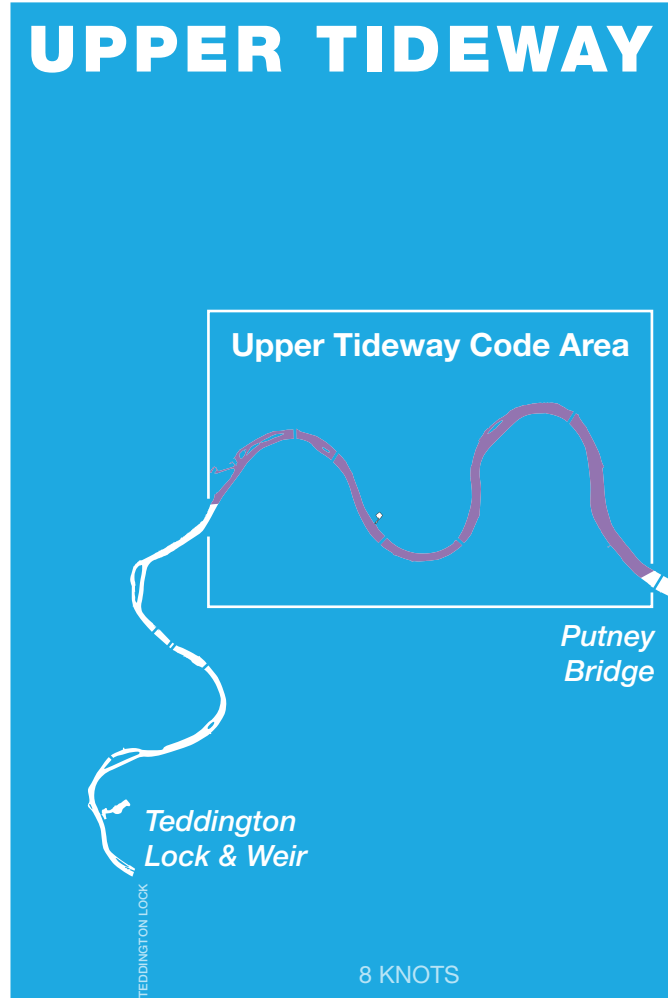
- [Putney Bridge to Chelsea Bridge.](#)
- [Chelsea Bridge to Tower Bridge \(Heart of London\).](#)

Lower Tideway

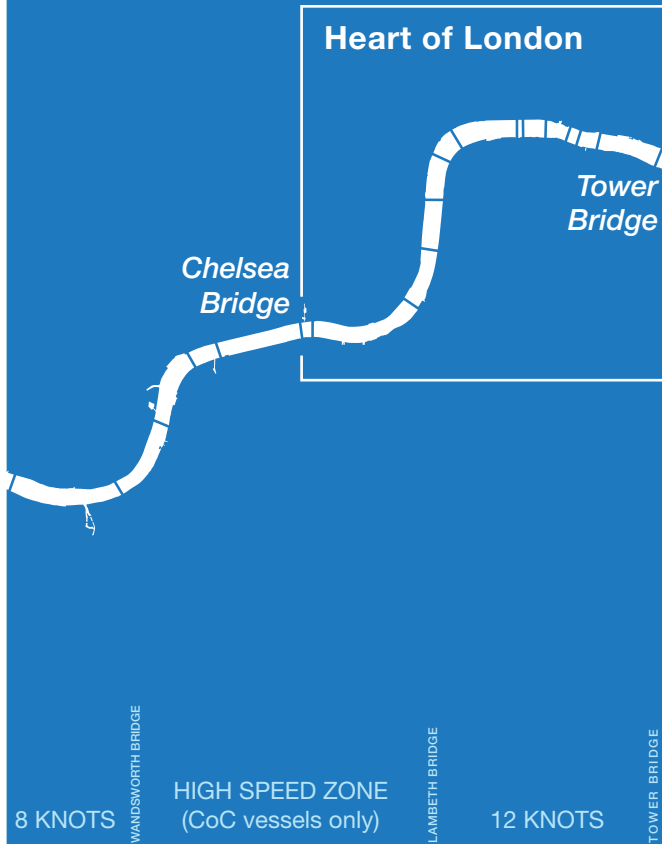
- [Tower Bridge to Greenwich.](#)
- [Greenwich to Thames Barrier.](#)

As well as highlighting specific areas of navigational concern to small boats, each section describes the navigation patterns expected of small boats. The Tideway Code Areas in particular also include the direction of the tide, in the order of:

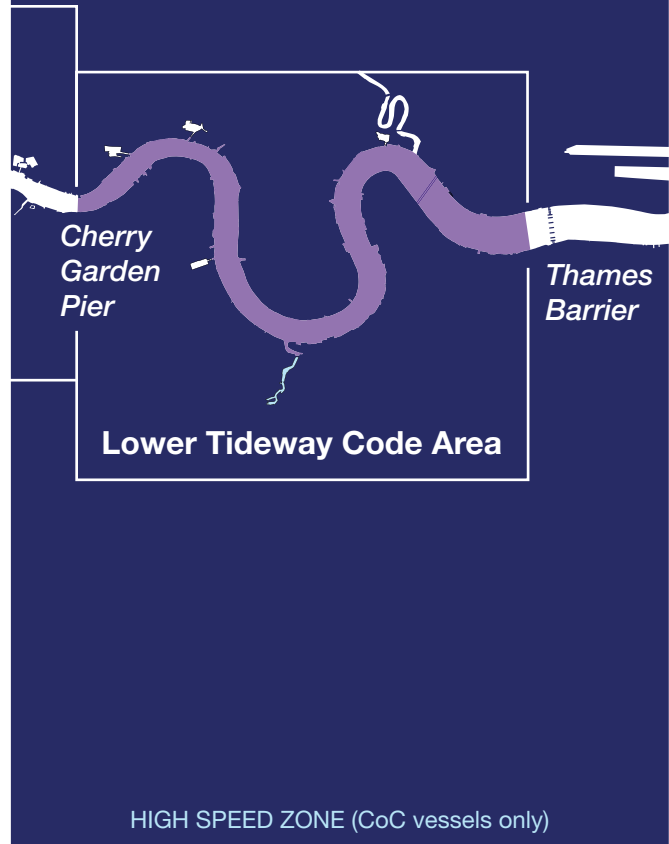
- ▶ [Ebb tide.](#)
- ◀ [Flood tide.](#)



CENTRAL LONDON



LOWER TIDEWAY



Reduced upriver depths

Mariners are reminded that depths in the upper reaches of the tidal Thames are greatly affected over the low water period by the amount of land water flowing over Teddington Weir.

The area particularly affected lies between Kew Railway Bridge and Richmond half-tide lock.

Under low flow conditions water levels in the above area will remain at or less than chart datum between three hours before and one hour after the time of predicted low water at Richmond Lock. Low water levels of 0.5m below Chart Datum are to be expected.

During such periods of reduced depths, Masters of vessels navigating upriver of Putney should only do so with caution and should also make every effort to avoid impeding the passage of commercial vessels, which are very constrained in their ability to manoeuvre in such conditions.

Small boats should check the status of the ebb tide flag warning ([p.15](#))

The Upper Tideway

The Upper Tideway refers to the part of the river between Teddington Lock and Putney Pier.

Although the Upper Tideway runs through the suburbs of west London, it has much more green space and wildlife than the river below it. There are fewer walls and wharves on the river's edge and much less commercial traffic in this section so as a result the water is generally calmer.

Because of this, **the Upper Tideway is very busy with recreational users** including paddlers, sailors and motor cruisers but by far the most common recreational sport in this part of the river is rowing.

The Upper Tideway involves two different navigation patterns for small boats (see diagram, right):

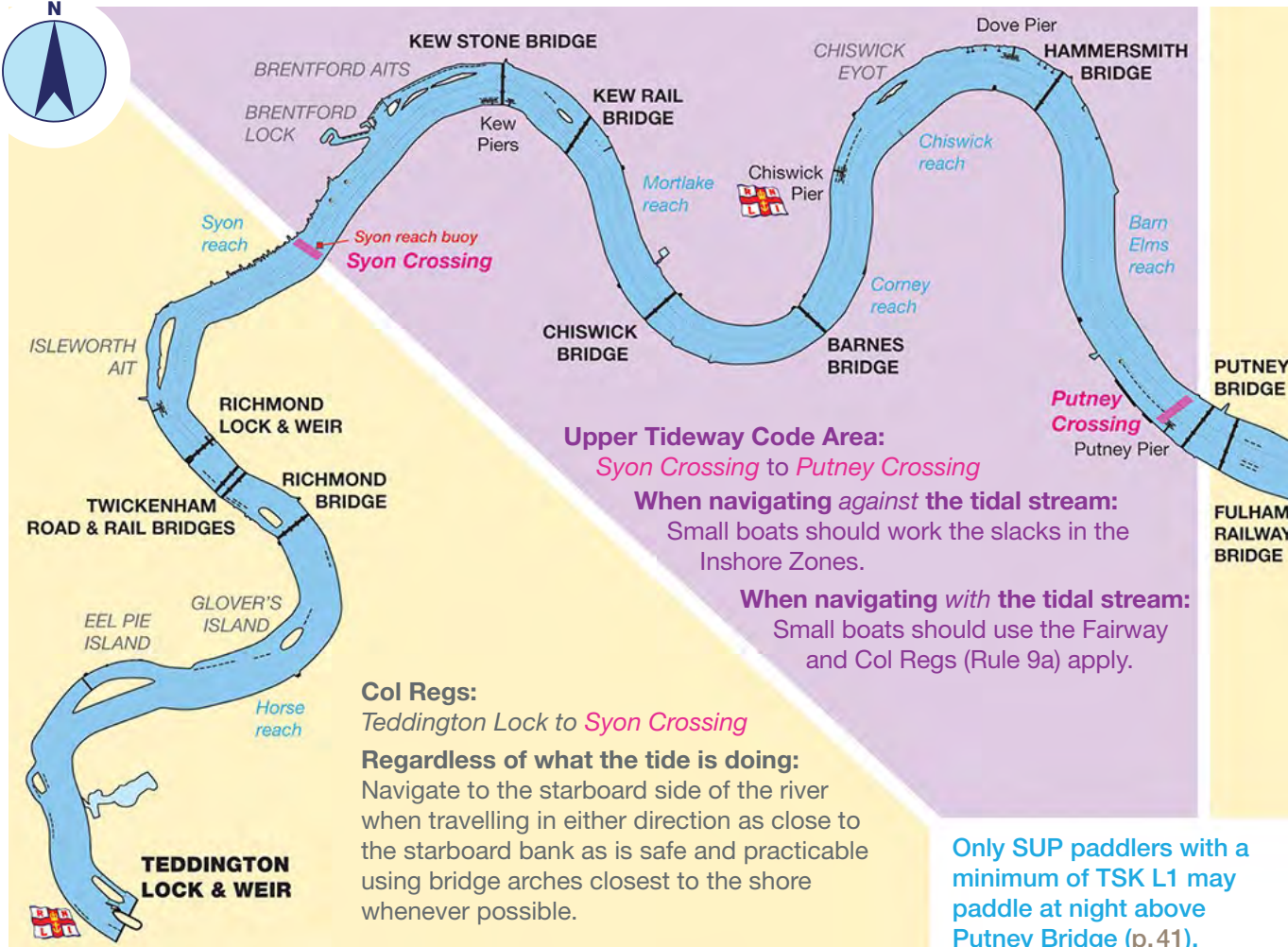
Col Regs ([p.58](#))

Col Regs apply to *all* vessels above Syon Crossing.

Upper Tideway Code Area ([p.59](#))

Working the slacks applies to rowing and paddled boats.





Upper Tideway Code Area:
Syon Crossing to Putney Crossing

When navigating *against* the tidal stream:
 Small boats should work the slacks in the Inshore Zones.

When navigating *with* the tidal stream:
 Small boats should use the Fairway and Col Regs (Rule 9a) apply.

Col Regs:
 Teddington Lock to *Syon Crossing*

Regardless of what the tide is doing:
 Navigate to the starboard side of the river when travelling in either direction as close to the starboard bank as is safe and practicable using bridge arches closest to the shore whenever possible.

Only SUP paddlers with a minimum of TSK L1 may paddle at night above Putney Bridge (p.41).

Teddington Lock to Syon Crossing



A mass start to a kayak race above Richmond Bridge



Very low water exposed shoals above Richmond Weir due to the draw-off

This part of the river is outside the Upper Tideway Code Area and can get very busy with recreational boats. In this stretch there are:

- Richmond canoe club and EPIC SUP.
- Twickenham and Richmond Bridge Rowing clubs.
- Twickenham and Richmond Yacht clubs.
- 🇬🇧 RNLI Lifeboat station at Teddington Lock.
 - A public boat hire business.
 - Commercial boat yards.
 - Houseboats at Isleworth, Richmond, Marble Hill and Eel Pie Island.
- ⏸ Scheduled stopping point for commercial sight-seeing/ passenger vessels at Richmond.
- ⓓ Draw docks giving public access to the river.

In the vicinity of Richmond bridge/quay the river is narrow and can get very busy, with hired rowing boats and pleasure cruisers, especially at weekends and in the summer.

This area above Richmond Bridge is used extensively by racing kayaks and canoes from Richmond Canoe Club for training and racing. During races, race organisers should ensure the river is clear of transiting vessels and should consider having ‘spotters’ above and below the race course.

The draw-off ([p.14](#)) allows the river to drain to its natural level, which is much lower than usual, almost to the point of drying out completely in places.

Col Regs (Rule 9a) apply to *all* vessels.

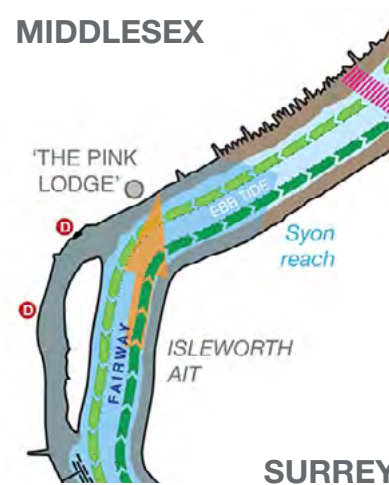
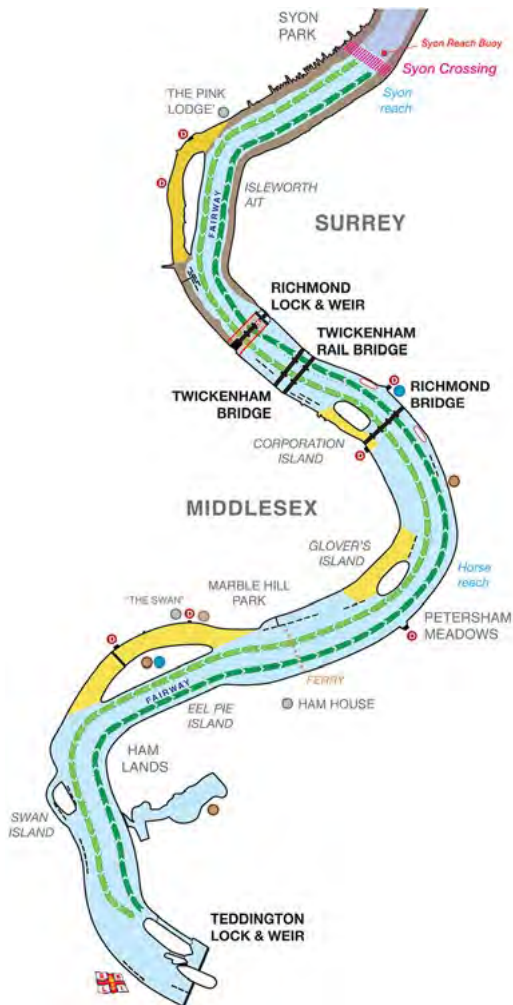
Regardless of the tide direction, all vessels should navigate to the **starboard** side of the river, in their direction of travel, at all times. Small boats should aim to be out of the Fairway and in the **starboard** Inshore Zone, as close to the bank as is safe and practicable.

If water levels allow, small boats may also use the water out of the main channel, **behind the aits and islands**, particularly when travelling inbound (upriver).

← Inbound navigation → Outbound navigation



Be aware that on the Isleworth Ait corner at the **EBB tidal set** will push small boats across the Fairway towards the Pink Lodge and into the path of **inbound vessels** on the Middlesex/north bank. Steers must be pro-active in staying to **starboard** on the Surrey/south bank (see right).



Richmond Lock and Weir

The lock and weir at Richmond is a half-tide lock. This means that for approximately 2 hrs either side of high water arches #2 and #3 are normally open to navigation. Severe dry weather and very low tides can reduce this 4hr window when the weirs are raised. Predicted high water times can be found at – tidepredictions.pla.co.uk/

At all other times those arches are closed due to weirs being lowered into the river to maintain the water level above the lock. Be aware that the weirs are lowered without much notice so particular attention must be paid to **lookout** in this vicinity.

There is an **Exclusion Zone** which extend from either end of Lock Island in a line across the river to the Middlesex shore (see diagram, right).

No vessel should enter this zone whilst:

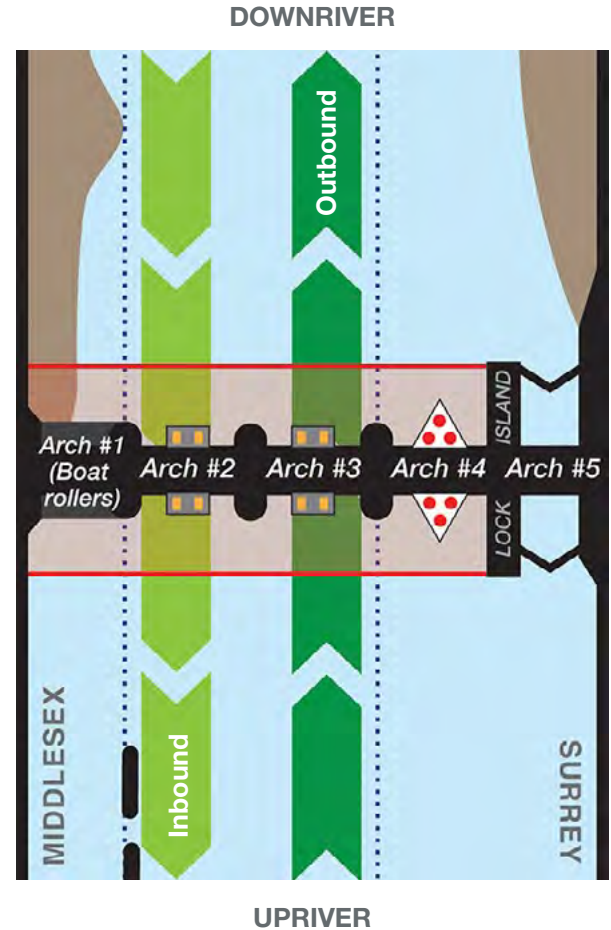
- the weirs are in the lowered position;
- the weirs are being operated.

The only exceptions to this are:

- vessels manoeuvring on or to the Lock Island berths;
- vessels engaged in emergency operations;
- small boats utilising the boat rollers in #1 arch.

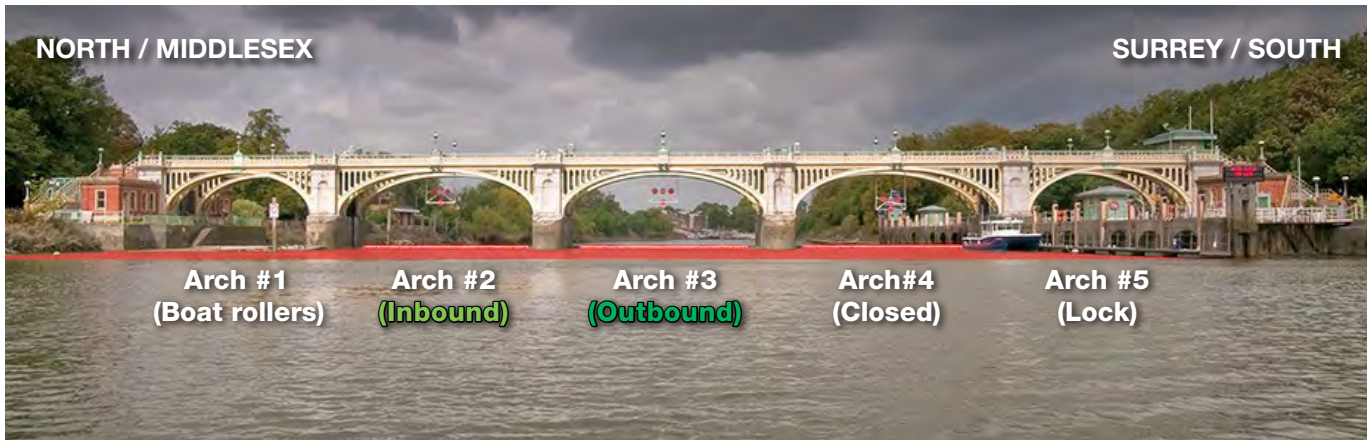
Only when the weir gates are fully raised and the Closed Arch Signs have been removed are vessels permitted to transit the Exclusion Zone and arches #2 or #3.

Note: Richmond Lock and Weir is covered by CCTV.



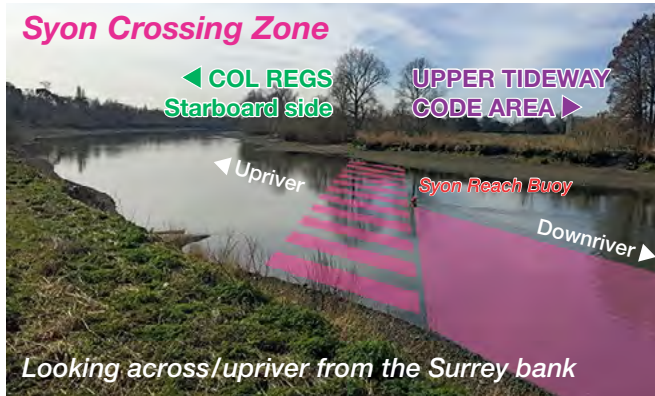


Above: Looking upriver from below the weir, showing the barriers down

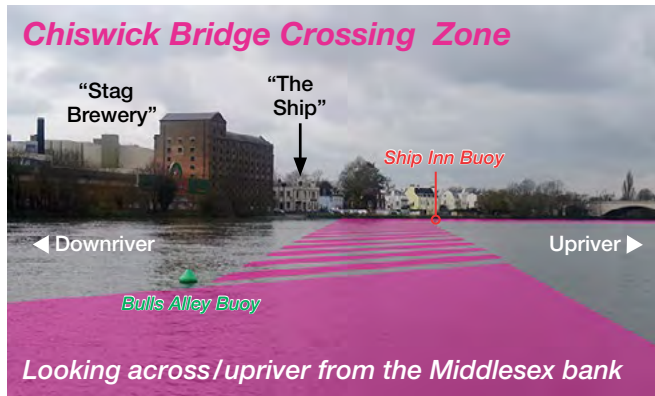


Above: Looking downriver from above the weir, showing the barriers down

Syon Crossing to Chiswick Bridge Crossing



The *Syon Reach Buoy*, is the point at which the navigation pattern changes from Col Regs to working the slacks in the *Upper Tideway Code Area*.

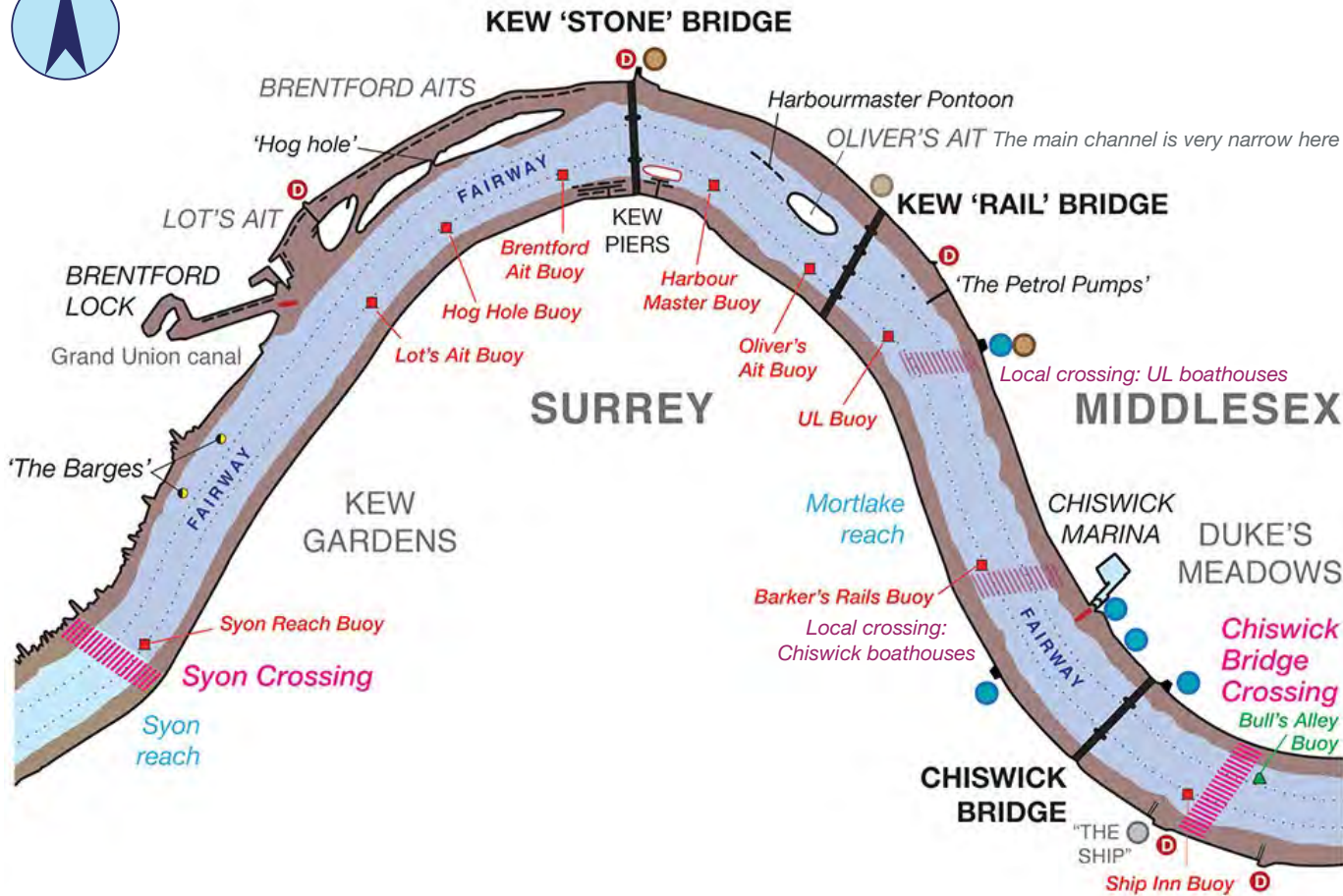


This part of the river forms the top half of *Upper Tideway Code Area* and is very busy with recreational boats, especially at the weekends and on summer evenings. In this stretch there are:

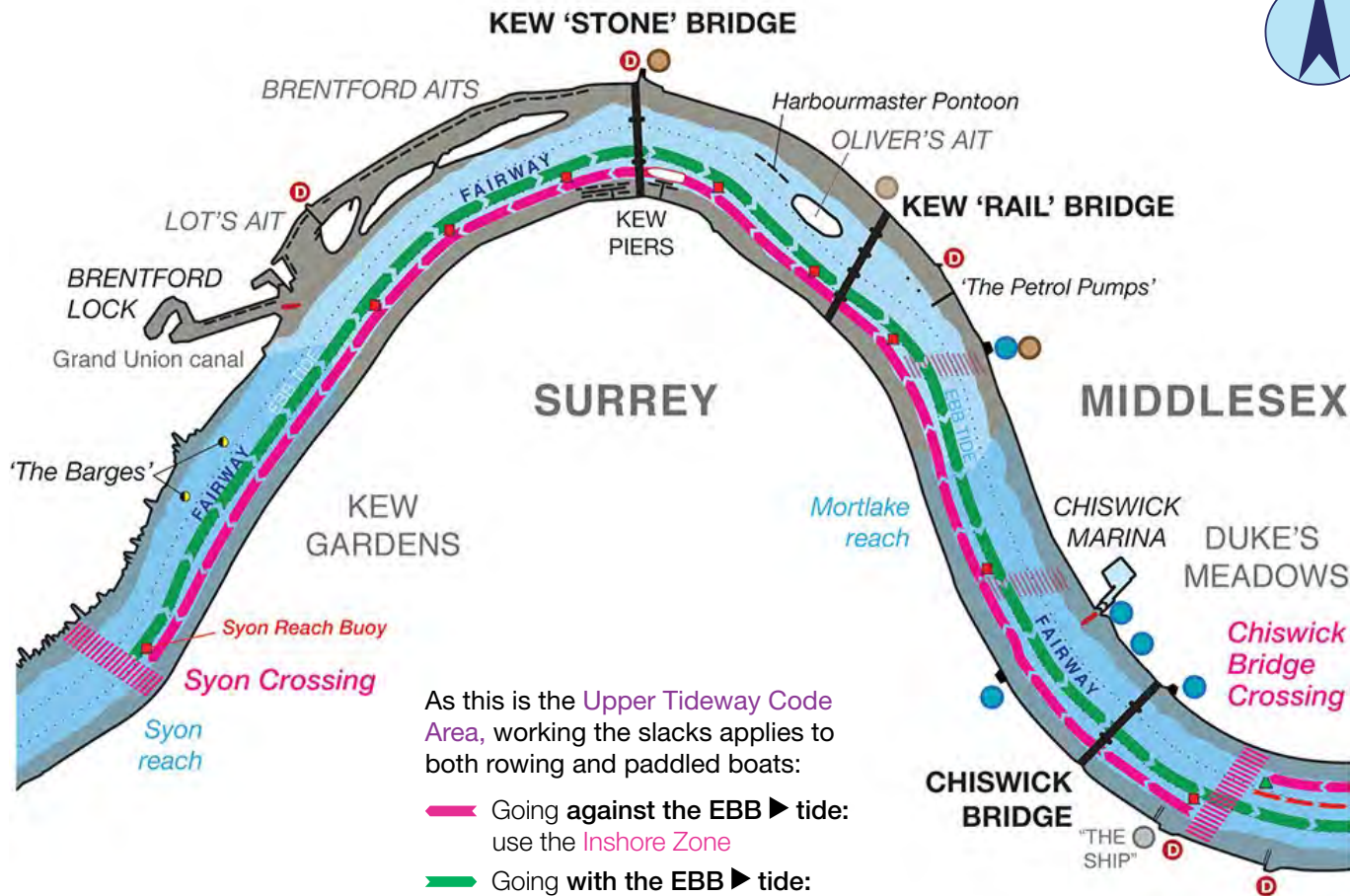
- 5 boat houses with over 21 different rowing clubs.
- Canoe, kayak and SUP clubs at Kew Stone Bridge.
- Outrigger and Dragon boat club at UL.
- A sailing club at Kew Rail Bridge.
- Commercial boatyards at Brentford.
- Houseboats at Kew Pier.
- Boats entering and leaving the river at Brentford Lock and Chiswick Marina (2 hours either side of high tide).
- Scheduled stopping point for Passenger vessels at Kew Pier (which require space manoeuvre in the Fairway).
- Ⓧ Draw docks giving public access to the river.
- ▨ *The Syon and Chiswick Bridge Crossing Zones.*
- ▨ *Local crossings at UL and Chiswick Marina.*

Because it is so busy, *Upper Tideway Code Area* is the only part of the Tideway where the edges of the Fairway and the Crossing Zones are marked with navigation buoys:

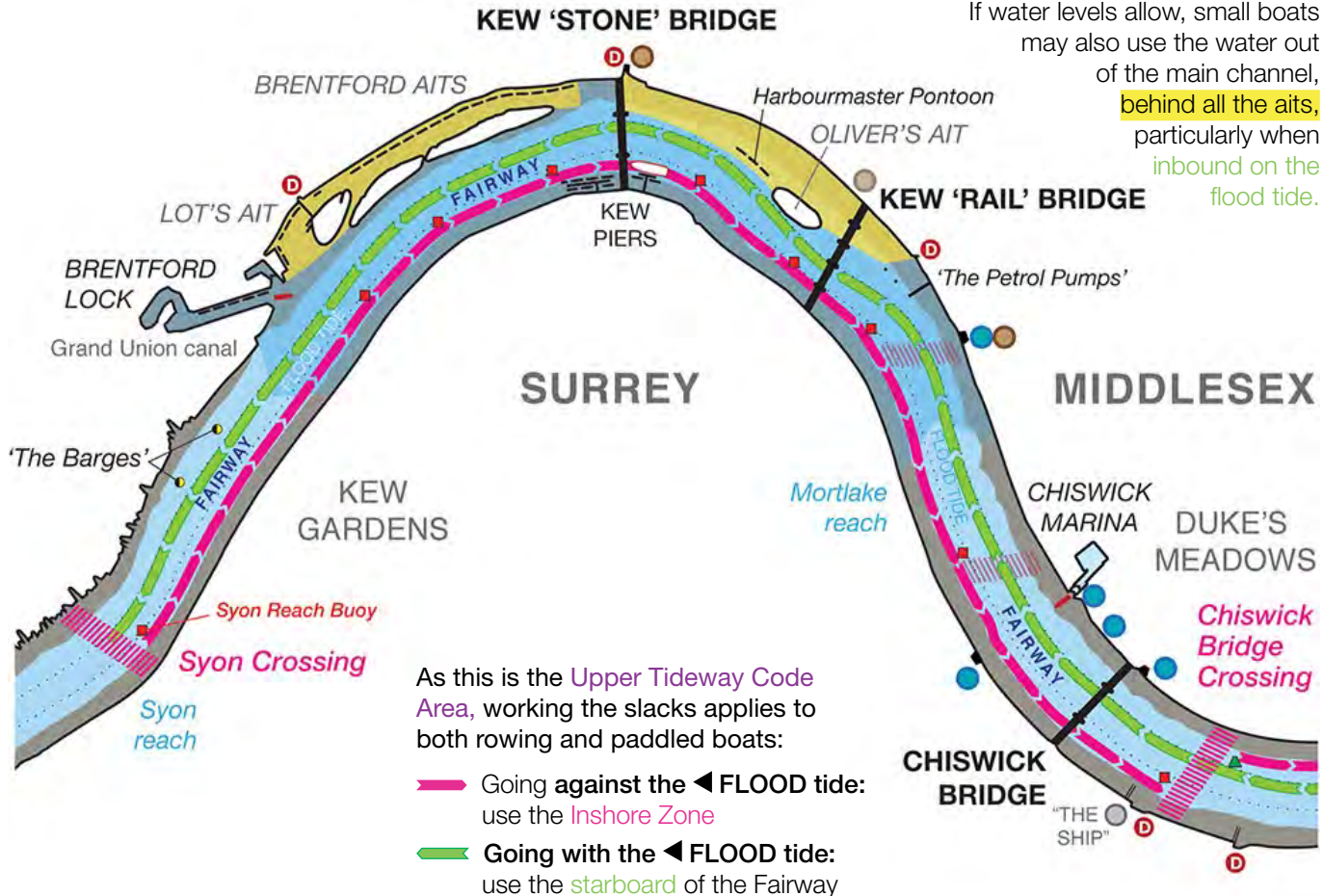
- ▨ **Red buoys** on the Surrey/south side.
- ▨ **Green buoys** on the Middlesex/north side.



Syon to Chiswick Bridge ► EBB tide navigation



Syon to Chiswick Bridge ◀ FLOOD tide navigation

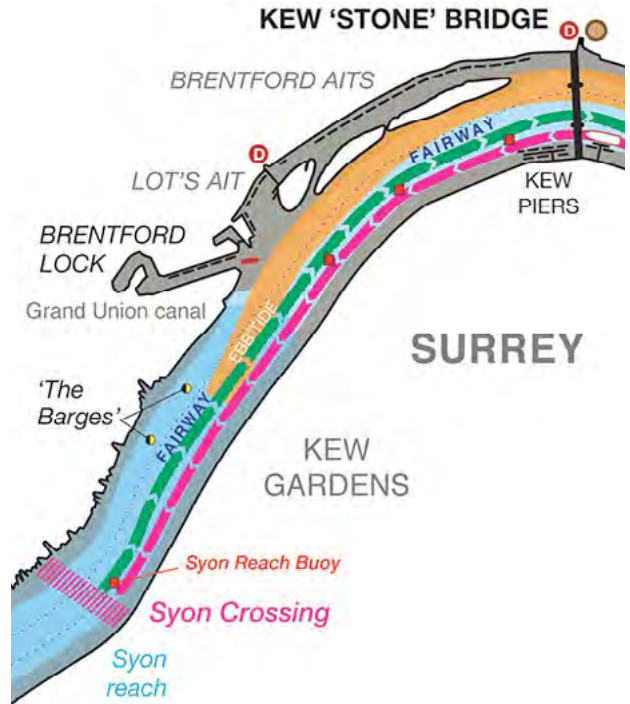
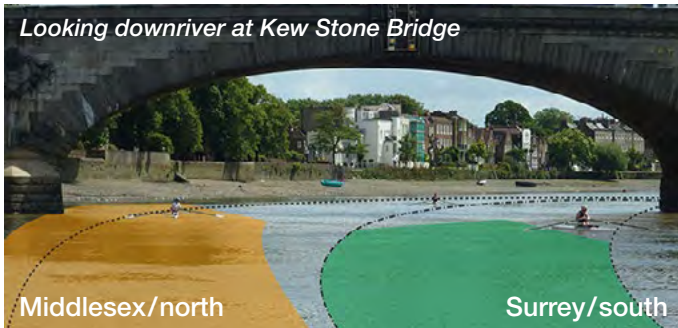


Navigational hazards ► EBB tidal set around Kew bend

The **tidal set** is particularly strong on the ebb tide at Brentford Ait and will always push small boats towards across the Fairway towards the Middlesex/north bank.

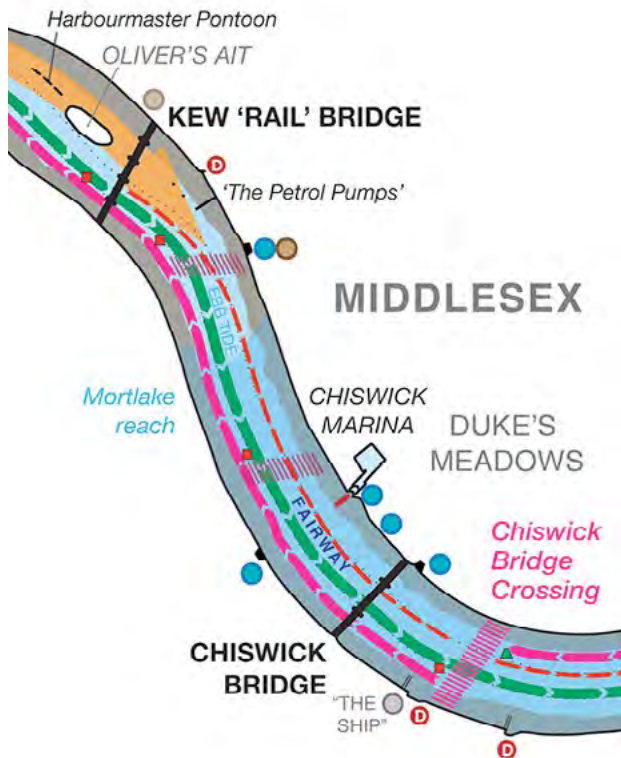


This **tidal set** continues to push small boats onto the port side of the Fairway at Kew Stone Bridge and potentially into the path of vessels inbound below the bridge who are unsighted because of the bend.



Around Kew bend on the ebb tide, steers must be pro-active in staying to the **starboard** ➔ side of the Fairway (close to the red buoys) and not be pushed over to port by the **tidal set**.

The ebb tidal set continues around the bend and below Kew Stone Bridge where it continues to push small boats off the **starboard** line, towards Harbourmasters Pontoon and Oliver's Ait.



Harbour Master Pontoon from the Surrey bank

After Kew Rail the tidal set encourages steers to 'cut the corner' down Mortlake Reach, pushing them to **port** side of the Fairway and into the path of inbound vessels.



Looking downriver at Chiswick Bridge from the Surrey Bank

Kew pier

This pier, just below Kew Stone bridge, is a scheduled stopping point for Class V passenger vessels, which operate mostly in the summer months.

These large vessels are likely to turn around in the Fairway below the bridge, alongside of Kew Pier and small boats must always give way to a Class V vessel as it is limited in its ability to manoeuvre by the river depth.

This is particularly hard to see when approaching with the ebb tide from above the bridge so extra good lookout is necessary including listening for any sound signals (p.55) which would indicate manoeuvring by a Class V vessel.

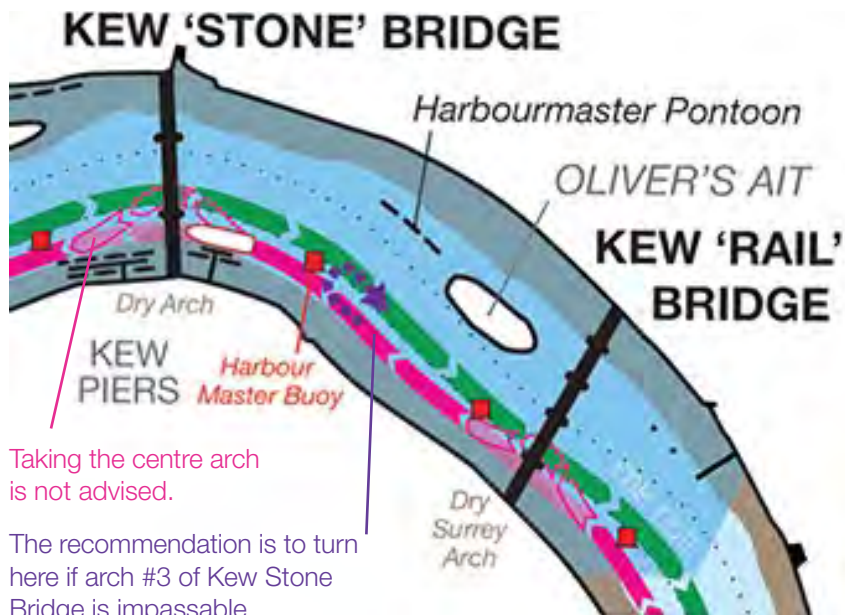


Class V manoeuvring at Kew Pier

Navigational hazards: Kew bridges

Between the bridges at Kew is a notorious hot spot for incidents, particularly at low water where the river gets very narrow. Small boats should transit both bridges as quickly, efficiently and safely as possible. Between the red buoys either side of both bridges and in both the Fairway and the **Inshore Zone**. Small boats should keep an extra good **lookout** and must not:

- stop, spin or turn
- proceed abreast or overtake
- baulk or impede other vessels
- do technical exercises

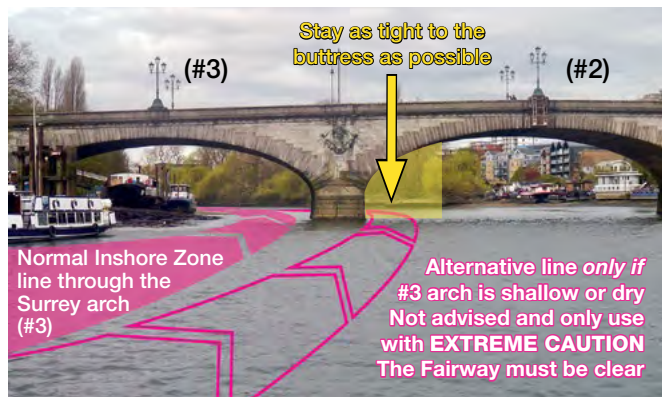


The recommendation is to turn here if arch #3 of Kew Stone Bridge is impassable.

Kew Stone (road) Bridge

- The inshore/Surrey arch (#3) can get extremely shallow at low water and all small boats using the **Inshore Zone** must take extra care here.
- Visibility through the bridge is very poor so using the centre arch (#2) inbound against the ebb tide is **not advised**. Instead the recommendation is to **turn around** before Harbourmasters Buoy if arch #3 of Kew Stone Bridge is impassable.
- If the centre arch (#2) absolutely must be use then only do so with **EXTREME CAUTION**, ensuring the Fairway above the bridge is entirely clear before proceeding, staying tight to the Surrey buttress.

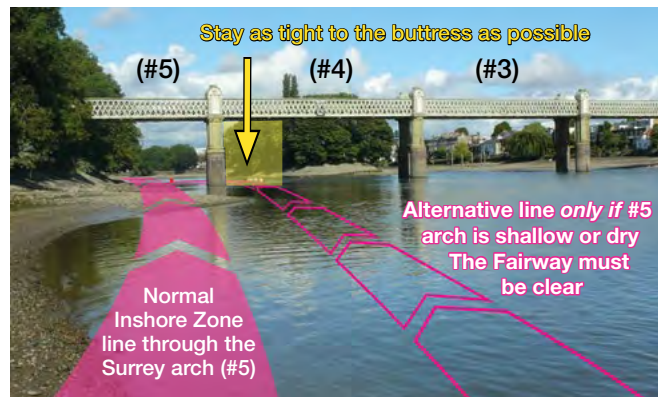
⚓ **Rowing boats:** To even consider attempting this manoeuvre, all crews **must** have an accompanying coach to spot upstream through the bridge for them.



Kew Rail Bridge

- The inshore inshore/Surrey arch (#5) often dries out completely at low water and all small boats using the **Inshore Zone** must take extra care here.
- Visibility through the bridge is good so boats going inbound against the ebb tide in the **Inshore Zone** may **very carefully** navigate through #4 arch instead – but only if the Fairway is clear. Boats in the **Inshore Zone** **must** always give way to those in the Fairway and once clear of the bridge buttress must move back in the **Inshore Zone** immediately.

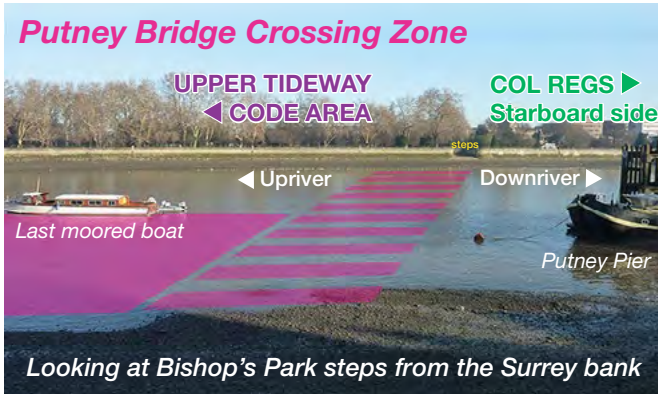
⚓ **Rowing boats:** Doubt about the water depth at Kew Rail will indicate the same at Kew Stone. If in doubt, **turn around** here or below the Harbourmaster buoy and continue the putting downriver, rather than risk transiting the centre arch of Kew Stone Bridge.



Chiswick Bridge Crossing to Putney Bridge Crossing



The *Putney Crossing Zone* is where the navigation pattern changes from working the slacks in the *Upper Tideway Code Area* to Col Regs.

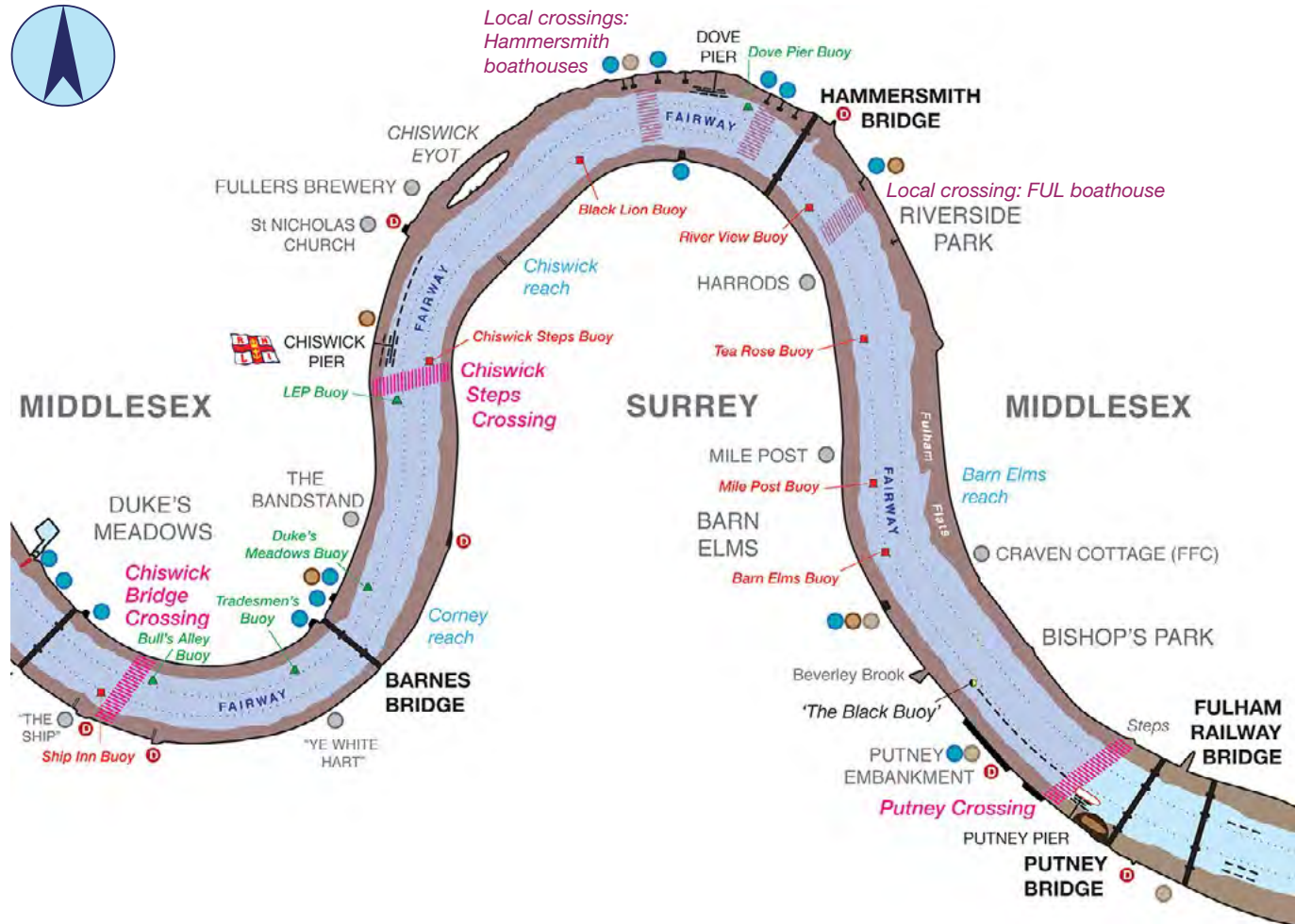


This part of the river forms the bottom half of *Upper Tideway Code Area* and is very busy with recreational boats, especially at the weekends and on summer evenings. In this stretch there are:

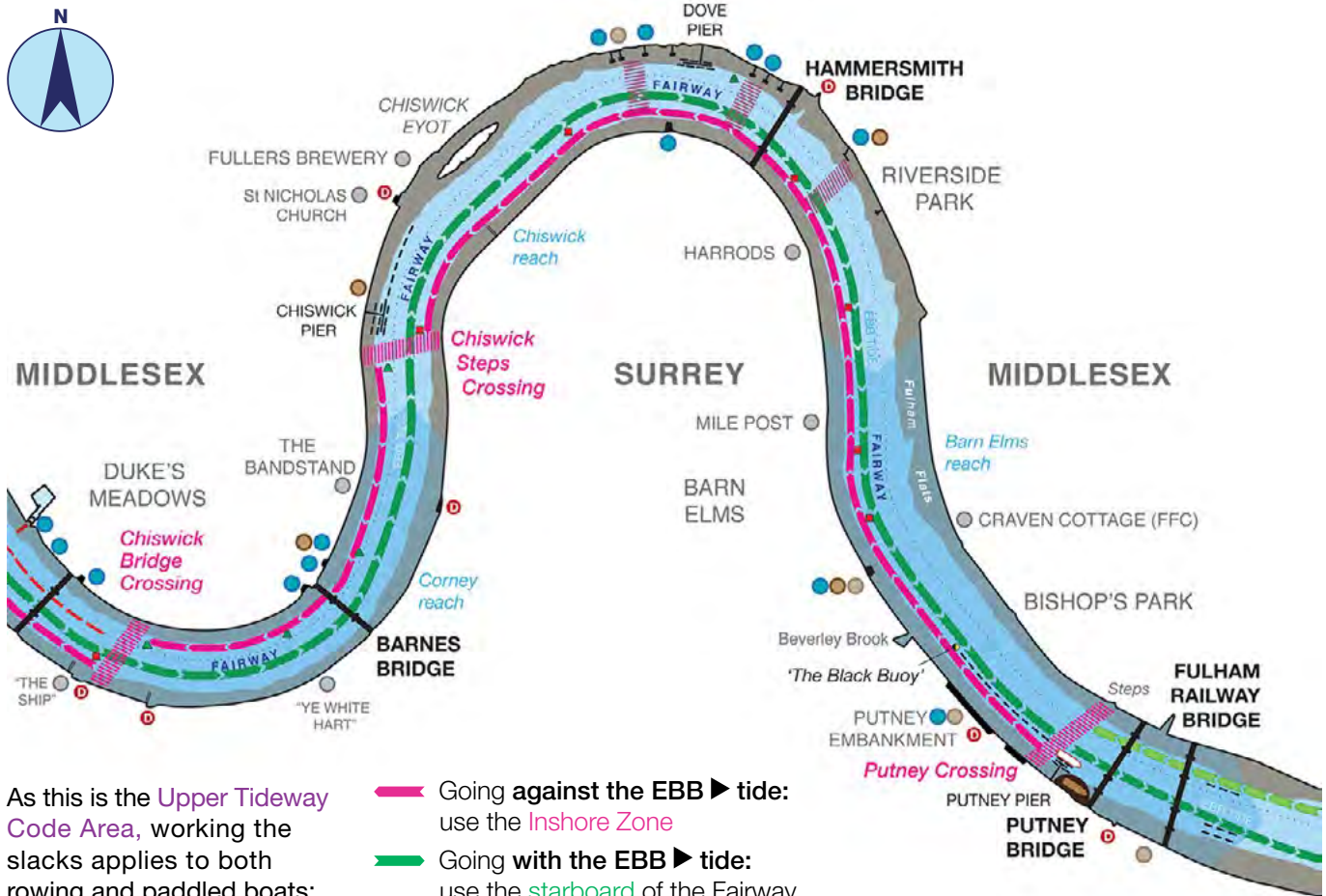
- 18 boat houses with over 30 different rowing clubs.
- Canoe clubs at Chiswick Pier, Fulham Reach and Barn Elms.
- Sailing clubs at Hammersmith, Barn Elms & Putney.
- 🚣 RNLI Lifeboat station at Chiswick Pier.
- Commercial boatyard and moorings at Putney.
- Houseboats at Chiswick and Dove Piers.
- ⬭ Scheduled stopping point for Passenger vessels at Putney Pier (which require space manoeuvre in the Fairway).
- Ⓧ Draw docks giving public access to the river.
- ▨▨▨▨ *The Chiswick Steps and Putney Crossing Zones.*
- ▨▨▨▨ *Local Crossings at Hammersmith.*
- 🚇 Thames Tunnel site at Putney Pier (until 2021).

Because it is so busy, *Upper Tideway Code Area* is the only part of the Tideway where the edges of the Fairway and the Crossing Zones are marked with navigation buoys:

- **Red buoys** on the Surrey/south side.
- ▲ **Green buoys** on the Middlesex/north side.



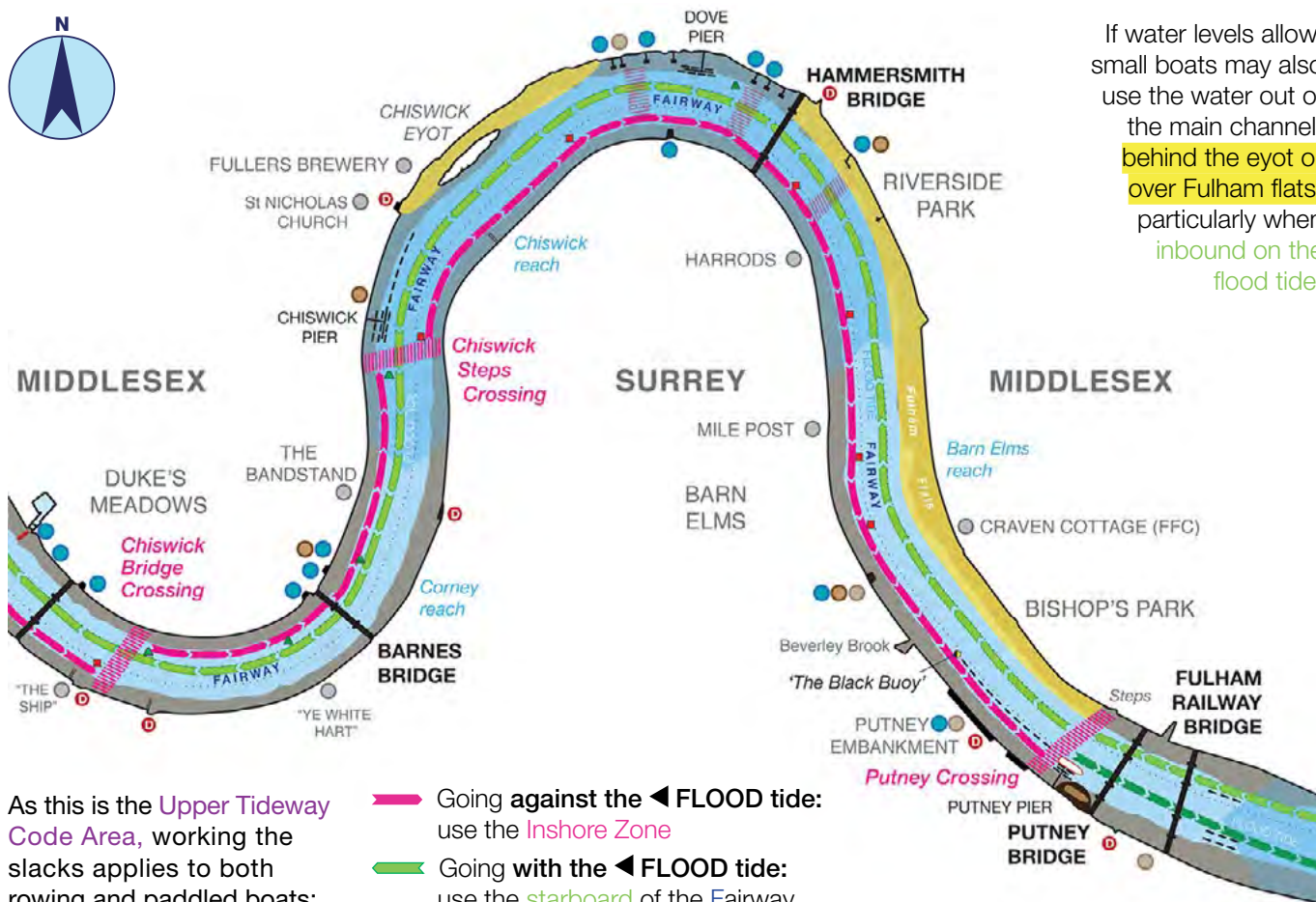
Chiswick Bridge to Putney ▶ EBB tide navigation



As this is the Upper Tideway Code Area, working the slacks applies to both rowing and paddled boats:

- Going against the EBB tide: use the Inshore Zone
- Going with the EBB tide: use the starboard of the Fairway

Chiswick Bridge to Putney ◀ FLOOD tide navigation



If water levels allow, small boats may also use the water out of the main channel, behind the eyot or over Fulham flats, particularly when inbound on the flood tide.

As this is the Upper Tideway Code Area, working the slacks applies to both rowing and paddled boats:

- Going against the ◀ FLOOD tide: use the **Inshore Zone**
- Going with the ◀ FLOOD tide: use the **starboard** of the Fairway

Navigational hazards: Barnes bend and bridge

After Chiswick Bridge, steers **outbound on the ebb tide** are often tempted to 'cut the corner' on the **port** side of the Fairway around Barnes bend putting them into the path of inbound vessels.

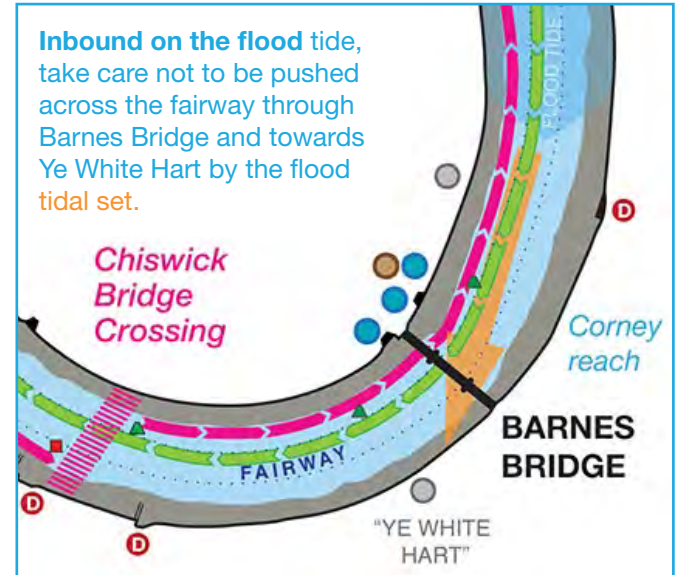


Looking downriver from Chiswick Bridge

This is particularly hazardous as being on the (wrong) **port** station means it's impossible for inbound vessels approaching below Barnes Bridge to see outbound boats behind the bridge buttress.

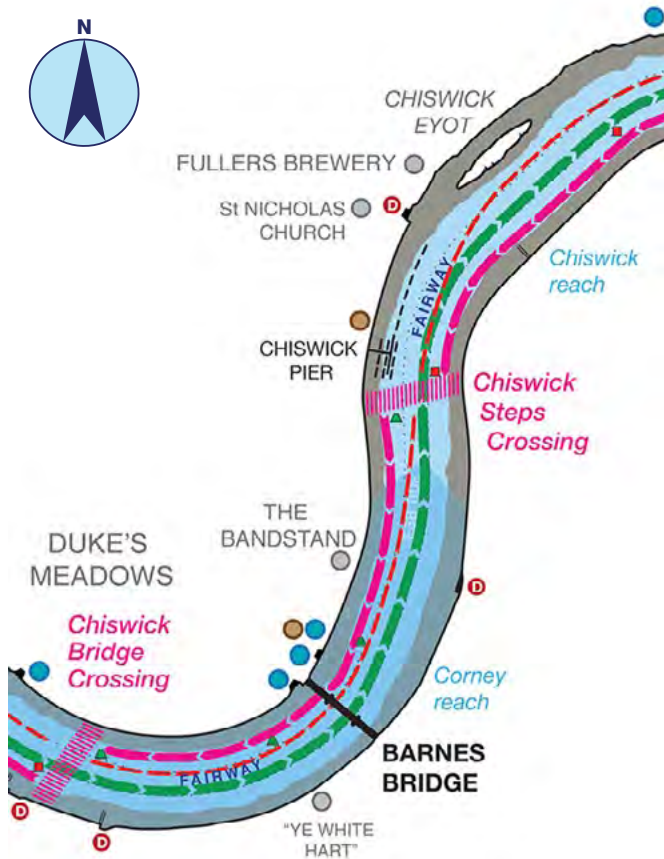


Looking downriver at Barnes Bridge from the Fairway



Looking upriver at Barnes Bridge from Barnes Terrace – this is why you don't cut the corner!

Corney and Chiswick reaches



The Surrey/south foreshore is extensive at low water, particularly where the river narrows around Chiswick Pier. It is especially tricky for boats in the **Inshore Zone** against the ebb tide. Take extra care at low water.



Rowing boats must stick to the **starboard side** of the Fairway and not try to 'stay in the 'stream' or take the **racing line**. This line is only allowed when the river is shut for Head races.



Navigational hazards: Dove Pier ◀ FLOOD Tide

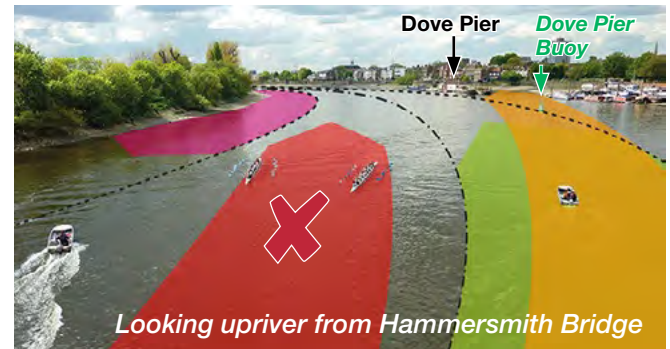
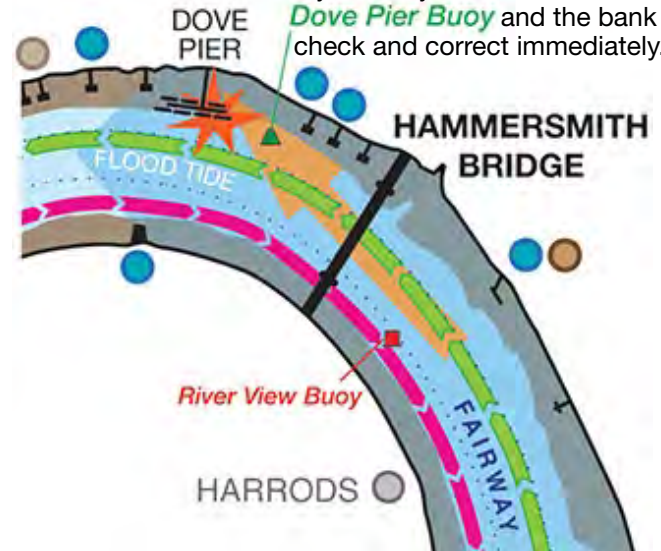
Upriver of Hammersmith Bridge on the Middlesex/north bank Dove Pier has been the scene of several very serious (rowing) incidents on the flood tide. The flood tide is very fast and inattentive navigation can develop very quickly into a dangerous situation.

Inbound boats on the **starboard** side of the Fairway are very easily pushed out of the Fairway towards Dove Pier by the **set of the flood tide** potentially causing a **collision** with the large barges on the pier.

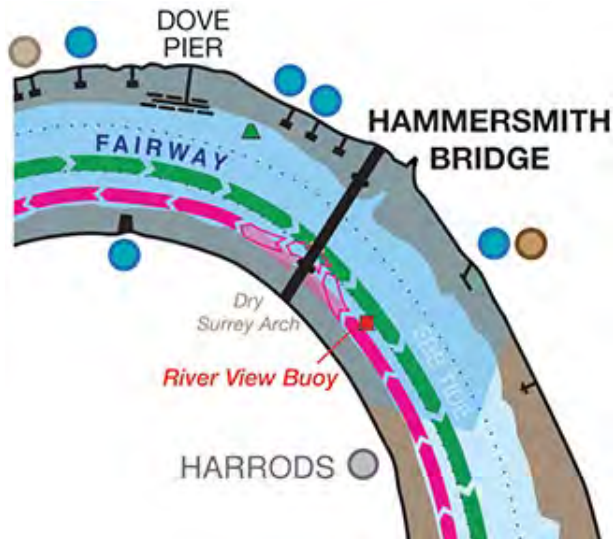
The green **Dove Pier Buoy** has been positioned on the edge of the Fairway downriver of Dove Pier as a guide to help steers, who should stay to port side of this buoy.

To help avoid this situation occurring, steers inbound on the flood should not completely **cut the corner** (see picture bottom right) but should aim to pass under the word **"BRIDGE"** on Hammersmith Bridge.

If you find yourself between **Dove Pier Buoy** and the bank check and correct immediately.



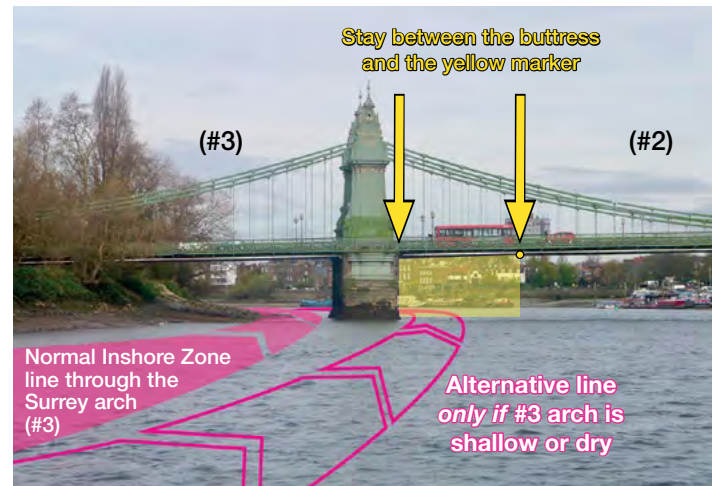
Navigational hazards: Hammersmith Bridge ► EBB Tide



The inshore/Surrey span (#3) of Hammersmith Bridge often dries out completely at low water and all small boats using the **Inshore Zone** must take extra care.

Visibility is reasonably good here so boats going inbound against the ebb tide, in the **Inshore Zone**, may **very carefully** navigate through the main span – but only if the Fairway is clear. Boats in the **Inshore Zone** **must** always wait and give way to those in the Fairway.

There are **yellow markers** under the bridge and steers making this manoeuvre **must** stay between these markers and the bridge buttress. Once clear of the bridge buttress they must move back in the **Inshore Zone** immediately.

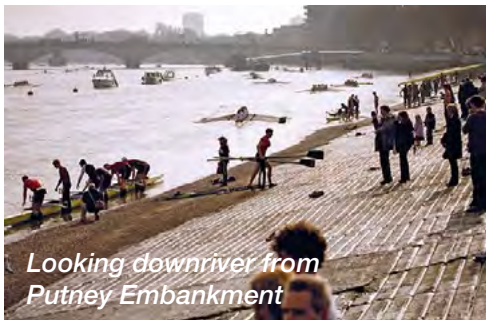


Navigational hazards: Putney Bridge and crossing

Putney is something of a critical point as far as navigation goes as it's where the Upper Tideway Code Area ends and Col Regs navigation through Central London begins.

Putney Embankment is hub for recreational boats with a lot of rowing clubs in particular but also paddling and sailing clubs, as well as public access to the river and fixed moorings.

Commuter and pleasure boat services run from Putney Pier and there are also major works at the Thames Tunnel site, including heavy barge movements for 2hrs either side of high water. These works are in place until approximately 2021.




Looking downriver from Putney Embankment

Navigating and turning safely and correctly at Putney requires a bit of explaining, particularly on the **ebb tide**.

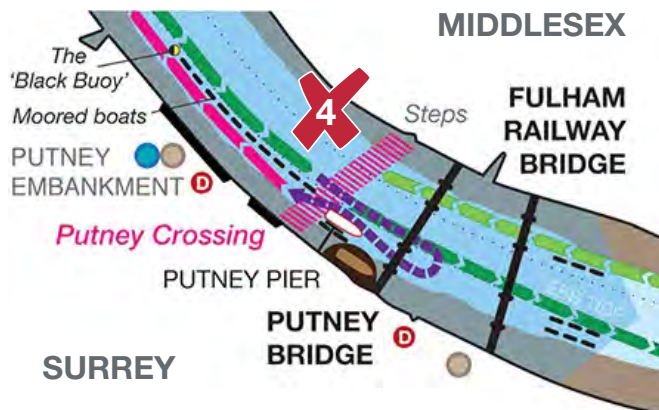
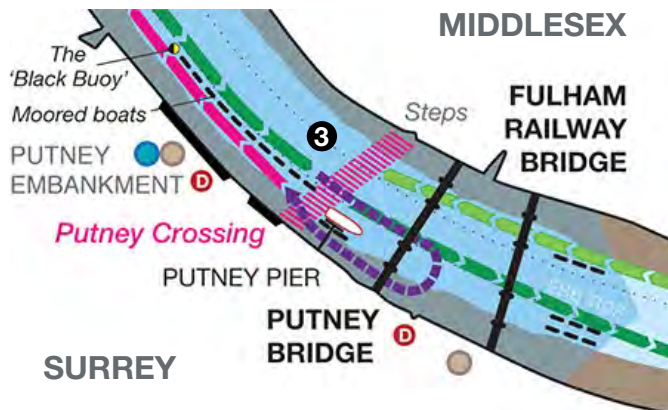
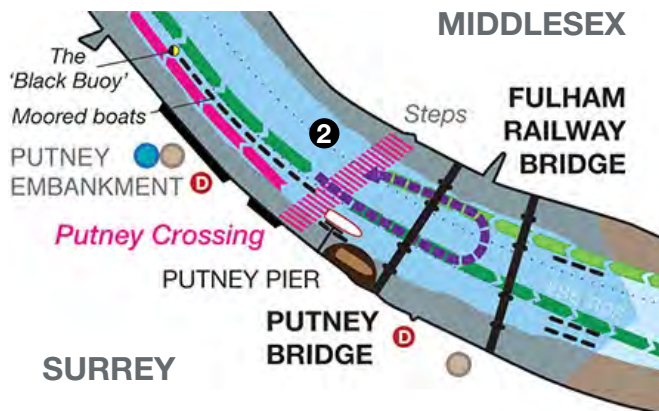
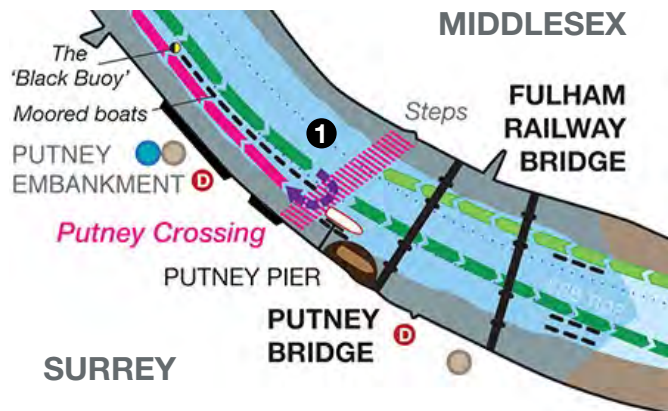
Boats should approach the crossing zone on the **starboard** side of the Fairway, close to the line of moored boats. To turn and go back inbound up the Surrey **Inshore Zone** there are three options:

- 1 Turn around the last moored boat and into the gap between that boat and Putney Pier. This does run the risk of getting swept onto the pier so any turning manoeuvre should start *before* reaching the last moored boat.
- 2 Continue through Putney Bridge, turn onto the Middlesex bank and return through the #2 arch, then cross over the river back to Surrey using the **Putney Crossing Zone**. Whenever crossing the river always give way to boats in the Fairway.
- 3 Continue through Putney Bridge, turn onto the Surrey bank and return through the #5 arch and behind Putney Pier. This is the safest option but will only work if there is sufficient water under Putney Pier.

 **This will only be an option once the Thames Tunnel works have been removed in approximately 2021.**

 **Under no circumstances** should boats continue through Putney bridge, turn towards the Surrey bank, return through arch #4 and then go *outside* Putney Pier. **This manoeuvre is extremely dangerous and has caused several serious collisions.**

Note: Under no circumstances should small boats or launches go straight through the moored boats opposite the embankment. **This manoeuvre is extremely dangerous!**



The PLA have an excellent instructional video available called **“Rowing through central London”**.

It is recommend for both rowers and paddlers who are planning to navigate in this section of the river and can be found on the PLA leisure users website – www.boatingonthethames.co.uk



Central London

Central London refers to the part of the river between Putney Bridge and Tower Bridge.

The river is very much more commercial in this section especially below Westminster Bridge (Heart of London) where there are much higher volumes of passenger and commuter traffic as well as work boats and barges. The river's edge is also almost entirely walls and wharves and as a result the water is generally rougher and there are fewer places to get out of the river.

As well as being busy with choppy water, there are also 20 bridges and countless piers, moorings and wharves to negotiate. For those reasons Central London is not especially well suited to recreational activities, particularly in fine rowing boat, all open boats and SUPs. Sea or touring style kayaks with closed cockpits are best suited to coping with the water in this section.

Small boats are, however, not banned from navigating through Central London but journeys require much more stringent planning – some specific requirements and restrictions apply which are detailed in this section.

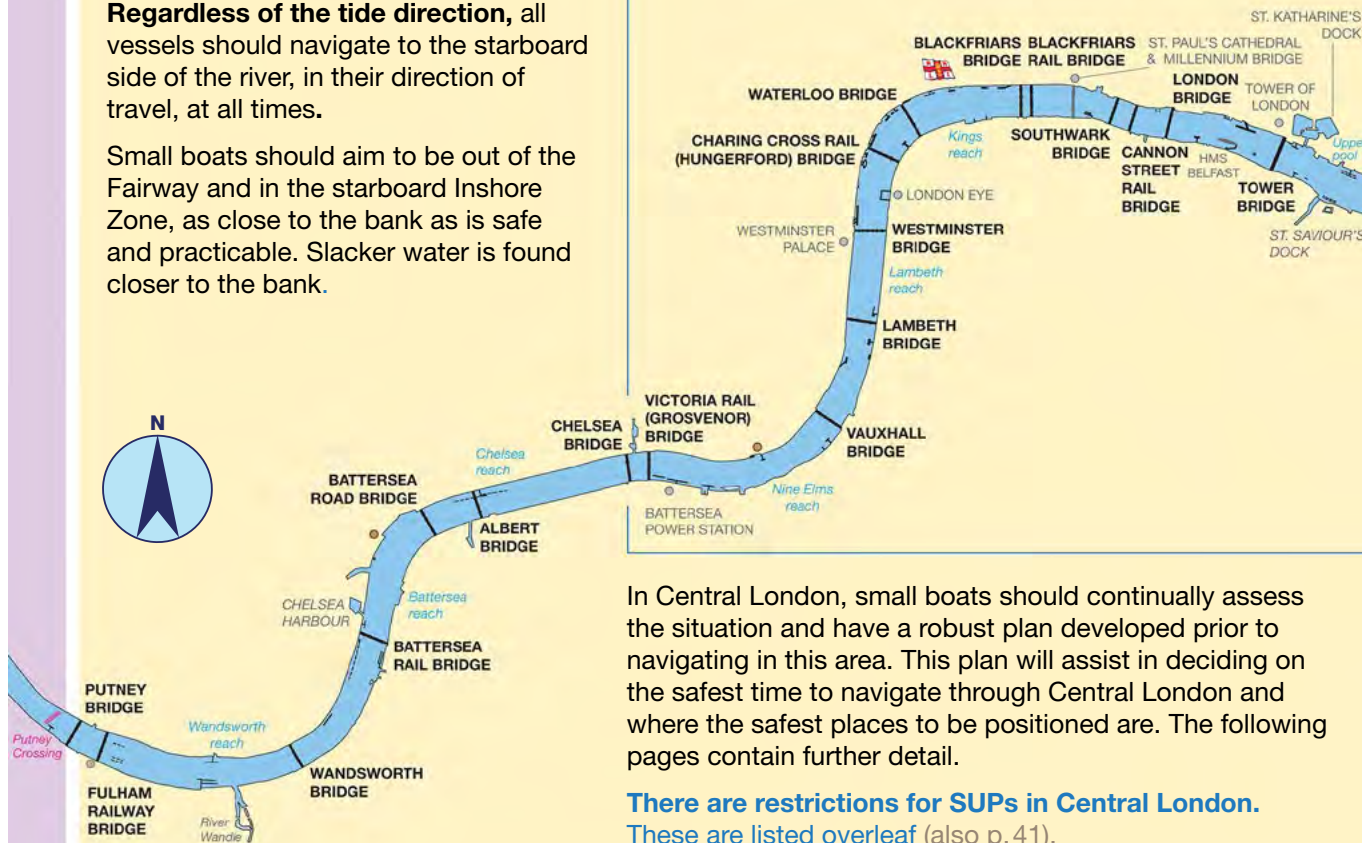


Col Regs (Rule 9a) apply to *all* vessels.

Regardless of the tide direction, all vessels should navigate to the starboard side of the river, in their direction of travel, at all times.

Small boats should aim to be out of the Fairway and in the starboard Inshore Zone, as close to the bank as is safe and practicable. Slacker water is found closer to the bank.

HEART OF LONDON – pages 104–109



In Central London, small boats should continually assess the situation and have a robust plan developed prior to navigating in this area. This plan will assist in deciding on the safest time to navigate through Central London and where the safest places to be positioned are. The following pages contain further detail.

There are restrictions for SUPs in Central London.
These are listed overleaf (also p. 41).

Putney Bridge to Chelsea Bridge

→ Rowing

Rowing boats are advised to inform London VTS if they go below Wandsworth Bridge but it has been agreed that they may proceed as far as Chelsea Bridge without having to contact London VTS.

This is a concession, don't abuse it!

Due to commercial barge traffic movements at various freight facilities, **rowers must not proceed below Fulham Railway bridge for 3hrs before and 2hrs after high tide.**

Rowing boats should not proceed below Wandsworth Bridge, regardless of tide, unless the outing plan has been pre-approved by the Club Rowing Safety Advisor.

Rowing boats *must* inform London VTS if going **afloat in the dark below Wandsworth Bridge.**



Chelsea Bridge

← Paddling

Paddled boats *must* inform London VTS if they intend to paddle into or through the Heart of London (between Chelsea Bridge and Cherry Garden Pier).

All paddled boats *must* inform London VTS if going afloat **afloat in the dark below Wandsworth Bridge.**

SUP restrictions between Putney and Chelsea Bridges:

- At least one person must carry a VHF radio (*Channel 14*).
- Do not paddle 3 hours before and 2 hours after high water at London Bridge, due to large freight vessels movements.
- Unless they hold a TSK L1, SUPs with **some experience* must have leaders with a TSK L2 at a ratio of 1:4.
- Solo paddlers must have a TSK L2.
- At night, paddlers must hold a minimum of TSK L1 and paddle as a group of at least three boats.
- No solo paddling at night.

**Some experience: means have paddled on the tidal Thames on at least three previous occasions.*







- Kayaking London & EPIC CIC at Cremone Wharf are the only paddling clubs in this section.

Col Regs (Rule 9a) apply to *all* vessels.

Regardless of the tide direction, small boats should, whenever possible, navigate out of the Fairway and in the starboard Inshore Zone, as close to the bank as is safe and practicable.

When water levels allow, always use the bridge arch closest to the shore, unless it is closed and always pass inside/under all piers except where specific advice says otherwise (pp. 107–109).

KEY

-  Inbound navigation
-  Outbound navigation
-  Passenger vessel stop
-  Commercial freight berth
-  Thames Tunnel site
-  Draw Dock



The area to the north of the Fairway between Cremone Wharf and Vauxhall Bridge is not used by the commercial freight vessels at Nine Elms, Cringle Dock and Battersea power station. Therefore this area could be used by paddlers, when paddling with either tide, to keep out of the way of other traffic *if* the need arises and water levels allow.

There is a **100m Exclusion Zone** around the London Heliport above Battersea Rail Bridge. Small boats may transit this area but for safety reasons, must not stop in it.

Chelsea Bridge to Tower Bridge (Heart of London)

→ Rowing

Rowing below Chelsea bridge and into the Heart of London is discouraged, particularly in fine boats. Wider rowing boats with more freeboard are more suitable but open boats should be fitted with sufficient buoyancy. Using coxed boats is also advised.

It is recommended that all rowing excursions into or through central London are **restricted to the weekends before 10.00am** when the river is less busy with commercial traffic.

For Upper Area-based clubs:

- All rowing boats **must** inform London VTS if they intend to row into or through the [Heart of London](#) (i.e. below Chelsea Bridge).

For Lower Area-based clubs:

- Rowing boats **must** inform London VTS if they intend to row into or through the [Heart of London](#) (i.e. above Cherry Garden Pier).
- If going above Cherry Garden Pier rowers should cross at Surrey Entrance Crossing and use the north bank ([p.117](#)).
- If returning downriver, rowers should stay on the south bank and turn before Cherry Garden Pier ([p.117](#)).

← Paddling

Paddling open boats below Chelsea bridge and into the Heart of London is discouraged but all open boats should be fitted with sufficient buoyancy. Sea or touring style kayaks with closed cockpits are the most suitable type of paddle boat for the conditions in this part of the river.

All paddled boats **must** inform London VTS if they intend to paddle below Chelsea Bridge and into or through the Heart of London ([pp.106–109](#)).

SUP restrictions between Chelsea and Tower Bridges:

In addition to the requirements on [page 102](#):

- No paddling 11.00hrs–18.00hrs between Good Friday and September 30th.
- SUPs require a minimum of TSK L2 and must paddle as a group of at least 3 boats. No solo paddling.
- No paddling at night.

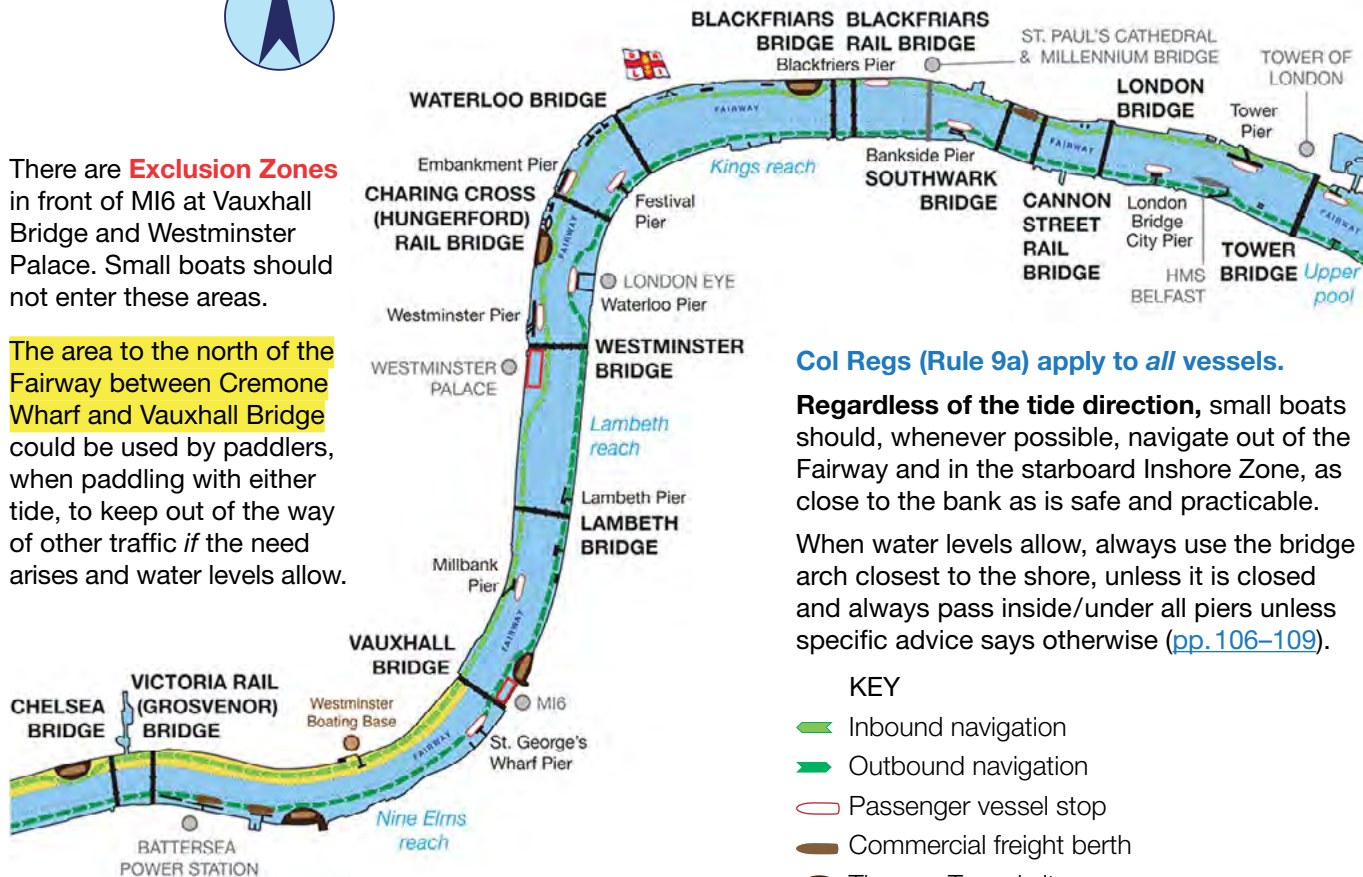
Note: Commercial groups may paddle in this area without a TSK endorsement, provided they meet the requirements set out on [page 41](#).

- Westminster Boating Base on Nine Elms reach is the only paddling club in this section.



There are **Exclusion Zones** in front of M16 at Vauxhall Bridge and Westminster Palace. Small boats should not enter these areas.

The area to the north of the Fairway between Cremone Wharf and Vauxhall Bridge could be used by paddlers, when paddling with either tide, to keep out of the way of other traffic *if* the need arises and water levels allow.









Col Regs (Rule 9a) apply to all vessels.

Regardless of the tide direction, small boats should, whenever possible, navigate out of the Fairway and in the starboard Inshore Zone, as close to the bank as is safe and practicable.

When water levels allow, always use the bridge arch closest to the shore, unless it is closed and always pass inside/under all piers unless specific advice says otherwise ([pp.106–109](#)).

KEY

-  Inbound navigation
-  Outbound navigation
-  Passenger vessel stop
-  Commercial freight berth
-  Thames Tunnel site
-  Draw Dock

Heart of London

For the purposes of this code, the Heart of London is the section between **Chelsea Bridge and Cherry Garden Pier**. This by far the busiest part of the Tideway, especially in the summer months.

Commuter services (such as Clippers) run less frequently at weekends above Chelsea Bridge but sightseeing trips still operate, from around 10.00am. Therefore, the PLA encourage small boats to only transit this section **before 10.00am on weekend mornings**.

General advice for navigating small boats in the Heart of London:

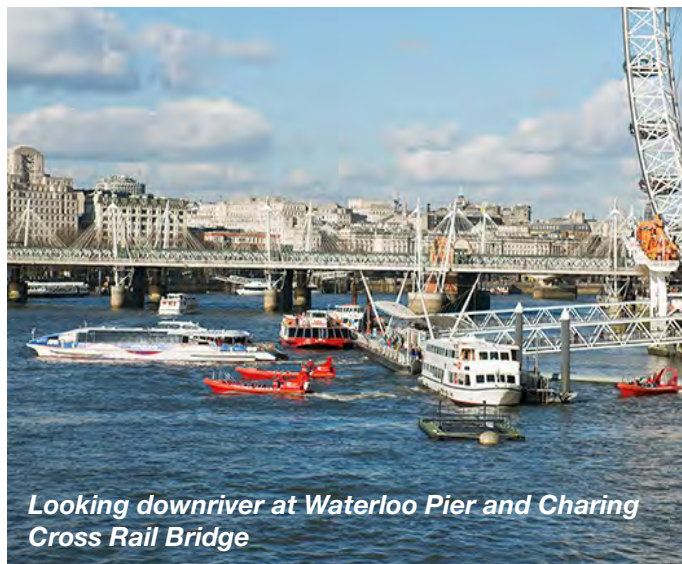
- Only the most experienced and qualified Tideway steers should attempt to navigate this section outside the times advised above.
- **Keep a very good, proactive lookout and proceed with extreme caution at all times.**
- Use of a personal VHF (*Channel 14*) to help understand traffic movements is recommended.
- Expect high waves and rough water and be aware of wash from behind as well as in front.
- Make your intentions clear and try to make eye contact with the helm of motor vessels.
- Clipper services rarely spend long at a pier. Let them leave the pier rather than attempt to go around them while they are stopped.

Navigational hazards: Piers

Navigational hazards are ever present in the Heart of London and too numerous to list in detail.

However, when navigating around the numerous piers it is important to pass inside/under them whenever water levels and width allows. Do so as a tight group and ensure that the helm of any vessel can see the group, before returning to the starboard edge of the river.

Exceptions to this procedure are detailed on the following pages, starting with Westminster opposite.



Looking downriver at Waterloo Pier and Charing Cross Rail Bridge

Westminster and Embankment

The river between Westminster and Charing Cross Rail Bridges is extremely busy with tourist and commuter traffic often causing rough water conditions.

There are three piers in this section that require particular caution:

1 Embankment Pier

Never go **inside** Embankment Pier ❌

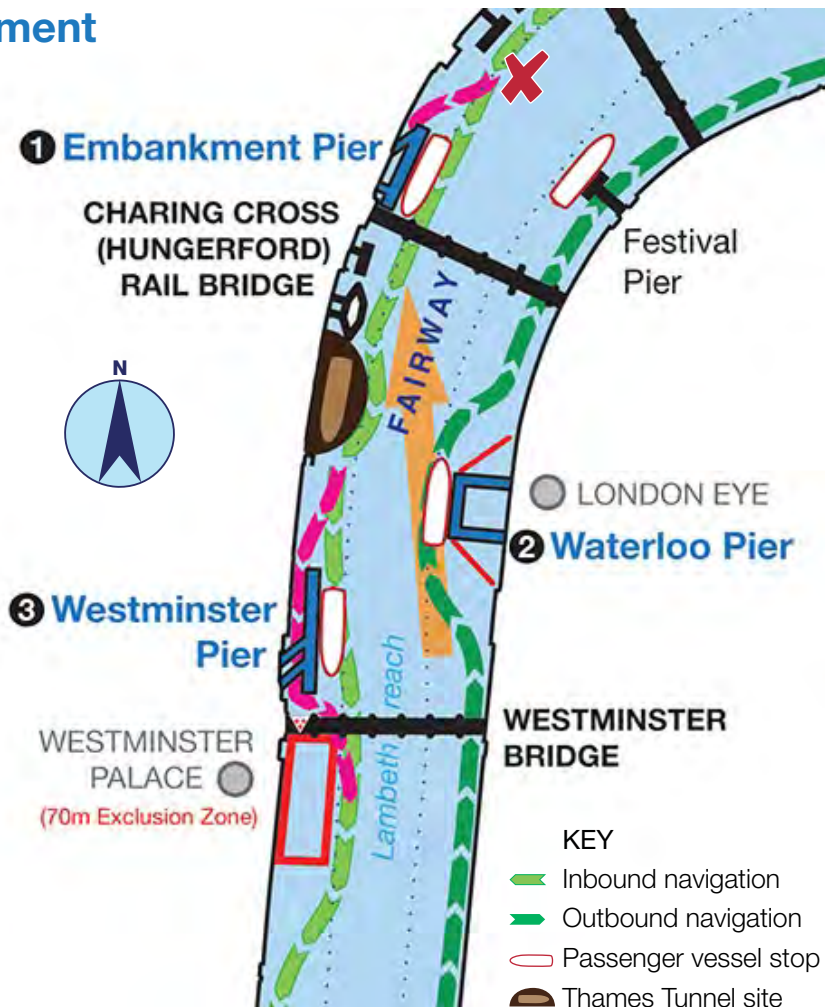
2 Waterloo Pier

There are **barriers** to prevent vessels from going inside or under the very busy Waterloo Pier. Steers should wait until they are certain that it is safe to go around the outside then tuck back in immediately once past. When waiting for the Fairway to clear also be aware of the **tidal set** on the ebb tide.

3 Westminster Pier

A decision whether or not to go **inside** Westminster Pier should only be considered by the most experienced paddlers or leaders. **If in doubt go outside** but with extreme caution as this pier is also very busy.

⚓ **Rowing boats should always go outside Westminster Pier**



Bankside Pier

Due to the pier not being in line with the river flow or the bank, the river ‘funnels’ behind Bankside Pier so is especially hazardous.

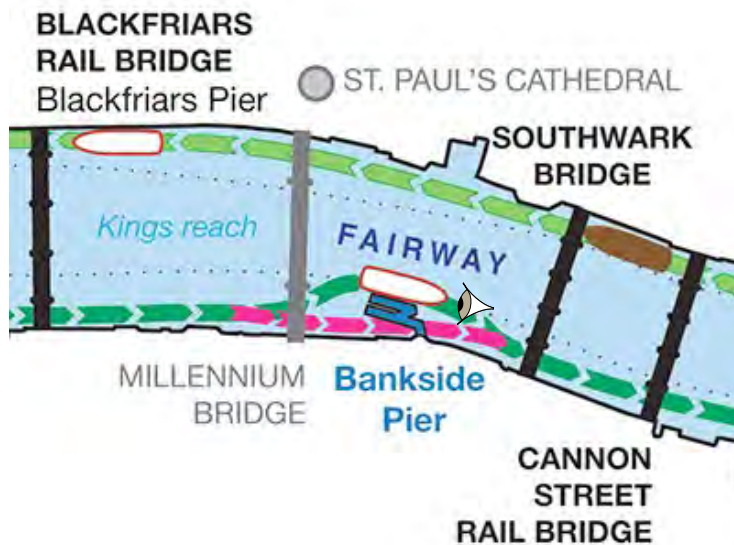
Going outside Bankside Pier is recommended and extreme care should be taken if choosing to go inside. **Inexperienced paddlers and rowing boats should not go inside Bankside Pier.**

➤ An early decision should be made on which line the group should take, especially on the ebb tide. Navigational intentions should be made very clear to other vessels – which may be approaching from behind.

🚤 Remember that Clipper services will not stop at the pier for long so it is generally best to wait for them.

👁️ If choosing to go outside a vessel stopped on Bankside Pier, don’t cut-in closely across her bows once passed. Continue well past the bows and, if possible, make eye contact with the helm to ensure that they have seen you before returning to the south bank.

- If choosing to go behind Bankside Pier, passenger vessels may have even less chance of seeing you as you reappear in front of them from behind the pier.







The river narrows a little between Blackfriars Bridge and London Bridge. As a result the tidal stream increases in strength here, which can also increase wave height.

Just below London Bridge the effect of the old bridge foundations on the river bed can cause large wave height, particularly on the last of the ebb tide.



KEY

-  Inbound navigation
-  Outbound navigation
-  Passenger vessel stop
-  Commercial freight berth

The Upper pool

The Upper Pool, between London Bridge and Tower Bridge is another particularly busy section with a lot of tourist and commuter river traffic often causing rough water conditions. It requires good judgement and caution to navigate, especially outbound.

Tower Pier

This is an extremely busy pier and a lot of commercial vessels cross the river between Tower Pier and London Bridge City Pier. If the water level allows, small boats should go behind/under Tower Pier.

HMS Belfast

It is recommended that all small boats go inside HMS Belfast, water levels allowing – but there are pros and cons:

Outside HMS Belfast?

- More visible to other river traffic.
- More easily avoids moorings below Tower Bridge.

Inside HMS Belfast?

- Less wash and less traffic.
- Easier to recover to shore.

Make an early decision, especially on the ebb tide and clearly show your intentions to other vessels.

The Lower Tideway is complicated by the fact that small boats follow different navigation patterns within the Lower Tideway Code Area – between Cherry Garden Pier and Royal Wharf Pier:

- ✦ Rowing boats must work the slacks against the tide.
- ✦ Paddled boats should follow Col Regs at all times.

In fact, paddled boats are permitted to work the slacks but to avoid complication, it is recommended that they don't. Should paddlers choose to work the slacks then they must make it very obvious to other river users, particularly rowers, which navigation pattern they are following. Fortunately recreational use is quite light in this part of the river and it is easy to keep a good lookout for some distance ahead.

Lower Tideway

The **Lower Tideway** refers to the part of river below Tower Bridge out to the estuary (although in practical terms small boats rarely venture far below the Thames Barrier).

The river is less commercially orientated above the Barrier but regular commuter services do still run. The river's edge is mostly walls and wharves (a hint of the industrial past) and the river is now much wider and more open. The water can get very rough and places to get out are still few and far between. This section is less suited to recreational activities, particularly in open boats and SUP's may not paddle on this section at all. Other paddled and rowing boats are able to use the Lower Tideway but more consideration must be made to the probable conditions and there are two different navigation patterns for small boats (see diagram right).

Col Regs [\(p.58\)](#)

Col Regs apply to all vessels below Tower Bridge except rowing boats.

Lower Tideway Code Area [\(p.59\)](#)

Working the slacks applies to **rowing boats only**.



Lower Tideway Code Area

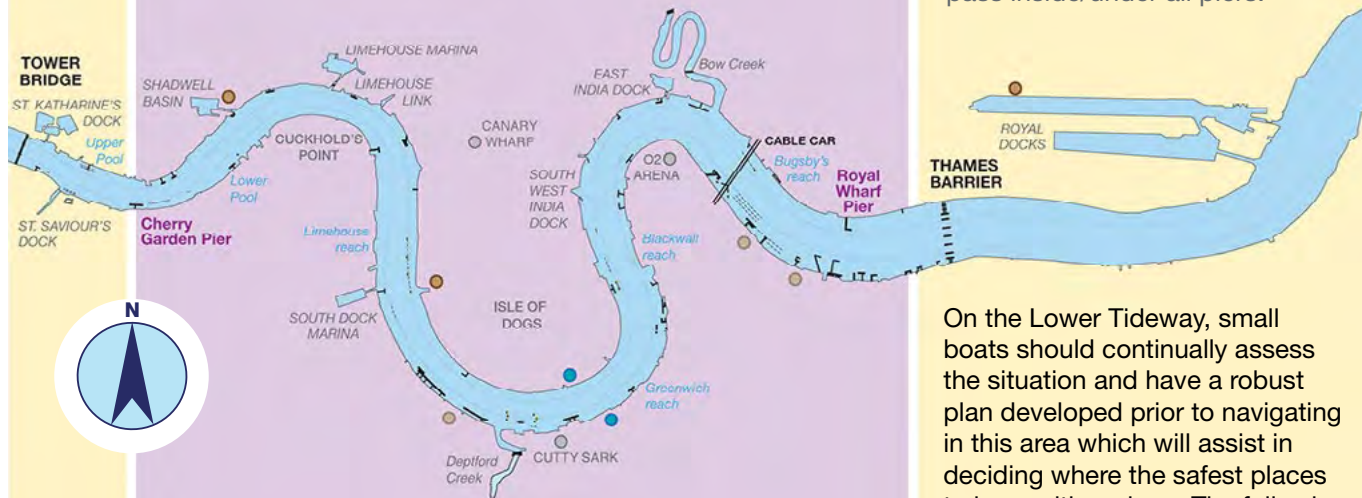
Cherry Garden Pier to Royal Wharf Pier

When navigating against the tidal stream:

- Rowers must work the slacks in the Inshore Zones.
- It is recommended that paddlers navigate according to Col Regs (Rule 9a) rather than work the slacks.

When navigating with the tidal stream:

- Both rowers and paddlers should use the Fairway and Col Regs (Rule 9a) apply.



SUP is not permitted below Tower Bridge

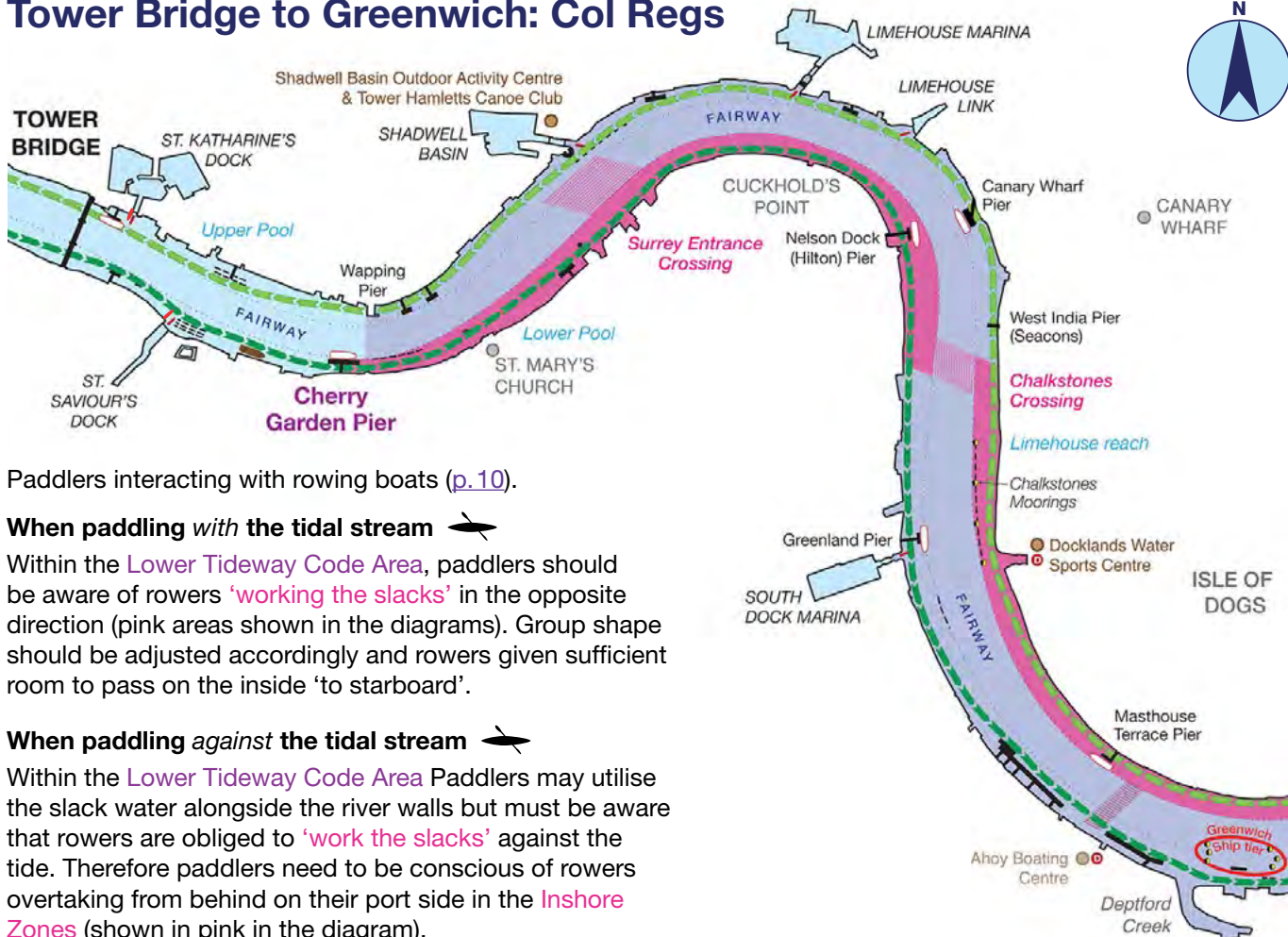
Col Regs

Tower Bridge to Cherry Garden Pier and below Royal Wharf Pier

Regardless of what the tide is doing, all small boats should navigate to the starboard side of the river at all times, Aim to be as close to the starboard bank as is safe and practicable – travelling in either direction. Where water levels and width allows, always pass inside/under all piers.

On the Lower Tideway, small boats should continually assess the situation and have a robust plan developed prior to navigating in this area which will assist in deciding where the safest places to be positioned are. The following pages contain further detail.

Tower Bridge to Greenwich: Col Regs



Paddlers interacting with rowing boats (p. 10).

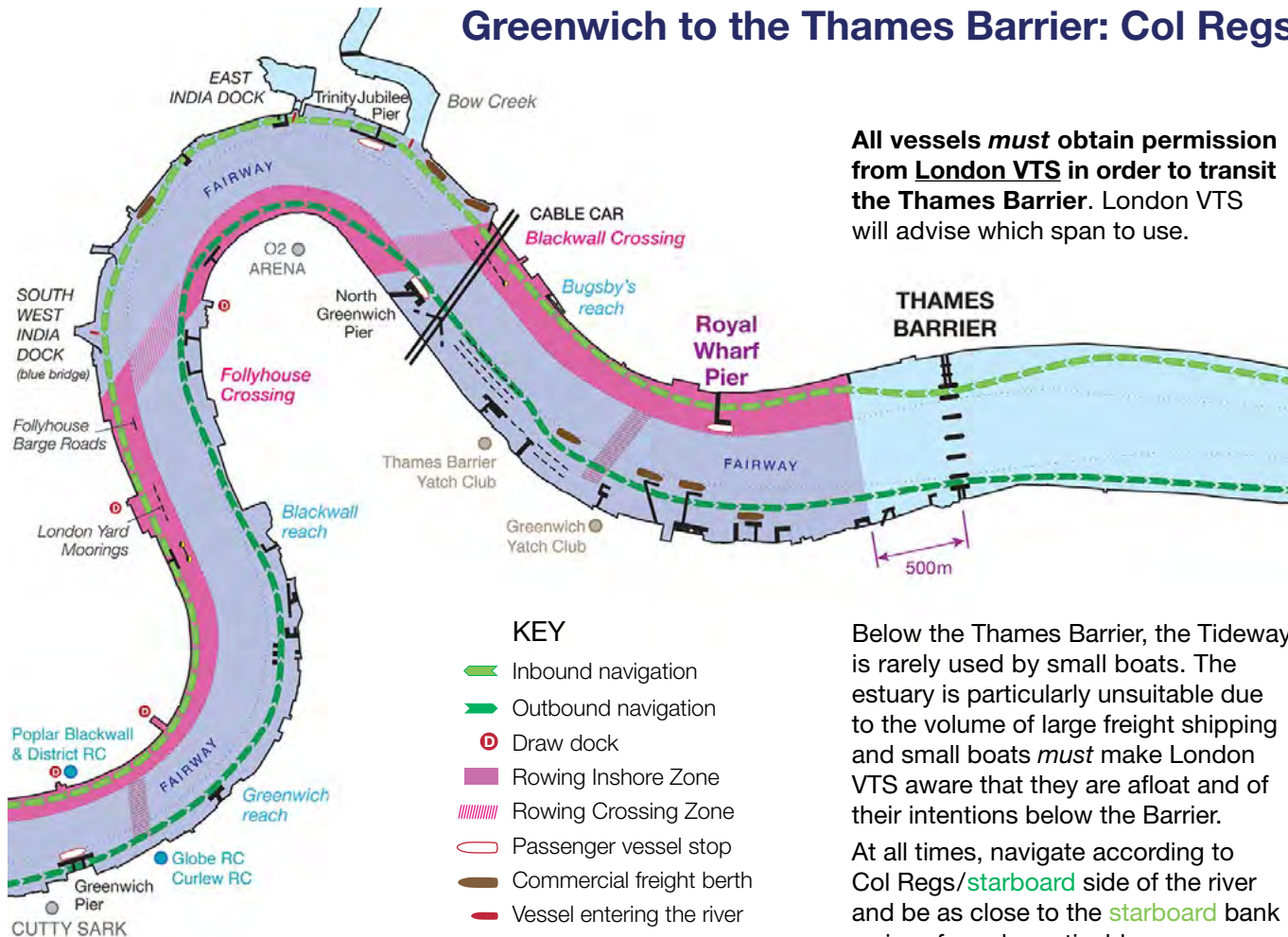
When paddling *with* the tidal stream

Within the **Lower Tideway Code Area**, paddlers should be aware of rowers ‘**working the slacks**’ in the opposite direction (pink areas shown in the diagrams). Group shape should be adjusted accordingly and rowers given sufficient room to pass on the inside ‘to starboard’.

When paddling *against* the tidal stream

Within the **Lower Tideway Code Area** Paddlers may utilise the slack water alongside the river walls but must be aware that rowers are obliged to ‘**work the slacks**’ against the tide. Therefore paddlers need to be conscious of rowers overtaking from behind on their port side in the **Inshore Zones** (shown in pink in the diagram).

Greenwich to the Thames Barrier: Col Regs



All vessels *must* obtain permission from London VTS in order to transit the Thames Barrier. London VTS will advise which span to use.

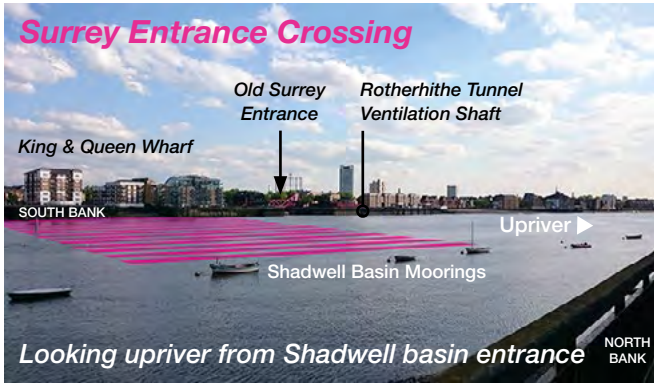
KEY

- Inbound navigation
- Outbound navigation
- Draw dock
- Rowing Inshore Zone
- Rowing Crossing Zone
- Passenger vessel stop
- Commercial freight berth
- Vessel entering the river

Below the Thames Barrier, the Tideway is rarely used by small boats. The estuary is particularly unsuitable due to the volume of large freight shipping and small boats *must* make London VTS aware that they are afloat and of their intentions below the Barrier.

At all times, navigate according to Col Regs/*starboard* side of the river and be as close to the *starboard* bank as is safe and practicable.

Tower Bridge to Greenwich → Tideway Code Area



The **Surrey Entrance Crossing Zone** is where the navigation pattern changes from Col Regs to working the slacks in the **Lower Tideway Code Area**.

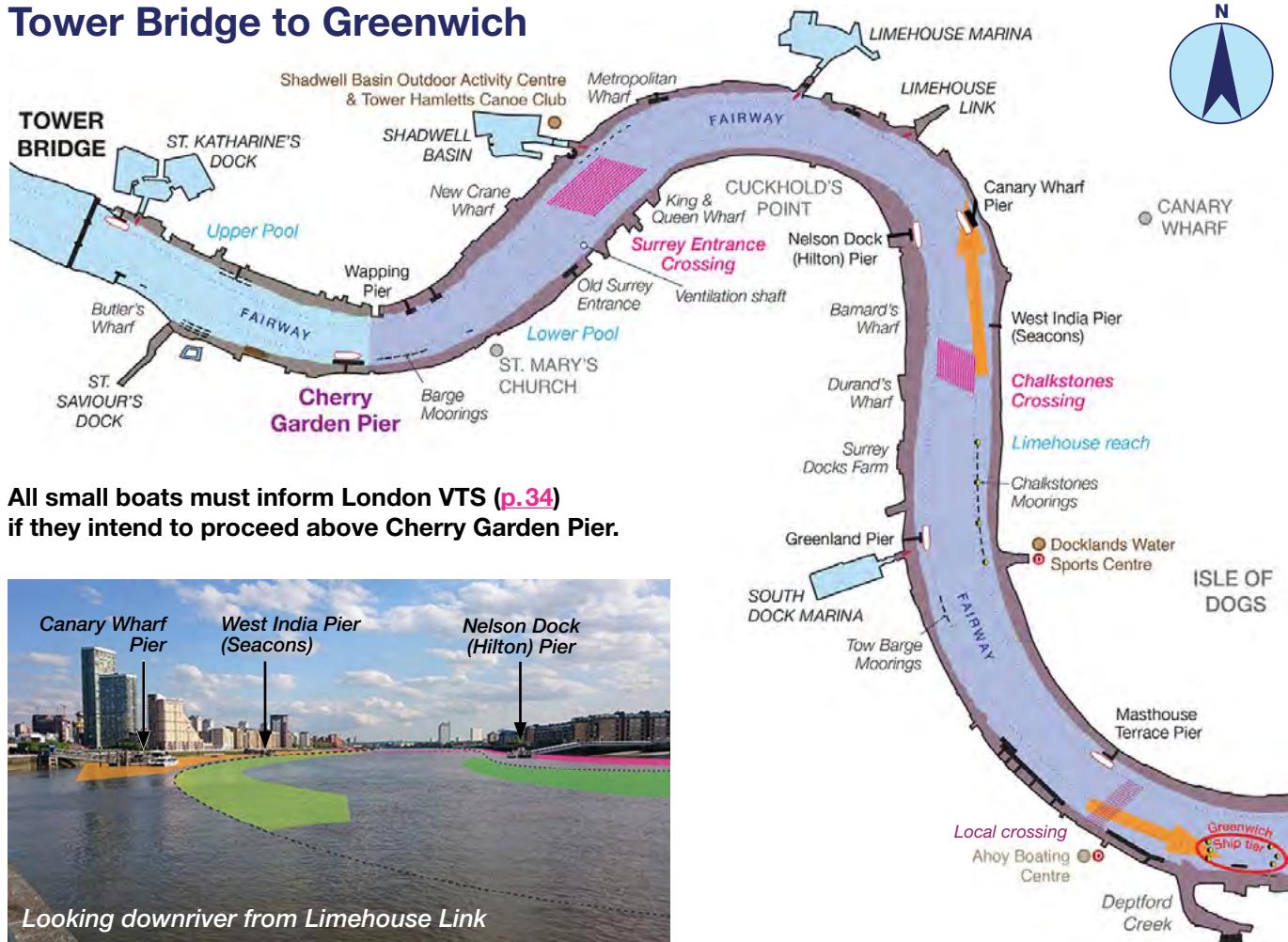


For the most part, this section of the river forms the top half of **Lower Tideway Code Area** where rowing boats are obliged to work the slacks. Rowing boats *advised* to inform London VTS prior to going afloat on the **Lower Area** and fly a **'Rower On The River Flag'** from their clubhouse.

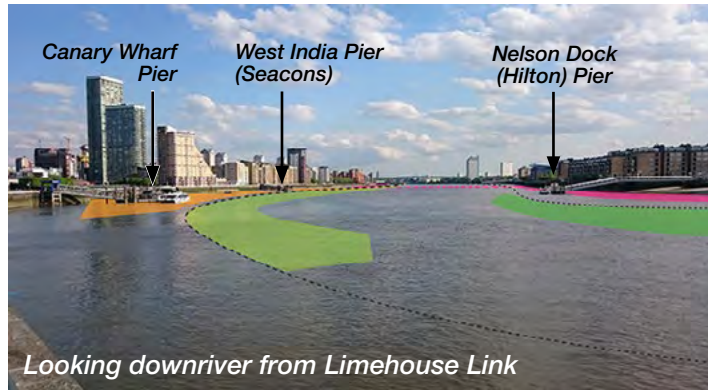
Hazards include:

- Busy commercial traffic movements particularly at Cherry Garden, Canary Wharf, Hilton, Greenland and Masthouse Terrace Piers.
- Extensive shallows at low water on the south bank around Nelson Dock (Hilton) Pier and on the north bank around the Isle of Dogs.
- Multiple piers, moorings and wharves.
- Motor vessels accessing the river at Limehouse, St. Katharine's Dock and South Dock Marinas.
- Small boats accessing the river at Shadwell Basin, Docklands and Ahoy Activity Centres.
- ▨▨▨▨ A **Local Crossing** at Ahoy Boating Centre.
- ▨▨▨▨ **The Surrey Entrance and Chalkstones Crossings**.
- ➡ A strong **tidal set** around Isle of Dogs and Cuckhold's Point. This applies in particular to Canary Wharf Pier and Greenwich Ship Tier.
- **Greenwich Ship Tier Exclusion Zone**.

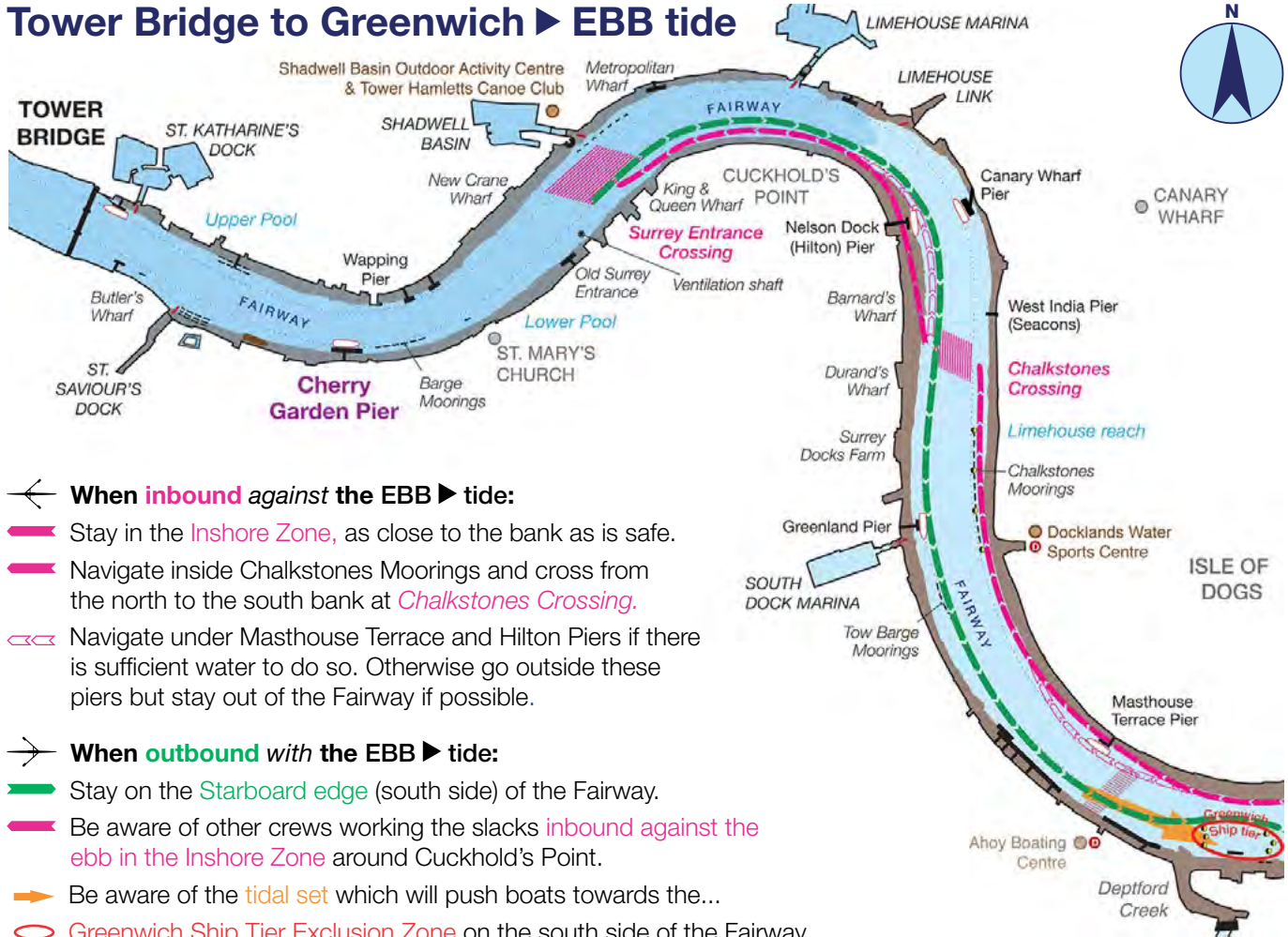
Tower Bridge to Greenwich



All small boats must inform London VTS (p.34) if they intend to proceed above Cherry Garden Pier.



Tower Bridge to Greenwich ▶ EBB tide



← **When inbound against the EBB ▶ tide:**

- ▶ Stay in the **Inshore Zone**, as close to the bank as is safe.
- ▶ Navigate inside Chalkstones Moorings and cross from the north to the south bank at **Chalkstones Crossing**.
- ◀◀◀ Navigate under Masthouse Terrace and Hilton Piers if there is sufficient water to do so. Otherwise go outside these piers but stay out of the Fairway if possible.

→ **When outbound with the EBB ▶ tide:**

- ▶ Stay on the **Starboard edge** (south side) of the Fairway.
- ▶ Be aware of other crews working the slacks **inbound against the ebb in the Inshore Zone** around Cuckhold's Point.
- ▶ Be aware of the **tidal set** which will push boats towards the...
- ◯ **Greenwiche Ship Tier Exclusion Zone** on the south side of the Fairway.

Turning at Cherry Garden Pier ► EBB tide

← Crews rowing **inbound** against the EBB ► tide intending to return downriver:

Should remain in the **Inshore Zone** on the south bank, navigating inside the ventilation shaft, if there is sufficient water to do so. Otherwise take care going outside and stay out of the Fairway if possible.

Turn anywhere before the downriver end of the Barge Moorings and **return downriver with the EBB tide** as described below.

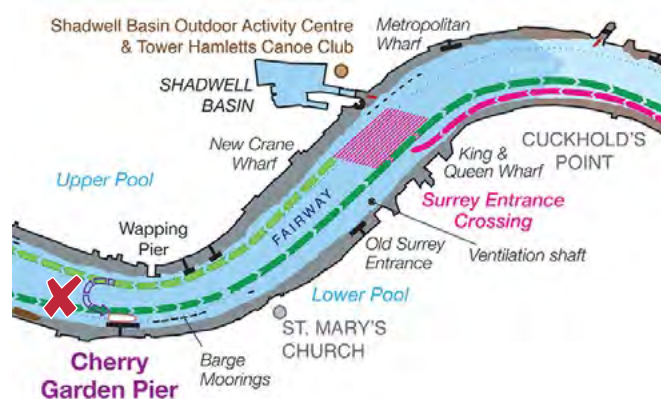
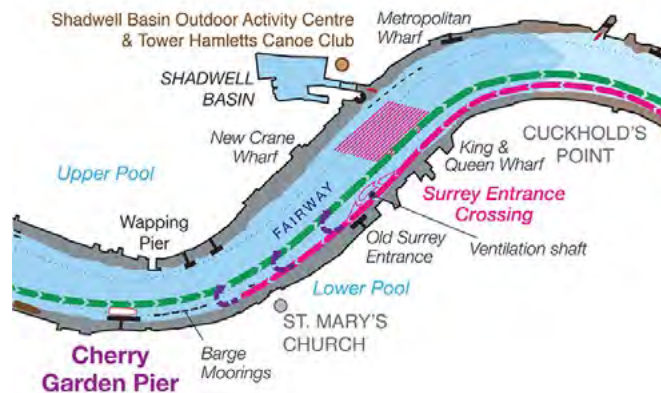
→ Crews rowing **outbound** with the EBB ► tide having turned before (or come from above) Cherry Garden Pier:

Navigate outside the pier and Barge Moorings then: stay on the **starboard edge** of the Fairway and outside the ventilation shaft – but be aware of other crews rowing **inbound against the ebb in the Inshore Zone** on the south bank (inside the ventilation shaft).

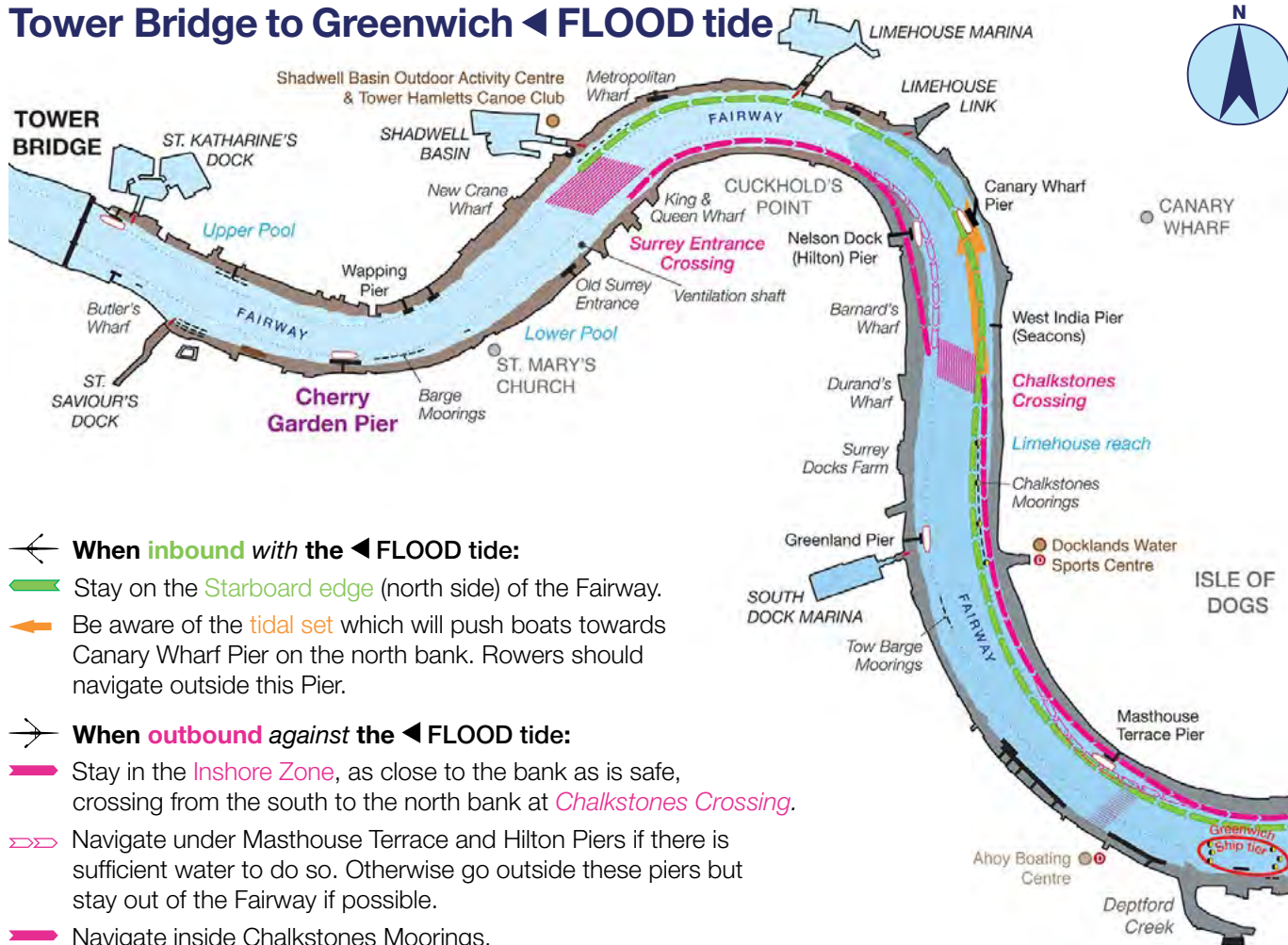
← Crews rowing **inbound** against the EBB ► tide intending to proceed upriver through Tower Bridge:

Should cross at the **Surrey Entrance Crossing** and follow **Col Regs/starboard side** along the north bank, staying outside the Fairway where possible.

✗ Crews who use this Col Regs navigation **must not then cross at Cherry Garden Pier** and return downriver.



Tower Bridge to Greenwich ◀ FLOOD tide



◀ When **inbound** with the ◀ FLOOD tide:

- ➡ Stay on the **Starboard edge** (north side) of the Fairway.
- ➡ Be aware of the **tidal set** which will push boats towards Canary Wharf Pier on the north bank. Rowers should navigate outside this Pier.

➡ When **outbound** against the ◀ FLOOD tide:

- ➡ Stay in the **Inshore Zone**, as close to the bank as is safe, crossing from the south to the north bank at **Chalkstones Crossing**.
- ➡ Navigate under Masthouse Terrace and Hilton Piers if there is sufficient water to do so. Otherwise go outside these piers but stay out of the Fairway if possible.
- ➡ Navigate inside Chalkstones Moorings.

Turning at Cherry Garden Pier ◀ FLOOD tide

◀ Crews rowing **inbound** with the ◀ FLOOD tide intending to return downriver:

Cross at the **Surrey Entrance Crossing** and continue upriver on the **port side** of the Fairway. **Turn** anywhere before the downriver end of the barge moorings into the **Inshore Zone** on the south bank and **return** as described below.

➔ Crews rowing **outbound** against the ◀ FLOOD tide having turned before (or come from above) **Cherry Garden Pier**:

Navigate inside the pier and Barge Moorings then: stay in the **Inshore Zone**, as close to the south bank as is safe. Navigate inside the ventilation shaft if there is sufficient water to do so. Otherwise go carefully outside this obstacle but stay out of the Fairway if possible.

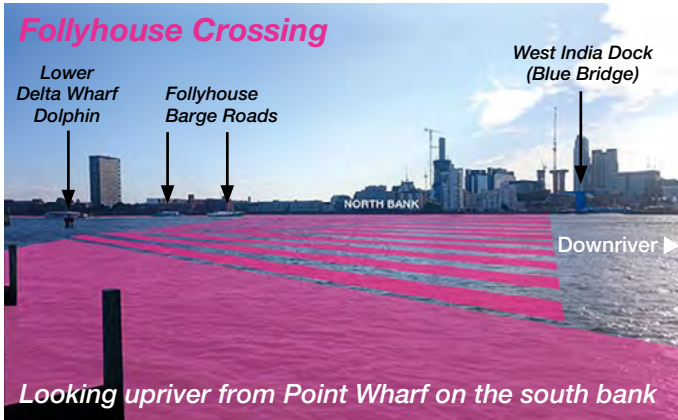
◀ Crews rowing **inbound** with the ◀ FLOOD tide intending to proceed upriver through **Tower Bridge**:

*Do not cross but remain on the north bank and navigate according to Col Regs on the **starboard side** of the Fairway.*

✗ Crews who use this Col Regs navigation *must not then cross at Cherry Garden Pier and return downriver.*



Greenwich to Thames Barrier → Tideway Code Area



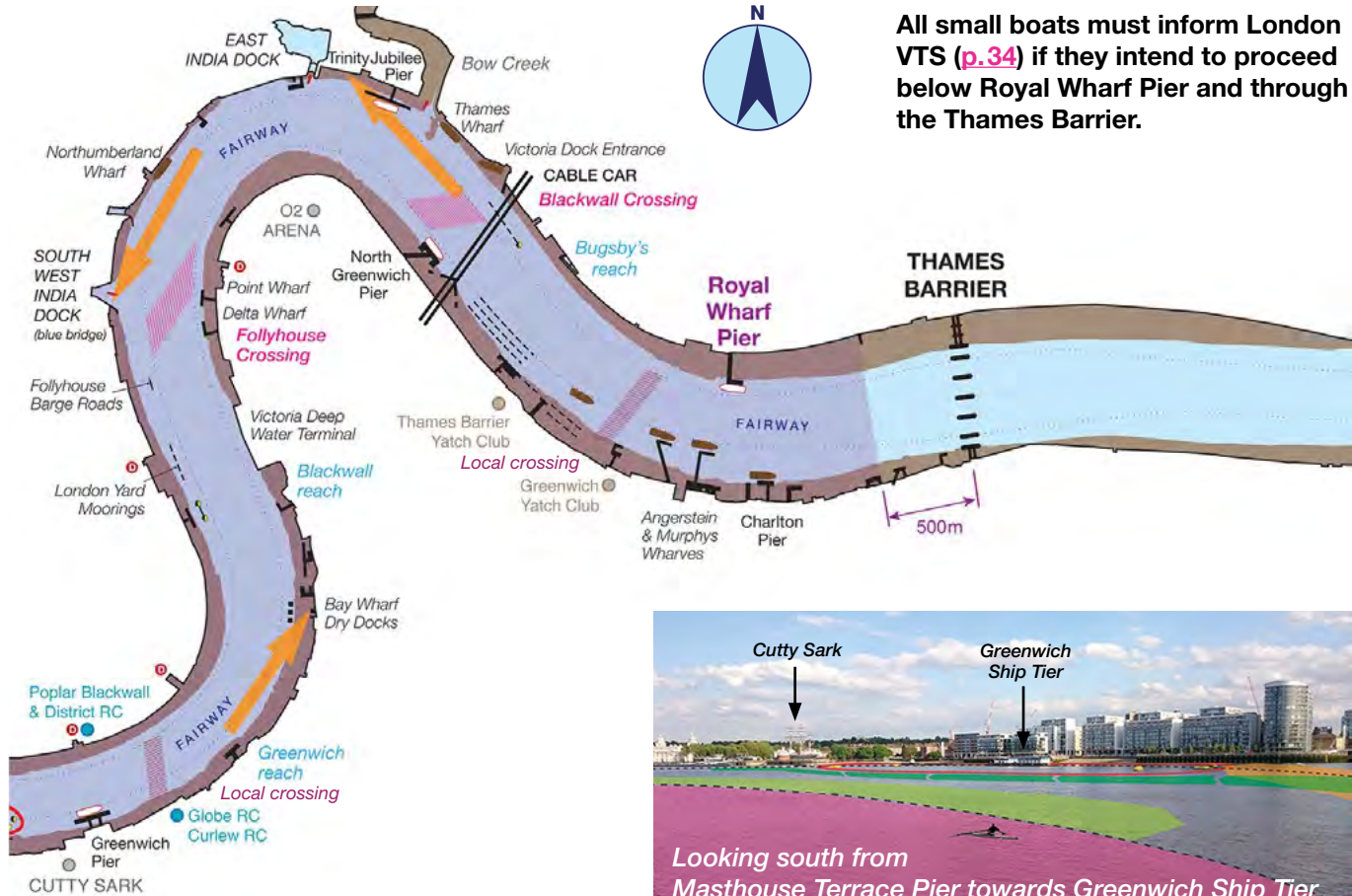
For the most part, this section of the river forms the bottom half of **Lower Tideway Code Area** where rowing boats are obliged to work the slacks. Rowing boats *advised* to inform London VTS prior to going afloat on the **Lower Area** and fly a **'Rower On The River Flag'** from their clubhouse.

Hazards include:

- Busy commercial traffic movements particularly Greenwich and Trinity Jubilee Pier, Victoria Dock Entrance, Thames and Northumberland Wharves.
- Extensive shallows at low water on the north bank around the Isle of Dogs and on the south bank around Blackwall point (O2 Arena).
- Multiple piers, moorings and wharves including the dry docks at Bay Wharf.
- Motor vessels accessing the river at Bow Creek, East India and West India docks.
- ← A strong tidal set around Isle of Dogs and Blackwall Point.
- ▨▨▨▨ *The Follyhouse and Blackwall Crossings.*
- ▨▨▨▨ *Local crossing for the:*
 - Rowing clubs at Greenwich pier
 - Yacht clubs on Bugsby's reach.



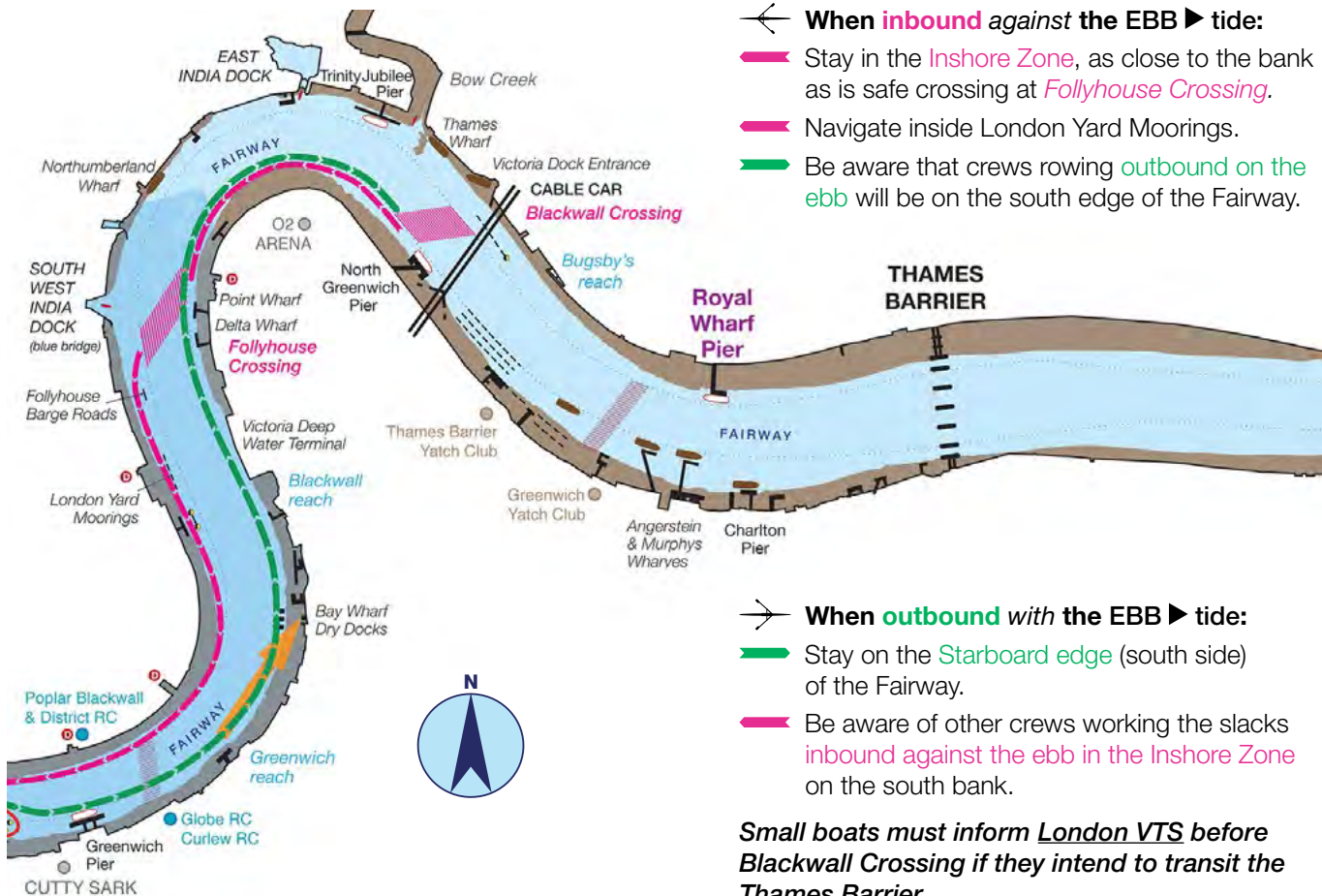
Greenwich to Thames Barrier



All small boats must inform London VTS (p.34) if they intend to proceed below Royal Wharf Pier and through the Thames Barrier.



Greenwich to Thames Barrier ► EBB tide



- ◀ When **inbound** against the EBB ► tide:
- Stay in the **Inshore Zone**, as close to the bank as is safe crossing at **Follyhouse Crossing**.
 - Navigate inside London Yard Moorings.
 - Be aware that crews rowing **outbound on the ebb** will be on the south edge of the Fairway.

- ▶ When **outbound** with the EBB ► tide:
- Stay on the **Starboard edge** (south side) of the Fairway.
 - Be aware of other crews working the slacks **inbound against the ebb in the Inshore Zone** on the south bank.

Small boats must inform London VTS before Blackwall Crossing if they intend to transit the Thames Barrier.

Turning at the Thames Barrier ► EBB tide

➤ Crews rowing **outbound** with the EBB ► tide intending to return upriver:

Cross at the **Blackwall Crossing** and continue downriver on the **port side** of the Fairway.

Turn after Royal Wharf Pier but at least 500m before the Thames Barrier into the **Inshore Zone** on the north bank and return as described below.

← Crews rowing **inbound** against the EBB ► tide having turned or come through the Thames Barrier:

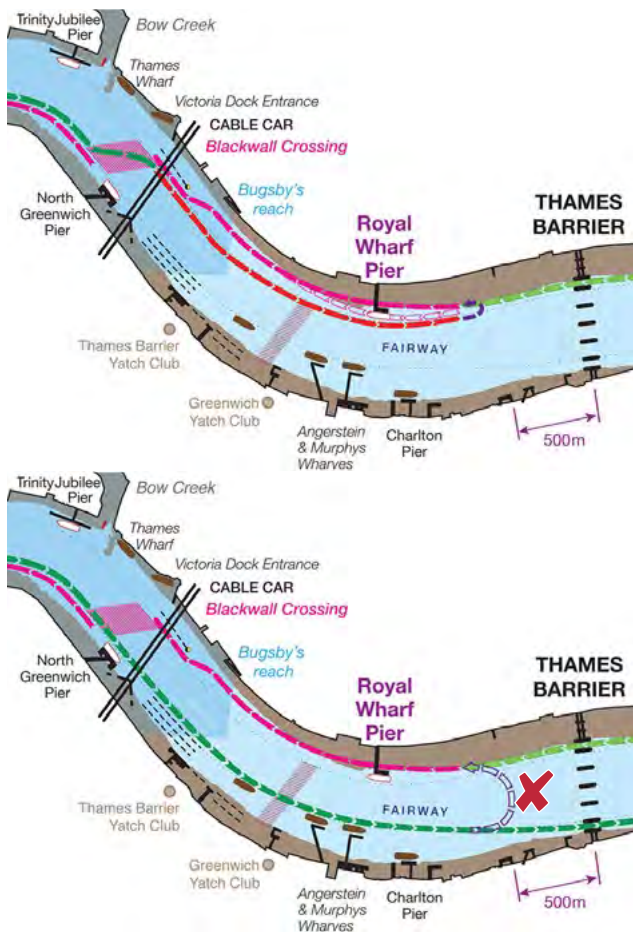
Remain in the **Inshore Zone**, as close to the north bank as is safe. Navigate inside Royal Wharf Pier if there is sufficient water to do so. Otherwise go carefully **outside the pier** but stay outside the Fairway avoiding any outbound boats on the **port side** of the Fairway.

Navigate outside the moorings below the **Blackwall Crossing** then cross onto the south bank and proceed around Blackwall point in the **Inshore Zone** as close to the bank as is safe. *Be aware of other crews rowing **outbound on the starboard side of the Fairway.***

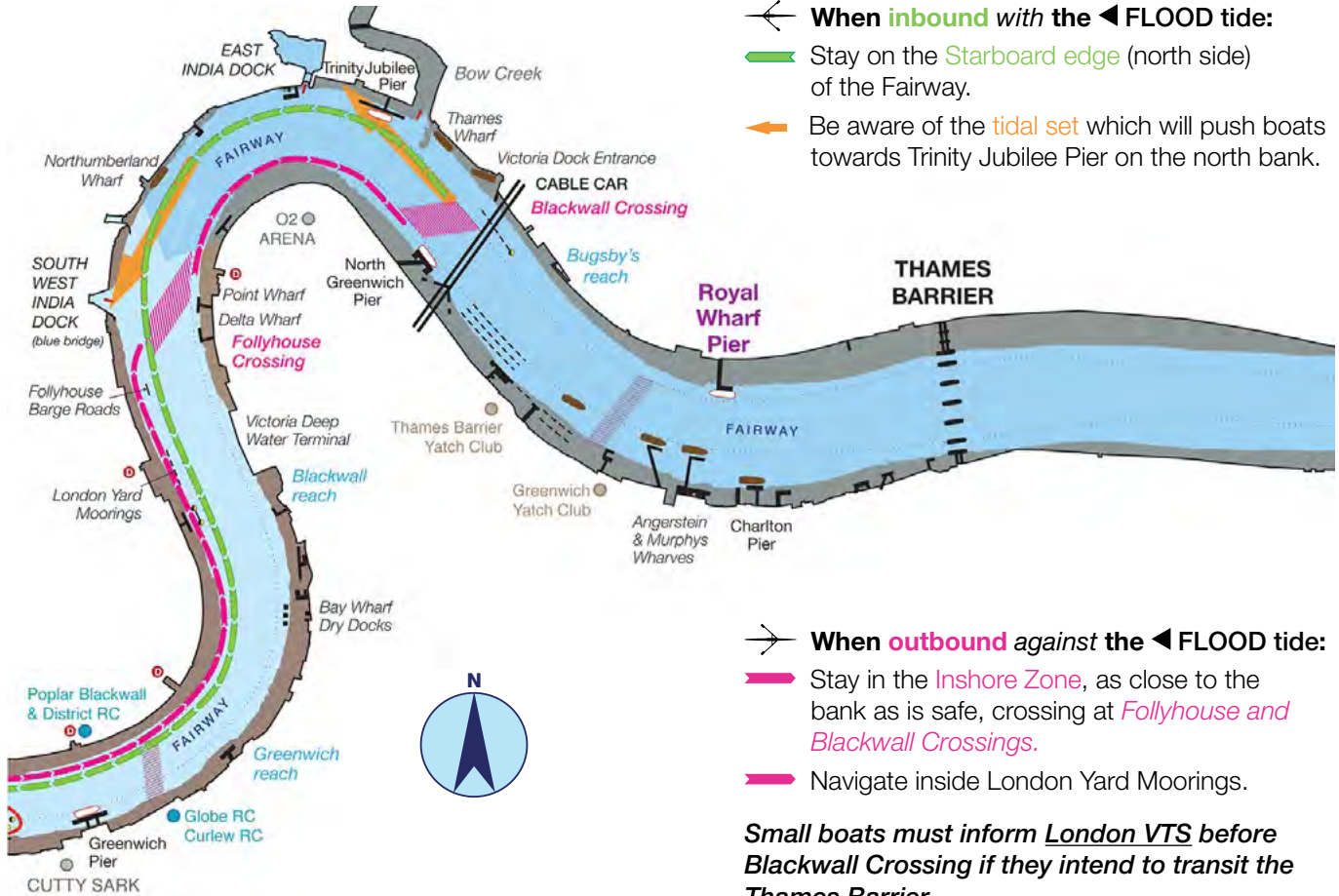
➤ Crews rowing **outbound** with the EBB ► tide intending to transit the Thames Barrier:

Should stay on the south bank at **Blackwall Crossing** and continue on the starboard side of the Fairway.

✗ Crews who use this Col Regs navigation *must not then cross the river in front of the Barrier and return upriver.*



Greenwich to Thames Barrier ◀ FLOOD tide



- ◀ When **inbound** with the ◀ FLOOD tide:
 - ➡ Stay on the **Starboard** edge (north side) of the Fairway.
 - ➡ Be aware of the **tidal set** which will push boats towards Trinity Jubilee Pier on the north bank.

- ➡ When **outbound** against the ◀ FLOOD tide:
 - ➡ Stay in the **Inshore Zone**, as close to the bank as is safe, crossing at **Follyhouse and Blackwall Crossings**.
 - ➡ Navigate inside London Yard Moorings.

Small boats must inform London VTS before Blackwall Crossing if they intend to transit the Thames Barrier.

Turning at the Thames Barrier ◀ FLOOD tide

➔ Crews rowing **outbound** against the ◀ FLOOD tide intending to return upriver:

Cross at **Blackwall Crossing**, navigate outside the moorings then stay in the **Inshore Zone**, as close to the north bank as is safe.

Navigate inside Royal Wharf Pier if there is sufficient water to do so. Otherwise go carefully **outside the pier** staying out of the Fairway and give way to any rowing crews inbound on the flood tide.

Turn after Royal Wharf Pier but at least 500m before the Thames Barrier onto the **starboard side** of the Fairway and return as described below.

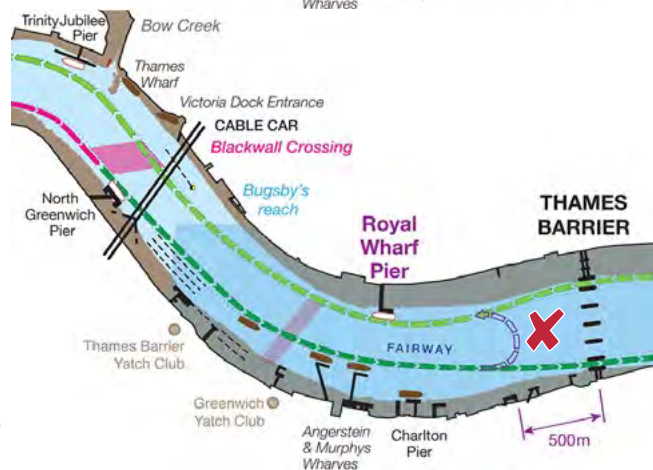
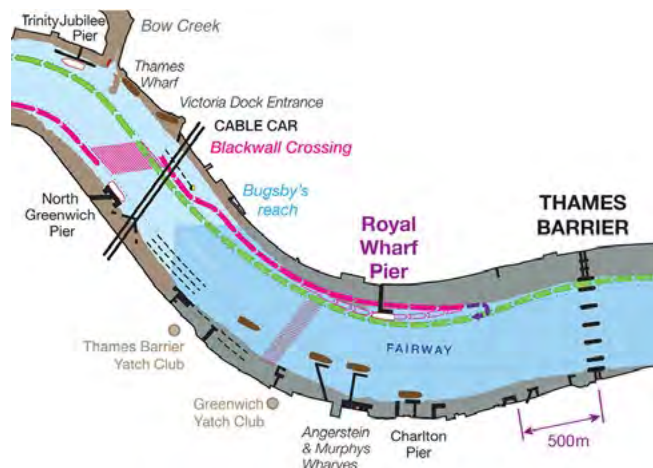
↙ Crews rowing **inbound** with the ◀ FLOOD tide having turned or come through the Thames Barrier:






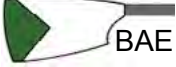






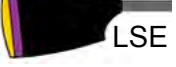

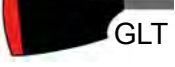




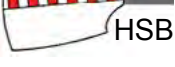










Stay on the **starboard edge** of the Fairway. Navigate outside Royal Wharf Pier and be aware of other crews rowing **outbound in the Inshore Zone**.

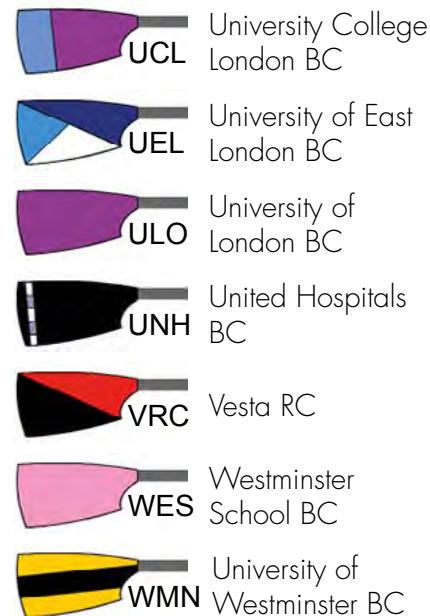
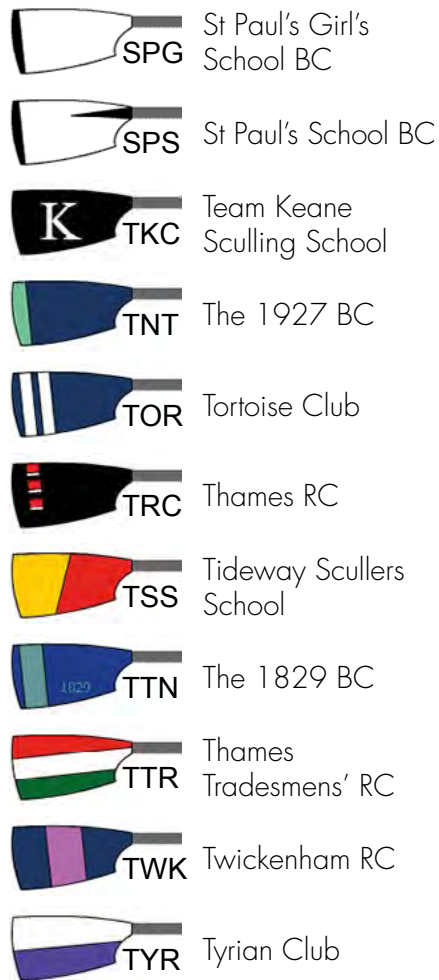
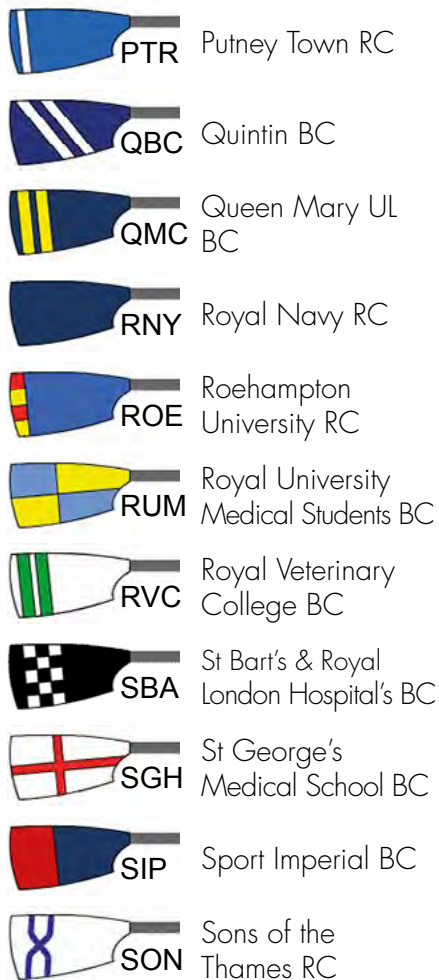
➔ Crews rowing **outbound** against the ◀ FLOOD tide intending to transit the Thames Barrier:

Do not cross at the **Blackwall Crossing** but remain on the **starboard side** of the Fairway and navigate according to Col Regs.

✗ Crews who use this Col Regs navigation **must not then cross the river in front of the Barrier** and return upriver.



 AKN Auriol Kensington RC	 EMA Emanuel School BC	 KCS King's College School Wimbledon
 ASL American School in London BC	 ERT Erith	 LOS London Oratory School BC
 BAE Barn Elms RC	 FSC Furnivall Sculling Club	 LOT London Otters RC
 BBL Barnes Bridge Ladies RC	 FUL Fulham Reach BC	 LRC London RC
 CDH Cold Harbour BC	 GLB Globe RC	 LSE London School of Economics
 CHK Chiswick School BC	 GLT Godolphin & Latymer School BC	 LTU Latymer Upper School BC
 CRB Crabtree BC	 GRV Gravesend RC	 MAA Mortlake Anglian & Alpha BC
 CUR Curlew RC	 HSB HSBC Rowing Club	 ORI Orion RC
 CYG Cygnet RC	 IMM Imperial College School of Medicine	 PAR Parrs Priory RC
 DAC Dacre BC	 KCL King's College London BC	 PBD Poplar Blackwall & District RC
 DUL Dulwich College BC	 IMP Imperial College BC	 PHS Putney High School RC



The Port of London Authority (PLA)

London River House, Royal Pier Road, Gravesend,
Kent DA12 2BG

Head Office: 020 7743 7909

Richmond Lock: 020 8940 0634

www.boatingonthethames.co.uk

www.pla.co.uk

London Vessel Traffic Services (VTS)

Teddington to Crayfordness:

- *Phone: 0203 2607711*
- *VHF: Channel 14*

Crayfordness to Sea Reach 4:

- *Phone: 01747 562215*
- *VHF: Channel 68*

Sea Reach 4 to Seaward Limit:

- *Phone: 01747 562215*
 - *VHF: Channel 69*
-

RNLI

Emergencies: Phone 999/112 ask for Coastguard

Chiswick: www.chiswicklifeboat.org.uk

Tower: www.towernli.com

Safety www.rnli.org/safety/respect-the-water/

Thames Water

www.thameswater.co.uk

Thames Regional Rowing Council (TRRC)

www.thames-rrc.org

British Rowing

www.britishrowing.org

safety@britishrowing.org

British Canoeing

www.britishcanoeing.org.uk

safety@britishcanoeing.org.uk

Great Britain Outrigger Canoe Association

www.gboca.org

The Royal Yachting Association (RYA)

www.rya.org.uk

The Environment Agency

[www.gov.uk/check-river-conditions-and-closures/
river-thames](http://www.gov.uk/check-river-conditions-and-closures/river-thames)

