

Risk Assessment – Cardington Wavehopper Race

Event: Cardington Wavehopper Race 2026

Organiser: Grant Underwood

Affiliation: The Sharks

Date: Saturday, 20th June 2026

Location: Viking Kayak Club, Priory Country Park, Cardington, Bedford (MK44 3JZ)

Assessment Completed by: Grant Underwood

Assessment Date: Tuesday, 24th March 2026

Assessment Updated: N/A

Safety Officer: Rick Moore

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1. Event Overview

This event is delivered in partnership with Viking Kayak Club and forms part of a wider weekend of paddlesport activity, including a Division 2/3/4 Canoe Slalom.

The Wavehopper Race is a short-format Wild Water Racing (WWR) sprint held on the Cardington artificial white water course.

The event will consist of:

- 16:45 – Compulsory safety briefing for all participants
- 17:00–19:00 – Timed racing runs (multiple runs where possible)

The event is open to mixed abilities and craft, including:

- General Purpose kayaks
- Slalom kayaks
- Wavehoppers

Safety cover, marshals, and experienced coaches will be present throughout.

Craft exceeding **3.6m (e.g. Wavehoppers)** will be restricted to paddlers with proven white water competency and must be signed off by lead coaches.

A maximum of **3–4 paddlers** will be on the course at any one time.

The event will be run on an artificial white water course with consistent flow and established infrastructure, making it suitable for development activity and first-time racing experiences.

Facilities available:

- Artificial white water course

- Portaloo toilets
- Onsite café tent (hot and cold drinks)
- Onsite parking
- Event HQ building

These facilities provide essential welfare support, including shelter in adverse weather.

2. River Grade and Environment

The Cardington course operates at approximately **Grade 2**.

As an artificial course, conditions are **consistent and predictable**, offering a controlled environment compared to natural rivers.

Course Characteristics:

- Artificial *Rapid Bloc* system creating waves, stoppers, and flow features
- Narrow sections increasing potential pinning risk
- Limited slack water
- Increased likelihood of craft interaction in confined areas
- High concrete banks preventing exit except at designated points
- Fixed ropes available for egress at key locations
- Bankside safety with throwlines

Environmental Factors:

- Water is controlled via a flood-release channel from the River Great Ouse
- June conditions likely warm/sunny
- Exposure risk: sunburn, dehydration, overheating
- Some natural shade available, but limited
- Low risk of cold exposure/hypothermia

3. Key Hazards & Controls

Hazard	Risk Level	Who is at Risk?	Controls / Mitigations
Artificial white water (Grade 2)	Medium	Paddlers, water users	Mandatory safety briefing; appropriate boat choice encouraged; coached support available; safety cover positioned along course
Hazard: Craft exceeding 3.6m (Wavehoppers) becoming pinned across narrow sections	Medium	Paddlers, Course infrastructure	Explicit risk highlighted in briefing; Maximum 3–4 Wild Water Racing paddlers on course; Downstream-only paddling during racing; No stopping or surfing in constricted areas; Competency-based restriction on Wavehoppers and Wild Water Racing kayaks; Mandatory front (30L) and rear (50L) airbags; Secure grab loops front and rear; Boat inspection and visible approval marking prior to launch; Designated safety team pre-positioned at identified narrow sections.
Increased Load on Blocks or Groynes from a Pinned Craft	Low–Medium	Infrastructure	Strict paddler spacing; Downstream-only movement during race phase; Rapid response protocol; Manual extraction via grab loops; Rope-based rescue techniques deployed only if required and without placing additional load on course infrastructure; Immediate notification to the Viking Kayak Club of any suspected infrastructure contact.
Fatigue Leading to Reduced Decision-Making	Medium	Paddlers	Structured rest period; Encouragement to observe between runs; Active monitoring by coaching staff; Authority to restrict further runs if required.
Collision with artificial obstacles (blocks, features)	Medium	Paddlers, water users	Water levels assessed before event; Safety Officer to monitor conditions; helmets and buoyancy aids compulsory; safety cover on water and bank; controlled start intervals; briefing on reading water and line choice
Collision between paddlers	Medium	Paddlers	Staggered starts managed by marshals; course marshals monitoring flow; briefing covers overtaking and stopping procedures

Capsize and swim	Medium	Water users	Self-rescue techniques explained; safety cover present on course; compulsory buoyancy aids, helmets, and airbags
Entrapment in boat or equipment failure	Low/Medium	Paddlers, water users	Airbags compulsory; boat checks conducted; safety team trained in white water rescue; paddlers briefed on emergency exits
Stoppers (risk of recirculation)	Medium	Inexperienced / fatigued paddlers, water users	Coaches available to advise; safety positioned near key features; briefing on how to negotiate stoppers
Towpath slips, trips, falls	Low/Medium	All participants	Suitable footwear compulsory (sole thicker than top); equipment kept clear of paths; signage and marshal supervision
Grass areas (wet weather slips)	Low/Medium	All participants	Awareness raised during briefing; appropriate footwear encouraged; designated pathways used where possible; marshals monitor high-traffic areas; extra caution advised in wet conditions.
Heat, sun exposure, and dehydration	Low–Medium	All participants, volunteers	Participants advised to bring water, sun protection, and appropriate clothing; access to shaded areas and shelter; onsite café and welfare facilities available; monitoring for signs of heat-related illness.
Congestion at start / finish areas	Low/Medium	Paddlers	Controlled start system; designated finish area; marshals manage access
High course walls preventing exit	Medium	Water users	Designated exit points only; safety marshals assist exits; briefing covers exit procedures
Cold water exposure / hypothermia	Medium	Paddlers, water users	Low seasonal risk highlighted in briefing; appropriate clothing encouraged; limited time in water due to short sprint format; safety cover enables rapid recovery; access to shelter and warm facilities; monitoring for early signs of cold exposure.
Inexperienced paddlers	Medium	Water users	Mandatory briefing; coached support; organiser reserves right to restrict participation if unsafe

Equipment failure (boats, paddles, airbags)	Low/Medium	Paddlers	Competitor responsibility for checks; random checks by officials; limited spares available
Sunken or submerged boats	Low	Paddlers, water users	Airbags compulsory; boats inspected before being allowed on course
Road traffic within site	Low	All participants	Adherence to site speed limits; safe carrying of equipment; awareness raised during briefing
Parking congestion	Low/Medium	All participants, public	Designated parking areas; clear signage; unloading encouraged with care
Weather changes	Medium	All participants	Weather monitored; clothing guidance provided; event delayed or cancelled if unsafe
Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis)	Low	All water users	Advice given in briefing; hygiene guidance provided; symptoms explained and medical advice encouraged
Temporary gazebo / event shelter becoming unstable or causing obstruction	Low-Medium	Event staff, volunteers, paddlers, spectators, members of the public	Gazebo erected only by competent event staff or volunteers; Structure secured using appropriate leg weights/ballast on all corners; Gazebo additionally tethered using guide ropes/guy lines where possible; Structure positioned away from primary pedestrian routes to minimise interaction; Guy lines positioned to reduce trip hazards and monitored throughout event; Where ropes cross potential walking routes they will be clearly visible and communicated during briefing; Weather conditions monitored throughout the event; In the event of strong winds or deteriorating weather conditions the gazebo will be lowered or dismantled; Manual handling managed with minimum two-person setup and dismantling; Participants and spectators advised not to lean on or interfere with structure or tethering lines.

Suspended slalom poles along the course (including adjustment/movement during the event)	Low-Medium	Paddlers	Mandatory helmet (crash helmet) required for all paddlers; hazard highlighted during safety briefing; paddlers instructed to maintain awareness while navigating downstream; course adjustments carried out only when the course is clear; marshals confirm course is safe before racing resumes.
Restricted barrier area adjacent to the white water course	Low-Medium	Participants, volunteers, spectators	Barrier designated for safety personnel and event organisers only; access restricted and monitored by marshals; anyone entering the restricted area must wear a helmet and buoyancy aid; requirement communicated during safety briefing; clear signage and verbal instruction provided.

4. Safety Measures

- Mandatory safety briefing for all participants
- Separate operational briefing for safety personnel
- Pre-event course walk-through
- Equipment inspection and visible approval system

Mandatory Equipment:

- Helmet (EN approved)
- Buoyancy aid (EN approved)
- Spraydeck
- Airbags (correct size and securely fitted)

The event team reserves the right to restrict participation if safety standards are not met.

Operational Controls:

- Safety cover at key points
- Controlled starts and finishes
- Maximum 3–4 paddlers on course
- Downstream-only paddling
- Mobile communication across event team (multiple networks)

Coaching & Staffing:

Participating clubs are encouraged to bring coaches.

All coaches attend a briefing covering:

- Roles and positioning
- Communication
- Rescue and extraction protocols
- Identification of higher-risk sections

This ensures a strong ratio of experienced personnel to paddlers.

Infrastructure Transparency:

A pre-event visual check of course features (blocks/groynes) will be conducted with Viking Kayak Club to establish shared understanding of conditions prior to activity.

5. Emergency & Incident Plan

Pinning Incident

- Immediate stop to racing
- Upstream course held clear
- Safety team deployed
- Manual or rope-based extraction
- Casualty moved to bank
- Full reassessment before restart

Infrastructure Contact

- Immediate notification to Viking Kayak Club
- Activity paused if required
- Incident recorded

Medical Emergency

- Immediate response from safety team
- First aid administered
- Emergency services (999) contacted if required
- Clear access maintained

Evacuation

- Participants directed to designated safe area or shelter

Incident Reporting

All incidents recorded and reported in line with governing body requirements.

Overview

- **Incident Control:** Event organiser
- **Immediate Response:** Safety team
- **Medical:** First Aid Lead / Emergency services
- **Access:** Maintained at all times
- **Evacuation:** Directed to safe areas
- **Reporting:** Formal documentation completed

6. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Event Organiser:** Overall responsibility for event safety and decision-making
- **Safety Lead:** Oversees safety operations and emergency response
- **On-Water Safety:** Responds to capsizes, swimmers, and rescues
- **First Aider:** Provides first aid and coordinates medical response
- **Start & Finish Officer (Timing):** Manages starts, finishes, and timing operations
- **Marshals:** Control flow at key points (start, finish, escalator, towpath)
- **Coaches:** Support paddlers during development sessions and racing
- **Photographer:** Operates only from designated safe areas

7. Insurance & Compliance

- Event covered under club and governing body insurance
- Equipment compliance checks conducted
- Organisers reserve the right to restrict or stop participation if unsafe