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NORTH PADDINGTON CANALSIDE FESTIVAL



Report
February 2026

PADDLEBOARDING LONDON.CO.UK

PADDLEUK

City of Westminster

North Paddington Canalside



North Paddington Canalside Festival

The North Paddington Canalside (NPC) Festival saw the Grand Union Canal towpath and public space under the Westway flyover brought to life across four weekends in September 2025. The space, dark and underused, was turned into a vibrant and welcoming hub hosting 48 free community-led public activities funded by the Council's NPC Activation Grant.

The events invited local people to explore the canal's history and ecology, empowered them to care for and engage with the space. It also provided an opportunity for people to enjoy a wide range of cultural workshops, arts and crafts activities, walks and paddleboarding.

Westminster City Council organised the Festival to showcase the canal's potential and build connections with the local community, ahead of permanent improvements to the public space.

North Paddington Canalside Programme

The North Paddingon Canalside Programme was launched in March 2024 to deliver improvements along 2.5km of the Grand Union Canal between Ladbroke Grove and Little Venice. The Programme identified this area as a key place for strategic investment, community safety, and long-term transformation. Backed by strong community support and the need to holistically address concerns regarding the canal, early interventions focus on key sites, including the **Westway Canalside**.



North Paddington Canalside Activation Grant

A selection of grants were offered to residents and organisations to deliver their own public activities as part of the festival. The Council received 69 applications from a diverse range of groups, and awarded funding to 20 projects in total.

Three local organisations from the NPC Activation Working Group, alongside the Council's City Lions Events Leadership Team, hosted each festival day. This included supporting the application process, refining proposals, curating and coordinating their allocated weekend, and delivering their own activities.

All activities reflected the festival's objectives and themes, fostering local ownership, creative experimentation, and a diverse, inclusive programme.



North Paddington Canalside Festival



460+
Total attendance

115+
Hours of activities

91%*
overall festival satisfaction



"Events like this are a **fantastic opportunity** *to bring people together and make the most of what the canalside has to offer. It was brilliant to see the festival offering such a wide variety of activities and attracting so many different people from the local community."*

- Councillor Geoff Barraclough

The festival transformed the canalside into into a lively hub of community activity. More than 460 people took part in 40+ activities led by local organisations, bringing colour, creativity, and connection to the area.

As well as offering a range of enjoyable activities, it laid the foundations for long-term stewardship and transformation, helping to reclaim the space for positive, community-led uses.

The festival strengthened community partnerships, increased engagement with the space, and shifted perceptions, demonstrating its potential as a welcoming, safe, and vibrant destination. Feedback from those who came showed 91% overall satisfaction*, highlighting both the impact on attendees and the wider community.

"The canal has seemed a forgotten place for a lot of the community and this really highlighted the **importance and beauty of the canal**.*"*

- Activity organiser

"We see [that the space] has the **potential to become flexible and open community gathering spot** *for diverse activities."*

- Activity organiser

* North Paddington Canalside Attendee Survey responses

Before



October 2024

After



September 2025

Before



December 2024

After



September 2025

Weekend 1 | Biodiversity



Saturday 6 September 2025

130+
Total attendance

35
Hours of activities

5
Grant awarded activities

Hosted by Paddington Development Trust (PDT), the opening festival day celebrated biodiversity through 12 activities and a total of 35 hours of activities, drawing over 130 participants.

Grant Awarded Activities

Nature-hood Watch: Citizen Science Training
Host Activity | PDT
Climate workshop

Waterside printing: Nature Mark-making Workshop
Timothy Benton
Plant-printing workshop

River Echoes: Sensing North Paddington's Ecological Pulse
Cybernetic Landscapes
Installation - Water sensor on the canal

Paddle & Pick on a Bellboat
Urbanwise London
Litterpicking on the canal

Flora and Fauna of the Grand Union Canal
Third Sector Media
Nature walk & workshop

Waterway Puppets: A creative Workshop
Hot Desque
Puppet craft workshop

The programme of activities for the first festival day offered a mix of environmental clean-ups, creative workshops, art installations, and paddleboarding. Highlights included Paddle & Pick and River Echoes, which combined ecological action with artistic expression. Paddle sessions ran throughout the day alongside a Place Shaping Workshop for the Half Penny Steps, activating both water and towpath spaces.

The festival also hosted an ice cream boat, and facilitated five new collaborations between local organisations and the Council, strengthening connections and empowering groups to play an ongoing role in animating the canalside.



Children's waterway puppets created during the workshop.



*"While we encouraged children to be **inspired by Canalside nature**, they were likely to be more creative and imaginative with the outcomes. It was great to see adults as engaged and we learned that we could target individual adults more in future."*

-Activity organiser



A group taking part in a Paddle & Pick on a Bell boat activity, collecting litter along the canal.



Participants enjoing and engaging in the Waterside Printing creative activity.



The first paddle taster session of the festival – people gearing up to try paddleboarding for the first time!



Participants immersed in the creative process of designing and making their own puppets.

Weekend 2 | Health and Wellbeing



Saturday 13 September 2025

100+
Total attendance

24
Hours of activities

4
Grant awarded activities

The second festival day, hosted by Urbanwise London, explored health, creativity, and mindfulness through 9 activities over 24 hours of activities, with over 100 attendees.

Grant Awarded Activities

Mood Art - Feeling Through art
Host Activity | Urbanwise London
Drawing workshop

Canal Citizen Science
Community Classroom CIC
Water quality testing workshop

Rest & Reset
Wander and Rest Life
Mindfullness and massages

Local Investigators
Architecture for Kids CIC
Nature sketching and walk for children

Meditative Melodies
Curly Riot Ltd
Breathwork and harp performance

The Health and Wellbeing festival day offered a range of activities, including mindfulness and massage sessions, creative workshops, wellbeing talks, and paddleboarding on the canal. Highlights such as Mood Art and Rest and Reset proved especially popular. Four new community organisations worked with the Council for the first time, strengthening local collaboration and helping bring the festival to life.

"It was really lovely seeing people using the canal and getting on the water especially! I was **thrilled to see people having fun on the water** *and not being concerned about it."*

- Festival host



Creating a canal code that supports health and wellbeing with Local Investigators.



"[it was nice to see] a Tibetan group of friends who **stopped and reconnected to their country through art** *and left lovely and heartwarming messages to all. Also, a mom who said she didn't remember the last time she sat down to draw, or paint was pleased to do so."*

- Festival host



Paddle Skill Development Session 2 – returning participants building on their skills from the first weekend!



Event organiser from Rest & Reset, receiving a drawing created by an local resident, inspired by her work and given as a gift.



Meditative Melodies: A harpist leads participants in a relaxing meditation by the canal.



Everyone is welcome! People from diverse ages joined the drawing session hosted by Urbanwise London.

Weekend 3 | Culture and Creativity

Saturday 20 September 2025



26
Hours of activities

5
Grant awarded activities

Hosted by Westminster Children's University, the third festival day celebrated creativity and storytelling with 9 activities over 26 hours.

Grant Awarded Activities

Face painting and Stories Drop In!
Host Activity | Westminster Children's University
Facepainting & storytelling for children

Canal Chronicles – Create Your Own Immersive Theatre Show
DreamArts
Canalside creative walk

Queen's Park Canalside Community Storytelling Space!
Queen's Park Community Council
Storytelling

Health in Motion: Street Dance Party
Speakerbox Street Party
Dancing workshop

From Trash to Modern Chic
French African Welfare Association
Upcycling of old fabrics workshop

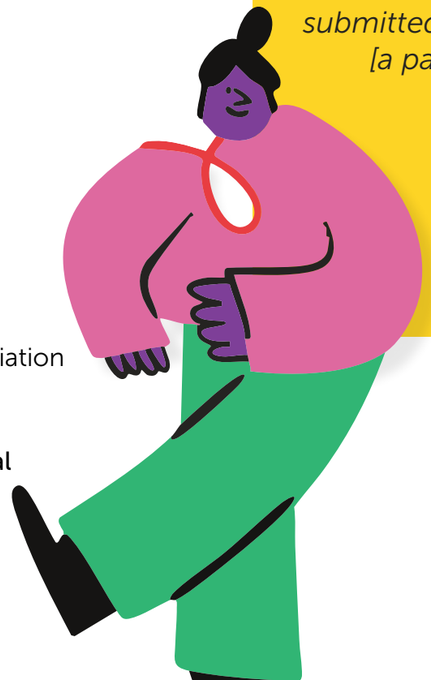
Canalside Storytelling Festival
Hikayetna
Poetry, music and storytelling

The programme of activities for the third festival day included upcycling workshops, creative learning sessions, dance and music sharing, and paddleboarding. According to the attendance survey, Hikayetna's Canalside Storytelling Festival was the most popular activity, bringing the community together through shared stories, music, and laughter.

Four new community organisations worked with the Council for the first time, while food and drink traders and a dedicated chill-out area helped create a welcoming, vibrant space. This showcased the canalside's potential as a hub for creativity, culture and community connection.



Hikayetna Storytelling



"We had some amazing stories submitted by elderly residents ... [a participant's] story ... was moving and difficult to hear - exactly the sort of **challenging and inspiring story we hoped to record.**"

- Activity organiser



FAWA members blending creativity and culture, complementing their upcycling workshop with traditional music.



Andino Valley's vegan ice creams and traditional Latin food activated the space, inviting people to try new flavours.



Health in Motion brought vibrancy and joy to the canal through music and movement. It was impossible not to join in!



Face painting and storytelling with Westminster Children's University – a joyful cultural experience for children.

Weekend 4 | Finale



Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 September 2025

170+
Total attendance

30
Hours of activities

7
Grant awarded activities

The festival concluded with a lively finale on Saturday, hosted by the City Lions Events Leadership Team, offering 11 activities across 24 hours and drawing over 170 participants. The Saturday finale included creative workshops, zumba, jewellery and weaving sessions, comedy shows, a fashion catwalk, paddleboarding, and Latin food and ice-cream traders.

Grant Awarded Activities

The Charm Lab
Host Activity | City Lions ELT
Jewellery making workshop

Weaving Waves
The Floating Classroom x Canal Dream
Weaving workshop

Own the Arena: Paddington Speaks
Corporate Jungle Impact CIC
Public speaking workshop

Gerry's Gongoozling Canal Parade
Gerry's Pompeii
Sunday canal parade

Comedy on the Canal
Craic House Ltd
Comedy show for children

ReFashion: Community in Every Stitch
UA in UK Community
Fashion catwalk show

Zumba Gold
Sandra
Zumba for all ages

Free Social Walk
The Great Friendship Project
Walk, games and pub trip

On Sunday, the festival ended with two events taking place: The Great Friendship Project delivered a walk, games and pub social, while Gerry's Gongoozling Parade, a grant-supported event, ran from Paddington Basin to Meanwhile Gardens, attracting over 400 attendees.

Saturday's finale was hosted by locally-recruited young people in partnership with the Council's City Lions team, who help 13-16 year olds to get involved in cultural and creative opportunities happening in Westminster. Six young people were selected to be NPC Festival hosts through the Events Leadership Team (ELT) programme*, which aims to co-create, manage and deliver events for other young people at the festival.

The Charm Lab jewellery workshop, led by the City Lions Events Leadership Team, was a particularly popular highlight.

Seven new community organisations worked with the Council for the first time, further strengthening local partnerships, while Andino Valley (Latin food & ice-cream traders) sold out, adding energy and flavour to the day.



Weavings by Mary and Gahsem

"**Canalside spaces have incredible potential for creative and community-driven activities.** *The combination of water, open air, and industrial architecture creates a unique atmosphere that* **inspires collaboration and cultural exchange.**"

- Activity organiser

*For more information on the programme please visit: https://citylions.org/elt/



Craic House demonstrating the potential of comedy for kids as a source of joy and fun, and most importantly, wellbeing.



A closer look at the Weaving Waves activity, where participants explored creativity through hands-on textile art.



Zumba with Sandra - fun and healthy! A beautiful moment as people of all ages danced and moved together beside the canal.



Models preparing for the Canalside Catwalk – an unforgettable experience.

Watersports



75+
People participated in paddle sessions accross the 4 weekends

13
Paddle Sessions

18.5
Paddleboarding hours delivered

The festival's watersports programme, delivered in partnership with Paddle UK – the National Governing Body for paddlesports – and activity provider Paddleboarding London, offered free, bookable introductory paddleboarding sessions. This included a progression pathway for people of all ages to develop skills, confidence, and a sense of ownership on the water.

Across the festival, 13 paddleboarding sessions were delivered, including 6 tasters, 3 Paddle & Pick canal clean-ups, and 4 skills development sessions, engaging over 75 participants and promoting health, wellbeing, and environmental stewardship.

Six participants committed to the Self-Delivery Programme for 2025/26, supporting ongoing skills development and long-term engagement.

This initiative successfully combined recreation, sustainability, and personal development, leaving a lasting impact and creating opportunities for future watersports participation.



"Fantastic team and **they made paddleboarding accessible** *to anyone and everyone!"*

- Paddleboarding participant

"A huge thank you to all your staff and volunteers... I really enjoyed my time learning new skills and becoming more **confident at paddleboarding.** *I would very much like to take this learning further towards an instructor qualification."*

- Paddleboarding participant



Jennifer from Paddleboarding London leading participants from the towpath.



Participants enjoying paddleboarding along the canal, discovering new skills on the water.



Participants preparing to begin their paddleboarding session along the canal.



Paddleboarding skill development session showing 4 members standing up!

Impact and legacy

80%
Respondent's experience of the festival improved their perception of the Canalside

83%
Want to see more events along the Canalside

The North Paddington Canalside has seen a significant shift in perception since March 2024, with satisfaction among residents rising from 24% to 80% following the festival. Over 120 hours of free programming across four themed weekends engaged 19 community organisations, many collaborating with the Council for the first time. 83% of attendees expressed interest in seeing more events along the canalside.

The festival strengthened community ties, inspired long-term stewardship, and increased local ownership of the space.

Thank you to everyone who was involved in, contributed to and attended the festival. It wouldn't have been possible without the incredible collaborative effort and commitment everyone showed to celebrating the canal!

Next steps

Paddle UK has committed to continuing regular paddleboarding sessions, supporting both skill development and community engagement on the water.

The NPC Activation Working Group are continuing to meet to discuss upcoming activities along the canalside.

Building on this momentum, the Council will continue to offer paddle sessions and other activities to sustain the positive energy, creativity, and sense of ownership established through the festival.

If you would like to find out more about the North Paddington Canalside programme and hear further project updates, please scan this QR code:

or visit:
https://npcanalsidestrategy.commonplace.is

You can also contact our team at:
npcanalside@westminster.gov uk

*"**I would love to use the canal side more!** I think that area in particular would be great for a playground or something of the like, as it's covered. It also might be really nice as a little seating space, or somewhere where there could be a shared canoe for people to use. Actually, the shared canoe is what I really want!"*

- Festival Host



