

The Devizes to Westminster Organisation Limited

DW 2024 – Directors’ Statement

Senior Doubles Race

Following on from the Director’s Statement of 28th February 2024, we would like to communicate openly where we are at regarding the Senior Doubles Class. As of today, entry numbers are 63 boats. Whilst this is a large increase from last week, it is still a fair way short of making a Westminster finish viable due to the significant costs involved in providing the mandated safety cover and necessary infrastructure and Services at Westminster. Once again, we urge any potential crews to enter now and not wait until the closing date and thank those crews who responded to the plea issued last week.

For clarity, **no decisions have been made as yet**. However, here are the facts as they stand.

- The current Thames flow and water levels, whilst dropping, remain high. We are, as is normal, liaising closely with the EA and they are telling us to expect high flows at Easter. This means that we are expecting to implement a screening process for all crews – the required scoring for crews to be allowed to race will depend on the course conditions at the time of the race.
- For a Westminster finish, we need 100 SD crews to have passed screening so that we get near to covering costs for the SD race. We are a way off that, and it seems that we are unlikely to get there.
- The financial situation of the Organisation means that we cannot run the 2024 DW at a significant loss. A major cost saving would be to terminate the SD race at Thames Young Mariners, as we did in 2022.
- We are looking at a potential sponsor for the race for this year. Talks are ongoing and we hope to have an outcome by the weekend. However, the amount will not cover the full costs of a Westminster finish.
- We could consider an appeal to the DW Community for funds to enable the Westminster finish. We are not certain how that might be received, but we are open to it, or any other ideas to raise the necessary funds (approximately £30K). In order to reduce committed expenditure, and therefore losses, by terminating contracts that are in place, we need to have this in place by W/S D.
- If we terminate the race at Thames Young Mariners, it opens up the opportunity for DW to be run on a daylight Thames. The exact details of this need to be finalised, but this means crews would paddle most of the canal in the dark, timing their start on Saturday evening so that they can arrive at Dreadnought for an opening window at first light on Sunday (around 6am GMT, but to be confirmed). There would also be a closed window for Teddington at 7pm GMT (TBC) after which crews would be retired from the race. No paddlers would be allowed on the Thames in the dark. Why are we considering this? The simple reason is that it significantly reduces the risk on the Thames and means we would be able to lower the screening cut off point – enabling more boats to race. Of course it means massive disruption to our army of volunteers (not to mention paddlers and their support crews) as everything is effectively switched around by 12 hours. However, we need the permission of the Canal and River Trust to be able to do this – the process to get that approval has started. This does not mean we are committed to a night canal for the race, but we would have the option if permission were to be granted. And to be clear, it is not guaranteed. In case you are thinking a daylight Thames with more paddlers means a possibility we can run to Westminster on the evening tide, the PLA just will not entertain that idea, and neither would our tideway safety partners.

The Director’s fully understand that the current levels of uncertainty are by no means what anyone wants to experience, but you have our assurance that we, like all paddlers, want to enable a Westminster finish if at all possible. However, we have an obligation to safeguard the Organisation for future years and simply cannot risk insolvency. In addition, we commit to running a safe race for all competitors and to be as inclusive as we possibly can in doing that.

Stages Race

The Directors will be issuing a separate statement in the next few days that covers the situation for the Stages race.

The Directors.
8th March 2024

Vice Presidents: Robin Meads
Mrs Janice Begent
Tom Armitstead