



A consultation to inform a decision on a potential application for part of the River Dee in Chester to be designated as a bathing water

What is this consultation about?

The Council would like to hear your views on a proposal to submit an application for part of the River Dee in Chester to be designated as a bathing water.

Background to the consultation

Concern about the pollution of our rivers and coastal waters has been growing over the last few years. While there are several sources of pollution, attention has focused on the issue of untreated sewage being discharged into our waters, particularly during and following periods of heavy rainfall.

Responding to increasing local concerns about river cleanliness, the Council set up a cross-party task group of councillors to investigate the issue in the Borough.

In August 2022, just after the task group was established, the issue of sewage in our rivers and coastal waters became heavily publicised in the national media after raw sewage was discharged into the sea in several locations and the Environment Agency issued advice against bathing.

The issue also gained momentum locally, and in October 2022, the Leader of the Council wrote an open letter to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) about the unacceptable sewage discharges into the River Dee during periods of pressure on the drainage system.

In its report (March 2023), the task group recommended that the Council should look into the feasibility of submitting an application to DEFRA for part of the River Dee in Chester to be designated as a bathing water and should work with others, including community groups and the water company, towards that goal.

What is a designated bathing water?

Designated bathing water status refers to the designation of a beach or inland water as a bathing water so that information on water quality is provided to bathers and their health can be protected.

If a site is designated, the Environment Agency will monitor bathing water quality during the bathing season, from 15 May to 30 September, and categorise it at the end of the season as 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Sufficient' or 'Poor'. It will also investigate any sources of microbiological pollution and recommend measures to improve water quality.

Bathing water designation does not mean the water meets bathing water quality standards or that the water is safe for bathers, but it can be the first step to ensure action is taken to improve water quality by reducing contamination.

The creation of over 400 coastal bathing waters around the UK has led to 97% of these beaches meeting minimum water quality standards, up from just 27% in the 1990s. In addition, 93% of bathing waters in England met the highest standards of 'good' or 'excellent' in 2022, up from just 76% in 2010. As well as coastal waters, there are also 12 lakeside sites in England that are designated as bathing waters but to date only two rivers.

Improved water quality would, of course, benefit not only bathers but also a wide range of other leisure and sports users, including paddlers, paddleboarders, canoeists, rowers, leisure boat users and local businesses as well as the environment and wildlife.

The purpose of designation is to protect existing bathers, not to increase the number, and evidence from other areas, albeit limited, suggests that it does not increase numbers unless it is used as part of a campaign to drive tourism.

As part of its ongoing commitment to water safety throughout the borough, the Council is working with consultants and others in seeking to ensure that a wide range of users can enjoy water safely.

Applying to designate a bathing water

The bathing season runs from 15 May to 30 September. On 3 July 2023, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published new, stricter guidance on the criteria and the application process. Further clarification of some of the new criteria is still being sought.

In considering applications, DEFRA will take into account the facilities at the proposed site, the number of bathers and the outcome of a local consultation.

Although there are several sites where people access the water, it is only Sandy Lane, upstream from the river ferry, that potentially fits the criteria due to the number of people bathing there and the existence of facilities. Please note there are no plans for development and no plans to increase the number of bathers.

DEFRA's guidance can be found here:

[Designate a bathing water: guidance on how to apply - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/designate-a-bathing-water)

Your views

The Council would like to hear the views of all stakeholders - local residents, community and sports groups, visitors and businesses on the proposed designation of bathing water in the River Dee.

How to take part:

There are a number of ways you can share your views:

- complete the [on-line survey](#)
- email your views to: regulatoryservices@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk
- send a letter to: Public Protection Service, The Portal, Wellington Road, Ellesmere Port, CH65 0BA.
- request a copy of our consultation in alternative formats, including paper and easy read, using the contact details above.

How your views will be used

Once all the required information, including consultation responses, have been collected, the Council will consider the results and then make a decision on the feasibility of an application. Any application must be submitted by 31 October.

The results of the consultation will be published on the Council's website.