

## INFORMATION NOTE

### St Annes Bathing Waters 2022 Update Report

#### Reason for report:

1. In March 2022, the Committee received an update report on the water quality at the two St Annes bathing waters. The Committee were advised that St Annes North had been deemed 'Sufficient' quality for the previous 3 years, with Fylde Council and the Environment Agency (EA) sharing concerns with regards to the lack of improvement. The Committee were further advised that testing was being done on the waters, including the impacts from farmland runoff and DNA testing to highlight what pollutants were found in the water. The Committee were informed that United Utilities were planning a series of roadshows in the summer and advised that it would be beneficial for Members of the Committee to attend.
2. Following discussion, it was agreed that an update report would be brought back to the June Committee and that would be produced in liaison with the Environment Agency and United Utilities.
3. The Environment Agency are responsible for implementation of the Bathing Waters Directives, monitoring and reporting on water quality and ensuring action is taken to meet the appropriate standards for the directives throughout the UK. They also regulate discharges to the aquatic environment.

#### Sewerage responsibilities:

4. The Environment Agency make daily predictions of pollution risks at our bathing waters during the bathing season which Fylde Council then must advertise. The predictions inform the public of increased pollution risk through signs displayed at bathing waters. These warnings are short term pollution events that have clearly identifiable causes (e.g. rainfall, tide height, wind speed and direction etc) which are not normally expected to affect bathing water quality for more than approximately 72 hours. Where pollution risk forecasts have coincided with statutory bathing water sampling and if all conditions are met there is a potential for discounting samples at the end of the season.
5. The Fylde Coast is located at the mouth of the Ribble Estuary. There are numerous pressures coming down this catchment which impact bathing water quality from urban and rural sources.
6. Bathing waters are complex and influenced by several factors such as rainwater running off roads and roofs, run-off from agricultural land, sewage from privately owned treatment works and septic tanks, boats or even animals such as dogs or seabirds on the beach. This can be made worse by heavy rain.

Some water company operations can directly affect bathing waters:-

- i. Sewage treatment works – these treat wastewater from homes and businesses to strict standards before releasing the treated water out to sea, or other watercourses, through outfall pipes.
- ii. Misconnections – when homes or businesses have wrongly connected their private plumbing into the surface water system, which eventually discharges into rivers or streams, instead of to the public sewerage network to be treated. This can affect bathing water quality. A national campaign ([www.connectright.org.uk](http://www.connectright.org.uk)) raises awareness of the issue.

#### Fylde's sewerage system

7. Much of the Fylde is serviced by a combined surface water/foul drainage system which is under pressure at times of high rainfall. Most of the system is historic and is managed/owned by United Utilities.

United Utilities have discharge consents, which are an essential part of managing the combined sewer system. Storm overflows are an important part of the sewerage network and include combined sewer overflows (CSOs) and storm tank discharges. They act as a pressure relief valve when there is too much rainfall, allowing rainwater, mixed with sewage, to rise inside the sewer and eventually enter a separate pipe which flows into a river or the sea. Sewers operate this way to help prevent the flooding of streets, homes and businesses. When they are in use, they can sometimes affect river and bathing water quality, albeit temporarily. All the spill data for the year is available on the United Utility web site. To change the current combined system would require most houses in the region to be re-plumbed, roads dug up to separate the sewers and surface water drains with a significant increase in water bills. To comply with statutory requirements the combined sewer system needs to be designed for a 1 in 30-year storm; the current system across the Fylde Coast complies with this requirement.

8. The Environment Act 2021 contains provisions that the Government intend will ensure water companies secure a progressive reduction in the adverse impacts of discharges from storm overflows. The measures included in the act are set out [ent/news/environment-bill-further-strengthened-to-tackle-storm-overflow here](#).

#### **Monitoring reports:**

9. At the time of the Committee in March 2022, there was concern from the Committee about the number of alleged reported sewerage spills in the Fairhaven and Ballam Road area reported on the Surfers Against Sewage website. United Utilities confirmed that at this time the only spill that had occurred was on 3rd January 2022. In addition, United Utilities stated a contractor was working at Preston Water Waste Treatment Works on level instruments in a storm tank. This caused a 7-minute-high reading indicating to the Surfers Against Sewage app that a storm tank was discharging when in fact it was not. There were no actual discharges from any United Utilities asset along the coastline during that period. The Environment Agency confirmed that this was reported to them by United Utilities.

#### **Press and social media reports**

10. On the 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022, an article that featured in both The Sun and Country Living ranked St Annes beach as the worst water in the country for swimming. This needs to be kept in perspective. The article was originally reported nationally, based on data and rankings provided by Business Waste. This study appears to have based the rankings on high bacteria counts in single samples rather than classifications made using data over a 4-year period. Any bathing water can have high results following heavy rain, high tides etc but focusing on a result from a particular day does not give the overall water quality of the bathing water. In St Annes case – Good and St Annes North – Sufficient. Both meeting and exceeding the minimum standards set out in the Bathing Water Directive.
11. The Surfers Against Sewage website has flagged up 6 alerts so far this year, 1 within the bathing water season (at St Annes North and Pier).
12. DEFRA/EA Bathing Water Quality samples are taken between 1<sup>st</sup> May and 30<sup>th</sup> September. On the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022 the E.coli readings for St Annes North hit 8400cfu per 100ml, a high reading, whereas St Annes registered 770cfu per 100ml. The high spring tide and sporadic rainfall in the catchment are likely to be the source of the high result.
13. Samples taken on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2022 for St Annes North the E.coli reading was 160cfu per 100ml and for St Annes registered 82cfu / 100ml. E.coli should not exceed 500cfu per 100ml.
14. In terms of the bathing waters, the deterioration of the water quality at St Annes North is of concern to the Council and the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency has identified St Annes and St Annes North as priority bathing waters, which means an action plan will be drawn up to improve the water quality. In 2021/22, DEFRA provided the Environment Agency with additional funding to deliver additional work on farms. The South Fylde area was identified as a ‘hot spot’ and the additional funding was used to target pressures on bathing waters from agriculture. This project comprised of:
  - Farm inspections
    - 30 farm inspections completed along South Fylde area in 2021/22
    - 50+ farmers written to about the ongoing Water Quality issues in the area

- Numerous issues identified such as livestock having open access to water courses so resolved with fencing being installed.
- Saltmarsh grazing with cattle having open access to the estuary was identified as a big pressure. However, the cattle graze here under a HLS agreement with Natural England to support the wildfowl in this area.

A full report on this project will be available in due course.

15. The water quality in Liggard Brook is causing concern. Ballam Road pumping station is sited on Park View playing fields and has a large storm overflow tank sited next to it. When the pumping station receives its maximum pass forward flow of 100 l/s, incoming flows are diverted into the available storage tank which can store approximately 9 million litres of storm water. When this reaches capacity, flows are diverted to a wet well where the flows are pumped into Liggard Brook via a screening system to a maximum of 500 l/s. It is worth noting that flows at this point are relatively diluted due to the amount of rainwater in the system. United Utilities have discharge consents, and this system only operates in a flood situation. If this system were not in place houses in the area would flood.

### **Conclusion**

16. Bathing waters are complex and influenced by several factors as described above. Any bathing water can have high results following heavy rain, high tides etc but focussing on a result from a particular day does not give the overall water quality of the bathing water. The deterioration of the water quality at St Annes North is of concern to the Council and the Environment Agency. The Environment Agency has identified St Annes and St Annes North as priority bathing waters which means an action plan will be drawn up to improve the water quality. Part of the plan will involve the identification of the problem with DNA testing and then measures can be put in place to resolve the problem.

**FURTHER INFORMATION** - Contact: Darren Bell Head of Technical Services

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