

# Bathing Water Status 1 year on – Report for RYWQG (Updated)

June 2024

I am sure you are all aware that last month Defra granted an unprecedented bathing water status (BWS) to 13 river sites, including Coastguards Beach on the Erme estuary.

The application for the Erme site was led by Emily Woodley, and I met with her on 4.6.24 to discuss what we could learn from her experience, and what she thought might have changed. The main learning points were as follows:

- There is recognition that the main driver for obtaining BWS is to clean up the river where the site lies – by focusing the EA’s attention on the river and providing much more official water testing.
- Defra has closed applications for this year and further applications are in limbo pending Defra revision of the rules
- There is pressure to widen the definition of “Bathing” to include water sports i.e paddle borders, dinghy sailors and paddlers, which to date have been excluded. This inclusion would be to the benefit of any application we might make.
- There will be a public a public consultation prior to Defra’s change in rules and Emily felt it was important that both YEM and RYWQG were involved in this (this is currently active).
- The application for Coastguard Beach was supported by the landowner (John Mildmay-White), the Holbeton PC, and other Erme riparian PCs.
- Car parking and toilet facilities for Mothercome Beach were accepted as sufficient for both beaches.
- Emily made the important point that the swimmers at Mothercombe and Coastguard are mainly drawn from a different population of visitors who travelled to the Erme beaches, while the swimmers in the Yealm are primarily from the local population – either from local holiday lets or permanent residents. Therefore, BWS is thought unlikely to draw in extra people to a local Yealm site. The Erme beaches are available for swimming at all states of the tide, while Pope’s Quay on the Yealm, for example, is only available for a couple of hours either side of high water. Could Bathing Status to a limited area in the vicinity of Pope’s Quay and south shore keep swimmers there, and away from the more dangerous boating waters elsewhere in the vicinity of the harbour on the north shore?
- SHDC need to be supportive, and was supportive of the Erme application. PC approval is not necessary, but is obviously important to show local support.

There was a very useful assessment for the Ilkley Clean Water group following this year’s success, the main points being:

- Data is vital to support any application – e.g. water quality (CSI), number of spills, local public opinion
- What does achieving BWT get you?
  - Weekly testing of water quality by EA during the “season”
  - Signage re water quality incl. risks to swimmers (paid for by district council)
  - Management Plan for the river

- CSI + EA data provides collaborative strong evidence with which to hold agencies to account (YEM are doing this)
- STW upgraded by water company
- Data from Ilkley after EA required the water industry to install monitors on outflows showed that discharges were not just during “exceptional circumstances”
- BWS did not result in more tourists coming to swim.
- BWS kept pressure on the water company to up their act.

## Conclusion

There has been a huge step forward in plans being drawn up to improve the water quality of our rivers, in large extent due to the pressure brought about by CSI, BWS and newspaper publicity about both.

So, should we re-think an application which we put on hold in 2023?

My advice would be to wait for Defra’s reassessment of the rules concerning BWS criteria, and ensure that all interested bodies take part in the public consultation. In the meantime, publicise the data collected on Yealm Water Quality and build a consensus so that when further applications are permitted we know how to respond.

If not resolved in 2024 this position should be reviewed annually until it is.

Peter Brown

YEM

4.6.24

## **Updated 10.12.24**

DEFRA has since put out their public consultation to update the regulations regarding BWS and we have responded to that (you can respond until 23<sup>rd</sup> December on <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/water/bathing-water-reforms-consultation/>).

We will be able to apply for BWS once the new rules for applying have been published by DEFRA. We are looking for a community minded enthusiast to take on the organisation of the public consultation to see if such an application has the support wish of the local community. If you are interested please let Jane Pennington know at [jkpennington123@gmail.com](mailto:jkpennington123@gmail.com) .