

Ilkley gets green light for first river bathing site in England

Part of the River Wharfe in Ilkley will be added to the list of bathing waters in England from 2021.

This follows a public consultation which ran from 7 August to 2 October 2020 on designating the area of the River Wharfe which runs between Ilkley Main Bridge and Beanlands Island at Ilkley in Yorkshire. It is a popular swimming and paddling spot for both local residents and visitors to the area.

The new status means that the Environment Agency will regularly take samples from the river to assess whether action is needed to cut bacteria levels, helping to ensure the water is cleaner and safer for swimmers, and improve the Wharfe's water quality. Monitoring will begin from May 2021.

Today's announcement comes as Yorkshire Water confirmed a new partnership to improve water quality in the River Wharfe, bringing together the Environment Agency, Bradford Council, National Farmers Union (NFU), Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and landowners upstream of Ilkley.

It has also set out plans to reduce storm overflow discharges into the river by 20%, increasing the use of smart tech to predict and prevent pollution incidents.

Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

The residents of Ilkley and the surrounding area have shown their overwhelming appreciation for the River Wharfe as an asset to enjoy and protect. I am delighted that this stretch of river will be the first river to host a designated bathing water site.

Unfortunately, we all know that water quality won't change overnight. It will take time and we need farmers and businesses to commit to achieve the necessary improvements. I am pleased to see Yorkshire Water stepping forward with new proposals today to help move things in the right direction.

The Environment Agency has been monitoring at bathing water sites on the coast and at certain lakes since the 1990s, and in this time there have been significant improvements to water quality. In 2019, 98.3 per cent of England's bathing waters met the minimum bathing water standard and for the first time since the relevant regulations were brought into force, more than 70 per cent of bathing waters achieved the highest standard

Responses to the consultation were received from a wide range of interested

parties across the country, including Ilkley residents, NGOs, conservation groups and local water company Yorkshire Water.

In total there were 1073 replies, the largest response to date for a proposed bathing water designation, with 998 of respondents in favour of making the site a designated bathing water area.