

# FIRESTONE BAY – BATHING WATER DESIGNATION

Briefing Paper



## Bathing Waters – Introduction

Formal bathing waters are areas that are:

- Officially identified (designated) by the Secretary of State because a large number of people bathe in that location;
- Water quality tested every year by the Environment Agency (EA). The testing happens from 15th May to 30th September, weekly assessments measure current water quality, and at a number of sites daily pollution risk forecasts are issued. Annual ratings classify each site as excellent, good, sufficient or poor based on measurements taken over a period of up to four years
- Designated under the Bathing Water Regulations
- Local Authorities are required to display information at the bathing water to show water quality during the bathing season.

Within Plymouth, there are two existing DEFRA designated bathing areas

- **Plymouth Hoe East**
- **Plymouth Hoe West**

## Firestone Bay as a Designated Bathing Water

Firestone Bay is one of a number of swimming areas identified within Plymouth Sound, which are currently marked by seasonal buoys and identified on navigational charts. While these areas are popular swimming zones they are not officially designated bathing waters.

Firestone Bay has been identified as an area that could become a Designated Bathing Water and there is a lot of community support for the site to be designated. Initial discussion with the Environment Agency have demonstrated their support for the proposal, and they have carried out some initial water sampling. This has indicated that the water quality of Firestone bay should typically be similar to Plymouth Hoe West and therefore sufficient to meet the required standards.

## Application Process

Local authorities usually apply for designation, but anyone can apply. Local authorities must support all applications. The application process is relatively simple and requires evidence as follows:

- User surveys. These need to be carried out between May- September, cover a minimum of 20 days and include weekend and bank holidays and school holidays. Number of users need to be recorded and how they are using the site i.e swimming, paddling.
- Information about any facilities at the site that promote or support bathing
- Evidence of a consultation with users, local groups and interested parties.

The main focus of the evidence needs to be on the use of the site – this is the determining factor not the current water quality.

Applications for designations for the following years bathing season need to be submitted by 31 October.

Once DEFRA has all the relevant evidence it will hold a public consultation. Ministers make the final decision before the Local Authority is notified.

There is no cost associated to submit the actual application.

### **PCC Responsibilities if successful.**

If we were successful our responsibilities will be similar to the other two designated sites in the city. Between May and September PCC we are currently responsible for displaying up to date information on water quality at each Bathing Water site.

The Public Health Team are currently responsible for the onsite signage and for updating if/when conditions change. They have been consulted in the production of this paper and have indicated that it will be possible to add an additional site to their current rounds within existing staff capacity.

There is potential to move to digital signage in the future but to do this we would need 3-4 years' worth of data before it can be implemented. This would have a cost implication for purchase and installation of the signs, and an element of staff time to manage the data and information placed on them. However, it would remove the requirement for PH team to physically go out and visit the sites with paper copies. The roll out of a digital system is not needed at this time to enable a further site to be designated as a Bathing Water.

### **Evidence Gathering**

- There is a vibrant community of users in the Firestone Bay area that have indicated they would be happy to contribute to the evidence base required.
- A University of Plymouth Research Project, supported by PCC is looking at wild swimmers and their experiences recorded in a diary format, which could contribute to the evidence base.
- The NMP Rangers could work with local communities to collect information required as Firestone Bay is identified as a NMO community Hub in the Heritage Horizons funded programme.

### **Reference**

[Bathing waters: apply for designation or de-designation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bathing-waters-apply-for-designation-or-de-designation)

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Approval to submit an application to DEFRA requesting that Firestone Bay is designated a formal Bathing Water for the 2023 Bathing Season.