



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Application for designation as a bathing water

Wolvercote Mill Stream, Port Meadow, Oxford

February 2022

We are the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We're responsible for improving and protecting the environment, growing the green economy, sustaining thriving rural communities and supporting our world-class food, farming and fishing industries.

We work closely with our 33 agencies and arm's length bodies on our ambition to make our air purer, our water cleaner, our land greener and our food more sustainable. Our mission is to restore and enhance the environment for the next generation, and to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.



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Contents

Background	4
Proposal for new Designation.....	5
Location and facilities	5
Usage numbers and methodology	6
Local consultation.....	7
Responding to this consultation.....	8
Annex - List of consultees	9

Background

Popular beaches and inland waters that attract a large number of bathers are designated as bathing waters under the Bathing Water Regulations 2013 (S.I.2013/1675) (“the Regulations”) to protect bathers’ health against faecal pollution. During the bathing season, which in England runs from 15 May to 30 September, the Environment Agency monitors the water quality to test for intestinal enterococci and *E.coli*. Bathing waters are classified annually as ‘excellent’, ‘good’, ‘sufficient’ or ‘poor’, based on an assessment of the level of bacteria in the water over the preceding four years. If the site is designated, the Environment Agency will develop a bathing water profile and put plans in place to monitor and protect the bathing water, with the aim of achieving at least a sufficient classification

The Regulations define a bathing water as a surface water where “...*the Secretary of State expects a large number of people to bathe, having regard in particular to past trends and any infrastructure or facilities provided, or other measures taken, to promote bathing at those waters.*” (Reg. 3(1)). We have not defined a “large number” because there is a wide variety of bathing waters in England that attract a level of usage proportionate to their size and location and setting a minimum number could exclude smaller sites. Designation also takes into account any facilities that are provided to promote and support bathing (for example lifeguarding, first aid facilities, public toilets, shops and cafes) because the presence of such facilities demonstrates that the site is an established bathing area and is promoted and managed for bathing.

Under the Bathing Water Regulations 2013, the local authority must display public information about water quality and pollution sources at designated bathing waters during the bathing season (15 May to 30 September). The information displayed is provided to the local councils by the Environment Agency.

Defra provides guidance for those applying for bathing water status and requires that the application provides information on the facilities provided, the number of bathers and description of local consultation¹.

¹ [Bathing waters: apply for designation or de-designation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Proposal for new designation

The Oxford Rivers Project, which is made up of 4 parties: Oxford City Council, the Rivers Trust, Thames Water and Thames21, has applied for Wolvercote Mill Stream, on the River Thames at Port Meadow, Oxford, to be designated as a bathing water.

This consultation sets out our summary of the application and seeks your views on the proposal to designate this site as a bathing water.

Location and facilities

Wolvercote Mill Stream, the proposed designation, is highlighted in Image A.

Image A



The land is owned by Oxford City Council and it is the responsible local authority for the land.

If the site is designated as a bathing water, the Environment Agency will determine a sampling point on the basis of where the greatest number of bathers go into the water. The annual classification would reflect bathing water quality at this point on the river.

The application has described the area used for swimming and paddling as having easy access to a village shop, three pubs/restaurants, car parking (60 to 70 spaces) and nearby public transport options.

A lifebelt is available and there is a block of 4 toilets at the site, including one with baby-changing facilities.

The site also has picnic benches authorised for barbeques, bins and a play park within 200m of the site.

The site is easily accessible by foot, as the riverbank is all open access, and there are multiple footpaths nearby.

Usage numbers and methodology

The Defra guidance on applying for a new bathing water designation asks for a numerical survey of beach usage covering a minimum of 20 days during the bathing season. The survey must include 10 weekend or bank holiday days and half of the survey days must be during school holiday periods. The guidance asks for the numbers of adults bathing and children bathing/paddling to be shown separately, as children, even if paddling, are more likely than adults to become immersed and ingest water and for that reason are counted as a bather.

The Oxford Rivers Project provided a survey of usage at the river taken over 45 days between 23 May and 22 September 2021.

The 45 counts taken during the survey registered a total of 1093 bathers (adults and children swimming, and children paddling). However, on 13 dates, 2 or more counts were taken (13 July, 15 July, 17 July, 19 July, 22 July, 23 July, 27 July, 7 August, 8 August, 14 August, 22 August, 11 September and 15 September) therefore to be consistent with the usual approach of a single count on each survey date in this consultation, we have used the figures from the higher count on each of these dates.

The river is used for recreational activities such as fishing and boating, as well as swimming and paddling. However, recreational activities other than bathing are not counted in our assessment.

The breakdown of numbers reported over 45 days were:

- 1093 bathers (adults swimming and children swimming or paddling)

Using the 20 survey days with the highest number of bathers (including 10 weekend or bank holiday days and half of the survey days during school holidays) the figures were

- 595 adult bathers
- 316 children paddling/bathing

If the daily averages are multiplied by 20, to give a comparison with a 20-day survey, the figures are:

- an average (rounding up) of 46 bathers per day

The total number of bathers during the 20 surveyed days with the highest number of bathers is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Date of count	Adults swimming	Children swimming/paddling	Totals
Monday 31 May	5	18	23
Tuesday 1 June	6	18	24
Saturday 12 June	30	33	63
Monday 14 June	5	14	19
Friday 9 July	10	12	22
Thursday 15 July	10	10	20
Saturday 17 July	55	45	100
Sunday 18 July	309	43	352
Monday 19 July	16	10	26
Wednesday 21 July	20	36	56
Friday 23 July	8	12	20
Saturday 7 August	2	4	6
Sunday 8 August	18	14	32
Saturday 14 August	50	5	55
Sunday 22 August	5	4	9
Monday 23 August	4	16	20
Monday 30 August	5	2	7
Wednesday 8 September	23	8	31
Saturday 11 September	4	2	6
Wednesday 15 September	10	10	20
Totals	595	316	911
Daily average			46

Local consultation

Prior to submitting the application, the Oxford Rivers Project held a local consultation to gather views on the proposal to apply for designation as a bathing water. The consultation was opened for responses for 2 months, between 7 July 2021 and 5 September 2021. It

targeted groups directly affected by the proposed bathing water area. This included residents, neighbourhood, environmental and sports groups and businesses local to Port Meadow. There were 234 responses:

- 224 respondents stated they were in favour of designated bathing water status at Port Meadow
- 5 opposed the proposal
- 5 neither supported nor opposed the proposal

In addition, in September 2020, in response to news and data of raw sewage discharges into the Thames basin and in rivers across the country, the #endsewagepollution mid-Thames group launched a petition on the website change.org calling on Defra, the Environment Agency and the local authority to “Give the Thames in Oxford bathing water status”. The petition remains open and as of September 2021, stood at 5,124 signatories. Respondents can choose to leave their address and/or postcode. From those who did, 2,125 stated they lived in Oxford.

Responding to this consultation

We would welcome your views on the proposal to designate Wolvercote Mill Stream in Oxford as a bathing water.

In your response please state:

- that you are responding to the consultation on whether Wolvercote Mill Stream in Oxford should be designated as a bathing water
- your view on the proposal
- your reasons or evidence to support your view

Please respond by 2 March 2022 via Citizenspace, by email to bathingwater@defra.gov.uk or by post to:

Bathing Water Team
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
Seacole Building
London
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Annex - List of consultees

British Destinations and UK Beach Management Forum

British Long Distance Swimming Association

Consumer Council for Water

Country Land and Business Association

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Marine Conservation Society

National Farmers Union

Outdoor Swimming Society

River and Lake Swimming Association

Surfers Against Sewage

Visit England

Water UK

Thames Water