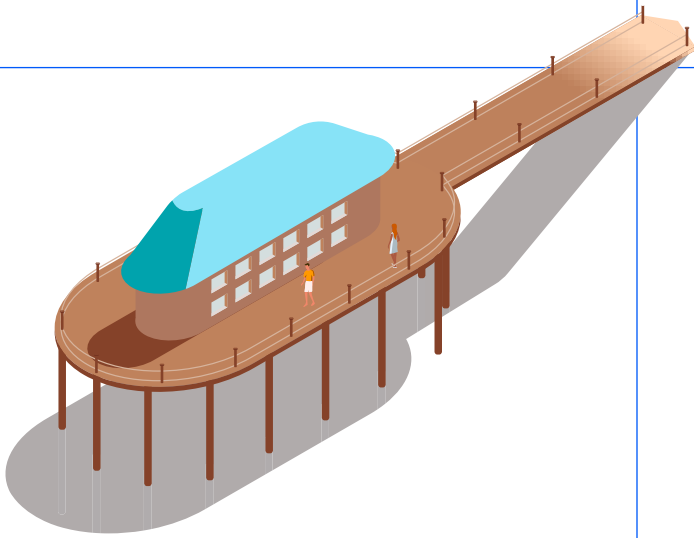


FACTSHEET

CUTTING THROUGH CONFUSION ON:

BATHING WATERS

The UK has over 600 designated bathing waters. While people may swim in many locations, designated bathing waters are regularly tested throughout the bathing water season each year. This information – along with details of any other pollution sources – is displayed by the relevant Local Authority or beach owner, both online and physically during the bathing season (15th May to 30th September in England and Wales, 1st of June to 15th September in Scotland and Northern Ireland).



By the 1990s the UK was known as the 'dirty man of Europe' as a result of its poor coastal bathing waters when less than a third would have met today's standards following years of underinvestment when the water sector was publicly owned.

Water companies have been investing in additional treatments, including ultraviolet disinfection to improve the quality of used water being returned to the environment. Thanks to this investment and stronger regulation, our nation's bathing waters have been transformed. More beaches than ever are now achieving the "Excellent" classification.

BATHING WATERS CLASSED AS GOOD OR EXCELLENT



94.7%
ENGLAND



94.2%
WALES



60%
SCOTLAND



CLASSIFICATION

Bathing waters in England are classified by the Environment Agency with individual bathing areas ranked as Excellent, Good, Sufficient and Poor. The quality of bathing waters is measured during the bathing water season which generally runs from May to September every year. In Wales and Scotland, a similar process takes place with National Resources Wales and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in charge of testing.

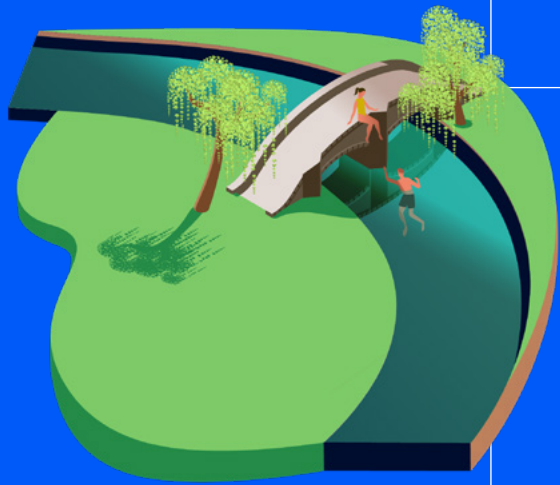
EXPLAINER

BATHING RIVERS

Up until recently, only coastal waters were typically designated for bathing however this is now changing.

Due in part to the rise in popularity of pastimes like wild swimming and paddleboarding, there has been a growing call for more designated inland bathing areas in rivers. Currently there are only three designated bathing rivers in England in Yorkshire, Oxfordshire and The Isle of Wight.

Of these only one, The River Wharfe at Ilkley, has been classified by the Environment Agency with the other two to be classified for the first time in 2022.



MISCONCEPTION

Water companies don't want bathing in rivers

REALITY

Water companies are currently working in partnership with Local Authorities, landowners, the Environment Agency and other interested parties to increase the number of designated inland bathing waters across the country, so that more people can enjoy these amenities local to them.

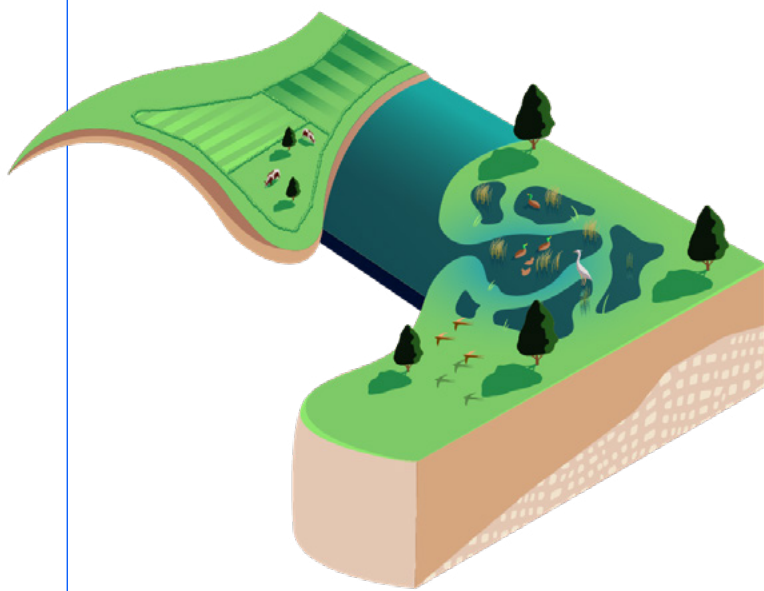
**OVER
£2.5BN**

invested by water companies to protect UK bathing waters and continue to invest through the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP).

CHALLENGES

The rise of open swimming and other activities means people increasingly want to use rivers for recreation. However, the regulations protecting rivers were not originally designed to include consideration for swimming and were more focussed towards protecting river ecology. As a result, not a single river in the UK currently meets bathing water standards.

There are many factors that can impact river water quality in addition to water company assets, such as treated discharges and storm overflows. Run off from roads and farmland, grazing animals and wildlife and private non-regulated sewerage discharges, all have the potential to impact water quality.



SOLUTIONS

MORE BATHING RIVERS

Water companies want to work with the Government, farmers and landowners to help create bathing rivers in every region of England. This would require the development of a new set of rules and tests to ensure rivers are safe for people to use for recreational purposes.

A number of water companies are already working on large scale pilot trials to demonstrate how collaboration at a catchment scale can bring about the necessary water quality improvements. Water companies are also investing in additional monitoring equipment to better understand the impact of their own assets on rivers, investing even more in their treatment works, and many are putting in place measures to reduce the frequency that storm overflows operate.