

Background Notes

for the Bathing Water Quality Meeting 10th November 2011 between Newport Town Council (NTC), Nevern Community Council (NCC), Environment Agency (EAW), the Local Authority (PCC), Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (PCNPA), Welsh Water (DC/WW) and concerned local groups in the Newport and Nevern areas.

Notes prepared by Newport Area Environment Group (NAEG) 24th October 2011

Please read these in conjunction with NAEG comments on Newport North Bathing Water Profile 2011

Bathing Waters in Wales are “designated” by DEFRA and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) Beaches for proposed designation were historically put forward by our Local Authority 23 years ago and amongst those accepted was the beach named “Newport North”

EAW monitors and assesses whether designated bathing waters comply with the current **European Bathing Water Directive** standards (76/1160/EEC) The aim of the Directive is to preserve, protect and improve the quality of the environment and to protect human health It was originally envisaged that the bathing water directive would be widened to include recreational waters e.g. where people sail, canoe or surf, but this has not been the case. Currently, such users (and of course this particularly affects Newport) must benefit as far as they can from the system of Directives in place.

The current Directive will be repealed and a **Revised Directive** (2006/7/EC) is coming into play in stages but will be fully in force in the UK in 2015. This will pose even further challenges of more stringent bathing water quality standards and stronger emphasis on beach management and public information to enable people to take better informed decisions about whether to bathe. At the same time, rainfall and extreme weather events are widely predicted to increase in future.

EAW

- ⇒ identifies the significant sources of pollution which cause individual bathing waters to fail and progresses plans to improve the water quality.
- ⇒ works with the water industry and The Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat) through the periodic review process to identify and prioritise sewage treatment works and sewerage infrastructure for improvement.
- ⇒ works with other initiatives such as Catchment Sensitive Farming, sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) and water protection zones to find solutions to other pollution sources.
- ⇒ also maintains good quality bathing waters through its regulatory permitting process.

Each Welsh designated bathing water site receives an annual **water quality classification** for every season. This classification is calculated from 20 samples taken weekly by Environment Agency Wales during the season. (May to September) At present, the results are eventually posted on Newport website but the delay renders this information of limited use to anyone considering bathing or carrying out an activity off Traethmawr on any particular day

Locally, the EAW team has been able to take additional samples in 2010 at Newport Bridge to coincide with sample taking at the “Newport North” designated point, endeavouring to understand the contribution of the River Nevern from up-river sources. PCC has also tested at Cwm occasionally. These results are not currently posted up and the public remains ignorant of water quality when bathing at Parrog or Cwm or even Pyg Y Benet

Pollution is mainly from human sewage, mostly the CSOs at Newport and into the Nevern, and/or from livestock waste.

The number of certain types of bacteria are counted. These are Total coliforms (TC) Faecal coliforms (FC) Faecal streptococci (FS) (The latter are not directly harmful but indicate the presence of pollution). An increase in the concentrations of bacteria indicates a decrease in water quality.

Under the 76/1160 Directive, **Minimum** means that at least 95% of the samples meet the **mandatory** standards of the Directive; limits used are TC: ≤10000; FC: ≤2000; FS: N/A. If **more than** one of the twenty weekly samples fails to meet this standard then the water is classified as ‘Fail’ for the year. **Higher** means the bathing water meets the criteria for the stricter UK **Guideline** standards of the Directive (includes lower levels of concentrations and a third parameter (FS)); limits used are TC: ≤500; FC: ≤100; FS: ≤100.

For water quality to be classified as 'Guideline' for the year, 80% of the samples taken must meet this standard) (All values are colonies per 100ml of sample)

On three occasions during the 2011 bathing season samples taken at "Newport North" failed to meet this stricter Guideline standard which means the beach has a Water Quality Classification of a "Minimum" pass and will lose "Blue Flag" status for 2012. The last occasion was after the new replacement Long Sea Outfall was in place and operating.

European Blue flag status The Programme is administered in Wales by **Keep Wales Tidy (KWT)** and is managed internationally by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) Blue Flags are valid for one year. At the moment, Blue Flag beaches must meet 'Guideline' standards set in the Bathing Water Directive in the previous year, as well as 28 separate beach-management criteria concerning facilities, safety, environmental education and management.

Abnormal Weather Waivers Article 5 of the Bathing Waters Directive (76/1160/EEC) allows the EAW to disregard results that exceed the bathing water standards if they were affected by floods, other natural disasters or abnormal weather conditions. This applies to both the mandatory and guideline bathing water quality standards.

Abnormal weather for the purposes of the Bathing Water Directive is defined as a storm event with return period of at least 1 in 5 years. A storm event will usually have occurred between 1 to 48 hours before the sample was taken (exceptionally upto 72 hours for larger catchments). We use rainfall data from rain-gauges that are representative of the bathing water catchment and approved by the Met Office. We then use this data to make an assessment based on the 1 in 5 year criteria.

EAW monitoring policy requires that bathing water samples are taken according to a pre-determined timetable. Sample taking is not avoided because there is a forecast of wet weather. If it subsequently happens that there is a mandatory exceedence and the sample was affected by abnormally wet weather, flooding or natural disaster, an application for "a waiver" is made. If the application is successful the sample result will be disregarded when compliance is assessed but it will not be removed from the EAW public register.

"Newport North" failed to meet Guideline Standards in both 2009 and 2010 as well as this year 2011 EAW applied for wet weather waivers in all 3 consecutive years and the beach was allowed to retain "Blue Flag" status for 2010 and 2011 but not for 2012.

The wet weather waiver scenario will remain an option under the Revised Directive

However ---- **The Good Beach Guide** **The Marine Conservation Society (MCS)** makes its own bathing water "**recommendations**" which get a lot of publicity through the **Good Beach Guide** and its website and also press coverage **MCS does not take wet weather waivers into account in recommending beaches. Thus Newport North was not a "recommended beach" in the Good Beach Guide in 2010 and 2011 and will be designated as having only a "Basic Pass" in 2012**

MCS claims in its Good Beach Guide 2011 on line that it lists "every UK bathing beach" but only recommends bathing beaches that had excellent water quality during summer 2010 **and aren't affected by badly treated, continuous sewage discharges** (emphasis added)

Currently the information given on Newport is a mess. Type in "Newport Sands North" into search and you are told "Remember to always choose an MCS "recommended beach"..." which we are not of course i.e. MCS is advising readers to go elsewhere to bathe and will undoubtedly continue to do so in 2012. Poppit and Goodwick are given as our nearest beaches! A map gives "Newport Sands South" with a photo showing Traethmawr labelled as "not tested" and what MCS calls "Newport car park slip" is also stated to be "not tested". The word "Lifeguarded" is followed by a question mark. MCS website also states "We only recommend bathing beaches that had excellent water quality during summer 2010 **and aren't affected by badly treated, continuous sewage discharges**

The Revised Directive

From 2015 bathing waters will be classified on 4 years worth of data and measuring compliance will change from **Mandatory** and **Guideline** to **Poor/Sufficient/Good/Excellent**

The number of determinands assessed is reduced from 19 to 2 – intestinal enterococci and E.coli
In summary, the “Excellent” standard is twice as stringent as the current “Guideline” values, “Good” is roughly equivalent to “Guideline” and “Sufficient” is tighter than the current “Mandatory” standard and “Poor” is normally non-compliant water.

All designated bathing waters must be classified as “Sufficient” by 2015

Bathing Water Profiles must be developed for all designated bathing waters from 2011 and information displayed at the bathing water location

From the beginning of the 2012 bathing season all bathing water controllers must provide information about water quality and potential sources of pollution at designated beaches and inland waters including:

- A general description of the bathing waters based on its bathing water profile;
- information on abnormal situations and their expected duration; and
- information on where to find more detailed information.

Detailed information about these statutory requirements is outlined in “[Guidance for Bathing Waters Controllers in Wales](#)” and “[Public Information Summary Guide](#)”, available from WAG

EAW and PCC must take realistic and proportionate measures with a view to increasing the number of bathing waters classified as excellent or good.

“**Newport North**” **Bathing Water Profile 2011** can be found at http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/bwprofiles/BW_38600_Newport_North_Bay.pdf

NAEG commented to EAW in September 2011 and this document was endorsed by both NTC and NCC and can be found on NAEG website <http://naeg.org.uk> or obtained by requesting a copy from the clerk to both Councils. In summary, NAEG pointed out

- ⇒ The name “Newport North” is misleading and not generally used
- ⇒ The photo used was welcome in that the beach was shown to include the Newport side but in other ways the image is inadequate
- ⇒ The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park plays a role in “control”, in that PCNPA rents the foreshore from the Crown and owns and operates facilities serving the designated beach
- ⇒ The geographical extent of designation has never been clarified.
- ⇒ Bathers use the whole length of the beach including particularly points such as Pyg-y-benet and Cwm at its southern extremity. And local opinion is that these areas should form part of the designated beach
- ⇒ The “designated” sampling point is not at the centre of the beach but at the northern end, between flags marking the extent of beach warden monitoring of bathing safety
- ⇒ The map is incorrect for 2011 in showing the outfall to its original discharge and not the temporary discharge point much closer to shore, in not showing the CSO at Parrog and the streams meeting the River Nevern within Newport.
- ⇒ A lot of information on the map is irrelevant whilst at the same time there is no clear indication of what might impact on bathing water quality e.g. streams draining into the River Nevern are not clear, nor are the “*numerous small streams and surface water drains which empty into the Bay*” shown. The many CSOs draining into the River Nevern or into streams connecting to the Nevern are not marked, including two more within Newport - at Parrog and the Elmes.
- ⇒ As stated above under “Catchment Map”, the many CSOs - the discharges from which enter (or eventually enter) the River Nevern - are not listed, nor is their impact analysed. Only one CSO within the catchment area currently has telemetry to monitor discharges. This is the CSO through which biologically treated effluent also flows from Newport Treatment Works.
- ⇒ Dogs and horses on Newport Beach itself are not mentioned though EAW often mentions this to be a problem in possibly affecting sample results

SB/NAEG/24/10/11