



BLACKPOOL BUSINESS LEADERSHIP GROUP

BATHING WATERS SUMMIT: Briefing Paper

Introduction

Bathing water quality standards throughout the UK will become much tighter from 2015 as the revised Bathing Water Directive comes into force. This new legislation also places stronger emphasis on beach management and public information.

To this end, a North West Bathing Water Summit - "Turning Tides" - took place at the Winter Gardens on Monday 17 September, 2012.

It was organised in partnership with Blackpool Council, United Utilities (UU) and the Environment Agency (EA) and was attended by a range of more than 100 delegates including local businesses.

Blackpool was specifically chosen by the EA and UU to host this event in recognition of the potential effect on the economy if the bathing water quality issues are not addressed.

We are already in a position where the bathing beaches on the Fylde Coast do not meet the EU standards from Blue Flag. This does not require us to take any direct action other than the need to mitigate against bad publicity.

In 2015 the revised bathing water directive comes into force and from that point on we will be responsible for erecting signage based on the bathing water results of the years 2012–2015. The classifications are Excellent, Good, Sufficient and Poor.

Signage showing the standard will need to be erected; if Blackpool bathing water results are poor then the signs will advise against bathing.

If they continue to fail for five consecutive years we will have to erect permanent signs advising against bathing.

Key Issues Highlighted During The Summit

Public Health: The overall objective of the revised Bathing Water Directive remains the protection of public health and the environment from faecal pollution. Blackpool is at risk of not meeting the revised standards in 2015.

Economy: In the North West the failure to meet the Bathing Water Standards could lead to an estimated loss in tourism revenue of £1.3 billion over the next 15 years.

The three main causes of faecal pollution in bathing water were suggested to be:

- Effluent from combined sewer overflows
- Urban pollution
- Agricultural pollution

United Utilities has invested in and undertaken much work in the last 20 years to improve bathing water quality and continues to undertake significant works. For example, the work currently being undertaken in Preston will have a major benefit on our bathing waters

The Environment Agency is working to remove misconnections (ie, foul water pipes that are wrongly connected to surface water drains) within urban areas and with local businesses with the support of Local Authorities.

The newly-established Fylde Peninsular Water Management Group is also looking at beach management measures to reduce pollution from dogs and donkeys.

The Environment Agency is working with Natural England and local farmers to reduce run-off and pollution from agricultural sources. However, The National Farmers' Union has expressed reservations about the input from farming and was keen to point out at the summit that work had already been undertaken to reduce agricultural pollution.

Nurture Lakeland gave a presentation highlighting the importance of communication and engagement with the public and residents as well as businesses and tourism in order to affect behaviour change; this is ultimately needed to improve our bathing waters.

Positive Outcomes from the Event

Young Ambassadors from St Mary's Catholic College in Blackpool gave a ten-minute talk to the delegates about what the beach means to them and how they can help spread the word in cleaning our beaches and bathing water.

The afternoon session at the summit provided an opportunity for interactive discussion by the delegates in the form of four breakout groups, i.e.

- A catchment approach
- How the tourist and visitor economy can play a role
- The value of bathing waters
- The role of our communities

Outcomes of the group discussions highlighted the following actions:

Communications: It was recognised that there is much being done to combat the issues raised but that this needs to be communicated better. A meeting is scheduled with the Marine Conservation Society with a view to producing an agreed Communications Action Plan. In addition, positive communication will be undertaken with the media to provide an awareness of the issues and to set out what actions are being taken. There will also be improved co-ordination between existing groups.

Engagement: Further engagement is planned with young ambassadors; meetings have been arranged via Head Teacher forums to highlight the issues and seek their assistance in tackling some of the issues. Further engagement is also planned with the National Farmers' Union and with local community groups to gain their help and support.

Business: It is intended that there should be a clear link between Fylde Beach Management Group and Blackpool Business Leadership Group in order to communicate effectively with business and gain their help and support.

The summit concluded by launching a Strategic Partnership to oversee the improvement of North West Bathing Waters. The partnership consists of:-

- Neil Jack – Blackpool Council (Chair)
- Keith Ashcroft – Environment Agency
- Peter Hampson – British Destinations
- Jo Harrison – United Utilities
- Dr Robert Keirle – Marine Conservation Society
- Richard Mcilwain – Keep Britain Tidy
- Robert Sheasby – National Farmers Union

Terms of reference and frequency of meetings will be set out at the first meeting which has yet to be scheduled.