

Report to	Partnerships Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	19th December 2024
Lead Member / Officer	Barry Mellor: Lead Member for Environment and Transport, Paul Jackson: Head of Highways and Environmental Services
Report author	Paul Jackson: Head of Highways and Environmental Services / Tony Ward: Corporate Director, Environment and Economy
Title	Blue Flag Status for Denbighshire's Beaches

1. What is the report about?

1.1 This report is about Blue Flag status for Denbighshire's beaches.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 At the request of the Committee, this report will enable Members to scrutinise the work being undertaken with partner organisations in a bid to achieve blue flag status accreditation for as many as possible of the county's beaches.

3. What are the recommendations?

3.1. That the Committee note the work being undertaken with partner organisations and make comments and recommendations as appropriate.

4. Report details

4.1. The Wales Coast Awards play a vital role in protecting our marine environment and are recognised around the world as a symbol of quality. The Blue Flag beach award is widely considered the gold standard for beaches. In the 2024 Blue Flag Award, 184 Blue Flags were awarded in the British Isles (UK & Ireland). There were 21 Blue Flags

awarded in Wales, and only 1 in North Wales (Prestatyn Central). The certification process is carried out every year and beaches can lose or gain their Blue Flag status.

4.2. Whilst most people are aware that Blue Flag certification considers the quality of bathing water, this is only part of the criteria. The Blue Flag criteria are divided into four categories with a total of 33 individual targets. The 33 individual criteria under the four categories are summarised in Appendix A, and a full explanation is provided in Appendix B: Blue Flag Beach Criteria and Explanatory Notes, 2024. The four main categories are:

- **Environmental Education and Information:** This includes information on the Blue Flag award itself along with details on the water quality. A beach map including locations of facilities must also be displayed.
- **Water Quality:** The most important stipulation is that no industrial, waste-water or sewage-related discharges should affect the beach.
- **Environmental Management:** These criteria include the administrative side of things as well as keeping the beach clean. It also states there must be toilets available to the public.
- **Safety and Services:** The beach should be patrolled by lifeguards. Other criteria include availability of drinking water and accessibility features.

4.3. Blue Flag status requires 'Excellent' water quality as one of the criteria, and a beach therefore cannot achieve Blue Flag status unless it has 'Excellent' water quality (even if it meets all the other criteria).

4.4. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are the lead agency in terms of regulating to protect bathing water quality. NRW are responsible for regulating Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) assets and work with them on proactive measures to prevent bacteria from the sewers impacting on bathing water quality. NRW also regulate and work with the agricultural sector. NRW in recent years have focused resource on funding agricultural schemes to reduce bacteria inputs from livestock in the Lower Clwyd. A summary of the work/role of NRW in respect of bathing water quality is attached at Appendix C. A similar summary relating to the work/role of DCWW is included at Appendix D.

- 4.5. Denbighshire has 4 recognised Bathing Waters, 3 of which are designated Bathing Beaches (Rhyl Central; Rhyl East and Prestatyn). The other designated Bathing Water is in the Marine Lake in Rhyl.
- 4.6. Prestatyn Central is the only designated Bathing Beach in Denbighshire to achieve 'Excellent' classification for water quality. It is therefore the only beach in Denbighshire to achieve Blue Flag status. Many years ago, DCC used to sample bathing waters at Splash Point, Ffrith, Barkby and Gronant. It is considered that there may be an opportunity for Barkby Beach to obtain Blue Flag status in future.
- 4.7. The 2024 Wales Coast Awards were based on the 2023 water quality classifications. Prestatyn achieved 'Excellent' classification for water quality in 2023, which enabled it to maintain the Blue Flag status in the 2024 Wales Coast Awards. The 2025 Wales Coast Awards will be based on the 2024 water quality classifications which will be formally announced in December 2024. Unfortunately, following some elevated sample results this season, Prestatyn has dropped a classification and will now be classified as a 'Good' bathing water. As the Blue Flag status requires 'Excellent' water quality as one of the criteria, Prestatyn will not retain its Blue Flag in 2025. The Blue Flag for Prestatyn will be replaced by the Seaside award. The new classifications for Bathing Water quality in Denbighshire will be as follows:

	Rhyl Central	Rhyl East	Marine Lake	Prestatyn
2023/24	SUFFICIENT	GOOD	SUFFICIENT	EXCELLENT
2024/25	POOR	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD

- 4.8. It is will be difficult for Rhyl to ever achieve Blue Flag status, given the proximity of the River Clwyd and its estuary which is the main issue in terms of bathing water quality. Sewerage outfalls are one of two major factors that can impact on water quality. The sewage infrastructure in the area has been designed to try and ensure that Rhyl achieves 'Sufficient' status, which is a long way from the 'Excellent' status required for Blue Flag status. The Clwyd Valley is also farmed intensively, and livestock access to streams can be a significant source of bacteria which impacts on water quality.

- 4.9. The bigger issue for Rhyl is not the inability to achieve Blue Flag status, it is that Rhyl Central will now be classified as a 'Poor' bathing water for 2025 following a number of elevated sample results this season. This means that people must be advised not to bathe in that area until the classification returns to 'Sufficient'. The assessment is made annually using a rolling four-year data set. At the end of the 2025 season, 2021 data will be removed from the assessment. As 2021 data contained some poor results, Rhyl Central is likely to return to 'Sufficient' in 12 months' time.
- 4.10. The 2015 Bathing Water Directive revision reviewed the limits for acceptable levels of bacteria, and this resulted in many beaches moving from 'Excellent' to 'Good' and from 'Good' to 'Sufficient', as in the case of Rhyl Central. Since 2015, Rhyl Central has been at risk of dropping to 'Poor' status but the use of Prediction & Discounting where daily water quality predictions are published allows up to 15% of sample results to be discounted from the data set. This has been key in preventing Rhyl Central from dropping to 'Poor' status before now.
- 4.11. The issues for Rhyl Central are not as prevalent for Rhyl East, as that part of the beach in Rhyl is further away from the River Clwyd and its estuary. Water quality samples for Rhyl East are therefore affected less than at Rhyl Central, and Rhyl East will retain its 'Good' status for 2025. Therefore, although people will have to be advised not to bathe in the water at Rhyl Central, this will not be the case further down the beach at Rhyl East. The area of the beach designated as Rhyl East begins at around the lifeboat station and stretches eastwards towards Splash Point.
- 4.12. The DCC Harbour Team works with DCWW and NRW to highlight periods of reduced water quality, putting out signage when notified of a predicted drop in water quality. The Harbour team have worked closely with DCWW and NRW to achieve improved water quality at Marine Lake by investing in a new sluice gate system and working with DCWW to install an automated closure system on the sluice gate linked to the emergency discharge system on Westbourne Avenue Pumping Station. The Harbour Team are responsible for applying for the coastal awards and ensuring with other departments that all criteria are met. The one criterion outside of our control is water quality and therefore our role is to challenge (and assist where possible) DCWW and NRW to engage in works and initiatives to improve the standards of water quality.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

- 5.1. Bathing water quality and beach awards contribute mainly to the following two Corporate Plan themes: “a Prosperous Denbighshire”; and “a Greener Denbighshire”.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1. There are no direct costs associated with this report other than officer time in managing the impacts of the water quality assessments and working with partner organisations which can be contained within existing resources.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1. A well-being impact assessment has not been undertaken at this stage.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1. No other consultation has been carried out prior to this report to the Committee.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1. Not required for this report.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1. There is a risk that people are put off from visiting Denbighshire’s beaches due to reduced classifications for bathing water quality in Rhyl Central and Prestatyn Central, and the loss of Blue Flag Status for Prestatyn.

- 10.2. **Rhyl:** Rhyl East will be the designated bathing beach for 2025 which is opposite the Kite surf café which may benefit this area of the promenade due to the increased footfall. Press releases will be issued nearer the time to inform members of the public of the change of bathing water area, and signage will be placed along the

promenade. During peak season, RNLI lifeguards will be strategically positioned directly shoreside of the new bathing water beach marked by the lifeguarding unit.

10.3. **Prestatyn:** Prestatyn Central will lose its blue flag for 2025 and will be replaced with a keep Wales tidy Seaside award, all infrastructure will remain, lifeguards will be present, bathing water beach unaffected.

11. Power to make the decision.

11.1. Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and Section 7 of the Council's Constitution.