

Future Trend: Designation of Additional Bathing Waters

Trend definition and relevance to DWMP

Designated bathing waters require UK Water companies to limit the number of storm overflow discharges to three per bathing season at coastal locations, two at locations where excellent status is already achieved and one spill per season at inland river sites where nearby discharges may affect water quality. This may sometimes require the disinfection of treated wastewater effluent that could impact bathing waters. An emerging trend is an increase in the number of designated bathing waters, as authorities seek to meet growing public interest and demand for ‘wild swimming’. The Government is also consulting on proposals to extend protections to cover other water-based recreational activities.

Until 2025, Thames Water discharges could affect three designated bathing waters: Frensham Ponds in Surrey, Wolvercote Mill Stream¹ in Oxford and Wallingford in Berkshire. However, there is growing demand from local communities for additional bathing water designations across our region, and future legislation may further increase this likelihood. Recently the Government has announced the designation of an additional two bathing waters in our region; the River Thames at Ham and Kingston (the first designated location in London) and Pangbourne Meadow in Berkshire.

DWMP28 will address the current and potential bathing waters in the risk assessment stage of the Bathing Water Quality Performance Indicator. We will work with partners to define the list of bathing water sites included. The impact on our plan is likely to be the requirement for additional treatment processes and further reductions in storm overflow discharges.

Stage of DWMP used

Risk assessment

Plan development

Impact/Importance

Short term (2035)

Medium term (2045)

Long term (2055)

Example PIs affected by this trend

Bathing water

Storm overflow performance (England)

Treatment works compliance (numeric)

Trend description, uncertainty and potential impact on our region

Wallingford Beach, Oxfordshire, a designated bathing site in the Thames Water region



Source: Thames Water, 2025

- In February 2026, the UK Government consulted on proposals to designate 13 new bathing water sites across England², two of which are located in the Thames Water region, as outlined above.
- The UK Government has also consulted on reforms to the Bathing Water Regulations 2013³, which may broaden the scope of public health protections beyond traditional bathing activities to include a wider range of water-based recreational activities, including paddleboarding, kayaking, rowing and fishing. If implemented, these proposals are likely to further increase the number of waters eligible for designated within our region.



References

- 1 www.thameswater.co.uk/about-us/performance/river-health/water-quality-at-wolvercote-mil
- 2 www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-set-to-benefit-from-13-new-bathing-spots-proposed-across-england
- 3 www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforms-to-the-bathing-water-regulations-2013/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-government-response

