

Bathing water quality, 2024

www.lancashire.gov.uk



David Jenks, Research and intelligence officer

March 2025

For further information on the work of Business Intelligence, please contact us at:

Business Intelligence
Lancashire County Council
County Hall
Fishergate Hill
Preston
PR1 0LD

E: BusinessIntelligence.insight@lancashire.gov.uk

www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancashire-insight

Follow us on Twitter [@lancsinsight](https://twitter.com/lancsinsight)

Contents

1	Overview	1
1.1	Key findings for Lancashire-14 in 2024.....	1
2	Background information	1
2.1	Organisations which provide classifications for beaches in the UK	1
3	Analysis: Bathing water quality	2
3.1	Bathing water classifications from the Environment Agency.....	2
3.2	The Blue Flag and Seaside Awards.....	5
	3.2.1 <i>Blue Flag Awards</i>	5
	3.2.2 <i>The Seaside Award</i>	5
3.3	Other initiatives affecting water quality at beaches in Lancashire.....	6
	3.3.1 <i>Catchment flood management plans</i>	6
	3.3.2 <i>Sewage Alert Service</i>	6

1 Overview

This article deals with the quality of water present at specified Lancashire beaches, which is most relevant to bathers entering the water there, and the quality of the beaches themselves, in terms of tidiness, littering and facilities, these being features which affect all visitors. The beaches are found in just three of the 12-districts that are within the Lancashire County Council area, namely Lancaster, Wyre and Fylde, and in one of the two unitary authorities, namely Blackpool.

1.1 Key findings for Lancashire-14 in 2024

- No beaches were classified as excellent in 2024
- Four out of the ten beaches in Lancashire and Blackpool were classified as having good water quality in 2024
- There were four beaches in the Lancashire-14 area classified as having only sufficient water quality in 2024
- There were two beaches, St. Annes North and Blackpool North, in the Lancashire-14 area classified as having poor water quality in 2024
- There were no beaches in the North West of England to be awarded a Blue Flag in 2024
- 10 of the 11 of the beaches to receive the Seaside Award in the North West were in Lancashire in 2024

2 Background information

2.1 Organisations which provide classifications for beaches in the UK

The article uses bathing water quality results derived from the [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#) website that were published in November 2024. Please also see the Environment Agency website that contains a wealth of details regarding the [state of the local environment](#). Online maps include topics such as risk of [flooding](#), pollution, river water quality and air pollution. There is also the Environment Agency's [bathing water data explorer](#).

The [Environment Agency](#) state that the top five sources of pollution to bathing waters are:

- Runoff from agricultural land where manure from farmed animals gets washed into rivers and streams and then into a bathing water.
- Runoff from urban areas can carry animal and bird faeces through surface water drains to bathing waters.
- Wrongly connected sewers from homes and businesses can discharge to surface water drains putting raw sewage into the surface drainage system and potentially into bathing waters.
- Animals and birds can be a significant source of pollution at certain sites
- Sewage from sewage treatment works and storm discharges.

[Keep Britain Tidy](#) is an environmental charity that is responsible for the blue flag and seaside awards, and this article draws attention to the Lancashire results for these two initiatives.

3 Analysis: Bathing water quality

3.1 Bathing water classifications from the Environment Agency

450 bathing waters were monitored in 2024 in England, 110 in Wales, 89 in Scotland and 26 in Northern Ireland making a total of 675 across the UK. Most of these are coastal and only a few are inland waters in Great Britain

The Environment Agency samples North West beaches between May and September to assess the performance against bacteriological standards laid down in the [2006/7 EC Bathing Water Directive](#). This replaced the 1976 directive and only came into effect in England in March 2015. Before Brexit the directive was drafted into [UK law](#). In 2024 there was a government [consultation](#) on reforms to the legislation. The 2024 results are therefore the ninth to be measured against the new more stringent standards. The new classifications are based on a rolling average of four years, and the weekly measurements are no longer available. In England 281 beaches were classed as excellent and eighteen were classed as poor.

The new standards are explained by the [Environment Agency](#). It is possible to compare some of the thresholds with [those in the 1976 directive](#) but this is a very technical area.

The results for Lancashire beaches in 2024 are disappointing when compared with 2021. St Annes North and Blackpool North were the only beaches in the North West to be classed as poor and were two out of only 22 in the whole of England. The only change from 2023 is that Morecambe South improved from sufficient to good.

Table 1, Bathing water quality at Lancashire beaches, 2021 to 2024

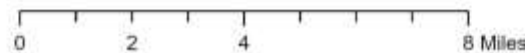
Beach	2024	2023	2022	2021
Bispham	good	good	excellent	excellent
Blackpool Central	sufficient	sufficient	sufficient	good
Blackpool North	poor	poor	poor	sufficient
Blackpool South	sufficient	sufficient	sufficient	good
Cleveleys	good	good	good	good
Fleetwood	good	good	good	good
Morecambe North	sufficient	sufficient	sufficient	good
Morecambe South	good	sufficient	good	good
St Annes North	poor	poor	sufficient	sufficient
St Annes Pier	sufficient	sufficient	sufficient	good

Source: Environment Agency

Bathing water quality, Lancashire, 2024



Source: Environment Agency



© Crown copyright and database rights 2025 OS AC0000850590



United Utilities provides water and wastewater services to people living in the North West region. The company's website emphasises the popularity of the North West coast and the role of the company in improving local bathing water quality. Their website mentions investment projects in the North West that include a number of

important [schemes in the Lancashire area](#). The largest was the £160 million development in Preston which involved building a 3.5 kilometre storm water storage tunnel and the construction of shafts to divert storm water flows, which are retained in the new storage tunnel. It is supposed to reduce the number of spills to the River Ribble from combined sewers and seems to have already delivered significant improvements to the Fylde Coast bathing waters and the Ribble Estuary.

Morecambe Bay, scene photographed from Morecambe (Lancaster district)



There are other lists of national beaches that include some in Lancashire such as [British Beaches](#) and the [Beach Guide](#). The [Marine Conservation Society](#) helps to organise [beach cleaning events](#) by volunteers.

The pier, St Annes-on-Sea (Fylde district)



3.2 The Blue Flag and Seaside Awards

[Keep Britain Tidy](#) is responsible for the [Blue Flag and Seaside Awards](#) (formerly known as Quality Coast Awards).

3.2.1 Blue Flag Awards

[Blue Flag](#) is an international award scheme which acts as a guarantee to tourists that a beach or marina they are visiting is one of the best in the world. The Blue Flag compares beaches throughout the world that meet high standards of cleanliness and management, promote coastal environmental care, and have attained the higher guideline standard of water quality. It refers only to the busier 'resort' beaches. The [2024 results revealed 72 beaches](#) across the country gaining the award, with no beaches in the North West to achieve this standard. Blackpool South was awarded the Blue Flag in 2016, 2017 and 2018. The Royal Albert Dock and Salthouse Dock Marina at Liverpool was awarded a Blue Flag but does not count as a beach.

3.2.2 The Seaside Award

The [Seaside Award](#) is focused on raising standards at the coast. The award is said to reflect the great achievements of England's beach managers and helps them in future planning for beach improvements and developments. In 2024, the Seaside Awards (in conjunction with Keep Britain Tidy) [website](#) showed 10 winners in the North West, all of which are in Lancashire. The beaches are Morecambe North and South ([Lancaster City Council](#)), Ferry, Jubilee in Cleveleys, Marine and Rossall ([Wyre Borough Council](#)), [St. Annes Pier](#) ([Fylde Borough Council](#)) and Bispham, Blackpool Central and South ([Blackpool Council](#)). Blackpool North was not listed as a winner in 2023 or 2024.

Cleveleys (Wyre district)



3.3 Other initiatives affecting water quality at beaches in Lancashire

3.3.1 Catchment flood management plans

Catchment flood management plans give an overview of the flood risk across each river catchment. The [Environment Agency](#) is responsible for the management plans and GOV.UK has a link through to a number of [plans for the Lancashire area](#). A £20 million plan to improve sea defences at Fairhaven was approved in 2017. Lancashire has a [flood risk management strategy](#) now in place, and there are a [number of projects to reduce flooding](#) at particular risk locations. Another major project is the [Wyre Natural Flood Management Project](#).

3.3.2 Sewage Alert Service

The [Sewage Alert Service](#) is a national scheme that informs people in real time when untreated human sewage and wastewater is being [discharged at a local beach](#). It thereby allows people to make an informed decision about how, when and where to use the sea. Under normal circumstances, there will be no alerts to mention on the site.