

Bathing water quality, 2019/20

www.lancashire.gov.uk



David Jenks, Research and intelligence officer

May 2020

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

Business Intelligence
Lancashire County Council
2nd floor Christ Church Precinct
County Hall
Fishergate Hill
Preston
PR1 8XJ
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 2019 (and 2020)	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 located 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 2019 (and 2020)

- One beach, Bispham, was classified as excellent
- Six out of the ten beaches in Lancashire and Blackpool were classified as having good water quality
- There were three beaches in the Lancashire-14 area classified as having only sufficient water quality
- There were no beaches in the Lancashire-14 area classified as having poor water quality
- There were two beaches in the North West of England to be awarded a Blue Flag in 2020, one being Blackpool South
- All 11 of the beaches to receive the Seaside Award in the North West were in Lancashire in 2019

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 2017. Please also see the Environment Agency website that contains a wealth of details regarding the [state of the local environment](#). The [range of online maps](#) includes 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.
- Animal 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

420 bathing waters were monitored in 2019 in England, 104 in Wales, 86 in Scotland and 26 in Northern Ireland making a total of 636 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. The 2019 results are therefore the fifth 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 300 beaches were classed as excellent and seven 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 are good despite the tightening of the standards. No beach was classed as poor, though three, both of the Morecambe stretches and St. Annes North, only achieved the sufficient standard. The results in Lancashire are the poorest since the new directive came into effect.

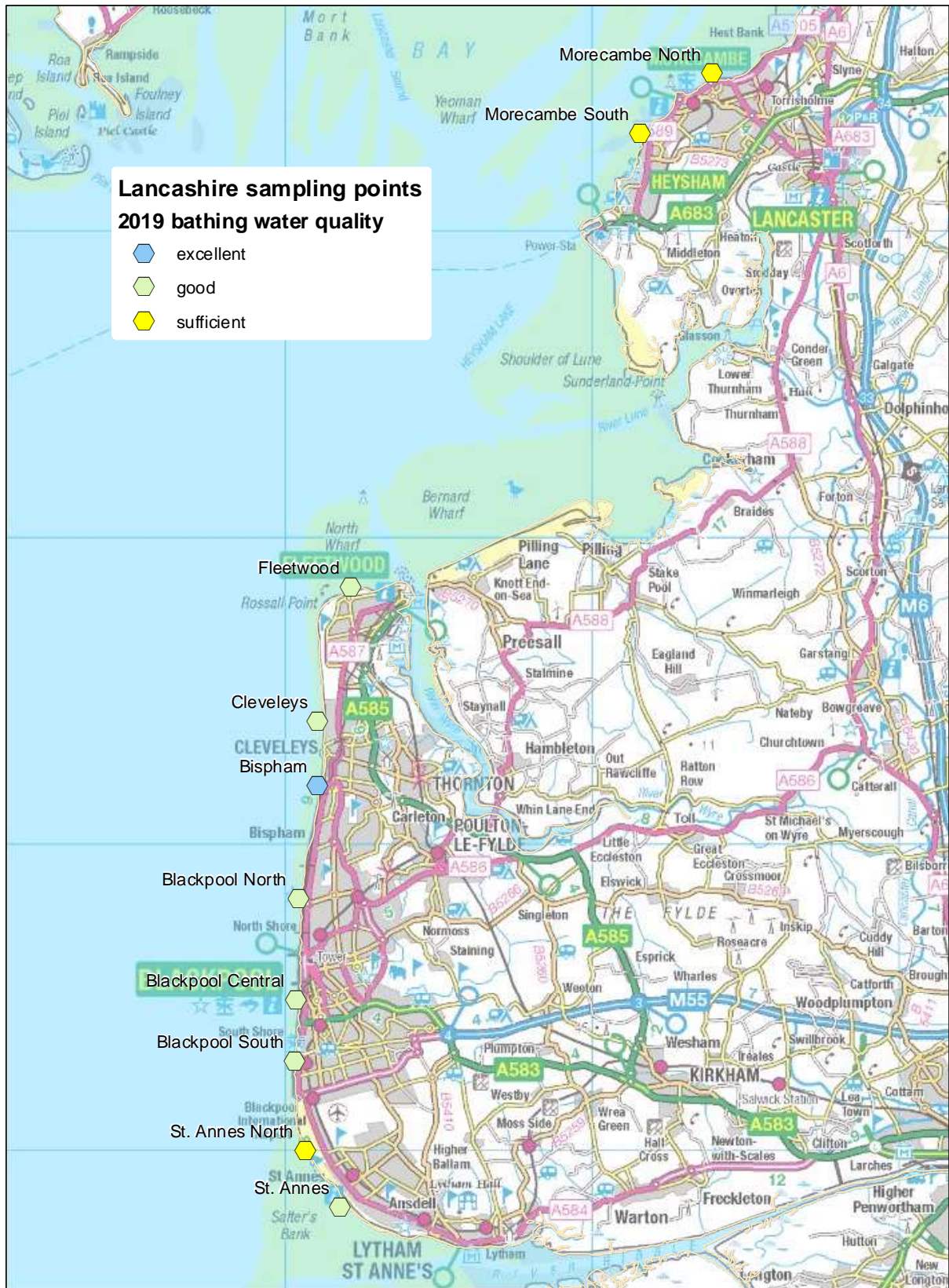
Table 1, Bathing water quality at Lancashire beaches, 2017 to 2019

Beach	2019	2018	2017
Bispham	excellent	good	good
Blackpool Central	good	good	good
Blackpool North	good	sufficient	good
Blackpool South	good	good	excellent
Cleveleys	good	good	good
Fleetwood	good	good	good
Morecambe North	sufficient	good	good
Morecambe South	sufficient	good	good
St Annes North	sufficient	good	good
St Annes Pier	good	good	good

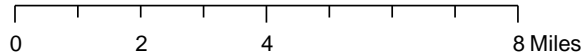
Source: Environment Agency

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

Bathing water quality, Lancashire, 2019



Source: Environment Agency



© Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence No. 100023320 2019



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)



In addition to the results published on the DEFRA website, the [Marine Conservation Society](#) publishes a [Good Beach Guide](#) that lists details for 17 Lancashire beaches. MCS also 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](#) was previously responsible for the [Blue Flag and Seaside Awards](#) (formerly known as Quality Coast Awards). It is not clear if the latter are still being awarded.

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 governing body is the Foundation for Environmental Education. The Blue Flag compares beaches throughout the world that meet high standards of cleanliness and management, promote coastal environmental care, are patrolled by lifeguards, accessible and have attained the higher guideline standard of water quality. It refers only to the busier 'resort' beaches. [The 2020 results](#) revealed 68 beaches across the country gaining the award, with two in the North West achieving this standard. Blackpool South is one of these, and was also awarded the Blue Flag in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

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 2019, the Keep Britain Tidy website stated that 137 beaches in total achieved the award including 11 in the North West. All of these 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 North, Central and South ([Blackpool Council](#)). It does not seem that the Seaside Awards for 2020 have been made at the same time as Blue Flag, and have possibly been discontinued.

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 the website 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.

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.