

Improving our bathing waters and rivers

An action plan to improve bathing waters and
rivers in North Somerset



Vision for North Somerset

North Somerset is a thriving and sustainable place, renowned as a great place for people to live, work and visit. It is welcoming, safe and clean.

This high-quality environment is supported through a robust and co-ordinated management of the natural and built environment and an excellent, accessible network of open spaces, coast and countryside.

The water environment is a critical aspect to this vision, providing the essence of North Somerset's offer of four bathing water beaches, ecologically diverse river systems and water bodies which complement the quality of the public realm.

The areas' inland surface waters, river systems and coastal waters are managed to guard against flooding and the passage of pollutants into the bathing waters. Open spaces are accessible and maintained and there are good walking and cycling routes to promote healthy lifestyles.

North Somerset is home to one of the country's most visited and iconic coastlines. There are, however, significant environmental challenges that provide opportunities to ensure that the coastline reaches its full potential.

Three of the four bathing waters needs to improve to meet tighter standards of the revised Bathing Waters Directive.

Rain, tide, wind and seasonality all have an effect on bathing water quality. These factors affect the levels of bacteria that get washed into the sea from livestock, sewage and urban drainage via rivers and streams and how they disperse.

Collectively these issues have wider social and economic impacts that are increasingly under pressure from development and climate change.

The North Somerset Bathing Water Steering Group is a partnership comprising of the following stakeholders:

- Environment Agency
- Catchment Sensitive Farming
- Wessex Water
- North Somerset Council
- Town and Parish Councils

- Visit Weston
- Local MPs
- Councillors
- Chamber of Commerce
- Internal Drainage Board
- National Farmers Union
- Local Tourist Board
- Surfers Against Sewage
- Cleaner Coastlines
- Severn Estuary Partnership

The purpose of the group is to provide a sustainable and collective approach to the management of:

- Water quality, including bathing waters and rivers
- Beach management and usage
- Surface water drainage, including flooding and development

A partnership approach

The Partnership established a set of guiding principles to work towards:

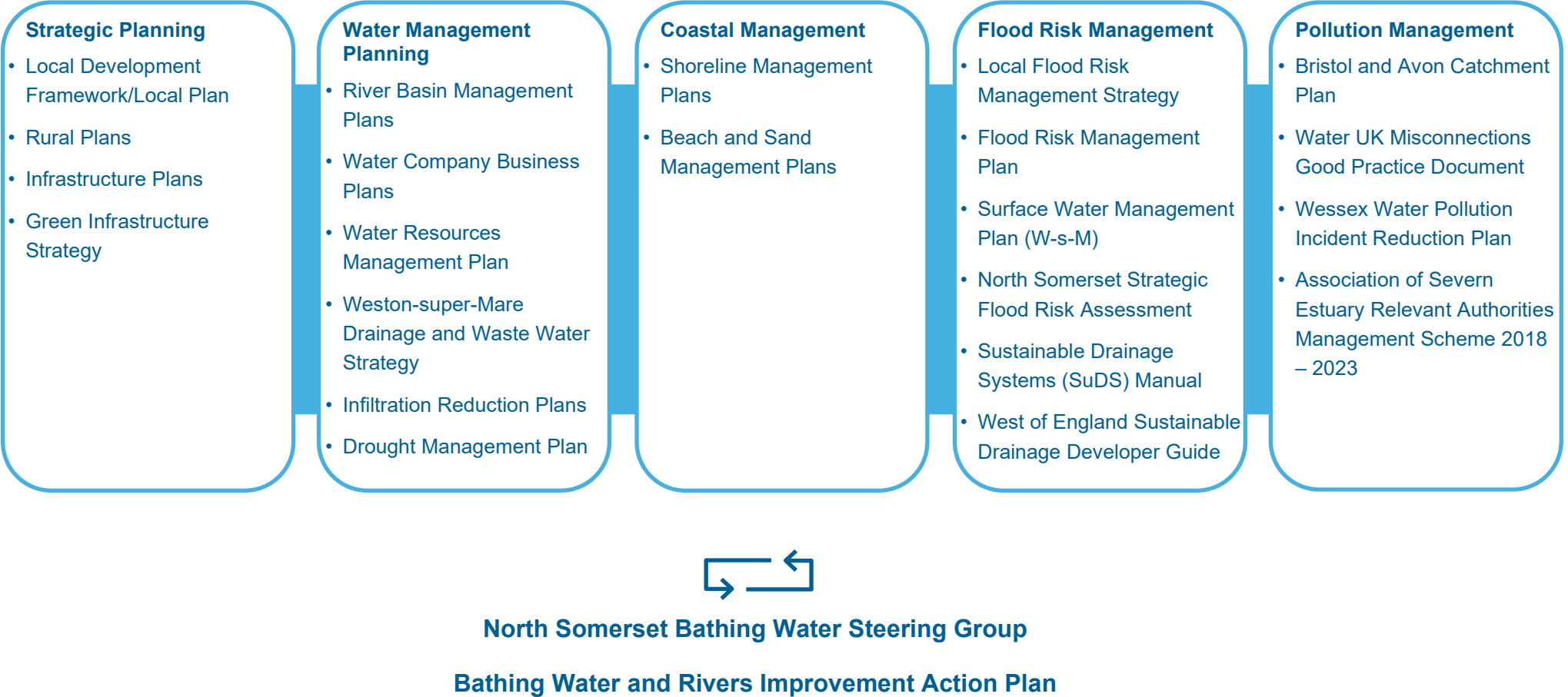
- Work together to develop a strong evidence base so we can prioritise what is important for the area
- Use this evidence to demonstrate how environmental improvements can deliver real and lasting social and economic outcomes
- Cooperate to identify and deliver innovative solutions
- Unlock new funding streams and align investment plans to deliver real value for money
- Develop an agreed programme of works that delivers real and lasting change

A plan to improve the quality of our bathing waters and rivers

This action plan sets out the work that is needed to deliver long term improvements to bathing and river water quality across North Somerset.

This plan concentrates on improving our rivers and bathing waters but can also help reduce flood risk and water use. The plan should complement other water plans set out in figure 1.

Figure 1: The links between the Bathing Water and Rivers Improvement Plan and other water plan



1. Reduce the impact of continuous and intermittent discharges from water company assets

Wessex Water

Works completed

Construction of a new sewage treatment works at Black Rock Pumping Station and improved treatment and UV disinfection.

Surveys of foul sewer infrastructure undertaken and repairs made where needed.

Circa 200 meters of sewer re-lining in Weston.

Investigations into impact of discharges.

Asset Management Plan 7 Bathing water investigation.

Achieve only two to three spills (stormwater overflows) at a designated bathing water per season.

Extensive [misconnection](#) surveys undertaken by StreamClean Team.

Developed [Storm Overflow Improvement Plan](#).

Publicised [Storm Overflow Improvement Dashboard](#) – select North Somerset Council area for improvements planned up to 2050.

Infrastructure repairs at Uphill Beach.

Ongoing

Four improvements at:

- Bleadon Purn – sewer sealing to reduce groundwater infiltration
- Butcombe – reedbed treatment of storm overflow
- Wick St Lawrence – reedbed treatment of storm overflow
- Winscombe – additional storm storage constructed

AMP8 2025-2030, improvements at nine storm overflows identified:

- Blagdon
- Butcombe
- Clevedon, Layde Bay
- Langford, Blackmoor Road
- Portbury Wharf
- Portishead
- Weston-super-Mare
- Wick St Lawrence
- Winscombe

Environment Agency

Works completed

Implement the pollution forecasting model for Weston main beach.

Undertake microbial source tracking from collected water samples.

Beach walkovers, particularly at Sand Bay.

Ongoing

Water quality checks in the River Axe and the Uphill Great Rhyne.

Periodic beach and river walkovers to identify potential sources of pollution.

2. Reduce pollution from surface water outfalls

Wessex Water

Works completed

Pre-season [misconnections](#) surveys completed by the StreamClean team.

Walkover surveys around Weston main.

Ongoing

Continuation of Pre-bathing season misconnection surveys, although limited activity within the Weston-super-Mare catchment.

Environment Agency

Works completed

Surveyed surface water outfalls, identifying those which are polluted and directly affecting bathing beaches.

Hydrodynamic modelling.

Sediment Sampling.

Tracer studies.

Ongoing

Investigate and develop action plans to address issues at caravan and camp sites (such as septic tanks and soakaways).

Local Authority

Works completed

Walkover surveys of local authority assets to identify issues.

Ongoing

Undertake relevant enforcement actions to address issues where action isn't taken at properties with wrong connections.

All Partners

Ongoing

Undertake a promotion campaign to promote the benefit for homes and businesses to check for wrong connections and improve private sewage systems where they are insufficient.

3. Reduce pollution from rural and agricultural land

Wessex Water

Works completed

Support projects with Somerset Catchment Partnership and relevant local groups.

Ongoing

Ongoing support of Somerset Catchment Partnership and relevant local groups.

Environment Agency

Works completed

Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF), is a joint project with Natural England and Defra. One of the project's main aims within Somerset is to reduce phosphorous, nitrates and sediment in Brue and Axe catchments, using free advice and support for farmers alongside land based/capital options/grants.

Attending pollution incidents and targeting high risk farms within the catchment.

Administering regulation such as Storing silage, slurry and agricultural fuel oil (SSAFO), Farming Rules for Water.

Ongoing

Providing data and evidence to support a focused approach to targeting high priority farms within the catchment.

Working jointly with Natural England to identify high risk farms which may benefit from CSF support.

Investigate and develop action plans to address issues for specific sectors that may be contributing to poor bathing water quality at catteries/kennels/ equestrian centres and dairy/sheep/mixed/piggeries/ poultry farms.

Attending pollution incidents and targeting high risk farms within the catchment.

Natural England

Works completed

CSF, a joint project with the EA and Defra.

Ongoing

CSF Officers to work with high priority farms which have been identified as those that are a high risk within the catchment. To also work with EA referral cases where applicable.

CSF Officers to review where high priority farms have engaged within immediate proximity of River Axe.

CSF Officers to reinforce the importance of bathing water quality during visits, as well as alongside messaging within newsletters and general communications with farmers.

4. Reduce pollution from activities at bathing beaches

Wessex Water

Works completed

Ensuring work with Somerset Litter Free Coast & Sea project.

Misconnection surveys at commercial premises.

Ongoing

Continue to support Litter Free Coast & Sea.

Misconnection surveys at commercial premises.

Commercial Engagement Officers work with seafront business to improve management of fats, oils and greases to reduce risk of blockages.

Environment Agency

Works completed

Gull Survey completed.

Local Authority

Works completed

“No dogs” beach ban, enforced by authorised enforcement officers.

Letters sent to beach concessions regarding proper disposal of greywater, donkey faeces etc., followed up by the Seafront and Events Team.

Worked with the Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities (ASERA) and Natural England to address issues with jet skiing and bird disturbance on the River Axe.

Investigating areas of unregulated moorings (wooden jetties/pontoons in the River Banwell) to ensure that there is no further spread of unregulated moorings.

Worked with recreational anglers using charter boats to support and promote initiatives such as “fishing for litter”.

Ongoing

Review the effectiveness of measures in place during the 2025 bathing water season and identify if further actions are required for 2026-27.

Run campaigns to educate local communities and visitors.

Engage and develop a relationship with the Local Tourist Board and others and develop a strategy for publicising and communicating the efforts being made towards improving bathing waters.

Develop a strategy for the regular publication of achievements and successes.

Employ or identify a communication champion to develop a network of sources for good news from all organisations.

All Partners

Works completed

Developed a Beach Management Plan.

Developed an Activity Management Plan.

Ongoing

Develop a Sand Management Plan.

Develop a plan for a local accreditation scheme for the tourist industry that promotes good practice, including water efficiency measures and improved drainage.

Work with accommodation providers to promote good practice.

5. Improve the sustainable management of surface water

Wessex Water

Works completed

Creation of the [Storm Overflow Improvement Plan](#) 2022-2025.

Development of drainage strategies:

- [Weston-super-Mare Drainage Strategy](#)
- [Kingston Seymour Drainage Strategy](#)
- [Wick St Lawrence Drainage Strategy](#)
- [Portbury Wharf Drainage Strategy](#)
- [Blagdon Drainage Strategy](#)
- [Wrington Drainage Strategy](#)

Ongoing

Identify areas where separation of surface water and retrofitting of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) would benefit the number of spills and flood reduction.

Delivery of drainage strategies.

Local Authority

Works completed

Maintain a brownfield land register.

Ongoing

Encourage retrofitted SUDs solution on third party sites and reduction of surface water into the foul system on developments on brownfield sites. Develop a joined up approach between the Lead Local Flood Authority and Wessex Water.

Encourage projects, such as installation of water butts, to reduce rainfall runoff for parks and gardens – particularly focused on areas where surface water has a major impact upon sewer capacity.

Undertake a study to assess and prioritise the opportunities for taking council owned sites off mains surface water sewerage, i.e. discharge to ground or watercourse, which will provide both cost savings and benefits to surface water runoff.

Work with developers of residential, mixed use and holiday accommodation scheme in order to maximise the potential improvements in water efficiency and surface water management strategy.

All Partners

Consider the opportunities to accredit schemes/ businesses who undertake retrofit schemes privately and/or award schemes for the scale/effect of implemented schemes.

6. Improving water efficiency in homes and businesses

Bristol Water

Works completed

Adoption of a “Water Resource Management Plan”.

Ongoing

Implementation of the “Water Resource Management Plan”.

Environment Agency

Works completed

Support the progress of Water Efficiency Plans for all sectors.

Ongoing

Follow up and support the progress of Water Efficiency Plans for all sectors.

Local Authority

Works completed

Adoption of a ‘green infrastructure strategy’ to ensure an integrated approach to management of the natural environment.

Ongoing

Implementation of the ‘green infrastructure strategy’.

Promote and support the retrofitting of water efficient fixtures and fittings in homes and businesses.

All Partners

Ongoing

Develop an accreditation scheme for businesses that incorporate or retrofit water efficiency measures.

The Next Steps

Progress towards the completion of actions and the achievement of targets will be reported and monitored through regular meetings and publicised externally via our communication teams. Through these regular meetings and the communications, other partners will also be able to monitor our progress and measure our success.

The development of this action plan takes place within the context of financial constraints and reduced public spending. Every reasonable effort will be made to implement the action plan in full, however, these constraints may influence the delivery of some of the actions identified within this action plan.

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WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL

