



PUBLIC SURVEY 2021

Regarding Designated Bathing Water Status
at Conham River Park

July-October 2021

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www.conhambathing.co.uk

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Introduction

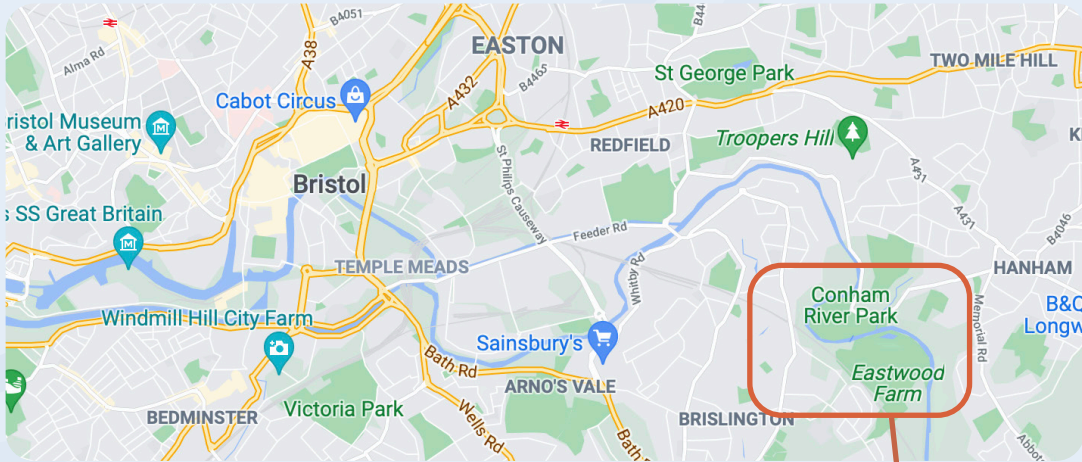
The Conham Bathing Water Group is a group of volunteers seeking water quality enhancement and protection for the (Bristol) River Avon at Conham River Park.

Over July-September 2021, we conducted a public survey to determine whether people use Conham River Park / Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve as a public swimming spot and what they think about regular water quality testing and awarding the area Designated Bathing Water Status.

Here, we provide an overview of the results with a brief discussion on what they indicate.



Location



The proposed bathing site is a stretch of the River Avon just outside Bristol city centre, with Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve on one bank and Conham River Park on the other.



Quick explainer:

What is Designated Bathing Water Status?

Essentially, Designated Bathing Water Status (DBWS) is an official way of recognising that a body of water (whether a beach, lake, or river) is a popular site for swimming, paddling, and other water-based activities.

Currently there are two rivers in the UK with DBWS: the River Wharfe in Yorkshire, and the River Thames in Oxfordshire.

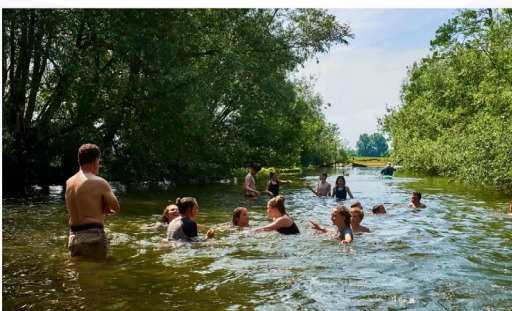
Achieving DBWS means that each year over the “peak bathing season” (May-September), the Environment Agency will test the site for pollutants, including the bacteria *Escherichia coli* (E.coli) and *Intestinal enterococci*. The EA publishes annual reports of all designated bathing waters and classifies them as “Excellent”, “Good”, “Sufficient”, or “Poor”.

Crucially, for any DWBS sites that don't meet regulatory standards, the EA will investigate the sources of pollution to identify remedial measures.

Links: [Bathing water classifications \(Environment Agency\)](#)
[Applying for designated bathing water status \(Defra\)](#)

Thames at Oxford to get bathing status in effort to clean up English rivers

Campaigners hope encouraging wild swimming will press water companies to reduce discharge of raw sewage



📍 The River Thames near Oxford. Wolvercote Mill Stream at Port Meadow will follow the River Wharfe in Yorkshire in receiving bathing water status. Photograph: Matt Smith/Alamy

News

Part of Yorkshire's River Wharfe becomes first in the country to be designated 'bathing water'

A Yorkshire river has become the first in the country to be given special 'bathing' status, meaning the water will be regularly tested to ensure it is clean and safe enough for swimmers.

By Rob Parsons

Tuesday, 22nd December 2020, 5:45 am

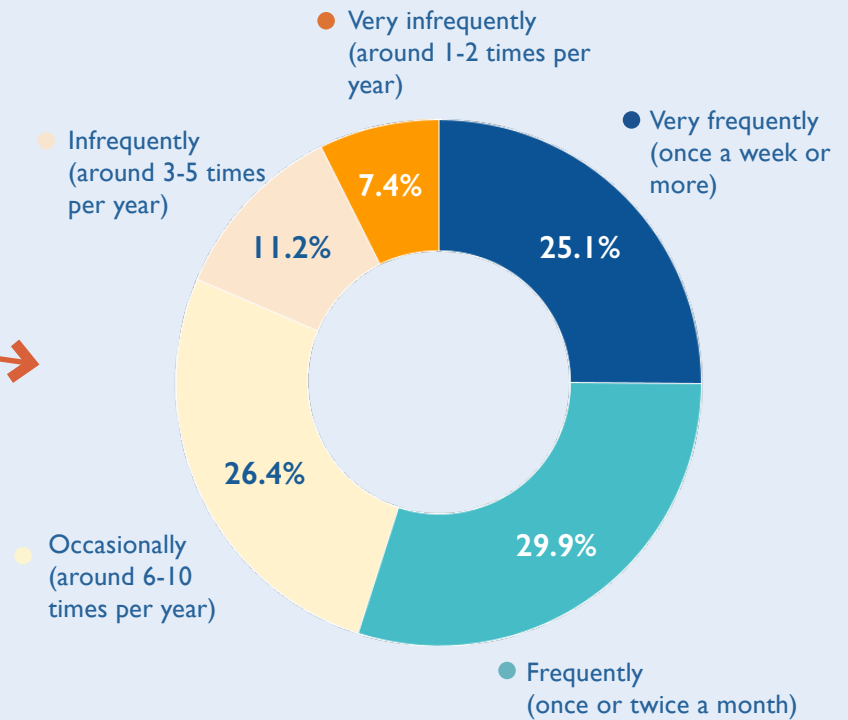


Visiting the site & mode of transport

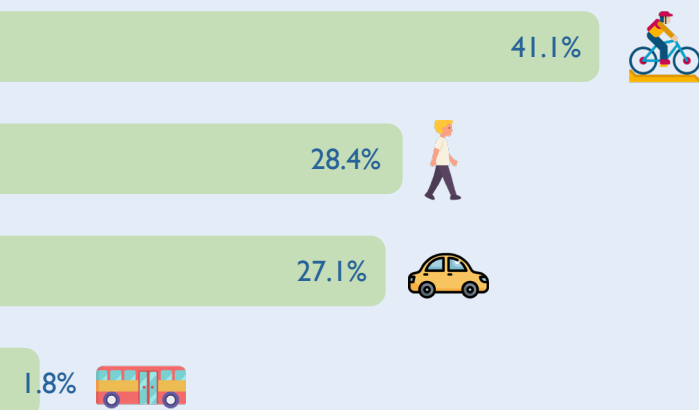
96% of our survey respondents said that they had previously been to Conham River Park / Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve, which suggests that the vast majority of respondents are directly impacted by the area's designation of bathing water status.

The responses further show that the area is well-frequented, with 55% of respondents visiting at least once a month.

Frequency of visits



Mode of transport



70%

Travel to Conham River Park by bike or foot

The majority of respondents travel to the area by bike or by foot (70%). This high figure is particularly interesting as active transport only accounts for 30% of total journeys in the city of Bristol, suggesting that a large proportion of respondents reside locally. Car journeys come in third with 27.1%. Only 1.8% visit the area by bus.

25.6%

Visit the area with children they care for



Furthermore, **25.6% of those who visit the area go with children they care for**, extending the public health implications beyond adults and adolescents, to children too.

Water quality

How important is it?

We asked how important it is that the River Avon is clean enough for paddling, swimming, and other water-based activities. 86.3% felt it was extremely important (see the figure to the right).

We further asked respondents to speculate what impact it would have on the City of Bristol if the River Avon was too polluted for water-based activities such as swimming.

The most common themes mentioned were impacts on: **physical and mental health, the environment, access to nature, Bristol's reputation, and local businesses.**

“Aside from the catastrophic impact on wildlife and plants, it will have an impact on humans. Restricting our ability to move (swim), and making open water swimming a risky and out of the ordinary activity might lead to further ill health and depression, when healthy river systems could in fact help alleviate these problems.”

Survey respondent

How important is river cleanliness?

Extremely important
86.3%

9.9% Very important

2.1% Somewhat important

0.8% Not very important

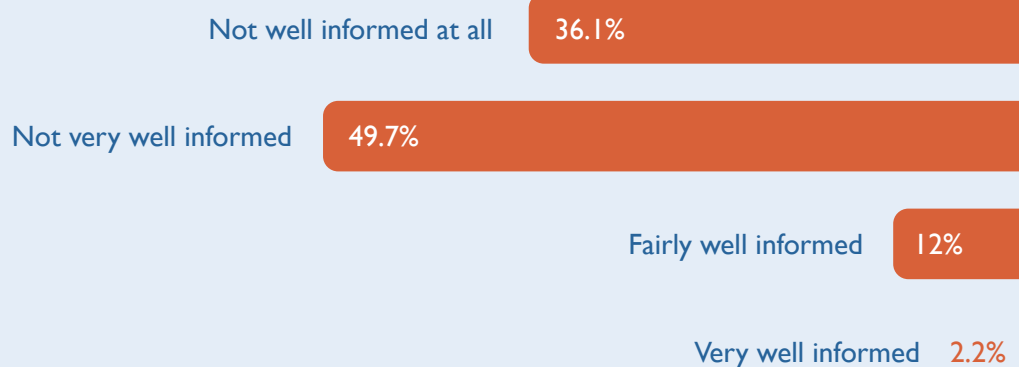
1% Not important at all

How informed do respondents feel about the water quality?



86%

Do not feel well informed about the water quality



Around 86% of respondents said they don't feel well informed about the water quality at this site.

A number of respondents indicated that they are, in fact, well informed but specified in one of the narrative responses that they feel confident about how bad the water quality is.

Water quality testing

Given the uncertainty surrounding the quality of the water, it is perhaps unsurprising that 98.1% (93.9% strongly) support regular water quality testing of the river stretch.

Of the respondents who oppose, the reasons mentioned included concerns about financial costs, increased littering in the area, and illegal parking. One person stated that they simply don't believe that results will actually be published.

With Designated Bathing Water Status, the Environment Agency would conduct regular water quality monitoring over the peak bathing season, meaning the public would be more informed.

98.1%

Support regular water quality testing at Conham River Park



"The more data collected, the more we'll know whether the water companies are meeting their contractual obligations"

Survey respondent

Of the overwhelming majority that support testing, 742 people provided an explanation of their support.

Most of the responses had significant thematical overlaps, but most commonly the following topics were mentioned:

100+

Physical health

"I swim there regularly and have only recently become ill from doing so. It is important to know it is safe"

277

Safety & informed decisions

"I want to know whether it is safe for my children and I to swim there."

59

Protecting nature & wildlife

"A healthy river benefits all, not only swimmers but the wildlife as well"

47

Sewage concerns

"There is an outlet nearby which is said to release sewage into the water."

18

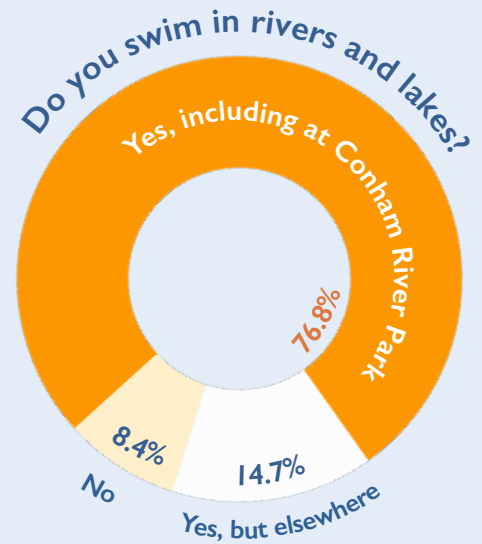
Mental health & wellbeing

"I swim outdoors regularly for my mental health, and don't want to put my physical health at risk to do so"

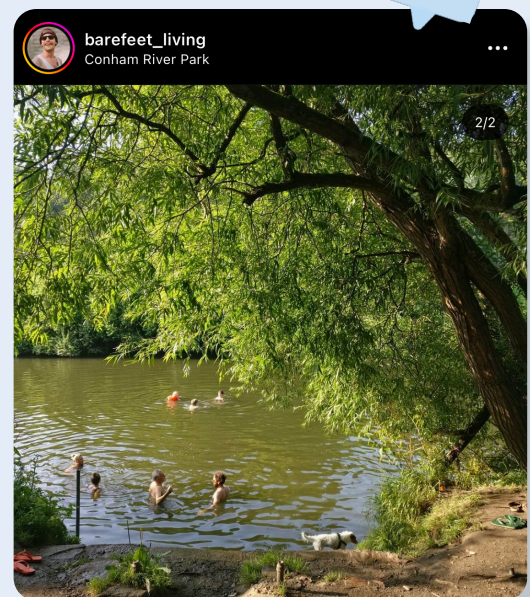
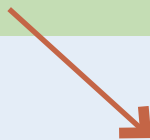
Swimming & other water activities

Out of all 902 respondents, 91.6% indicated that they go wild swimming, with 693 saying they swim in the area of Conham River Park / Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve.

Responding to a separate question, 82% of respondents who visit this site said they go swimming or undertake other water-based activities such as paddle-boarding.



A selection of Instagram images the @ConhamBathing account has been tagged in, showing the popularity of the site with swimmers and paddlers!



Bathing water status

in favour or opposed?

An overwhelming 95.7%, i.e., 863 respondents support awarding Conham River Park / Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve Designated Bathing Water Status.

Out of the few who don't, the explanations include worries about financial burdens upon the residents, insufficient parking, and the current lack of facilities.

It is clear, even from those who aren't in favour of wild swimmers, that the spot is highly frequented which is well-known by everyone in the area. As such, it is crucial that this is recognised to ensure the safety of everyone who bathes in the river – adults and children alike.

95.7%

Support awarding this site with
Designated Bathing Water Status



If awarded, the Avon could become the third river in England with a designated bathing water, following the Rivers Wharf and Thames!



Demographics

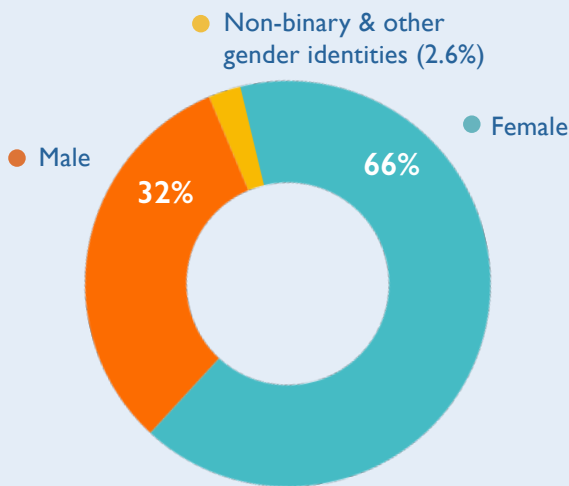
of our survey respondents

Overall, 902 people responded to the survey, 95% of whom described themselves as local residents*. There were also a few who only visited the area (31) as well as two previous and one prospective Bristol residents. 13 respondents were also local business owners, highlighting the importance of this topic beyond leisure.

*'local' is defined as living in the Bristol area



95% of respondents live in the Bristol area



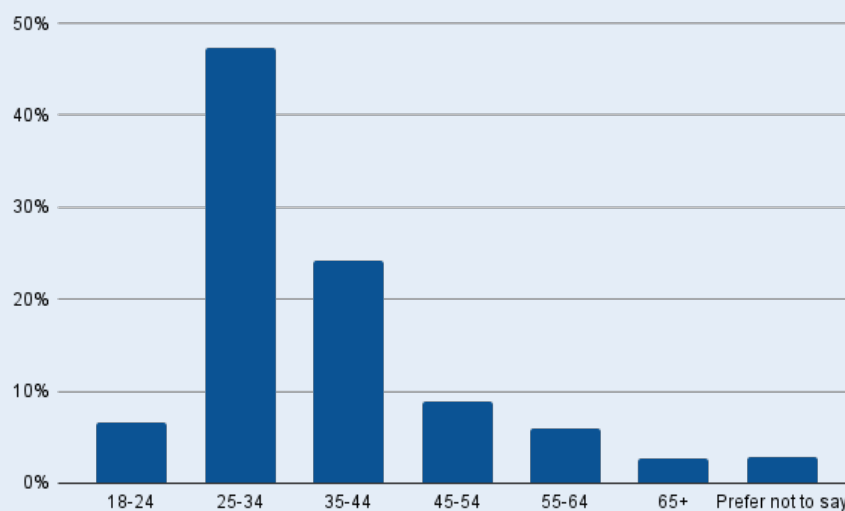
Gender identity of respondents

Out of the 870 who answered, 66% are female, 32% male and 2.6% identify outside of the gender binary.

The majority of respondents are aged 25-34 (47%) followed by those aged 35-44 (24%) (see chart below).

Further, 90% of respondents indicated that they are White (British/non-British) – an overrepresentation compared to the [general population statistics of the city](#) (84%). However, 6.1% chose not to answer this question, which may explain this slight discrepancy. 3.9% indicated to belong to the BAME population.

Finally, 5.5% of respondents considered themselves disabled, 90.8% did not and 3.7% preferred not to say.



Age distribution of respondents

Concluding remarks

Our survey shows there is considerable public support for an application of Designated Bathing Water Status at Conham River Park / Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve.

The site is frequently visited by our respondents, and most often on foot or by bike ([p.6](#)).

The vast majority of respondents swim, or have swum, at this site ([p.9](#)), despite concerns regarding the quality of the water. In fact, most said they don't feel well informed about the water quality ([p.7](#)) and almost all support regular quality monitoring here ([p.8](#)). In their narrative responses, people mentioned health and safety concerns, physical and mental health, and protecting nature and wildlife.



Appendix: original survey questions

1. How important to you is it that the River Avon is clean enough for paddling, swimming or other water-based activities?

- Extremely Important
- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Not very important
- Not at all important

1a. What do you think the impact would be on the local area / City of Bristol if the River Avon is too polluted and not fit for water-based activities such as swimming? Please let us know your thoughts on this. [narrative responses]

2. Do you go swimming in inland UK waterways such as rivers or lakes?

- Yes, including at Conham River Park
- Yes, but elsewhere
- No, not at all

3. How well informed do you feel about the water quality of the River Avon in the area of Conham River Park/Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve?

- Very Informed
- Somewhat Informed
- Not at all informed

4. Do you support regular testing of the water quality of the River Avon in the area of Conham River Park/Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve?

- Strongly Support
- Somewhat Support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose

4a. Following the previous question, why do you feel that way?

[narrative responses]

5. Have you ever been to Conham River Park/Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve?

- Yes
- No

If Yes >> 6. How often do you visit Conham River Park/Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve?

- Very Infrequently (around once or twice a year)
- Infrequently (around 3-5 times a year)
- Occasionally (around 6-10 times a year)
- Frequently (around once or twice a month)
- Very Frequently (around once a week or more)

7. How do you usually travel there?

- By car
- By bus
- By bike
- By taxi/Uber
- By E-scooter
- By foot
- Other _____

8. Do you go there with your children or children that you look after (e.g. relatives or as part of a child care service)?

- Yes, sometimes
- Yes, always
- No

9. Have you ever been swimming, paddle boarding or undertaking other water-based activities in the area of Conham River Park/Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve?

- Yes
- No

If Yes >> 10. Do you have concerns about the water quality of the River Avon in the area of Conham River Park/Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve?

- Yes
- No

11. Have you ever been ill after swimming/being in the water in the area of Conham River Park/Eastwood Farm Nature Reserve?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure (e.g. if you were ill but unsure whether the water was the cause)

12. Do you take measures against getting ill from swimming/water-based activities in the River Avon, e.g. by keeping your head above the surface?

- Yes
- No

13. Do concerns about the water quality deter you from swimming/water-based activities? [only those asked who picked "no" in Q9]

- Yes
- No, I don't go in the water/swimming for unrelated reasons

14. Do you support Designated Bathing Water Status for this site?

- Yes
- No

I4a. Following the previous question, why do you feel that way?

[narrative answer]

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

D1. Are you a... (tick all that apply)

Local resident

Service provider

Local business owner

Member of a local volunteering or community group

Visitor or tourist

Student

Other _____

D2. What best describes your gender? (if you feel that none of the options describe you, please specify in "other")

Female

Male

Non-binary

Gender Non-Conforming

Agender

Prefer not to say

Other _____

D3. What is your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual

Gay

Bisexual

Asexual

Other _____

D4. Which age group do you fall into?

Under 18

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65+

Prefer not to say

D5. What is your ethnic background?

Asian or Asian British

Black or Black British

Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups

Other Ethnic Groups (e.g. Arab, Iranian, Kurdish, etc.)

White

Prefer not to say

D6. Do you consider yourself disabled?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

END OF SURVEY

For any data queries, please contact
conhambathing@gmail.com

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