

Salcombe Harbour Board – 2 June 2008**LOSS OF BLUE FLAG STATUS FOR SOUTH SANDS BEACH****Report of Estuaries Officer****Statutory Powers: Pier and Harbour Order (Salcombe) Confirmation Act 1954**

Financial Implications: None.

Purpose

To report on the background to the loss of the Blue Flag status at South Sands and the progress in seeking to retrieve it.

This report supports South Hams objectives of good jobs (CP2), retention of the district's character (CP3) and maintaining a clean environment (CP4).

Recommendations

That the Harbour Board RESOLVES to:

Note the report.

Background – South Sands – Blue Flag

1. South Sands was first awarded its Blue Flag status in 2007, being put forward by SHDC and sponsored by South Sands Sailing and the Tides Reach hotel.

Apart from Water Quality standards, the award of a Blue Flag is also based on compliance with a number of criteria; including Environmental Education and Information, Environmental Management, Safety and Services (which are not being addressed by this report).

- Water Quality Criteria
 - Water quality must be compliant with the requirements and standards for excellent bathing water quality. To pass it must have no more than 500 total coliforms (bacteria) per 100 ml of water and no more than 100 faecal coliforms per 100 ml of water in 80% of samples. These can both indicate traces of human sewage and/or animal faeces.
 - No industrial or sewage related discharges may affect the beach area
 - Compliance of the community with requirements for sewage treatment and effluent quality
 - Algae or other vegetation should be left to decay on the beach unless it constitutes a nuisance

Background – Water Quality Failure

2. During the very wet season of 2007 (particularly August), 5 out of the twenty samples failed to reach the Guideline Standard and the bathing waters at South Sands lost it's Blue Flag as a consequence.
3. The failures were reported as a combination of the location of the local sewage treatment plants and the potential for spills, the consistent heavy rainfall, and the geography of the catchment. So the failure was seen as the result of a combination of events and location.
4. There is a very strong correlation between the levels of bacteria in the stream at South Sands and in the beach water, although the dilution factor of the tides would appear to be variable and sometimes high levels in the stream do not show up in the waters receiving them. There are public notices up at the stream outfall warning of the potential for higher bacterial levels.
5. The bacteria may come from a variety of sources; Sewage Treatment Works – either from the normal treatment process or from storm water overflows when excess water entering the works necessitate the bypass of the treatment process, private sewage treatment plants, farm animals or wild animals within the catchment area

Improving the Water Quality

6. At the April meeting of the Salcombe-Kingsbridge Estuary Conservation Forum, the Environment Agency reported that over the coming season they will investigate the reason for the decline in water quality at South Sands. Their investigation will involve collecting extra samples which will be tested using a new technique called Microbial Source Tracking that can distinguish between animal, bird, dog and human sources. They will also be installing monitoring equipment on the combined storm overflow (CSO) that discharges to the South Sands stream in Malborough village.
7. At the same time, it has been requested that the Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer for the area to make a special effort within the South Sands, Combe Stream, catchment to encourage local farmers and land managers to take extra steps to slow down the runoff of animal waste, etc. and possibly take advantage of the Catchment Sensitive Farming capital grant scheme to help pay for this. Such actions can minimise the amount of animal waste entering the stream directly, and allow the natural climate to reduce its bacteriological loading.
8. Assuming a more typical rainfall for the year, it is highly likely that the beach should pass this year and that we should be able to successfully apply for a Blue Flag beach status for next year 2009. However, heavier periods of intense rainfall are likely with Climate Change and the extra work being carried out should ensure that the bacteriological loading of the stream is minimised and the quality of the South Sands beach waters improved.
9. The other bathing beaches of the Salcombe Harbour are not eligible for Blue Flag status as there are no seasonal controls on dog access to them.

Strategic Risk Assessment

Risk/Opportunity	Issues / Obstacles	Benefits
A visiting bather may fall ill after swimming off the beach	The weather, costs of infrastructure at Sewage Treatment Works	Increased enjoyment of the bathing waters at South Sands with minimal risk to human health.
Improving the water quality will enable Blue Flag status to be restored.	Improvement of water run off quality	More attractive beach for tourists, thus facilitating a strong tourist industry.

Conclusion

9. Assuming water quality compliance in the 2008 season, a Blue Flag application will be made for South Sands beach for 2009.

Nigel Mortimer
Estuaries Officer, South Devon AONB Unit

Salcombe Harbour Board
2 June 2008

Background Documents:

ENCAMS Blue Flag website - <http://www.blueflag.org.uk/blue2more.asp>