Kate Hedges – Policy Adviser for

Bathing & Shellfish Waters

Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
3D/E Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

Our ref PV14-010
21 February 2014

Dear Ms Hedges,

RE: Walpole Bay request for de-designation from Water Sampling

Please accept this letter as a formal request to remove the water sampling testing from Walpole Bay. Our evidence is detailed below and includes a number of objections to our proposal, which we comment on. All the emails and letters in response to the consultation are attached for you to view.

Walpole Bay was a popular beach for both residents and visitors during the past decades. At its height the area enjoyed a lift, toilets and lifeguard facilities. To the west of the bay an outdoor swimming pool and changing rooms were on offer from the Lido at Ethelbert Terrace. However the increasing popularity of beach holidays abroad led to a decline in annual numbers of visitors. The beach last had lifeguard facilities in 2009 when the beach did achieve a blue flag.

There may be concerns that the Council is taking steps to remove facilities but Thanet District Council has had to make difficult choices in where to make investments over several years due to financial constraints. Thanet prides itself on its beautiful beaches and sees these as a key support for tourism, which is a key strand to the local economy. As such the Council has to focus its more limited resources on a disproportionately high number of beaches and bays, many of which have Blue Flags. The Council seeks to make full use of the excellent water quality at its beaches and use this aspect for its marketing. Sadly in the past and currently the impending new Bathing Water Regulations look likely to make the press focus on the negative aspects should we fail the new standards (89% likelihood to fail according to the EA in spring 2013). Our concern is that this will impact upon all our Blue Flag beaches and their links to tourism especially in the context of Margate where the District, County and Central Government are focusing attention to tackle the multiple deprivation that exists in the local community. With no longer a need to provide the beach for our Blue Flag awards it is seen as a weakness with insufficient users to justify its retention for water sampling.

The Walpole Bay beach does not have any lifeguard facilities at present provided by the Council

There are no public toilets on the promenade, the closest are at Harold Road which approximately 750 meters from the beach. The closest toilet facilities where previously at the Indoor Bowls Centre by the steps to the beach but these have been closed due to budget constraints. There is a lift at a point close the bathing water sampling point but this is no longer in operation.

There are no beach cafes on the promenade at Walpole Bay.; there is a café facility to the east of the site on the adjoining Palm Bay which is linked to a Jet Ski concession business that operates in that bay.

A map has been attached showing the access to the beach as it is below a cliff. There are 2 slope access points and one set of steps. The beach area has the benefit of a concrete promenade which runs from Margate's Harbour and Turner Gallery to Palm Bay. This promenade is popular for those who use the foreshore for walking and this is identified we believe in the figures from the EA survey. There is a concern that these people would have their impression of the area diminished by seeing a sign advising against swimming even though they may not have been intending to use the water.

There are many residents living in close proximity to the Bay, but Thanet has a heavily built up coastal hinterland and Walpole Bay is by no means unique in having a beach adjacent to a heavily populated areas. We have for instance similar beaches at Epple and Grenham Bays at nearby Birchington, Dumpton and Louisa Bays at Broadstairs and the Western Undercliff at Ramsgate.

Face to face discussions have taken place with the following:
Walpole Bay Hotel, Fifth Avenue
Smiths Court Hotel, Eastern Esplanade
Cliftonville Residents Association Chairman
Local Traders representative
These traders were met in December and January and all agreed that de-designation was favourable compared to a detrimental sign advising against bathing. The owners of Smiths Court Hotel were concerned that this move was a sign of decreasing support to the area.

There is no Margate Town Council but the District Council ward members are in favour of the idea of de-designating.

A public consultation exercise was undertaken by the District Council commencing on 22 January until 16 February. Over 77 individuals responded during this period, in addition a copied letter was distributed to some residents to place their address, sign and submit. This resulted in 17 identical letters being received which were in opposition to the proposal. Of the 74 email responses 5 are deemed to be in support whereas 36 were felt to be opposing the de-designation. Of the remaining 33 these seemed to be unclear in what their intentions where with regard to our options or they seemed to have misunderstood the issues as detailed on our web site pages. To assist you in your decision and to understand some of the comments I have included a document entitled 'Information displayed on Council Web site for consultation', a good example of this misunderstanding is on page 63 of the email responses where a local guest house seems to be in agreement with removing the water sample due to the negative image of the *No Bathing* signage but then seems to be against the removal and says this is not one of Thanet District Council's better ideas. Thanet District Council feels that the press coverage has given residents and users of the beach the impression that the beach will be closed in some way and that in some responses that the bathing pool would be emptied. This is not the intention of the Council and we would wish those people who use this beach to continue to do so. The tidal pool is particularly useful for training and also as a resource as it has superb sub tidal marine species evident and easily visible for those who are interested.
The public response has been keen to see more investment into the area and although the Council understands this pride in the area it has insufficient resources to allow it to develop another 'blue flag' type beach in the current economic climate.

As the owners of the promenade we are submitting this request but in view of the number of respondents to the consultation we are aware that the final decision to remove the water sampling rests with you reviewing the value of our evidence and weighing the concerns of local residents. We await your decision.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]
Parks and Coast Manager

Thanet District Council
PO Box 9
Cecil Street
Margate
Kent
CT9 1XZ

[redacted]
www.thanet.gov.uk