

CLEAN RIVER KENT CAMPAIGN

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

1 WHAT IS THE CLEAN RIVER KENT CAMPAIGN?

The Clean River Kent Campaign (CRKC) is a coalition of communities living along the River Kent, established in Autumn 2021. We include members from Staveley, Burneside and Kendal, and are a cross party organisation.

The River Kent in Cumbria is a beautiful river, and much loved by local people. It is designated as a site of special scientific interest at a national level and a special area of conservation at a European level because of the unique ecology including freshwater pearl mussels, white clawed crayfish, and bullhead.

Our aim is to make the River Kent clean for all types of water-based recreation and to protect the ecology and wildlife in the river by campaigning for:

1. A significant reduction in the amount of effluent discharged into the River Kent. We will assess this through regular testing of river water samples for faecal bacteria.
2. Improvements to the wastewater treatment works on the River Kent:
 - To meet current needs and in addition
 - To meet the needs of new housing development and
 - To meet the additional pressures which will result from climate change.
3. The protection of the river's ecology and wildlife.

We will:

1. Develop our coalition by working with local people and organisations who use the River Kent for water-based recreation eg canoeists and kayakers, anglers, swimmers and those who enjoy spending time on the banks of the river.
2. Build our campaign by working with local communities, councils, organisations and potential funders.
3. Apply for Bathing Status for one or more sections of the River Kent, while continuing to investigate the extent of the problem in specific areas in the campaign area.

2 WHAT HAS THE CLEAN RIVER CAMPAIGN DONE SO FAR?

We are preparing to put in an application to DEFRA (the Department for the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs) for safe bathing status at Staveley Recreation Ground in October 2022. This stretch of the River Kent is much used by local people including families with children. We need to collect information between May and September and are currently recruiting volunteers to take part in this citizen science project.

We also want to understand the river better, and specifically collect reliable information about the levels of pollution with faecal bacteria. So far we have taken 3 sets of river water samples from 6 sites on the river¹. These have been analysed in an accredited laboratory, and we have found evidence of significant bacterial pollution at some of the sites on the river which we know are used regularly for all types of water-based leisure.

We plan to take further samples through the summer during a range of weather conditions to get a deeper understanding of the levels of pollution at different points along the river.

3 WHY IS THE RIVER POLLUTED WITH FAECAL BACTERIA?

There has been a lot of coverage in the local and national media about the sewage pollution of rivers, lakes and beaches across the country, and the failure of government and the regulators to prevent this happening.

There has been growing criticism of the water companies for discharging raw sewage into inland and coastal waters. For example, the Staveley Wastewater Treatment Works is unable to cope with the volume of wastewater and discharges sewage (either untreated or partially treated) into the River Kent almost every day, year round. The water companies have been criticised for failing to invest in infrastructure to meet current and future needs – whilst rewarding their executives with large bonuses and their shareholders with generous dividends.

Wastewater Treatment Works are not the only source of river water pollution. Poorly maintained septic tanks are another source of pollution, and agricultural run-off can also be a significant problem.

There are further important sources of pollution including phosphates, nitrates and nitrites.

4 WHAT IS UNITED UTILITIES' POSITION?

United Utilities has just published a series of “commitments” which it says will kick start a river “revival” over the next 3 years:

¹ The 6 sites are:

Staveley Recreation Ground; Beckmickle Ing Wood, near Staveley; Burneside Millennium Bridge; and Dockray Hall (Sandy Bottoms); Hawes Bridge; and Sedgwick, all in and around Kendal

- Make sure the company's operations progressively reduce impact to river health
- Be open and transparent about performance and plans
- Make rivers beautiful, supporting others to enjoy rivers and waterways
- Create more opportunities for everyone to enjoy rivers and waterways.

We will attempt to work with United Utilities to ensure that they are able to meet these commitments, and the quality of water in the River Kent is significantly improved.

5 WHY APPLY FOR BATHING STATUS?

The Environment Agency (EA) is responsible for monitoring the quality of inland as well as coastal waters.

However, their testing is designed to detect only those water quality problems that cause damage to wildlife. It does not include the potential health hazards which faecal bacteria pose for people. There is no routine monitoring of the pollution caused by the bacteria found in sewage, which can enter the river from wastewater treatment works, septic tanks and/or agricultural run-off.

These faecal bacteria such as E coli pose a health risk to river users.

When bathing status is granted, it triggers four important actions:

- The Environment Agency will be required to conduct regular testing of water quality including for faecal bacteria to determine whether it is safe to paddle, swim or play in.
- Signage from the relevant local authority will be required to display information about water quality and pollution sources, indicating whether the water is clean enough to paddle, swim or play in.
- A management plan for the river so that there are the facilities for the people who already visit to paddle, swim and play in the river and on the riverbank.
- And in the longer term a full investigation of the sources of pollution, and the implementation of a plan to clean up the river.

Bathing status designation will shine a spotlight on sewage pollution and would be a step forward in ensuring that the River Kent is clean for water-based leisure.

6 HOW DO WE APPLY FOR BATHING STATUS?

We will submit an application to DEFRA (the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). The deadline is 31 October for approval for the next year's bathing season.

In 2022 we will apply for designation of a stretch of the River Kent between the beach above the Weir by Wilfs through to Staveley Recreation Ground. The application will need to include:

- The support of the landowner
- User surveys carried out between 15 May and 30 September (the bathing season) at peak use times to show how many people are using the river for leisure
- Information about any facilities at the site eg toilets, cafes, shops, and first aid services
- The results of a consultation with local people and their representatives, and with local businesses.

We will continue to test the river water at all 6 sites and user counts at Sandy Bottoms / Burneside with a view to making further applications from 2023 onwards.

7 WHO WILL PREPARE THE APPLICATION?

The Clean River Kent Campaign will coordinate the work and will invite those who live locally to participate, for example by:

- Undertaking user surveys/photos – completing a form to count how many people use the river on a given day – we have to count for a minimum of 20 days during the summer
- Helping with the consultation – finding out what local people think about the proposal, including local residents, businesses, voluntary groups and councillors
- Helping with the administration which will include a rota for the user surveys, data collation and analysis, supporting the consultation process, drafting the application, and communications
- Undertaking Citizen Science – learning how to collect further samples of river water for lab analysis.
- Completing monthly user diaries

The Campaign will provide any necessary training, as well as the support required by volunteers.

8 BATHING STATUS SEEMS A GOOD WAY FORWARD – WHAT ARE THE DOWNSIDES?

- **Will lots more people come to Staveley? More traffic congestion?**
The application will be based on the numbers of people currently using the River Kent.

So far only two rivers (the River Wharfe at Ilkley and the River Thames at Oxford) have achieved Bathing Water status. However, a number of other communities are also preparing applications, and hopefully it should become the norm for rivers to be properly monitored and managed. The River Kent will be one of many inland waterways which enable local people to enjoy water-based recreation.

In the Lake District 4 sites on Lake Windermere have safe bathing designation as do 8 coastal beaches, so there are a range of alternatives for open water swimming.

At present there is no overall management of the opportunities provided by the River Kent for local people. If we achieve safe bathing status then the bathing site or sites will need to be managed – which will bring improvements for us all.

- **Presumably it will cost money? Couldn't the money be put to better use?**

There will be some costs to the local authority. For example, they will be required to provide signs to say whether and if so when it is safe to be in the water as a bathing site may be more polluted and thus unsafe after heavy rain.

We will consult with local people and their representatives before submitting the application in order to demonstrate local support.

9 WHO HAS SUPPORTED THE CAMPAIGN SO FAR? DOES THIS INCLUDE FUNDING?

- Burneside Parish Council, Staveley with Ings Parish Council and Kendal Town Council have all donated grants of £500 each towards our initial costs. We have also received grants of £500 from the Lake District Foundation (LDF) and Burneside Community Energy, plus a Lakes Distillery Grant (administered by LDF) for £3,250.
- We will continue to fund raise by applying for further grants and plan to launch a Crowdfunder later this year.

10 HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

The Clean River Kent Campaign will coordinate the work and will invite those who live locally to participate, for example by:

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- Helping with the administration which will include a rota for the user surveys, data collation and analysis, supporting the consultation process, drafting the application, and communications
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- Completing monthly usage diaries

The Campaign will provide the funding and any training and support required by volunteers.

11 WILL YOU BE DOING ANY FURTHER WORK?

We are working with two local freshwater charities, The Freshwater Biological Association and South Cumbria Rivers Trust to continue our work in a variety of ways.

These organisations already have significant funding to do ecological work such as pearl mussel reintroductions and habitat restoration. By working together to apply for additional funding we would plan to:

- Continue with the bacterial sampling including some DNA analysis so we can determine where effluent is coming from
- Fund some “fun” education for the local community about how sewage is treated, what to flush and how we can all help to keep the river clean.
- Offer some small bursaries to university students to do research projects on the River Kent so we can learn more about the river, the wildlife and any pollution threats.

We will publicise the outcome of the funding bid in due course, and let local people know how they can be involved.

12 HOW DO I CONTACT THE CLEAN RIVER KENT CAMPAIGN?

Email: senstaveley@gmail.com
Facebook: @cleanriverkent
Website: www.sustainablestaveley.org.uk/clean-up-the-kent/

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