

North Yorkshire Council

Scarborough and Whitby Area Committee

23 March 2026

Review of bathing water quality in the North Bay and South Bay, Scarborough

Report of the Corporate Director Environment

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This extraordinary meeting of Scarborough and Whitby Area Committee has been convened to focus on the specific issue of bathing water quality in Scarborough's North Bay and South Bay by inviting submissions and evidence from a range of organisations which have **either** been actively involved in efforts to improve bathing water quality **or** whose lives and livelihoods have been affected by bathing water quality.
- 1.2 Through holding this meeting, the Area Committee wishes to review progress in this work by hearing from and asking questions of the relevant agencies and stakeholders, with a view to reaching some conclusions and making recommendations as appropriate to the different parties involved. The programme for the meeting can be found in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 This report sets the scene for the review by providing some historical and background information which explains the challenges regarding bathing water quality in the North Bay and South Bay and how agencies are responding.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Maintaining high standards of bathing water quality is important to upholding Scarborough's reputation as an outstanding seaside resort. The role of both bays contributes to the wider town economy, tourism sector and community pride. However, the issues impacting water quality are complex.
- 2.2 A complex range of factors can have a negative impact on bathing water quality, including:
- Discharge of sewage via water company overflows.
 - Animal waste.
 - Misconnected drains.
 - Agricultural runoff.
 - Urban runoff.
- 2.3 Scarborough's water quality is a cause of concern for residents, and businesses. As a council committed to public health, environmental stewardship and community wellbeing, North Yorkshire Council (NYC) recognises the importance of both bays and the need collaboration with key agencies to address this issue.
- 2.4 As a local authority, NYC's statutory role in this space is to provide clear public information and signage at designated bathing sites, including:

- Current bathing water classification (Excellent / Good / Sufficient / Poor).
- Short-term pollution warnings.
- Advice against bathing when risks are present.
- Any additional information required by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

2.5 As such, NYC's statutory responsibilities in this space are limited, with key responsibilities around enforcement and maintaining standards of assets belonging to both the Environment Agency and Yorkshire Water. Therefore, NYC has utilised its 'convening' role to establish a number of strategic summit meetings.

2.6 Furthermore, the Yorkshire Bathing Water Partnership was established in 2013, a multiagency group, working to improve and maintain water quality along the Yorkshire Coast through joint working, monitoring, investment, and pollution reduction initiatives. The partnership includes the Environment Agency as regulator and monitoring authority, Yorkshire Water (responsible for wastewater and infrastructure), East Riding of Yorkshire Council and North Yorkshire Council.

2.7 Establishing the Summits

2.7.1 The Scarborough Bathing Water Quality Summits brought together senior representatives from Yorkshire Water, the Environment Agency (EA), Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), McCains Foods, the MP for Scarborough & Whitby, local ward councillors and NYC officers (including the Chief Executive) to discuss and address concerns about water quality in Scarborough's South Bay and North Bay.

2.7.2 A key objective of the early Summits was to better understand what work was underway in Scarborough and secure a clear commitment from all partners to undertake further investigations regarding the sources of pollution, coordinate actions in response, participate in future summits, and ultimately, work collaboratively to deliver meaningful improvements.

2.7.3 An early action from the Summits was to support the work of two investigation studies, designed to better identify the sources of pollution affecting Scarborough's bays. NYC and McCains Food jointly funded Professor Gröcke from Durham University to utilise his method of tracking pollution via the collection of nitrogen isotopes from seaweed.

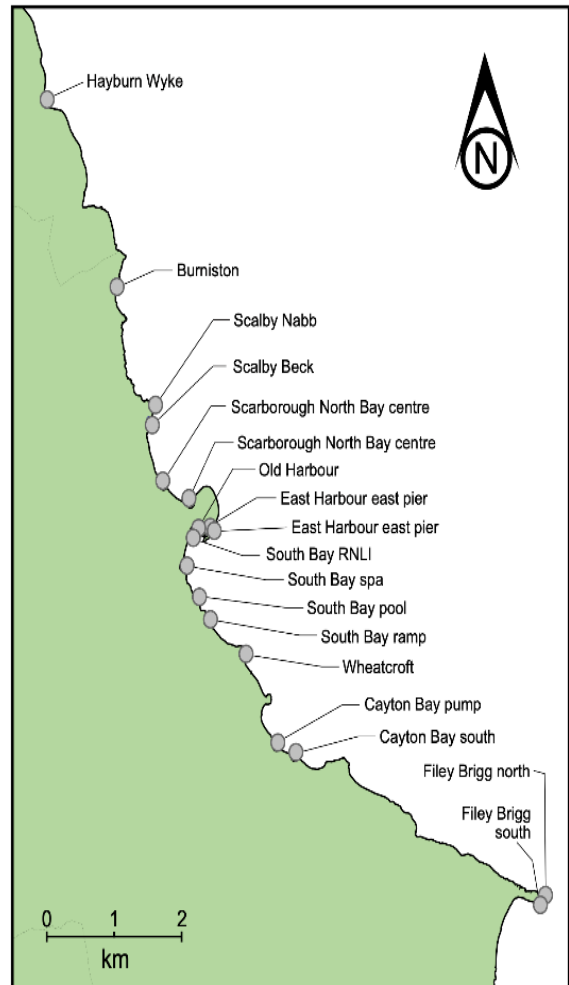
2.7.4 NYC, McCains Food, Yorkshire Water and the EA also funded an intensive study led by the EA to take water samples looking at bacterial community profiles and more.

3.0 THE STUDIES

3.1 Durham University Investigation

3.1.1 Between September 2023 and October 2025, Professor Gröcke collected more than 3,400 individual seaweed samples across the stretch of Scarborough’s coastline. These samples were taken from 18 sampling locations and included two species of seaweed, each of which absorbs nitrogen over different timescales. This allowed the study to measure both short-term and longer-term patterns of nitrogen pollution.

(Right: Illustration of sampling locations)



3.1.2 The findings provided evidence that there was a heightened level of pollution emanating from Scalby Beck, affecting **both** North Bay and South Bay. Nitrogen-isotope signatures indicated pollution originating from both agricultural and wastewater-related sources is contributing to reduced bathing water quality in Scarborough.

3.2 Environment Agency Investigation

3.2.1 The EA committed to carrying out extensive investigations into water pollution affecting Scarborough’s North and South Bays. As part of this study, real time monitoring devices were installed close to various sample monitoring locations.

3.2.2 The EA investigation involved sampling for E. coli and Intestinal enterococci Bacteroides, which are indicators of contamination from human; dog; seabird waste, and agricultural runoff.

3.2.3 Early EA investigation findings suggested that water quality tends to deteriorate in August, potentially due to associated pressures on the local water system. The early findings have also found pollution markers linked to human Bacteroides and agricultural runoff, particularly when there is increased rainfall in the Scalby Beck catchment. Some background pollution linked to seabirds was also found at sample points.

3.3 Scalby Beck

3.3.1 Scalby Beck is a watercourse flowing around the northern edge of Scarborough and entering the North Sea just above Scarborough’s North Bay. Approximately seven combined sewer overflows (CSOs), operated by Yorkshire Water, discharge into Scalby Beck during periods of heavy rainfall. This is consistent with early evidence collected by both studies. NYC is keen for partner agencies to further investigate sources of pollution in Scalby Beck, as a method to reduce pollutants being carried into both bays.

3.3.2 Yorkshire Water recognises the impact their CSOs can have on bathing water quality and has planned investment to reduce discharges. Scalby Beck also flows through

agricultural land, where runoff containing animal-derived pollutants can enter the watercourse before being carried into the bay.

- 3.3.3 There are also several private wastewater connections within the catchment that are not owned or operated by Yorkshire Water, which can contribute to contamination issues but lie outside the company's direct control. In addition, Yorkshire Water has acknowledged that ageing infrastructure in the area may have potential weaknesses or leaks, and it has committed to further investigations alongside the Environment Agency to better understand and address these issues.
- 3.3.4 During the course of the Summits, Scalby Beck has emerged as a potential source of contamination for both the North Bay and South Bay. Early work from Professor Darren Gröcke hypothesised Scarborough's tidal and current patterns play a significant role in transporting pollutants from Scalby Beck into South Bay. Currents push along the shoreline, moving in a north-to-south direction, before being pulled back into South Bay.
- 3.3.5 As such, pollutants released around North Bay can ultimately accumulate in South Bay, where the shallower, curved geography can trap contaminants.

3.4 McCains Investment

- 3.4.1 Discussed at the first Summit, McCain Foods provided valuable insight into the plant's manufacturing processes and the challenges arising from them. Their processing of potatoes generates a high-strength wastewater containing organic material such as bacteria and starch.
- 3.4.2 McCains undertook a £170million modernisation of the Scarborough site to "[future-proof](#)" operations and improve efficiency. As part of this investment, the company committed £23million to build an industry-leading wastewater treatment facility on-site.
- 3.4.3 This new facility uses advanced filtration, biological treatments and anaerobic processes to remove more than 97% of organic material from the wastewater. As a result, the factory now discharges clean water into the sea, bringing the site into full compliance with environmental standards and significantly reducing its impact on local bathing waters.

4.0 NEXT STEPS AND ONGOING AREAS OF FOCUS

4.1 Further Investigation into Pollution Sources

- 4.1.1 Throughout the Summit meetings, it became clear that there is a wide range of potential pollution sources. These include but are not limited to:
- Leaking pipes.
 - Misconnected drains.
 - Combined Sewer Overflows.
 - Private sewer connections.
 - Septic tanks.
 - Agricultural runoff.
 - Seagull waste.
- 4.1.2 All organisations represented at the Summit have committed to continued joint working to identify, assess, and map these pollution sources.

- 4.1.3 To that end Yorkshire Water and the EA have committed to installing water quality monitors further upstream, in Scalby Beck, widening our understanding of pollution points. Yorkshire Water will also investigate the impact of septic tanks in Hayburn Wyke.
- 4.1.4 The EA is also undertaking targeted agricultural visits to farms around the Scalby Beck catchment to ascertain the efficacy of their efforts to mitigate agricultural runoff into Scalby Beck.
- 4.1.5 Building a clearer picture of the contributing factors will support the development of targeted, evidence-based strategies to mitigate them.

4.2 Completion of studies

- 4.2.1 Professor Gröcke has agreed to undertake a second, shorter study; potentially including additional sampling points further north. This will generate comparative data against the initial research whilst also gathering robust evidence demonstrating that pollution from Scalby Beck is entering South Bay. This will inform the development of innovative mitigation measures aimed at improving bathing water quality in South Bay.
- 4.2.2 The EA will undertake a bacterial profiling study to further identify, quantify and characterise bacteria populations within their sampling. This will help to map microbial communities within Scarborough's water.
- 4.2.3 Yorkshire Water and the EA have also committed to working with Professor Gröcke to align the findings from their respective studies and data, helping to build a fuller understanding of the factors affecting bathing water quality.

4.3 Yorkshire Water accelerated investment & action

- 4.3.1 Yorkshire Water has committed to developing an asset management strategy to run in parallel with accelerated investment in Scarborough's water infrastructure. This includes plans to construct a new reduction tank, like Wheatcroft, near Jackson's Bay, north of Scalby. The tank will help reduce overflow discharges into the sea and prevent pollution from being washed into Scalby. NYC will continue to work closely with Yorkshire Water to shape this strategy, guide investment priorities, and support efforts to reduce pollution.
- 4.3.2 Following the Summit, there will also be a renewed focus on improving conditions in and around Scalby Beck. This includes revising the approach to attenuation tanks, so they are cleaned ahead of each bathing season, reducing the risk of unintended contamination affecting water quality during peak months.
- 4.3.3 Infrastructure monitoring, repair and upgrade programmes will also be accelerated in the Scarborough and Scalby Beck area. This will involve checking pipes for leaks, identifying misconnections, and replacing ageing infrastructure to ensure the network is resilient and operating effectively.

4.4 Areas of joint working & NYC actions

- 4.4.1 NYC continues to work with partners on identifying mitigating actions in the Scalby Beck catchment, particularly to Yorkshire Water assets that discharge into the bay. High-level discussions with strategic leads in Yorkshire Water have taken place to feed into Yorkshire Water's development of asset plans.

4.4.2 Yorkshire Water has indicated that some pollution may be linked to some developments that are incorrectly connected to the sewer network, allowing wastewater to enter the ground and ultimately wash into local watercourses. As part of our wider efforts, NYC will continue working closely with Yorkshire Water to investigate whether any developments have been improperly connected and to ensure that all future schemes meet the required infrastructure standards.

4.4.3 Yorkshire Water is operating a water-butt initiative, providing water butts that connect to household guttering and help reduce the volume of rainwater entering the combined sewer network during periods of heavy rainfall. These systems store rainfall and release it slowly, easing pressure on the drainage system and lowering the likelihood of CSO discharges during wet weather. While this scheme is active, NYC will continue to signpost residents to the initiative and encourage participation.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There were no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There were no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

7.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There were no equalities implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There were no climate change implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

9.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 To provide background and context to this area of work to the Area Committee.

10.0 RECOMMENDATION

i) To note the content of this report

Karl Battersby
Corporate Director Environment

County Hall, Northallerton

13 March 2026

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**EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF SCARBOROUGH AND WHITBY AREA COMMITTEE –
23 MARCH 2026**

**REVIEW OF BATHING WATER QUALITY IN THE NORTH BAY AND SOUTH BAY,
SCARBOROUGH**

PROGRAMME

(i) Public questions and statements

(ii) Local impacts

Surfers Against Sewage	Steve Crawford	5 minutes
Bay View Coffee House	Rosalind Aldcroft	5 minutes
Terror Towers and Scarborough Speed Boat Trips	Rudi Barman	
Scarborough Tourism Advisory Board and SEA LIFE Scarborough	Andrew Clay	5 minutes

Councillors' questions – 15 minutes

**Progress reports / presentations from key organisations and individuals involved
in improving bathing water quality**

(iii) North Yorkshire Council

Karl Battersby (Corporate Director Environment and NYC representative on Bathing Water Partnership) Stewart Rowe (Principal Coastal Officer) Joe Penny (Principal Officer to the Chief Executive)	15 minutes
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Councillors' questions – 15 minutes

(iv) Professor Darren Grocke (Professor of Stable Isotope Geochemistry, University of Durham) - 15 minutes

Councillors' questions – 15 minutes

(v) Environment Agency

Claire Barrow (Environment Planning and Engagement Manager – Yorkshire) Martin Christmas (Area Environment Manager – Yorkshire) Mike Dugher (Area Director – Yorkshire)	15 minutes
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Councillors' questions – 15 minutes

(vi) Yorkshire Water

Miles Cameron (Manager of Strategic Partnerships) Adam Ashman (Head of Strategic Partnerships & Sustainability)	15 minutes
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Councillors' questions – 15 minutes

(vii) Conclusions and recommendations