

**KEEP
NORTHERN
IRELAND
BEAUTIFUL**



Green Coast Award Guidance Notes

2020-21

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AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this award scheme is to acknowledge those beaches which meet 'Excellent' bathing water quality standards (the highest standard recognised under the revised bathing water directive) but which are also prized for their natural, unspoiled environment.

A 'natural, unspoiled environment' means that the special character of such a beach is not compatible with the level of infrastructure and intensive management generally associated with more urban, traditional seaside resort beaches that would qualify for either Seaside or Blue Flag Award.

Beaches eligible for this award will generally be:

- Managed carefully and in close consultation with conservation organisations to account for their environmentally sensitive nature as part of a management plan.
- If facilities and signs are present, which may or may not be some distance from the beach, they should be designed and located to minimise the visual impact on the landscape
- Be cleansed of litter sensitively without removing natural debris such as driftwood and seaweed.

The Green Coast Award will be presented to beaches on an annual basis, and refers to a section of beach which includes one water quality sampling point.

To be eligible for this award, the beach operator must provide evidence that they have addressed all criteria. Failure to do so may result in the removal of the award until these objectives can be met. Beaches are assessed during the season preceding that in which the Awards are made.

At all times throughout this text, the term 'must' indicates that the action is mandatory, while 'should' indicates that the action is advised.

INFORMATION TO BE DISPLAYED FOR BEACH VISITORS

Sufficient information must be displayed at the beach to enable beach visitors to make an informed choice whether to enter the bathing water and to also locate with ease the facilities and services if any are offered.

1. A code of conduct that reflects local rules governing the use of the beach and surrounding areas.
2. Information about bathing water quality.

It is not necessary to display individual sample results. An indication of water quality would be as a minimum the EU 'swimming man' symbol.

3. A map of the beach indicating different facilities, sensitive areas and/or points of interest.
4. A promotional mark (plaque, flag, banner), along with basic information about the Green Coast award or an indication of where to find this information. This must include contact details of Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful.

Only basic information is necessary at the beach. The nature of the Green Coast Award is that a site should minimise signage, etc. wherever possible. Additional information deemed necessary for the Award or promotion of activities may be made available at local tourism kiosks, websites, social media, etc.

5. Evidence that the interests of any protected sites and rare or protected species have been addressed in liaison with recognised local conservation organisations. This should encourage visitors to consider the sensitivity of the natural environment and local flora and fauna.
6. The logos or other contact information of the organisations which have contributed to the guardianship scheme or management plan.
7. Information on local environmental events or activities which are relevant to the beach or adjoining natural sites.

BATHING WATER

The bathing water must have achieved "Excellent" standard under the current EU Bathing Water Directive.

8. To be eligible for entry to the award scheme the bathing water associated with the beach must have attained 'Excellent' standard as outlined in the Bathing Water Directive Bathing Water Directive 2006/7/EC. The calculated quality over the previous four years (where available) result must be posted.

The beach does not necessarily have to be an identified bathing water. However, all monitoring must be carried out strictly within the Directive methods of analysis and inspection by either the national agency responsible or a laboratory accredited for the testing of seawater samples. The suitability of monitoring bodies should be confirmed with the National Operator. Where the Beach Operator is made aware of adverse bathing conditions, e.g. failed sample or prolonged heavy rain which is likely to affect water quality, they must inform the public as quickly as is reasonably practicable, highlighting that rivers and streams which cross the beach should not be used as an alternative bathing area.

9. The Beach Operator must highlight wastewater discharge points and riverine inputs within one km of the Award area to the National Operator and the public.

SAFETY

The safety equipment and services provided must, so far as is reasonably practicable, minimize the possibility of harm to beach users.

10. The Beach Operator must ensure a site-specific risk assessment has been carried out by appropriately qualified personnel. Suitable and sufficient control measures identified by that process must be put in place.

The qualifications and standing of the person completing the risk assessments must be stated in the application. If the risk assessment is carried out by an organisation such as the RNLI, RLSS or IWS then they will be deemed competent. If the risk assessment is completed by the Beach Operator then a record of the training, experience and professional qualifications which demonstrate the competence of the person completing the risk assessment should be provided.

11. So far as is reasonably practicable, easy and safe access to the beach must be provided for all, including people with impaired mobility

Safe and easy access for all should be provided at every site where it is technically, and financially feasible to do so, and the works will not adversely impact the local environment. It is understood that not every site can be made accessible, and if suitable access cannot be provided then this must be highlighted in the application. Lack of access is not in and of itself a barrier to the granting of the Award so long as there are reasonable grounds for the lack of provision. The Control visit will not, except under exceptional circumstances, make a determination on the safety of the site and access provision, but will instead be based on the provision of the control measures outlined in the risk assessment provided with the application. Beach Management is encouraged to make available an access statement outlining the measures used to promote access, for example the access statement developed by Visit England, which can be completed at www.access.tourismtools.co.uk.

12. Any significant incident which results in serious injury or loss of life, or significant harm to the environment on the beach must be notified to National Operator as soon as is reasonably practicable and at most within two weeks.

A significant incident is one which results in the attendance of an emergency service to deal with a serious injury or loss of life, or which causes significant damage to the local environment. This is included to ensure the National Operator is made aware of incidents which may affect the reputation of the Award or the beach as a safe place to visit; or highlight operational issues which might affect future applications. It is understood that accidents can happen even when suitable and sufficient controls are in place. As such, the occurrence of a significant incident is not by itself an issue, but failure to report a relevant incident constitutes a non-conformance.

LITTER AND WASTE

The beach and adjoining facilities must be clean.

13. There must be no obvious visual impact from litter or sewage-related debris (SRD) on the beach. The beach, intertidal area, backshore and any surrounding areas connected to the beach operation including carparks and amenity areas must be substantially free of litter, with no potentially harmful materials such as broken glass.

14. The beach operator should operate in accordance with the best practicable environmental option in cleaning the beach.

This places a higher value on the protection of the environment than on the cost implication. Best practicable environmental option means that where a choice exists for a process or technique, the expectation will be that the most environmentally advantageous option is selected even if it costs more to provide. This may result in the choice to litter pick by hand rather than use a mechanical screen, or to clean more often or to a higher standard than is required by regulation.

15. Properly secured and covered litter bins in adequate numbers should be made available for litter. These should be of suitable character and appearance and sited where appropriate to the surroundings.

Where a "take your litter home policy" is in operation, the public should be informed of this through education literature or via appropriate signage. This information could be included with other information at an access point to the beach such as the car park, possibly in the form of a countryside code. This method of litter management should be closely monitored to ensure its effectiveness.

BEACH MANAGEMENT

The beach must be well managed in partnership with the local community to protect and promote the local environment.

16. The Beach Operator must develop a guardianship scheme for the beach with local community and/or environmental groups, and act in agreement with them in managing the beach.

The Beach Operator must develop a management structure which encourages local involvement in the decision-making process as well as the service delivery. Suitable groups include resident's groups; development associations; Coast Care groups; 'friends of' groups; and environmental groups. Where such a group does not exist, the Beach Operator should support the formation of one. Expert input from recognised environmental groups should also be sought where such expertise is not already present within the local group. To the fullest extent possible, delivery of agreed tasks such as daily checks, litter-picking, path clearing, reporting damage and basic maintenance tasks should be assumed by the local group. The format of a suitable management plan is given in Appendix 2, along with an example.

17. Dogs and horses may be permitted in the award area unless local regulations prevent it. Owners should be encouraged, by the provision of suitable facilities and signage at access points, to clean up after their animals when using the beach.

18. The Beach Operator must provide adequate access and parking facilities and where possible suitable access for disabled people. Parking on the beach must be prohibited.

APPENDIX 1. EXAMPLE OF A CODE OF CONDUCT

Safety while bathing

1. Any activity can be dangerous. Be responsible for your own safety. Ensure you know the location of personal rescue equipment and pay attention to warning symbols. There is no lifeguard service at this beach.
2. Never leave children unsupervised.
3. Report any incidents or missing persons immediately by calling the emergency services - dial 999 from any phone.
4. First aid for minor conditions is available from the cafe in the car park between 10 am and 6pm. Outside these hours or in an emergency ring 999 and ask for an ambulance.

Animals on the beach between 1st May and 31st October.

1. Horses are only permitted onto the beach before 10am and after 6pm.
2. Dogs must be kept on leads at all times within the Award area - other parts of the beach are available for safely exercising your pet. Please respect other visitors and the local wildlife.
3. Dog fouling is never acceptable, anywhere. Bag it and bin it.
4. You must ensure any animal you bring onto the shore does not alarm other persons, animal or birds.
5. Breach of any of these regulations may result in an £85 fine or court appearance.

Activities on the beach

1. Cars, Quad bikes, scramblers or bicycles are not permitted on the beach or in the dunes at any time.
2. Jet skis and other personal watercraft are not permitted within 200m of the restricted area - to the south of the beach and marked by signs - at any time.
3. Metal detecting is not permitted anywhere on the beach or in the dunes at any time.
4. Kayaks and canoes may be launched from the beach and used near the shore outside the restricted zone but you must ensure you do not disturb the seal colony.
5. You must not remove anything from or dump anything onto the beach or dunes.
6. You must not light any fires on the beach or in the dunes. Barbeques are not permitted outside the designated area by the carpark.
7. Camping or overnight sleeping is not permitted on the beach or in the dunes.
8. You must not dig for bait.