

February 2021

# **Variation of Icosa Water Services Limited's appointment to include Woodacres in Hailsham, East Sussex**

## About this document

### Variation of Icosa Water Services Limited's appointment to include Woodacres, Hailsham, East Sussex

On 1 December 2020 Ofwat [began a consultation on a proposal](#) to vary Icosa Water Services Limited's ("**Icosa Water**") appointment to become the sewerage services provider for a development in Southern Water Services Limited's ("**Southern Water**") sewerage services area called Woodacres in Hailsham, East Sussex ("**the Site**").

The consultation **ended** on 30 December 2020. During the consultation period, we received responses from 3 organisations: the Consumer Council for Water ("**CCW**"), the Environment Agency and the Drinking Water Inspectorate ("**DWI**").

On 26 January 2021, we granted Icosa Water a variation to its existing appointment to enable it to supply sewerage services to the Site.

This notice gives our reasons for making this variation.

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## 1. Introduction

The new appointment and variation mechanism, specified by Parliament and set out in primary legislation, allows one company to replace the current company as the provider of water and/or sewerage services for a specific area. This mechanism can be used by new companies to enter the market and by existing companies to expand into areas where they are not the appointed company. In this case, Icosa Water applied to replace Southern Water to become the appointed sewerage company for the Site.

A company may apply for a new appointment (or a variation of its existing appointment to serve an additional site) if any of the following three criteria are met:

- None of the premises in the proposed area of appointment is served by the existing appointed company at the time the appointment is made (the “**unserved criterion**”);
- Each premises is likely to be supplied with at least 50 mega litres per year (in England) or at least 250 mega litres per year (in Wales) and the customer in relation to each premises consents (“**the large user criterion**”);
- The existing water and sewerage supplier in the area consents to the appointment (“**the consent criterion**”).

When considering applications for new appointments and variations, Ofwat operates within the statutory framework set out by Parliament, including our duty to protect consumers, wherever appropriate by promoting effective competition. In particular, in relation to unserved sites, we seek to ensure that the future customers on the site – who do not have a choice of supplier – are adequately protected. When assessing applications for new appointments and variations, the two key policy principles we apply are:

1. Customers, or future customers, should be no worse off than if they had been supplied by the existing appointee; and
2. We must be satisfied that an applicant will be able to finance the proper carrying out of its functions as a water and/or sewerage company.

Entry and expansion (and even the threat of such by potential competitors) can lead to benefits for different customers (such as household and business customers and developers of new housing sites). Benefits can include price discounts, better services, environmental improvements and innovation in the way services are delivered.

Benefits can also accrue to customers who remain with the existing appointee, because when the existing appointee faces a challenge to its business, that challenge can act as a spur for it to improve its services. We believe the wider benefits of competition through the

new appointments and variations mechanism can offset any potential disbenefits for existing customers that might arise. We consider these potential disbenefits in more detail below.

## 2. The application

Icosa Water applied to be the sewerage services appointee for the Site under the consent criterion set out in section 7(4)(a) of the Water Industry Act 1991 (“**WIA91**”). Icosa Water will serve the Site by way of a bulk discharge agreement with Southern Water.

### 2.1 The consent criterion

To qualify under the consent criterion, an applicant must provide a letter of consent from the existing appointee consenting to the application and consenting to the variation of its area of appointment corresponding to the applicant's application.

We received a letter dated 18 August 2020 from Southern Water confirming that it gives consent to Icosa Water to become the sewerage services provider for this Site.

Icosa Water has the consent of the Site's developer, Arlington Road Limited, as per its letter dated 28 May 2020, to become the sewerage services provider for the Site.

### 2.2 Financial viability of the proposal

We will only make an appointment or variation if we are satisfied that the proposal poses a low risk of being financially non-viable. We assess the risk of financial viability on a site-by-site basis and also consider the financial position of the company as a whole.

Based on the information available to us, we concluded the Site demonstrates sufficient financial viability, and Icosa Water has satisfied us that it can finance its functions and that it is able to properly carry them out.

### 2.3 Assessment of 'no worse off'

Icosa Water's charges will be as per its charges scheme. Charges will not exceed those that would otherwise be charged by Southern Water. No discounts are being offered to customers on this Site.

With regard to service levels, we have reviewed Icosa Water's Codes of Practice and its proposed service levels and compared these to the Codes of Practice and the performance commitments of Southern Water. Based on this review, we are satisfied that customers will

be offered an appropriate level of service by Icosa Water and that overall customers will be 'no worse off' being served by Icosa Water instead of by Southern Water.

## **2.4 Effect of variation on Southern Water's customers**

In considering whether customers will be no worse off, we also looked at the potential effects of this variation on the price that Southern Water's existing customer base may face.

The calculation necessarily depends on a range of assumptions, and there are clearly difficulties involved in quantifying the effect on customers of Southern Water. It is therefore necessary to use a simplified set of figures. We have expressed the effect in 'per bill' terms to try and quantify the possible effect in an easily understandable way. Broadly, we have assessed the potential magnitude of this impact by comparing how much Southern Water might have expected to receive in revenue from serving the Site directly, were it to serve the Site, with the revenues it might expect from the proposed arrangement with Icosa Water.

In this case, we have estimated that if we grant the variation for this Site to Icosa Water, there would likely be no potential impact on the sewerage bills of Southern Water's existing customers.

This impact does not take into account the potential spillover benefits to customers arising from dynamic efficiencies achieved as a result of the competitive process to win new sites.

## **2.5 Developer choice**

Where relevant, we take into consideration the choices of the site developer. In this case, the developer, Arlington Road Limited, said that it wanted Icosa Water to be the sewerage company for the Site.

### 3. Responses received to the consultation

We received three responses to our consultation; from the Environment Agency, CCW and the DWI. We considered these responses before making the decision to vary Icosa Water's appointment. The points raised in the consultation responses are set out below.

#### 3.1 Environment Agency

The Environment Agency responded by saying that it had no new comments on this application and that it was happy for us to progress as required with the application.

#### 3.2 CCW

In its response CCW stated that it expects new appointees to provide consumers with prices, levels of service and service guarantees that match or, ideally, better those of the incumbent.

CCW was disappointed that there was no direct financial benefit to customers from having Icosa Water as their provider of sewerage services. However, it noted that Icosa Water exceeds some of Southern Water's service standards and for this reason, CCW said that it supported this application.

Icosa Water is proposing to offer guaranteed and voluntary standards of service that generally match or exceed the standards offered by Southern Water. For example, Icosa Water will offer greater compensation if it fails to respond to written complaints within 10 working days and provides an automatic disturbance allowance, up to £100, to customers who need to use temporary accommodation as a result of sewer flooding. However, Icosa will not be able to offer its financially vulnerable customers a social tariff in the way that Southern Water can, although it will offer the standard WaterSure tariff for qualifying customers who find themselves in financial difficulty

CCW noted that Icosa will not be able to offer its financially vulnerable customers a social tariff in the way that Southern Water can, although it will offer the standard WaterSure tariff for qualifying customers. CCW agreed that given its size it may be appropriate for Icosa Water to tailor some of the services that it provides. Until it can provide a formal social tariff, the CCW expects Icosa Water to offer appropriate flexible support to any individual in financial difficulty who would otherwise benefit from a social tariff. This should not be at the expense of its other customers. CCW expects Icosa Water to research the views of its customers on any proposed cross-subsidy before introducing any social tariffs.

CCW noted that there would be no costs to the incumbent's existing customers as a result of the variation. However, it was unclear as to whether there will be any significant benefits arising from this arrangement for the incumbent's customers.



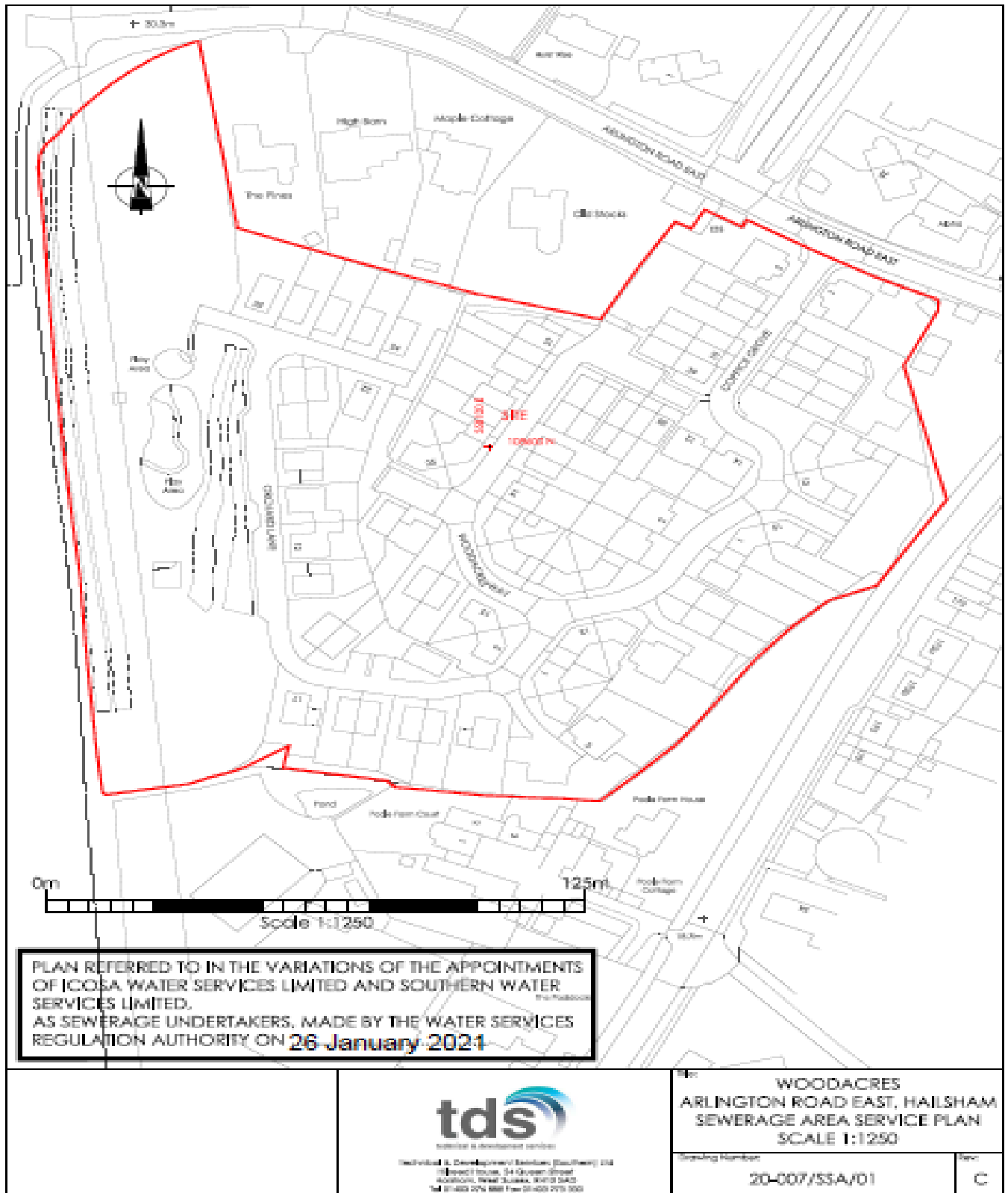
### **3.3 DWI**

The DWI confirmed to us that it has no comments to make in regards to this consultation and that its records have been updated accordingly.

## 4. Conclusion

Having assessed Icosa Water's application, and having taken account of the responses we received to our consultation, we decided to grant a variation to Icosa Water's area of appointment to allow it to serve the Site for sewerage services. This variation became effective on 27 January 2020.

## Appendix 1: Site Map



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