

May 2021

**Recommendation paper to consult on  
a proposal to vary the appointment of  
Independent Water Networks Limited  
– Blakeston Lane boundary variation**

## Contents

1. About this document	2
2. The Site	3
3. The applicant	4
4. The proposal	4
5. Our approach to the assessment of this application	5
6. The application	6
7. Conclusion and next steps	9
8. Site maps	10

## 1. About this document

We propose granting a variation of appointment to Independent Water Networks Limited (“**Independent Water Networks**”) as a water company and varying the appointment of Northumbrian Water Limited (“**Northumbrian Water**”) as a water company. This notice is a consultation on this proposal under section 8(3) of the Water Industry Act 1991 (“**WIA91**”).

The consultation period will last for 28 days from the date of publication of this notice. Having considered any representations submitted during the consultation period in response to this consultation notice, Ofwat will decide whether or not to grant the variation of appointment set out above.

## 2. The Site

Independent Water Networks has applied for a variation to its appointment to be able to provide water services to land adjacent to a current development of 76 household customers on a site called Blakeston Lane, Stockton-On-Tees, Cleveland (“**the Site**”). No additional properties will be developed as a consequence of this variation.

Site boundary maps can be viewed in section 8 of this document.

The land currently being developed was the subject of an application submitted by Independent Water Networks in 2020, and the variation was granted on 21 December 2020. The current application is for an extension to the existing boundary. The Site is in Northumbrian Water’s water supply area.

### 3. The applicant

In October 2007, Independent Water Networks obtained its first appointment as a water and sewerage undertaker for a housing development at the Long Croft Road site in Anglian Water's area. Since then Ofwat has agreed to vary Independent Water Networks' area of appointment so it can serve a further 71 sites for water and/or sewerage. The register of new appointments and variations can be viewed [here](#)

### 4. The proposal

Ofwat proposes to:

- grant a variation of appointment to Independent Water Networks as a water company to include the Site in its water supply area; and
- vary the appointment of Northumbrian Water as a water company by excluding the Site from its water supply area.

By means of the above, Independent Water Networks will become the water services supplier for the Site.

## 5. Our approach to the assessment of this application

The new appointment and variation mechanism, set out in primary legislation,<sup>1</sup> provides an opportunity for entry and expansion into the water and sewerage sectors by allowing one company to replace the existing appointee 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 appointees to expand their businesses.

When considering applications for new appointments and variations, Ofwat operates within the statutory framework set out by Parliament, including our statutory duty to protect consumers, wherever appropriate by promoting effective competition. In particular, in relation to unserved sites, we consider that we must ensure that the future customers on a 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 that:

- customers, or future customers, should be no worse off than if the site had been supplied by the existing appointee; and
- Ofwat 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.

We clarified these two policy principles in February 2011, and updated them more recently, when we published our new appointments and variations – [policy \(2015 and 2019\)](#) and [process \(2018\)](#) documents. In December 2015, we published our '[Statement on our approach for assessing financial viability of applications for new appointments and variations](#)'. This states that we will adopt a company-based assessment of financial viability, rather than a detailed site-based assessment, where it is appropriate to do so.

When we assess whether customers will be no worse off as a result of the appointment, we not only consider the customers on the site but also the generality of customers – i.e. customers of the existing provider and customers more generally across England and Wales, who in our view benefit from the effective operation of the new appointment and variation mechanism.

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<sup>1</sup> The legal framework for new appointments is set out in the WIA91. Section 7 of the WIA91 sets out the criteria by which an appointment or variation may be made. Section 8 sets out the procedure for making that appointment or variation.

## 6. The application

Independent Water Networks has applied to be the water company for the Site under the unserved criterion, set out in section 7(4)(b) of the WIA91.

### 6.1 Unserved status of the Site

To qualify under the unserved criterion, an applicant must show that at the time the appointment is made, none of the premises in the proposed area of appointment is served by the existing appointee.

The application is to marginally increase the size of the original site so as to accommodate the development within the boundary to the Site. No additional building is planned. Northumbrian Water has provided a letter consenting to the extension of the boundary, and indicating that it considers the additional land to be unserved.

Given the information provided by the applicant and the incumbent company, we consider the Site to be unserved.

### 6.2 Protecting customers

Ofwat acts to protect consumers, especially those who are unable to choose their supplier. In assessing applications to supply new development sites, Ofwat acts on behalf of both existing customers as well as potential new customers who are not yet on site, to protect their interests. The fact that future customers on a site have not directly chosen their supplier is not a position unique to new appointments and variations – only business, charity and public sector customers (“**Business Customers**”) in England and Wales are able to choose their supplier.<sup>2</sup>

Recognising this, our assessment of an applicant’s proposals includes analysis of its plans to ensure customers will be at least no worse off in terms of their annual bills and levels of service than if they had been supplied by the existing appointee in whose geographical area the relevant site sits.

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<sup>2</sup> The majority of Business Customers where the area of the relevant appointed company is not wholly or mainly in Wales (and whose premises are, or are likely to be, supplied with at least 50 Ml where the relevant area is wholly or mainly in Wales) have been able to effectively switch suppliers of water and/or sewerage since 1 April 2017.

## 6.3 Price

Independent Water Networks has confirmed that customers on the original site will be no worse off if served by Independent Water Networks rather than Northumbrian Water (i.e. charges will be no more than those of Northumbrian Water). There are anticipated to be no additional customers as a consequence of this variation

## 6.4 Levels of service

Every appointee is required under its licence conditions to publish and make available the Core Customer Information for its household customers. We have assessed Independent Water Networks' proposed Core Customer Information, and our view is that these are of an appropriate standard. Our view is that customers on the Site would be no worse off in relation to the points covered by the above Codes of Practice and the Customer Code than they would be if Affinity Water were to be the customers' water supplier.

## 6.5 Site owner choice

Independent Water Networks has the consent of the Site developer, Bellway Homes, to become the water services provider.

## 6.6 Environment Agency (EA) and Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI)

We take the views of these organisations into account before progressing to formal consultation on an application for a new appointment. Both the EA and DWI informed us that they are content for us to consult on this application<sup>3</sup>.

## 6.7 Incumbent's existing customers

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

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<sup>3</sup> The Environment Agency and the Drinking Water Inspectorate will also be formally consulted on the proposals, as they are on the list of organisations which must be formally consulted as set out in section 8(4)(b) of WIA91.



The calculation necessarily depends on a range of assumptions, and there are clearly difficulties involved in quantifying the effect. It is therefore necessary to use a simplified set of figures. We have expressed the effect in 'per bill' terms to try to quantify the possible effect in an easily understandable way.

We have assessed the potential magnitude of this impact by comparing how much Affinity Water might have expected to receive in revenue from serving the Site directly, were they to serve the Site, with the revenues they might expect from the proposed arrangement with Independent Water Networks.

In the particular circumstances of this application, as no additional customers are anticipated, the existing customers of Affinity Water are unaffected, and there will be no annual increase on the water bills of existing Affinity Water customers if we grant this variation to Independent Water Networks.

## **6.8 Ability to finance and properly carry out its functions**

We have a statutory duty to ensure that efficient appointees can finance the proper carrying out of their functions. When a company applies for a new appointment or variation, it must satisfy us that it is able to carry out all of the duties and obligations associated with being an appointed water or sewerage company.

Independent Water Networks Limited obtained an unlimited Keepwell Agreement from its owner Brookfields UK Limited (“BUUK”) in July 2013. Independent Water Networks has confirmed that this agreement is still in place and will cover the Site. BUUK continues to hold an investment grade credit rating with Moody’s, which meets our requirements.

On this basis, our view is that Independent Water Networks would be able to finance its functions if the variation is granted.

## 7. Conclusion and next steps

In assessing Independent Water Networks' application, we have considered the general benefits of new appointments. Our view is that our two key policy principles would be met in this case, as customers would be no worse off, and Independent Water Networks would be able to finance, and carry out, its functions. We have also considered the effects of granting the proposed variation on the existing customers of Northumbrian Water.

We are currently minded to grant the variation under the unserved criterion. We are consulting on our proposal to do so.

### Where to send submissions

Any person who wishes to make representations or objections with respect to the application should do so in writing to Chris Daly at Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham, B5 4UA or by email at [Licensing@ofwat.gov.uk](mailto:Licensing@ofwat.gov.uk)

Representations must be received by Ofwat no later than 17.00 hours on 9 June 2021. Further information about how to make representations or objections, including information on the treatment of confidential information, can be obtained from Ofwat at the above address or at <http://www.ofwat.gov.uk/foi/>

Ofwat will only use the information you have provided for the purpose of this consultation. We will retain your information in accordance with Ofwat's retention schedule and will not share with third parties unless we have a legal obligation to do so. For further information please see Ofwat's Privacy Policy in our [Publication Scheme](#).

## 8. Site map



**Ofwat (The Water Services Regulation Authority)  
is a non-ministerial government department.  
We regulate the water sector in England and Wales.**

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