

May 2021

Proposal to grant a variation of appointment to Leep Networks (Water) Limited as a water and sewerage company – Whitehouse Farm, Emerson's Green, Bristol

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1. About this document

We propose granting a variation of appointment to Leep Networks (Water) Limited (“**Leep Networks**”) as a water and sewerage company and varying the appointment of Bristol Water PLC (“**Bristol Water**”) as a water company and varying the appointment of Wessex Water Services Limited (“**Wessex Water**”) as a sewerage 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

Leep Networks has applied for a variation of appointment to be able to provide water and sewerage services to a site called Whitehouse Farm, Emerson's Green (“**the Site**”). Site boundary maps can be viewed in section 8 of this document.

The Site is within the water supply and sewerage services area of Bristol Water and Wessex Water respectively.

The Site will comprise 100 residential properties and is expected to be fully built out in March 2024.

3. The applicant

Leep Utilities Water Limited was formed in 2017 as a joint venture between Peel Utilities, part of the Peel Group, and Ancala Partners LLP, an infrastructure investment manager.

In 2019, Leep Utilities Water Limited (via Leep NAV Networks Limited, a newly incorporated subsidiary of group company Leep Utilities Water Limited) informed Ofwat that it proposed to directly acquire 100% of the shares in SSE Water Limited (“SSE Water”) from SSE plc. The outcome of the acquisition, completed in June 2019 was that Leep Utilities Water Limited would own two NAV companies: Leep Water Networks Limited and SSE Water. Leep consolidated all of its existing appointments and variations into SSE Water, which has been renamed Leep Networks (Water) Limited (“Leep Networks”).

On 1 October 2007, SSE Water obtained its first appointment as a water and sewerage undertaker for a housing development called the Portway, Old Sarum in Wessex Water’s area. Since then, Ofwat agreed to vary SSE Water’s area of appointment so that it served a further 34 sites for water and/or sewerage services.

Leep Water Networks Limited previously traded as Peel Water Networks Limited (“Peel”) until July 2017. On 13 February 2009 Peel obtained its only appointment as a water and sewerage undertaker for MediaCityUK in Salford Quays. On 25 October 2018 Leep Water Networks Limited obtained its only appointment as a water and sewerage undertaker for Liverpool International Business Park.

Now trading as Leep Networks (Water) Limited, Ofwat has agreed to 2 further variation of Leep Networks’ area of appointment. In total Leep Networks now serves 38 sites for water and/or sewerage services. The register of new appointments and variations can be viewed [here](#).

4. The proposal

Ofwat proposes to:

- grant a variation of appointment to Leep Networks as a water and sewerage company; and
- vary the appointment of Bristol Water as a water company by excluding the Site from its water supply area.
- vary the appointment of Wessex Water as a sewerage company by excluding the Site from its sewerage services area.

By means of the above, Leep Networks will become the water and sewerage services supplier for the Site.

5. Our approach to the assessment of this application

The new appointment and variation ("**NAV**") mechanism, set out in primary legislation,¹ 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.

¹ 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

Leep Networks has applied to be the water and sewerage 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 or variation is made, none of the premises in the proposed area of appointment is served by the existing appointee.

Leep Networks is applying for a variation based on the unserved criterion. Leep Networks have provided letters from both the current water undertaker and the sewerage undertaker, Bristol Water and Wessex Water respectively, to confirm that the Site is unserved by each of them respectively.

The Site had farm buildings with an existing water connection and due to the building's Grade II listed status and that it is planned to be retained, the buildings were excluded from the water boundary Site. There is no sewerage connection, and this is reflected in the larger sewerage boundary on the map. Leep Networks expect the Grade II listed building to be connected to the new mains drainage services on the Site. The farm buildings associated with the rest of the Site will be demolished as per the planning layout.

Given the information provided by the applicant and the incumbent companies, we are satisfied that the Site may be considered 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.²

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.

6.3 Price

Leep Networks proposes to match the charges on the Site to the water customers of Bristol Water and the sewerage customers of Wessex Water, it will not offer a discount.

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 Leep Networks’ proposed Customer Code of Practice, and our view is that it is of an appropriate standard. Our view is that customers on the Site would be no worse off in relation to the scope of Leep Networks’ proposed Customer Code of Practice than they would be if Bristol Water or Wessex Water were to be the customers’ water and sewerage services supplier, respectively.

6.5 Site owner choice

Leep Networks has the consent of the Site developer, Taylor Wimpey UK Limited, to become the water and sewerage services provider for the Site.

² 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.

6.6 Environment Agency 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 or variation. Both the Environment Agency and DWI informed us that they are content for us to consult on this application³.

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 Bristol Water and Wessex 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. 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 Bristol Water and Wessex 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 Leep Networks.

We estimate no annual increase on the water bills of existing Bristol Water customers and £0.01 on the sewerage bills of existing Wessex Water customers if we grant this variation to Leep Networks. This is once the Site is fully built out.

This estimate does not take into account the potential spill-over benefits to customers arising from dynamic efficiencies achieved as a result of the competitive process to win sites.

Therefore we consider that granting this variation to Leep Networks would have a very small financial impact on customers' bills and could have potential benefits for customers.

³ 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.

6.8 Ability to finance and properly carry out its functions

Leep Networks applied for a company based assessment in October 2020. We consider that the current level of financial security that Leep Networks has in place meets our requirements. Leep Networks has provided copies of two letters of credit.

Following a risk assessment, we made a decision to move to a company based assessment of financial viability for Leep Networks rather than the site-by-site assessment of each individual application, provided:

- Leep Networks remains within its existing group company structure, with continuing access to intercompany loans and financial security provision;
- any NAV applications involving an associated company of Leep Networks, the appointed business, will require site-by-site financial viability assessments; and
- applications for large sites with low expected profitability will be subject to a full, site-by-site financial assessment.

This Site meets the above conditions and we have applied a company based approach to our assessment of Leep Networks' financial viability in respect of this application. We have considered the financial position of Leep Networks in relation to providing services to the Site, and we are satisfied the company demonstrates sufficient financial viability.

On the basis of the above, our view is that the Site is unlikely to have a detrimental impact on the financial viability of the company and as a result we are currently satisfied that Leep Networks would be able to finance its functions if the variation is granted.

7. Conclusion and next steps

In assessing Leep Networks' application, we have considered the general benefits of new appointments and variations. Our view is that our two key policy principles would be met in this case, as customers would be no worse off, and Leep 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 Bristol Water and Wessex 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 Amy Manfield at Centre City Tower, 7 Hill Street, Birmingham, B5 4UA or by email at Licensing@ofwat.gov.uk

Representations must be received by Ofwat no later than 17.00 hours on 3 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 maps

Water Boundary

Whitehouse Farm, Emerson's Green, Bristol
E:367738 N:177927



Sewerage Boundary

Whitehouse Farm, Emerson's Green, Bristol
E:367738 N:177927



**Ofwat (The Water Services Regulation Authority)
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We regulate the water sector in England and Wales.**

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