



PRESS RELEASE

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Arcadis supports major UK utility provider as it investigates deploying full fibre broadband safely through drinking water pipes

Amsterdam, April 13, 2022: Arcadis (EURONEXT: ARCAD) - Water pipes in parts of South Yorkshire in the UK could be used to speed up the roll-out of faster broadband without digging up roads, under UK Government plans to trial innovative new technology to boost digital connectivity across the country.

This ground-breaking project, delivered by Yorkshire Water working with Arcadis and University of Strathclyde, will test solutions involving putting fibre sensors inside the water pipes. The first trial of its kind in the UK, it will also explore how fibre can help the water industry detect and repair leaks, often before they cause a problem for consumers. This will help water companies operate more efficiently and lower the carbon cost of drinking water.

Under the proposals, fibre-optic cables would be deployed through 17 kilometres of live drinking water mains between Barnsley and Penistone, South Yorkshire, in a technology trial. Broadband companies could then tap into the network to deliver gigabit-capable connections to up to 8,500 homes and businesses along the route.

Civil works, in particular installing new ducts and poles, can make up as much as four fifths of the cost to industry of building new gigabit-capable broadband networks. The Fibre in Water scheme will demonstrate what could be a greener, quicker and more cost-effective way of connecting fibre optic cables to homes, businesses and mobile masts, without the disruption caused by digging up roads and land.

The network will also be used to set up 5G masts to bring fast and reliable wireless broadband to hard-to-reach communities where wired solutions are too expensive to deliver commercially.

Peter Oosterveer, CEO of Arcadis, said:

“This is an ambitious and ground-breaking project that will help to future-proof both water and telecommunications infrastructure, and I’m excited that Arcadis is at the forefront of developing new and scalable solutions to some of today’s most pressing challenges. Fibre in water technology will be key when it comes to finding quicker, cleaner and more cost-effective ways to ensure hard-to-reach communities can access vital broadband services, while simultaneously reducing water leaking across the network.”

Mark Harrop, Head of Telecoms at Arcadis, said:

“This kind of project is where the depth and breadth of Arcadis really comes into its own. Fibre in water technology has been around for some time, but what is missing is an operational and commercial model that meets the needs of both telecoms and water industries.

“Working in both industries, Arcadis is well positioned to help identify pain-points and develop a viable approach that will make fibre in water a realistic choice for operators delivering the UK Government’s Project Gigabit plan. What is really pleasing is that, with Yorkshire Water, we are bringing the project to South Yorkshire and Barnsley, where Arcadis recently completed a project for the Mayoral Combined Authority, developing South Yorkshire’s digital infrastructure strategy.”

Minister of State for Media, Data, and Digital Infrastructure in the UK, Julia Lopez MP, added:

“Digging up roads and land is one of the biggest obstacles to rolling out faster broadband, so we’re investing to explore how we can make use of the existing water network to accelerate deployment and also help detect and prevent water leaks.

“We’re committed to breaking down barriers to better broadband and this pioneering project is an exciting example of the bold measures this government is leading on to level up communities with top-of-the-range digital connectivity.”

Sam Bright, Innovation Programme Manager at Yorkshire Water said:

“We are pleased that the UK Government is supporting the development of the Fibre in Water solution, which can reduce the environmental impact and day-to-day disruptions that can be caused by both water and telecoms companies’ activities.

“The technology for fibre in water has significantly progressed in recent years and this project will now enable us to fully develop its potential to help improve access to better broadband in hard-to-reach areas and further reduce leakage on our networks.”

The first phase of the project will focus on the legal and safety aspects of this innovative solution. It will ensure that combining clean water and telecoms services in a single pipeline is safe, secure and commercially viable before any technology is actually installed.

If successful, the project could be replicated in other parts of the country and could turbocharge the UK government’s £5 billion Project Gigabit plan to level up broadband access in hard-to-reach areas.

In the UK, 20 per cent of water put into public supply is wasted due to leaks every day. With current technology, it can be difficult for water companies to quickly identify the exact location of a leak and carry out a repair.

Water companies in the UK have committed to delivering a 50% reduction in leakage, and this project could help to reach that goal. The materials that will come into contact with the water supply have been approved for use in the UK, and they have already been deployed in water pipes in other countries such as Spain.

The trials will last for up to two years and, if successful, the technology could be operational in networks from 2024 onwards.

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