Project Restore plan for 2022

- New interim mast to be switched on
- More than 100,000 homes to receive improved TV signal
- Engineers to help those people in areas where aerial repointing is needed
- Plans under way for huge construction project to build a new, permanent Bilsdale Mast.

Arqiva, the operator of the Bilsdale Mast in North Yorkshire, today set out the next phase of its engineering programme for 2022 to restore TV services following the fire at the transmitter last August.

The work completed so far during **Project Restore** has included the construction of a temporary mast at Bilsdale and 13 relay sites across the region to improve service quality. That work has enabled almost 98% of households in the transmission area to receive free-to-air public service broadcast programming, and more relay sites will soon follow.

We are sorry for the disruption to services which the fire has caused, and are committed to restoring services as quickly as possible and supporting those who are affected.

To date, Arqiva has also provided support which includes:

- Nearly 17,000 calls to the dedicated freephone helpline: **0800 121 4828**
- More than 3,750 home visits carried out by engineers
- Over 167,000 visits to **bilsdalemast.co.uk**
- More than 6,800 vouchers worth £50 claimed towards the cost of TV streaming devices.

Interim mast to be switched on

Arqiva now plans a series of operational steps in 2022 in the next phase of Project Restore, the programme to restore all services to the region. The switch on of a second, more resilient, **interim mast** will take place next month following planned testing. This will be used throughout the extensive construction work on the new, permanent replacement for Bilsdale mast.

This second, 80-metre interim mast will mean improved TV signals for more than 100,000 households across the region. The mast will also be more robust and reliable in bad weather.

The exact location of the interim mast and the terrain of the North York Moors means that when the switch over happens this month a “signal shadow” will be created where the line of sight is interrupted. The majority of the homes affected will be along a strip of the County Durham coast.

The switch is unfortunately likely to mean a loss of service for some homes. We have written to around 2,500 households which are potentially affected, and our planners predict that half of these (approximately 1,250 homes) rely on Freeview services and will lose their TV signal as a

result of the switchover. **Homes which use Sky, Virgin and Freesat services will not be affected by the switchover**.

As a solution, Arqiva will provide engineers free of charge to help repoint aerials on homes. This will mean people can continue to receive TV signals and have a better long-term aerial set-up. In many cases this will be from another Arqiva-operated transmitter in the North-East, at Pontop Pike.

Households in these known “not spots” have been sent letters explaining the potential impact. The letters ask people to call the dedicated freephone helpline on **0800 121 4828** so that, if necessary, engineers can visit homes to repoint their aerials as quickly as possible. If other solutions are not available then, where appropriate, Freesat systems can be installed.

Additional transmitter sites have been switched on in Seaham and Sunderland to provide an alternative source of coverage for local households. Another, in Blackhall, is being explored.

The support will also include a touring Project Restore vehicle in County Durham, starting later this month. Teams on the mobile TV help clinic will provide advice, help and information directly to people in the areas affected. Arqiva is, as ever, committed to helping those who are affected across the region and will liaise closely with local authorities and others around the plans and support being made available.

Constructing the permanent replacement for Bilsdale mast

Arqiva has applied for planning permission to commence the building of the new permanent transmitter mast at Bilsdale. The new mast will be 303 metres tall, and will involve teams of more than 100 workers.

The construction of a **new Bilsdale Mast** in North Yorkshire, which will become one of the UK’s tallest structures and is only a few metres smaller than The Shard in London, is a significant engineering challenge. The scale and complexity of the project in a remote and environmentally-sensitive location, using a bespoke design, along with the impact of the weather at the moor top site, mean the finish date for the project has to be an estimate.

A construction project of this scale and complexity might usually take 18-24 months, but Arqiva is working hard with others – for example, steel suppliers in the UK – to reduce that timescale in a safe and effective manner. If planning permission is granted quickly and work commences as scheduled then it is hoped the new Bilsdale Mast will be in place by early autumn 2022 and will become operational between then and spring 2023.

Design and construction of such a large structure is a specialist activity. Arqiva is actively engaging with **local suppliers and manufacturers** in the region to provide a range of services for the construction project, and discussions with firms are continuing. Local firms and suppliers

have already been heavily involved in the response to the Bilsdale fire and the intensive work which has followed.

A detailed, forensic investigation into the cause of the fire last August has been continuing over recent months, and it is expected that an update on that will be provided in the coming weeks.

Residents can visit bilsdalemast.co.uk to find out more on plans and progress, or they can call the helpline on **0800 121 4828** for advice and support.

Shuja Khan, Chief Commercial Officer of Arqiva, said; “We want to restore and improve services to people across the region as quickly as possible, and today we have set out more details and likely timescales through 2022, including a huge construction project to permanently replace the old Bilsdale Mast.

“While we are making real progress, we also know that this work can cause disruption, and that is frustrating for many viewers and listeners. We are working hard with our partners to restore services, and to support those people whose services are affected.”

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