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MAINS REPLACEMENT SAVES MORE THAN A MILLION LITRES A DAY

New figures from Thames Water show the company's project to replace ageing mains pipes in Bethnal Green is saving 1,360,000 litres of water a day enough to supply 8,500 people.

The £6.6m project, which was completed in April 2003, involved work to replace Victorian mains with 19.5 kilometres of new plastic pipes. Improvements were also made to the way pipes in the area are connected, so that supplies are delivered more efficiently.

Data from meters fitted to the new mains show that the amount of water lost through leaks in the area has been massively reduced. The number of bursts locally has also fallen, lessening interruptions to supplies and the need for repair work.

Mark Simister, Thames Water's Project Manager, said: "Bethnal Green was the first area in London to get brand new pipes to reduce water loss, and the project was the forerunner for similar work in several other areas.

"Before the improvements were completed the area ranked among the highest in the capital for leakage. Now it is one of the lowest."

Thames Water has replaced over 120 miles of London's water mains since 2002 in the first systematic programme of pipe renewal in the capital since Victorian times. Half of the city's water mains are over 100 years old, while one third are over 150.

In addition to their age, London's mains have deteriorated as a result of the capital's clay soil, which has a corrosive effect on the pipes, and is particularly susceptible to movement as a result of rainfall and changes in temperature. The city's 24-hour traffic puts an additional strain on the mains.

The company plans to renew a further 850 miles of pipework by 2010, at a cost of £540m.