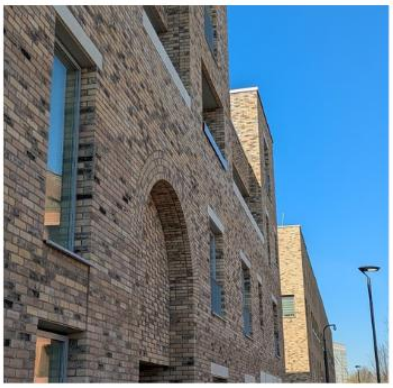
ACTION FOR ENFIELD'S FUTURE

MERIDIAN WATER UPDATE

JULY 2025

















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Summary

This report highlights concerns about the regeneration of Meridian Water.

- **Jobs for local people**: The Council's commitment to ensure regeneration of Meridian Water will deliver high-quality jobs for local people is not being met.
- **Homes for local people**: The Council's commitment that the local Edmonton community would be the principal beneficiaries of new homes at Meridian Water does not appear to be being met.
- **Support for community groups**: Most of the money in the Community Chest fund, intended to support local community groups, has not been distributed. Furthermore, the Council has not reported how money already distributed to local groups has been used.
- **Working with community groups:** The Council is not working with community groups to try to increase publicly accessible green space in the area i.e. the Banbury Reservoir Park.
- **Project management**: The Council appears to have lost control of the project, with no up-to-date Master Plan and uncertainty about when housing and job targets will be achieved.
- **Misleading the Scrutiny Panel:** Some aspects of the report provided to a Scrutiny Panel in March 2025 could have misled them.
- **Social Value Washing**: There are examples of 'social value washing,' where the Council appears to have presented itself as socially responsible without genuine action to back it up.

Background

1. Meridian Water is Enfield Council's £6-billion flagship regeneration project; since 2018 the Council has said it will deliver 10,000 new homes and 6,000 jobs within 20-25 years.

2. The Council is in the unusual position of owning most of the developable land at Meridian Water, as well as being the Local Planning Authority and Master Developer for the scheme.

3. Delivery has not met expectations; in 2010 the Council adopted a Core Strategy based on the scheme delivering 2,995 homes by 2024/25, however, only around 270 were completed.

4. Initially, the Council suggested costs for the scheme's strategic infrastructure (e.g. roads) would largely be met via developer contributions. However, central government and the GLA, have subsequently needed to provide around £200 million in funding.

5. By 2023/24, the Council had borrowed a further £441 million to fund the scheme, which will need to be repaid from land receipts. However, slow progress means these receipts cannot be realised, exposing the Council to significant financial risks.

6. In March 2025, Enfield Council's Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel received an update about the scheme from the Director of Meridian Water (Penny Halliday) and Leader of the Council (Cllr Ergin Erbil). 'Action For Enfield's Future' were pleased to see this item on the meeting's agenda but felt the accompanying report did not adequately address key issues.

7. We wrote to Panel Members to express our concerns ahead of the meeting and provided 44 questions covering 14 areas, which we thought needed to be addressed (Appendix A):

    - Housing Delivery
    - Meridian 13
    - The Meridian Water Masterplan
    - Employment
    - Community Chest
    - Strategic Infrastructure Works
    - Car Parking
    - Skate Park
    - Energy Use
    - Banbury Reservoir Park
    - Arriva Edmonton Bus Garage
    - Council Land Acquisitions
    - Community Infrastructure
    - Troubadour Meridian Water Studios

8. We recognised that this was a lot of questions but explained this was because opportunities to raise questions about Meridian Water are rare. Furthermore, most of our

questions related to matters officers should have already known answers to, so we assumed would not be too onerous to respond to.

9. Panel Members welcomed the questions and at the meeting asked officers to answer them in writing. The answers were received in late June 2025. This document provides a commentary to the answers received.

Getting the answers took far too long.

10. We are grateful to Panel Members for asking the Director of Meridian Water to answer our questions, however, it took **63 working days to get the response**. To put this into context, this is **three times longer than the maximum lawful limit for responding to Freedom of Information requests**.

Most questions were not properly answered.

11. In our view, **only 18 of the 44 questions were properly answered**. Most responses say the question will be answered in a subsequent report, or do not properly address the question. The answers we were given are provided in Appendix B of this report.

12. We are concerned **this approach reflects a pattern of behaviour**. In 2020, a Council scrutiny panel raised multiple concerns about Meridian Water. The response from the then Leader (Cllr Nesil Caliskan) and Meridian Water Programme Director (Peter George) was that many of these concerns would be addressed in a forthcoming updated Master Plan. However, the updated Master Plan was never published.

Some answers were concerning.

13. Some of the answers suggest the Council is **not on top of the project**, is **failing to keep important commitments to the community**, and that **the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Panel may have been misled**. We have provided examples below.

Commitments regarding jobs for local people are not being kept.

Permanent Jobs

14. The Council told the local community that the regeneration of Meridian Water will "*create 6,000 permanent, high quality jobs paying London Living Wage or above, of which no less than 25% will be from local labour*". However, the Council's answers reveal they are not monitoring how many permanent jobs the scheme has created, details about payment levels, or whether people from the local community are being employed (see their response to Q4.1). **Therefore, the Council cannot know whether it is meeting its commitments to the local community.**

Construction Jobs

15. Since 2020, the Council has claimed the regeneration of Meridian Water will create 1,000 construction jobs annually, sustained over 25-years. However, the answers provided show **the total number of construction jobs created to date is 1,212, considerably less than the claimed 1,000 jobs annually** (Q4.3). Furthermore, the Council's response suggests the construction jobs are not sustained employment (Q4.4).

16. The Council said no less than 25% of construction jobs would be from local labour and would include well paid accessible entry level positions, as well as higher paid and highly skilled professional roles. However, the answers show the Council is not monitoring how many local people are being employed in the construction jobs, or salary bands. **Therefore, the Council cannot know whether its commitments regarding construction jobs for local people or the quality and mix of these jobs are being kept** (Q4.3).



Figure 1 - Image shows ongoing construction work at Meridian Two July 2025, which received outline planning approval in March 2020. It is unclear how many local people are employed in the construction of Meridian Water.

17. Similar concerns were raised by a Council Scrutiny Panel in 2020. The Council's response at the time was, "*We have used both the contract with Vistry and the S106 agreement to ensure that 25% local labour is used on site …*". **We therefore question why the Council failing to ensure this contractual requirement and important commitment to local people is delivered?**

18. We are also concerned about the recent Meridian Water Newsletter (Issues 5, Summer 2025), which claims "*653 local people have secured roles on the Meridian One construction project*", and yet the Council's answers provided to us and the Scrutiny Committee suggest they do not have this information and therefore do not know how many local people have been employed in construction roles (Q4.3).

Meanwhile Jobs

19. The Council has also committed to delivering 1,000 new high-quality jobs through Meanwhile Employment Uses on land intended for redevelopment. However, the Council's

answers suggest just 247 genuine meanwhile jobs have been created and that they do not know whether these are "high quality". [1]

20. The Meridian Water Employment Strategy, approved by the Council in 2020, says:

"*We will engage with our existing and potential future tenants to record and regularly report on the jobs and skills development activities of our commercial occupiers, including exploring the development of a Local Employment and Skills Charter, which sets out the broad principles our occupiers will adhere to, in order to optimise the delivery of jobs and training opportunities for Enfield Residents*."

21. We are now over five-years on from this commitment, yet, as far as we are aware, **the Council has not provided the regular reports promised, nor developed a Local Employment and Skills Charter.**

22. In 2020, the Council said new temporary studios at Meridian Water would create "*up to 50 new jobs straightaway*" rising to 450. However, according to the Council's answers, 32 people were employed full-time at the studios in 2021/22, **declining to three recently** (Q14.4).



Figure 2 – Image shows temporary studio structures at Meridian Water (April 2025). The number of people employed at the studios is well below expectations.

[1] *Note: We excluded jobs associated with the previous Ikea site as we do not currently believe these qualify as regular or high quality meanwhile jobs, and because the site is not included as part of the Council's meanwhile employment strategy. Furthermore, construction jobs are not part of the meanwhile jobs calculation, so we believe it is misleading for the Council to include them in its response (Q4.4).

23. These issues with meanwhile employment are important; firstly because of the pressing need for jobs locally, and secondly because of the large amount of money the Council has spent developing its Meanwhile Strategy e.g. on the 'Meridian Water Meanwhile Masterplan' which was completed in May 2021. This extensive document sets out guiding principles to steer meanwhile employment opportunities at Meridian Water. The problem is that key elements of the strategy do not appear to have been delivered, and we are concerned that they may never be delivered.

24. We think there are questions to answer about the value for money of the Council's Meanwhile Strategy, its management and delivery, and important questions regarding who is, and who is not, benefitting from this expenditure. Specifically, in our opinion, the team responsible for Meridian Water should set-out how many local people have gained employment and the type/quality of this employment.

25. **In short, the Council has repeatedly said Meridian Water will provide a wide variety of much needed new high-quality jobs for Edmonton residents; it is both disappointing and concerning that they are not checking whether these commitments are being kept.**

26. To address these issues, the following recommendations are made:

- Conduct regular and detailed audits of job creation to ensure commitments to the local community are being met.
- Provide public reports on the beneficiaries of new jobs, including data on the number of jobs created, job quality, and the employment of local people.

Commitments about homes for local people are not being kept.

27. The Council has repeatedly stated that **Edmonton residents will be the main beneficiaries of the new homes built at Meridian Water**. For example, the Council said Meridian One would deliver "*world class dwellings for families in Edmonton*." [2]

28. In 2020 the then Council Leader and the Programme Director wrote to the Panel and stated:

[2] https://www.enfield.gov.uk/news-and-events/spades-in-the-ground-as-the-first-phase-of-meridia

"*Meridian Water is a unique major regeneration programme in London, being designed around and for local people. Enfield Council is committed to ensuring that local people will be the principle [sic] beneficiaries of the growth generated by the project. 'Local' is defined as the neighbourhood of Edmonton which in turn is defined in terms of the three Edmonton wards: Upper Edmonton, Edmonton Green and Lower Edmonton*." [3]

29. However, the answers to our questions suggest there is no monitoring taking place to check whether sales of "affordable" or market tenure homes are to Edmonton residents. The answers indicate three-quarters of "affordable" sales (i.e. shared ownership properties) have been acquired by households from outside Enfield (Q1.6).



Figure 3 – Image shows progress at Meridian 1a (July 2025)
The Council does not appear to know how many new homes have been purchased by Edmonton residents.

30. **Therefore, the Council does not seem to know whether residents from Upper Edmonton, Edmonton Green and Lower Edmonton are benefitting from these homes. The Council should not claim the people of Edmonton will be the principal beneficiaries of new homes but then fail to monitor the number acquired by them.**

[3] https://governance.enfield.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=107&MId=13564 (Meridian Water Scrutiny Report - Response from The Leader, 15/09/2020 Overview & Scrutiny Committee , item 6)

Many households appear to have refused offers of homes.

31. Additionally, many households appear to have refused offers of homes at Meridian Water. Three tower blocks in Edmonton have been closed recently for safety reasons, two of which were immediately adjacent to the Meridian Water site. As a result, approximately 330 Social Rent tenant households needed to be re-housed.

32. The Council's responses say all these households were offered homes at Meridian Water, but that only 15-16 accepted (Q1.7). **This begs the question: why are so many households turning down an offer of a home at Meridian Water?**



Figure 4 – Image shows apartments at Meridian 1a nearing completion but little progress on Phase 1b (April 2024). Many households appear to have turned down an offer of a home at Meridian Water.

33. To address these issues, the following recommendations are made:

- Investigate why households are turning down an offer of a home at Meridian Water.
- Conduct regular audits of home sales to ensure commitments to the local community are being met.
- Provide public reports on the beneficiaries of new homes, including data on the number of homes acquired by Edmonton residents.

Car parking requires more thought.

34. During site visits, we observed cars double parked and parked on the pavement, blocking access to the Hoppa Play and Skate Park. We asked the Council what they are doing to address this, to ensure the estate remains child/pedestrian/cycle friendly and safe. In response, the Council says it is seeking to put a parking enforcement regime in place "to prevent erroneous parking at the estate" (Q7.1).

35. The latest Summer 2025 Meridian Water Newsletter says "*All on street parking will be managed by Enfield Council through parking permits. All residents can apply for a parking permit (one permit per property), however note the parking spaces are on a first come first serve basis.*" According to a council report, there will only be around 120 car parking spaces available for 300 homes. **It therefore appears the Council is planning to limit car parking spaces but not permits**. Given this, we suggest the Council considers limiting parking permits to reflect the number of spaces available, alongside proactive management of parking, to help avoid the streets and footpaths being blocked.



Figure 5 – Image shows apartments at Meridian 1a (July 2025).
The cars to the left are parked on the pavement blocking access to the park and the bins block access to the pathway.

It is unclear who will pay for the maintenance of the new park.

36. We are concerned about who is responsible for paying for the upkeep of the new park at Meridian Water ("Hoppa Play and Skate Park"). Price lists for the new homes show, for example, that a 2-bed flat costing £450,000 also has expected annual service charges of £1,910, **plus estimated annual estate management fees of £455**. We believe the estate management fee may include costs for the maintenance of the public park. The issue is that if the Council has not adopted the new area, then responsibility passes to a third-party management company and residents could end up paying council tax *plus* estate management fees. Furthermore, these charges can potentially increase at any time, sometimes with no accountability or redress.

37. We asked whether the new park would be paid for by new residents as part of their estate management fee and if so, how much will residents be charged and how much is allocated to the maintenance of the park(s)? We also wanted to know whether estate management fees could be a barrier to purchase. However, **the Council did not properly answer the question (**Q8.1).



Figure 5 – Image of the new park (October 2024).
It is unclear who will be paying for the maintenance of this new public park.

Money earmarked for the local community has not been distributed.

38. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge local authorities can impose on new developments. It enables councils to raise money for things like schools, transport, healthcare, parks, and other community facilities. It is a fee developers pay to help mitigate the impact of their projects on local infrastructure. A portion, known as Neighbourhood CIL, may be spent on non-infrastructure items within a local area, often with community input.

39. Enfield Council charges CIL on most developments, however, it is not charged for most of the new properties within the Meridian Water masterplan area. The amount of lost CIL funding is already hundreds of thousands of pounds. The loss of CIL money is partly offset by something called the **Community Chest**. In 2021, Meridian Water developers handed over nearly a million pounds to the Council as money to be distributed to the local community – this money is referred to as the "Community Chest".

40. The answers to our questions reveal the Council still has £622,000 of Community Chest money i.e. money specifically paid to the Council to be awarded to local community groups (Q5.1). **The Community Chest money should have been passed on to local community organisations, however, by March 2025 only around a third had been distributed.**

41. Furthermore, the Council's responses show that this money has been left sitting idle in its accounts (Q5.4). As a result, it is now worth less than it was four years ago – holding on to this money in this way could potentially represent around £100k of lost value. **This appears to be a waste of public money, particularly as most of the Community Chest money should have already been distributed to local community groups.**

42. We are pleased a new round of Community Chest funding has recently been announced, however, we think this may have been a reaction to a Better Homes Enfield article "Where Has £650,000 of Meridian Water Community Chest Money Gone?", not a pro-active action.

We are concerned about the management of the Community Chest.

43. It is important that the Council monitors how the Community Chest money is used and its impact. When the Community Chest was established, one condition was that "... *in terms of outputs, outcomes, value for money and expenditure, an annual report will be published*."

44. We asked the Council what had happened to the annual reports regarding the £350,0000 already awarded to community groups, and their response suggest the Director of Meridian Water had changed the rules regarding reporting (Q5.2).

45. **It therefore seems the Council has distributed large sums of money but not reported how this money was used, or its impact, or the value for money it achieved.**

46. The numerous risks and problems associated with this approach to reporting how large amounts of public money is spent are obvious, and not what was agreed when the Community Chest was established.

47. To address these issues, the following recommendations are made:

- Conduct regular audits of the Community Chest fund to ensure the money is being distributed as intended.
- Provide public reports on the allocation and impact of the Community Chest money, including data on the specific projects and activities funded and their outcomes.

The Council appears to have lost control of the project.

48. Reading through the Council's responses, there is a sense they have lost control of the scheme. They do not appear to know when detailed planning applications will be coming forward on their own sites, let alone when land owned by Ikea, Tesco and Arriva might be redeveloped, if ever (Q1.1, Q1.2, Q1.8, Q11.1-11.3, Q12.1-12.2).

49. The Council's ambitions for Meridian Water have changed significantly from those set out in the current Master Plan that was approved 12-years ago, in 2013.

50. Having an evidence-based, up-to-date, and approved Master Plan is necessary for the scheme's successful delivery and to guide the expenditure of public money.

51. Since 2020, the Council has repeatedly committed to publishing and consulting the public about a new Master Plan and has spent a huge amount of public money developing it. However, the Master Plan has not been published. When asked when it would be published, the answer was evasive (Q3.2).

52. There are two possibilities, either the Council has an up-to-date Master Plan but has broken its commitment to consult the public and others about it, or it does not have an up-to-date Master Plan for the scheme. In the latter case, what has the money developing the Master Plan been spent on, and what Plan is the Council and its partners working to?

53. Furthermore, the answers show that there is considerable uncertainty regarding when the 10,000 homes housing target and 6,000 jobs will be achieved, if ever. Despite this, there appears to be no contingency planning regarding the impact this could have on the Council's repayment of its debts (Q1.3). **We are concerned - given the scale of debt - that the Council could be creating a major financial problem which could take generations to resolve; it may well be our children and our children's children who will be left to pick up the pieces.**

54. To address these issues, the following recommendations are made:

- Provide regular updates on the status of the Master Plan and ensure public consultation is conducted as promised.
- Develop and implement contingency plans to mitigate financial risks associated with the project's delays and uncertainties.
- Improve project management practices to ensure better control and oversight of the scheme, including regular progress reports and transparent communication with stakeholders.

The Council is not working with community groups to try to increase publicly accessible green space in the area.

55. In our view, nowhere near enough publicly accessible green space has been planned for at Meridian Water and the proposed 6-hectare park called Edmonton Marshes, is completely inadequate for the scale and type of high-density development being delivered.

56. To address this, local community groups and CPRE London proposed using fenced off and underutilised green belt land adjacent to Meridian Water to increase the availability of green space at Meridian Water and to create a new country park for the area. This is particularly important as the local area has a significant deficit of accessible green space and is difficult to navigate on foot or by bike. Engagement activity conducted by Enfield Climate Action Forum (EnCaf) showed a very high degree of support for the proposed park and a wealth of exciting ideas put forward by the local community.

57. Given this, we asked what officers are doing to engage with the local community groups about the proposed new park for Edmonton, and what action they were taking to support its delivery (Q10.1). **The response was extremely underwhelming as it suggested the officers have no intention of engaging with the local community about improving access to green space and to help facilitate the delivery of the park**.

Some aspects of the report provided to the Scrutiny Panel could be misleading.

<u>Employment from local labour</u>

58. The presentation to the Scrutiny Panel stated that 25% of employment would be from local labour. This claim is misleading because the Council is not collecting the necessary information to ensure this commitment is kept. Without accurate data on local employment and job quality, it is impossible to verify whether the Council is meeting its commitments.

Social Value

59. Additionally, the Council's responses indicate that they do not know how many jobs have been lost due to the scheme, such as when land was cleared of manufacturing businesses several years ago (Q4.2).

60. Understanding job losses is a vital for measuring the scheme's success, as neither the uplift in jobs nor the scheme's genuine "social value" can accurately be established without this information.

61. In 2020, the Council estimated between 1,500 and 2,500 jobs may have been lost or displaced due to the regeneration of Meridian Water. **This could represent a significant social value loss in salaries, we estimate this could be between £202 million and £338 million over the last five years alone**, assuming employees are paid the London Living Wage.

62. The update report provided to the Scrutiny Panel stated that the total social value achieved to date is £57,077,064.14. However, this figure does not appear to account for the social value losses associated with job displacement, which, if factored in, would result in a negative social value for the scheme.

63. To address these issues, the following recommendations are made:

- Conduct regular audits of employment data to ensure commitments to local labour are being met.
- Provide public reports on job creation and quality, including data on job losses and their impact on social value.
- Improve transparency and accountability by ensuring reports to the Scrutiny Panel are backed by accurate and verifiable data.

There are examples of "social value washing".

64. 'Social value washing' refers to the practice of companies or organisations falsely presenting themselves as socially responsible to enhance their reputation, without a genuine commitment to social good or failing to follow through on their promises. It is similar to 'greenwashing,' but focuses on social impact rather than environmental issues. This can involve overstating positive social impacts, downplaying negative ones, or making empty claims without real action. There are, we believe, examples of social value washing at Meridian Water.

65. The Council repeatedly claims local people will be the primary beneficiaries of Meridian Water. For example, the report provided to Panel Members in March 2025 stated that "*Enfield Council has taken a master developer role, investing over £400m of council money and resources to shape the new neighbourhood and ensure that local people are the principal beneficiaries of the new homes and jobs that will be created*."

66. The Council has also repeatedly said Edmonton residents will be the primary beneficiaries of the regeneration of Meridian Water, including of the new homes and jobs.

67. However, answers to our questions show the Council is not monitoring how many Edmonton residents are employed at Meridian Water, or the quality of the jobs provided. Therefore, the Council's claim that at least 25% of jobs will be for residents and that these will be "high quality" appear empty and not backed by genuine action. Likewise, the Council is not monitoring how many "affordable" shared ownership homes are acquired by Edmonton residents.

68. The Council also appears to be downplaying some negative aspects, such as the jobs lost because of the scheme and the impact of this on local businesses and residents, and that most "affordable" shared ownership homes have been sold to people from outside Enfield.

69. As we argued earlier, the Council also appears to have overstated the scheme's positive impacts in terms of its social value. There are other examples of this; for example, in 2021 the Council said up to 450 people per year would be trained and employed at a Troubadour Skills Academy and up to 810 residents per year would be trained at a Construction Skills Academy. However, the Troubadour Skills Academy has not materialised and roughly 225

"learners" per year on average have attended a course at the Construction Skills Academy, far below 810 per year. The number of learners who are 'residents' does not appear to have been reported.

70. The Council has linked the regeneration of Meridian Water to the challenges faced by Edmonton residents in terms of poverty, deprivation, and financial and health inequalities. Addressing these challenges has on occasion framed the Council's justification for the regeneration of Meridian Water and its publicity. It is therefore troubling that it is not checking whether commitments made to the Edmonton community aimed at tackling these challenges are being kept. In our view, this gives the impression that the Council is using the poverty and inequality experienced by residents for its own ends (e.g. to justify the scheme and to help generate positive publicity) but is not genuinely committed to resolving these challenges.

71. To address these issues, the following recommendations are made:

- Conduct regular audits of social value claims to ensure they are accurate and genuine.
- Provide public reports on the actual social impacts of the project, including data on job creation, job quality, and the beneficiaries of new homes, as well as job losses.

Overall Recommendations

1. **Quarterly Reporting**: Publish quarterly reports on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on the Meridian Water website, including commitments made to the local community. This will ensure transparency and keep the public informed about the project's progress.
2. **Regular Public Meetings**: Hold regular public meetings to review progress and establish strategies for delivering key commitments. These meetings will provide a platform for community engagement and feedback.
3. **Dedicated Scrutiny Panel**: Establish a dedicated cross-party scrutiny panel with a fixed membership. Given the scale, complexity, and importance of the Meridian Water project, this panel will have the time needed to understand and engage with the scheme in sufficient depth and detail and to scrutinise the project on the public's behalf and with input from interested parties.
4. **Annual Report**: The new scrutiny panel should deliver an annual report on key aspects of the scheme, including the delivery of homes, jobs, and infrastructure. This report will provide a comprehensive overview of the project's achievements and areas for improvement.
5. **Community Chest Fund Review**: Conduct an urgent review of the management of the Community Chest fund. This review will ensure that the fund is being used effectively to support local community groups and initiatives.

ABOUT ACTION FOR ENFIELD'S FUTURE

Action For Enfield's Future is a non-political community group with members from across Enfield including representatives from The Enfield Society, Better Homes Enfield, Enfield Climate Action Forum (EnCaf), Enfield Over 50s Forum and Enfield RoadWatch.