

An architectural rendering of a modern urban development. The central focus is a tall, curved skyscraper with a white facade and dark window bands. To its right is another tall building with a grid-like facade and vertical copper-colored accents. In the foreground, there are several shorter buildings with similar architectural styles. The scene includes a street with trees, a pedestrian walkway, and a small blue building with a white roof. The background shows a mix of greenery and other urban structures.

# Where is the Meridian Water Masterplan?

September 2022

# Where is the Meridian Water Masterplan?

Publishing a new Meridian Water Masterplan has been a ‘corporate priority’ for Enfield Council since 2018. By July 2020, the council had spent £1.2 million of public funds on developing the plan. Despite repeated promises, the Council has still not published the new Masterplan, leaving the development’s future direction unclear.

## 1. About Median Water

Enfield Council describes Meridian Water as a £6bn, 25-year London regeneration programme that will bring 10,000 homes and 6,000 jobs to Enfield, although there is considerable evidence that this claim is not realistic. <sup>[i]</sup>

Publishing a new Meridian Water Masterplan has been a corporate priority for the Council since it decided to become master developer for the scheme in 2018, following the collapse of negotiations with potential master developers (Barratt Homes, and Pacific Century Premium Developments). <sup>[ii]</sup>

As master developer, the Council is responsible for “setting the overall vision, taking the strategic planning role, acquiring land, delivering transport and social infrastructure, estate management, and appointing partners to deliver the home and employment projects.” There are potential benefits to the Council taking on this role (e.g. control over the vision and what gets delivered), but also potential risks, including very high levels of financial exposure that the Council has to manage. <sup>[iv] 1</sup>

Projects of this scale require a ‘masterplan,’ which is an evidence-based document that sets the overall vision and aims of a development. The masterplan helps to ensure that a development will deliver the type of housing, transportation, jobs, and community facilities (e.g. schools, restaurants, shops, parks, health, and leisure facilities) needed. It sets the priorities for action and acts as a framework, illustrating what will be built within each area of the development site over a period of time (e.g. project phasing and milestones). The masterplan is a key document for managing budgets and attracting investment, and also for encouraging local community engagement.

It is particularly important for the Meridian Water development to have an up-to-date masterplan because it is being led by a local authority, which is very unusual for a project of this scale and requires an enormous expenditure of public funds and significant risks to council finances.

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1 The Council has committed over £800 million to the project. The Council spends around £7million per year to pay interest on the loans associated with the project. At the time of writing, the Council’s 2019-20 accounts have still not been finalised due in part to problems valuing land at Meridian Water. The council has committed to selling off other land/property it owns to shore up its finances. <sup>[A]</sup>

## 2. Masterplan Delays

The current Meridian Water Masterplan was adopted in 2013, five years before the Council took on the master developer role and has been out of date for a number of years. The current 2013 Masterplan is based on the scheme delivering 5,000 homes and 3,000 jobs. <sup>[i]</sup>

The Council has been referring to a new masterplan for Meridian Water for over four years, but it has still not been published. Since 2018, the Council has said that the development will deliver 10,000+ new homes and 6,000 jobs.

### 2018

In July 2018, Enfield Council said that delivering a new Median Water Masterplan was a “corporate priority” which would help to attract inward investment and support sustainable regeneration and growth in the borough. <sup>[ii]</sup>

In December 2018, Council officers wrote to a Planning Inspector and said that the “upcoming Meridian Water Masterplan” would be based on a residential development of 5,000 units, which was contrary to the Council’s own publicity about the scheme. <sup>[iii]</sup>

### 2019

In January 2019, the Council reported that officers and the Council’s professional advisors were conducting extensive work and testing on the masterplan and delivery strategy, in order to inform the financial papers which would be brought to Cabinet later in the year. <sup>[iv]</sup> The report to Cabinet in October 2019 said the masterplan would be completed between 2019-2022. <sup>[v]</sup>

A number of companies and professional consultants were appointed to work on the Masterplan in November 2019, with an aim of the plan being ready for consultation in 2021-22. <sup>[vi]</sup>

### 2020

By July 2020, the Council had already spent £1.2 million on developing the new Masterplan. <sup>[vii]</sup>

In September 2020, the Council said the new Masterplan will be a “critical evidence piece to inform new area-based policies for Meridian Water in the new Local Plan” and delivered in 2020-21. <sup>[viii]</sup>

In June 2020, the Council’s Meridian Water Scrutiny Workstream raised a number of serious concerns about the development. In a written response (October 2020), the Leader of the Council

(Nesil Caliskan) and the Meridian Water Director (Peter George) claimed that the Workstream’s concerns were unfounded because they had been addressed in the new Masterplan, which would be published and subject to public consultation. However, the new Masterplan has never been published and the concerns remain largely unresolved. <sup>[ix]</sup> 2

## 2021

In March 2021, the Regeneration & Economic Development Scrutiny Panel was informed that “the plan will be ready for consultation later this year.” <sup>[x]</sup>

The Council’s Draft Local Plan was published in June 2021 and stated that “planning permission for individual phases must conform with a masterplan for the whole placemaking area” – however, there was no published up-to-date Masterplan to refer to. <sup>[xi]</sup>

In October 2021, the Environment & Climate Action Scrutiny Panel was told that the Masterplan would be taken to the Cabinet (published) next summer (2022). <sup>[xii]</sup> 3

In November 2021, the Regeneration & Economic Development Scrutiny Panel was informed that “the Masterplan is undergoing financial review and will be brought forward to Cabinet for approval to consult in summer 2022”. <sup>[xiii]</sup> 4

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*2 The Meridian Water Scrutiny Workstream was discontinued – there is no longer any Council scrutiny function that focusses solely on Meridian Water, which is surprising given the enormity of the development, the public funds at stake, and the risk to the Council. Scrutiny of the Meridian Water development has now been subsumed into other panels, which in effect has removed almost all in-depth and detailed scrutiny of the development.*

*3 A scrutiny report written and supported by the majority of members of the Environment & Climate Action Scrutiny Panel about Meridian Water was allegedly blocked from publication by the Council in 2021. The report is said to highlight “serious shortcomings” regarding the £6.5billion council-led scheme’s impact on air and water quality, flooding, climate change and available green space”. <sup>[B]</sup> The Council was accused of suppressing a further scrutiny report about Meridian Water in 2022. <sup>[C]</sup>*

*4 There was a lot of frustration at this meeting; some members were under the impression that they would be discussing the draft of the new Meridian Water Masterplan, but instead they were just asked their opinion about what should be in it and were not given an opportunity to discuss key issues such as housing. <sup>[D]</sup>*

## 2022

Summer 2022 has come and gone, but the new Meridian Water Masterplan has not been published.

The papers that accompanied the July 2022 Cabinet meeting stated that an “*overview of the Meridian Water Masterplan Vison [sic]*” would be brought to Cabinet in September 2022 to “*seek approval for its direction of travel and refinement*”. Such ambivalent phrases suggest that the new Masterplan is not ready for publication and public consultation, and this agenda item has since been rescheduled to the November 2022 Cabinet Meeting. <sup>[xiv]</sup>

In June 2022, a local journalist Simon Allin, writing for Enfield Dispatch, tried to find out when the Masterplan would be published but Enfield Council refused to say. <sup>[xv]</sup>

**It is now well over four years since the Council declared the new Masterplan a “corporate priority,” yet it remains unpublished. The serious and legitimate concerns about Meridian Water that have been raised by Council scrutiny panels were brushed aside by referencing the new Masterplan, which has subsequently never been published. Very large sums of money have been spent developing the new Masterplan, but commitments to publishing it have been repeatedly broken. As a result, the claims being made by the Council about the Meridian Water development are at odds with the formal documentation about the scheme; such contradictions and uncertainties are unlikely to encourage confidence and interest in the project from investors which are needed for the development to be a success.**

### 3. Reasons for not publishing the Masterplan

So why hasn't the new Masterplan been published? It is unlikely to be because a lack of resource or funding; by July 2020 the Council had already spent £1.2 million on developing the new Masterplan and according to the Council, by May 2020, there were 80 dedicated staff within the Council working on Meridian Water supported by 150 external consultants. <sup>[1]</sup><sup>5</sup>

We can only speculate - but one theory is that the new Masterplan has not been published because it would expose the gaps between reality and the Council's rhetoric about the development.

The Masterplan would help answer the following questions:

- Will the development deliver the number of homes or jobs promised?
- Are investors pushing for a higher proportion of studio flats and fewer family homes?
- Will the family homes, which are desperately needed locally, be delivered?
- When will the homes and jobs be delivered?
- Will the environmental ambitions be met (e.g. very low private car ownership/usage)
- Is the greenspace proposed for the development sufficient for the number of people who will be living there?

**The Council now needs to deliver on its commitment to publishing the new Masterplan for public consultation. The vision for the development itself requires clarity, but more importantly, enormous sums of public money have been directed into the Meridian Water development by Enfield Council and we are told this is being done for the benefit of local people. Therefore, local people have a right to be informed and consulted about the development and about how such vast sums of public money are being spent in their name.**

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<sup>5</sup> The Council has also said that there were only 36 Council staff working directly on the scheme in 2020-21, so it is not clear how many people the Council actually has working directly on the project. [E]



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