

Apparently, the Meridian Water Masterplan is complete, so why isn't it published and why weren't the public consulted?

In a recent report, Enfield Council announced that they're intending to cut the number of employees working on the regeneration of Meridian Water from 45 to 20. One of the reasons given for letting go more than half the staff, is that the Masterplan is now complete. ^[1]

This means the Council has completed the Masterplan without consulting the public. Failing to consult local communities about masterplans is very poor practice and implies a disrespect for residents' input and their local knowledge. ^[2]

The Government's National Model Design Code specifically says that masterplanning needs to be subject to a community engagement exercise, and the Homes England 'Engagement Toolkit' says that engagement should take place at the earliest possible opportunity (i.e. before key decisions are made) and involve as many people as possible (i.e. it should be inclusive). ^[3] Schemes that fail to properly engage with local communities are often met with more resistance, and do not encourage long term support or stewardship. ^[4]

It's very troubling that so much public money is being spent on the regeneration of publicly owned land at Meridian Water, without a published and publicly consulted masterplan. The regeneration is funded by public sector borrowing, which is reported to already be over £400 million and is predicted to exceed £500 million over the next 3-4 years. ^[5] Further funding comes from selling off existing assets (e.g. properties are being sold by the Council which could otherwise be used to house homeless families), and by prioritising funding over other areas (e.g. reduced spending on the upkeep of existing social housing stock). ^[6]

Council scrutiny committees have repeatedly tried to raise concerns about the Meridian Water scheme but have been told these would be dealt with in the new Masterplan, which would be subject to public consultation. ^[7] For instance, in 2020 councillors were told that the following would be addressed in the new Masterplan:

- Whether the number of family homes planned for would reflect the borough's needs.
- Whether the amount of publicly accessible greenspace planned would be adequate, particularly in regard to the scheme's density and expected population.
- Whether pylons crossing greenspaces would be placed underground.
- The impact of Covid-19 on assumptions about acceptable densities.
- Whether there was sufficient space to accommodate the employment space needed to accommodate 6,000 jobs and 10,000 homes.

It is impossible to know whether these concerns (and others) have been properly addressed in the Masterplan, because the Council hasn't published it and any meaningful scrutiny of the scheme from within the Council was effectively shut down from 2020 onwards. ^[8]

There is significant uncertainty about this project, and the Council are making what appears to be contradictory and unsubstantiated statements about the scheme's future. For example, they still claim the scheme will deliver 10,000 homes and 6,000 jobs over the next 20-25 years but have not explained how they will actually achieve this, given the planning restrictions which prevent the industrial land at Meridian Water from being used for housing. ^[9] The Masterplan should directly deal with this important issue, but whether it does or not remains a mystery.

In one way or another, the regeneration of Meridian Water impacts everyone living in Enfield and there are multiple community organisations and others who are very interested in its future and in the new Masterplan. For the Council to complete the Masterplan without public consultation and community engagement is entirely at odds with key principles of good urban design, placemaking and planning

practice. Politicians may not know any better, but qualified planners and urban designers working at the Council should be well aware of the significant issues with the approach they have taken.

The opportunity for meaningful early engagement with local communities, collaboration and partnership forming has already been lost, and any community engagement that takes place from here on may appear arbitrary or tokenistic, given that it is obvious that the key decisions have already been made by the Council in private. Nevertheless, Meridian Water is public land and being developed with public money and the public deserve respect and must be properly consulted.

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