



THE BIG PICTURE

How Enfield is proving local *authorities can be place shapers*



ENFIELD COUNCIL

Meridian Water is one of the biggest and most ambitious regeneration projects in the country – and the local authority is leading it. Austin Macauley discovers how Enfield Council is ensuring it creates places that deliver for the long term

Controlling your own destiny

Over the next two years a brand new neighbourhood for north London will begin to take shape. A new school is already open and soon the first phase of homes along with a purpose-built train station will follow.

Welcome to Meridian Water, one of the most ambitious developments in the country.

And yet the area looked for a long time like it was the mission impossible of regeneration sites. It had been derelict for years, was poorly connected, prone to flooding and was in multiple ownership – making land assembly extremely complicated. There's also the fact that much of land has many environmental obstacles to overcome and the site is surrounded by some of London's poorer areas. And despite being around 20 minutes from central London, local property values are low.

No wonder then that one multinational company tried and failed to get plans off the ground and developers steered clear of the area. Yet Meridian Water, which covers 85ha and takes in a number of former gasworks sites along the Upper Lea Valley at Edmonton, is now subject to one of the biggest and most ambitious regeneration schemes in the country; devised and led by Enfield Council.

The £6bn project – which includes £350m from the council – will create a vibrant and distinctive new riverside neighbourhood for north London with 10,000 homes and 6,700 permanent jobs. It will feature new green spaces and boulevards interspersed among the many waterways, with easy access to the adjoining 4,000ha Lee Valley Regional Park.

Over the next 20 years it will also support some 10,000 construction jobs and unlock huge economic growth elsewhere in the Lea Valley corridor and beyond.

Within the next two years Meridian Water will have a brand new train station, with an increasing number of fast links to Stratford London, London Liverpool Street and northwards to Stansted Airport and Cambridge. The addition of Crossrail 2 would see that rise to eight trains per hour by 2022.

It will also be home to artists and makers, independent shops and to meanwhile use in order to nurture new enterprises and support entrepreneurs while using them to create a unique identity for the neighbourhood. (see article, opposite)

'This will be a new community but critically it will be part of the wider existing Edmonton community and must give tangible benefits to local people,' says council leader, Cllr Doug Taylor.

Council-led regeneration

All of which is hugely impressive, but it barely tells half the story.

For example, the new housing will cut across tenures with everything from social rent to shared ownership to outright sale. 'Meridian Water is one of two areas with Housing Zone status in Enfield and the same considered approach can be seen across the borough,' says lead member for housing, Cllr Ahmet Oykenner.

Indeed, Mayor of London Sadiq Khan, pictured below

on a recent visit to Meridian Water, has highlighted a number of projects as best practice. He described Meridian Water as 'an important development for London' delivering thousands of new homes and jobs 'under the excellent leadership of Enfield Council'.

The Mayor added: 'The great thing about Meridian Water is that Enfield Council is also working with the developers to make sure the jobs that are created are for local residents.'

Housing will be introduced in a way that allows Meridian Water to build up and establish itself gradually – one and two bedroom properties coming first before being followed by larger homes as families have the confidence to move into the area. A new primary school has already been opened to facilitate that process. One of

Meridian Water

REGENERATION... THE ENFIELD WAY

Take the lead – joined-up political and senior officer leadership is essential to coordinate major regeneration projects
Take controlled risks – directly investing in major projects builds confidence and helps to de-risk developments, unlock growth and deliver long term returns
Develop your commercial side – understand how the private sector works, build those skills in house and work to commercial timescales
Take ownership – figuratively and literally, by acquiring sites and retaining ownership you can play that essential long-term place-making role



MERIDIAN WORKS: A destination in the making

the most common gripes about major developments is that infrastructure and amenities are too often an afterthought. Meridian Water is bucking that trend and it's all down to council control.

'I believe local authorities are best when they are willing to be innovative and enterprising,' explains Cllr Taylor. 'There's clearly a need for more jobs and houses in the borough. With Meridian Water we've taken the initiative on land assembly and the risks that involves.'

'What that's allowed us to do is retain high levels of control over what the place will look like in the years to come. It means we are better able to shape the final outcome.'

Ian Davis, director of environment and regeneration, says: 'Creating a sustainable place is the key. Long after master developer Barratt London and other partners have gone, Enfield Council will still be responsible for ensuring Meridian Water is a success. Local authorities are by their nature invested in places for the long term. The Enfield approach recognises that stewardship role and creates a way to make it work commercially and deliver on the council's economic, social and environmental objectives.'

It can be seen across the local authority's extensive regeneration programme, which is expected to deliver 16,000 homes and 8,000 jobs in total.

The council has adopted a proactive approach to buying up strategic sites. In the case of Meridian Water, from not owning anything it has acquired 22ha in four deals worth more than £100m in the space of just two years and plans

to take ownership of 55ha in total.

Peter George, assistant director of regeneration and planning, has driven the Meridian Water project forward. He says one of the keys to Enfield's success on this and other schemes is its willingness and ability to de-risk projects by taking control. While the private sector viewed it as simply too complex to take on, for the council it represented a unique opportunity to 'reboot' the local economy.

'Our approach to Meridian Water is unique in the UK,' says Peter. 'Councils are not known for delivering projects at the scale or speed we are doing it at.'

'The only way to do four deals in two years is by being extremely nimble.'

'One landowner didn't think we were serious and gave us six weeks to complete the sale from a standing start, which we did. Another wouldn't sell to us and sold it to another party who we negotiated with and purchased it on the same day.'

Overcoming obstacles

The same bullish mindset can be seen in the council's negotiations over transport issues with the Department for Transport, Transport for London, Network Rail as well as in discussions with Barratt London. All are valued partners, the council says, but ultimately Enfield has a vision for Meridian Water and won't compromise on quality or scope.

As Ian Davis puts it: 'The vision of what you want to achieve puts a line in the sand. The way you conduct

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Enfield Council's ethos and approach to regeneration is perhaps best summed up by Meridian Works. It's described as 'a series of places and spaces tailored specifically towards small businesses and freelancers' located within Meridian Water that are designed to deliver 'a major boost to the "maker" economy of London'.

It includes Building Bloqs, a social enterprise based in the regeneration area which aims to become Europe's largest open workshop for makers.

With over 50,000 sq ft of refurbished warehouse space, it will enable freelancers, small businesses and designers to access flexible workspace and all the machinery and technology they require.

This is being complemented by educational charity Acava, which will provide 30 artists studios in an adjacent warehouse.

It's meanwhile use, but with a long-term plan. The idea behind Meridian Works is to utilise areas of Meridian Water that may not be developed for some time while acting as an incubator for innovative new businesses. Some 300 jobs are expected to be created via Building Bloqs alone.

'It's planting the seed for economic growth within the site,' explains lead member for economic regeneration and business, Cllr Alan Sitkin.

That influx of creative enterprises will help to bring an energy and distinct identity to the area, changing

MERIDIAN WATER IN NUMBERS

£6bn of investment over 20 years - including £350m from the council

1 brand new railway station funded by Enfield Council, GLA, TFL and Network Rail, due to open in 2019

10,000 new homes

6,700 new permanent jobs

10,000 construction jobs during the lifetime of the project

5,000+ local people will gain construction skills through traineeships and apprenticeships at a new Building Environment Training Centre

4 new schools & facilities – Meridian Angel Primary School (already opened) & a new community centre & health & wellbeing centre to come

Contributing to £3bn GVA growth to the UK economy by 2036 by stimulating growth elsewhere in the region

perceptions in the process. A deal has been struck with Barratt London to ensure artists and makers will have a permanent base long after Meridian Water has become established so that those early pioneers remain.

Getting activity on site at an early stage will also generate £6m a year for the council.

'This meanwhile use is then complemented by a longer-term business development plan that will attract a mix of established international businesses, offering higher paid employment and skills at Meridian Water,' explains Cllr Sitkin.

The aim is to avoid creating just another identikit, generic development.

Aside from meanwhile use, it will be achieved through careful control of the retail mix. Enfield Council will not only retain ownership of much of the retail on site but is setting up a company to manage its portfolio.

It allows the local authority to play a place-making role.

'We're not talking about distorting the market but saying the choice of retailers should be conducted within our place framework. They will be chosen within the context of the place we want to create.'

So that could include independent retailers and choosing businesses that are priced at an affordable level to reflect local incomes. It will also enable the council to anticipate new trends and adapt accordingly – not just at Meridian Water but elsewhere in the borough where it owns sites.

'High streets are failing and not everyone has grasped how councils can affect change through ownership,' says Cllr Sitkin.

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discussions with developers makes it clear what the lines in the sand are and what's not up for debate, what can't be negotiated away. That's the approach that we have taken.'

Enfield knew it needed business savvy to people push Meridian Water forward and much of the senior team has been recruited specifically for their private sector experience.

'What the council accepts is that it's worth making sure we have sharp, bright people on our side.

'This commercial mindset and knowledge can be filtered down through to the rest of the team too so it's a smart, long-term strategy for developing in-house talent,' says Peter.

Ian Davis says this approach helped to ensure Enfield got exactly the type of train station it needed for Meridian Water, in the right location. What had been proposed wasn't fit for purpose, he says, so the council took the unusual step of coming up with its own designs and led the planning application process.

'It's a completely bespoke station that breaks the mould for Network Rail,' says Ian.

The environmental obstacles have also been considerable. With the site having housed various gasworks since the 1800s, Enfield has had to work in partnership with the Environment Agency and together they have found a solution to the site's contamination using a new process from the US. It means the site will be

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Council leader Doug Taylor

ready when Barratt London begins work next year on the first housing development.

Meridian Water has required major financial outlay from Enfield – an unprecedented commitment for a local authority on any single site – at a time of uncertainty over local government funding. It is debt financing its £350m contribution over the life of the project, mainly through PWLB borrowing, and that will generate a return for the council and local community, while ensuring a controlling position to oversee the regeneration.

That level of investment requires strong officer and political leadership. The project team hold monthly

meetings with senior management, the leader, deputy leader and cabinet members for economic regeneration and housing regeneration to give updates on progress and to forward plan. PwC has been brought in to create a bespoke financial model to monitor expenditure. The beauty of having such a large stake in the project means the financial rewards come as work progresses – with the option of taking cash or properties – and the council can control the pace of development.

Even at this early stage, Peter believes Enfield is feeling the benefit of Meridian Water.

'The Meridian Water development strategy is entirely scalable and can be replicated up the Lea Valley corridor. It's built a lot of confidence across the whole portfolio of council projects – all make money and are successfully delivered. They all have a knock on effect on each other.'

Most major regeneration projects make lofty claims about what they will achieve. But not many articulate the kind of place they want to create – or, like Enfield, retain a long-term stake for local government so that what's created over time stays true to that vision.

'As a local authority we need to have an eye on what local communities will look like in 20 or 30 years' time,' says Ian. 'If you don't plan for the future, development will happen haphazardly and you will not have been able to get the best out of it. At the end of the day, I expect Meridian Water to be one of London's flagship developments.'



Spreading the benefits

From a district heat network to council homes, Enfield is investing to make the borough work for everyone



While Meridian Water encapsulates Enfield Council's proactive approach to regeneration, the same mindset can be found in other key areas.

In January it launched energetik, a venture that will create community energy networks to provide low carbon heating and hot water to more than 15,000 homes and businesses across the borough. Using four energy centres, one of which will be at Meridian Water, the council is investing £58m and has enough capacity to serve over 30,000 homes and businesses. The scheme is projected to deliver £225m of economic, environmental and social benefits to residents and businesses in north London.

Similarly, the council is playing an active role in the housing market to ensure there's the right mix of tenures for local people. For example, it set up Housing Gateway in 2014 to buy and manage homes at below market rents. It has so far purchased more than 400 properties.

'On all of our housing projects – whether it's in

partnership with developers or direct delivery of new council homes – Enfield pushes for the highest standards in terms of space, specification and environmental ratings,' says lead member for housing, Cllr Ahmet Oyken.

Involving residents in the process is vital. For example, 50 new homes on Meridian Water's first housing development have been ring-fenced for leaseholders on a nearby estate that is the subject of a renewal project.

It's also indicative of the effort being made to engage communities living close to the Meridian Water regeneration area and involve them as it takes shape.

Numerous meetings have been staged with local people over the last two years about the plans and a dedicated residents' forum is to be established.

'Meridian Water is designed specifically to connect and integrate with the surrounding area, transforming the local environment and local economy and providing real opportunities for Enfield's residents to benefit from,' says Ian Davis.

For example, communities to the west of the development area will benefit from a new community centre in phase one along with a health and wellbeing centre. The local park is being re-landscaped and some of the green features planned for Meridian Water, such as sustainable drainage systems, will be rolled out to nearby existing streets by developer Barratt London.

Barratt will also fund a community chest with residents deciding how money is spent on local priorities.

Additional value like this was made part and parcel of the contract when Enfield took the project out to tender.

'It needs to be seen as their neighbourhood and things like the community centre help to make that happen. It comes back to one of our guiding principles – inclusivity.'

For further details on Meridian Water visit:
www.meridianwater.co.uk

For further details on energetik visit:
www.energetik.london