

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 17TH MARCH, 2021

MEMBERS: Councillors Margaret Greer (Chair), Mahmut Aksanoglu, Susan Erbil, Margaret Greer, Tim Leaver, Edward Smith and Claire Stewart (Vice Chair)

Officers:

Executive Director Place, Senior Regeneration Officer, Senior Regeneration Manager - MW Team, Head of Shareholder Strategy, Programme Director - Meridian Water and Interim Head of Planning

Also Attending: Councillor Nesil Caliskan and 9 members of the public

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MERIDIAN WATER - ADDRESSING LOCAL NEEDS

The panel received a presentation from Jamie Eagles and Ian Freshwater (Senior Regeneration Officers) updating members on the Meridian Water Programme and addressing local needs.

1. Presentation

The following key points were highlighted during the presentation:

- One of the key aims of the Meridian Water Project was to make sure there were benefits for the existing residents in the area, who were situated in one of the most deprived parts of the country.
- Research had been carried out, based on the recent Enfield Poverty and Inequality Commission and through mapping local indices and key data, to help the project find ways to meet the needs of the local community.
- Major health inequalities had been identified. The team were working closely with health partners, including the Clinical Commissioning Group and had identified a need to improve GP services: a new surgery was now planned as part of Meridian One, the first stage of the project, as well as a community garden which should benefit health and wellbeing.

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- Economic inclusion was also key factor, providing opportunities for the young and reskilling older people, as well as the need to support economic recovery, following the pandemic. The Enfield Skills Academy will train up to 810 residents per year in construction skills. The Troubadour Skills Academy will be training and employing up to 450 people per year: 6 kickstart places had already been confirmed. Twenty five percent of employment in construction and commercial spaces will go to Enfield residents and the Meridian One will employ 45 apprentices and create 145 local jobs. All jobs will be paid at a London Living Wage.
- Two thirds of the ground floor space, on the development, will be either commercial property or community assets owned by the Council. These spaces will support the creation of high quality, ethical, inclusive and sustainable jobs for local people and to serve local community needs.
- Community assets would be developed to serve the whole community; projects such as the new station with regular train services, as well as a new primary school, gym and health facility. An Infrastructure Delivery Strategy was being put together.
- The aim was to provide some high-quality parks and open spaces which were vital in promoting good health and wellbeing. “Park life on your door- step” was one of the key pillars of the project. As part of the phase one scheme, Vistry will be developing a community garden. There will also be two smaller parks connected by a green link – a visible green walking route through the site - and by 2024, two new large parks. These would be open to both visitors and the existing communities. Another key priority was to open up access to the Lee Valley Regional Park.
- Social value outcomes had been secured from key contractors which would feed into the Meridian Water Social Value Strategy which will go to Cabinet for approval later in the year.
- Thanks to the partnership with Vistry, a Community Chest fund consisting on an initial funding pot of £800,000 had been set up. Initially local groups in the three Edmonton wards would be able to bid for funding for local projects from this fund.

2. Questions/Comments

2.1 Thanks to officers for the excellent presentation.

2.2 The Leader’s response to a query, emphasising that the new homes and jobs were to be primarily for people who lived locally. The Council was committed to providing local jobs for local people. The emphasis on training and skills was to ensure that the local people were able to develop the skills that were needed to take on the work required. However, this could not solve all the problems, as more than 1 in 3 children living in the area were living in poverty and had very complicated needs. Meridian Water was crucial for success but there were other plans, including the proposals for the regeneration of the

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Snells and Joyce estates as well as for improving the culture offer and business centres.

- 2.2 Local people would be the principle beneficiaries of the new housing. A Community Housing Plan was being developed for approval later in the year. This would ensure that local people had priority for the new homes.
- 2.3 The GP surgery had deliberately been situated as close as possible to the boundary nearest to the existing community so that existing residents could access it. Tackling health inequalities was a key aim.
- 2.4 The vision for the ground floor spaces was not just for commercial use but also for community, leisure, culture, food and beverage and work spaces. Positive interest had already been received. It was hoped that providing diverse ground floor uses would help to create a lively vibrant community.
- 2.5 Before the Coronavirus, which had brought train use down by 90%, Network Rail had said that they were positively surprised by the growth in traffic at the new station. Footfall had exceeded expectations. The station now had a seven day a week service with at least 2 trains an hour. Local people had said that they now felt more connected. Some had been able to access jobs in other parts of London, that they could not have been able to before.

3. Chair's Summary

The Chair welcomed the great presentation and the plans for Edmonton, which had suffered in the past, from a lack of opportunity. She was looking forward to being able to assess the success of the Troubadour and other Skills Academy in providing training and jobs for local people and hoped that the predictions would be achieved. Acknowledging at the end that there was still so much to do.

4. MERIDIAN WATER SCRUTINY WORKSTREAM - REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The panel received a report and presentation from Peter George (Programme Director Meridian Water) updating them on progress against the four themes in the recent Scrutiny Workstream Report. Copies of the presentation slides can be accessed through the Council website.

1. Presentation

Peter George highlighted the following from his presentation which included information on housing, density/open space, employment and the financial model:

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- Since the last scrutiny meeting, the results of the Government's Housing Delivery Test had been released which showed that over the last 3 years Enfield had delivered only 56% of their housing targets. This was below the Government's requirement of a 75% target. Not enough homes were being built. This target figure was also about to be increased from 800 homes a year to 1,200.
- Meridian Water had been judged to be able to provide 5,000 homes and 1,500 jobs, but there had always been an ambition to build 10,000 homes and create an extra 6,000 jobs. Meeting this ambition would depend on the re-designation of industrial land on the eastern part of the site. The Local Plan had recently issued a call out for sites and the team had put forward their proposals for housing on this area and were hopeful this would be included in the new Local Plan.
- If Meridian Water could not accommodate 10,000 homes, it would further impact on Enfield's ability to meet its overall housing targets.
- Government had granted £170,000 in funding for infrastructure works and Vinchy had been commissioned to do £90,000 worth of work. This would also help unlock the potential of the land for housing.
- A reserve matters planning application had recently been submitted and Vistry were due to start work on the first 300 homes in April or May of this year. The first homes would be ready to move into within 12 months.
- A second planning application, for around 650 homes was due to be submitted this Summer, and the Council were finalising terms with Vistry to deliver another 250 homes on a second site that will deliver 100% affordable housing and 3,000 square meters of workspace. Two more sites which could deliver a further 1,000 homes would be marketed later in the year.
- The provision of green open space was integral to the project and one of the intended key legacy features for the area. The Meridian Water Environmental Sustainability Strategy set an ambition to achieve 30% green open space and to be carbon neutral by 2030.
- Planning permission and funding was in place for two new major parks to be delivered by Vinchy. This would be equivalent to the size of 12 football pitches.
- It was not possible to make up the open space deficit in the whole wider area, as this would take 75% of the Meridian Water site.
- Green connectivity across the site was an aim, as well as improving local access to the neighbouring Lee Valley Regional Park. This park was very underused at present and encouraging local people to make greater use of it was a key objective.
- The Council was keen to engage with local stakeholders including the Council for the Protection of Rural England who are campaigning for the creation of ten new London parks. Meetings had been arranged to discuss plans.
- The financial model was linked to the masterplan which was being updated and due to go to Cabinet for formal approval by the end of the year. Regular management meetings were held to ensure good oversight and scrutiny,

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- The Council's placemaking strategy involved delivering employment uses before homes. An important part of this was encouraging meanwhile uses. In 2019, as a result of the partnership with the Vibration Group and Broadwick, the Drumsheds music and cultural venue had brought in more than 75,000 visitors. The companies were hopeful that this achievement could be repeated this year. Twenty thousand tickets for a planned event had recently sold out within 2 hours.
- The Council, in partnership with Troubadour, had created three new film studios and a short-term drive-in cinema, providing jobs and training opportunities for young people.
- The new Building BloQs affordable workspace project would provide further work and opportunities and was due to complete this summer.
- Meridian Water was set in an attractive location as it was so close to the peace and serenity of the Lee Valley Regional Park.
- Meridian Water could be seen in terms of the 15 minute city concept (all needs to be within a 15 minute walk) which had become a key aim for many, particularly in the light of experience during the pandemic. This concept had always been a driver for Meridian Water.
- Positive progress was being made. It was essential that Meridian Water was able to provide the homes needed to meet the Council's housing targets and to create more public open space in an area, where it had been lacking.
- The purpose of the recent consultations was to listen and to respond to people's priorities.
- This year would be a year of transformational change. New homes were being built, the largest open workshop space in London created, as well as the new parks.

2. Questions/Comments

- 2.1 There were no further known obstacles, subject to planning permission, to prevent Vistry starting work on site. The site had been mediated.
- 2.2 The Council was not responsible for sales of housing but Vistry, the Council's development partner, were planning to focus sales on the UK market. There were no plans to market homes to investors in the Middle East.
- 2.3 Affordability levels were driven by Planning constraints: 40% were to be affordable (70% were London affordable rents and 30% at intermediate level). All should be affordable to the people living in the Edmonton.
- 2.4 Included in the new masterplan for Meridian Water were plans to meet a 30% open space requirement. This was an increase of 12% on what had originally been envisaged.
- 2.5 A comparison was suggested with the open space created at the new development at Woodberry Down in North Hackney. Meridian Water

compared well. The amount of open space in Meridian Water was more than the 25% of what it was hoped would be achieved at Woodberry Down.

- 2.6 Discussions were taking place with the Council for the Protection of Rural England on the creation of new parks and open space.

3. Summing up from the Chair

This was a major development for the borough and she was pleased to see that the foundations were being laid. The scrutiny panel would continue to seek clarity on future plans.

5. IMPROVING THE PLANNING PROCESSES

The panel received a presentation from Vincent Lacovara (Head of Planning) on the development of an improvement plan for the Council's planning service.

1. Presentation

The following points were highlighted in the presentation:

- The planning department were at an early stage in developing a service improvement plan. Much had been achieved since 2018 when two halves of the service were combined (development management and strategic planning and design) but there were more improvements to be made and challenges ahead.
- The views of the Regeneration and Economic Development Scrutiny Panel were welcomed.
- All the teams in the department were working together to improve delivery, working more across teams, rather than in silos.
- One of the problems that the service had had was in recruiting planning officers. This had improved from a 50% vacancy rate in 2018 to a handful of vacancies now. The numbers of agency staff had also been reduced.
- Service capacity had been increased including the creation of a new design team and the setting up of a Design Review Panel.
- Performance had improved significantly recently against statutory and corporate targets.
- Challenges included perception and image of the service, customer services, communications, responsiveness and accessibility, the Government changes to the planning and building control systems, performance issues in enforcement, impact of Covid, the need to improve service culture, recruitment and retention of staff, budget pressures, the need to support good design and outcomes through a pre application service and an inconsistent delivery of housing targets.
- Lots of work had been done improving the determination of applications but more needed to be done at the pre-application stage.

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- The Council would like to be recognised as one of the best planning authorities in London, positively and proactively engaging with communities and stakeholders to enhance places and enable good growth.
- The key themes for an improvement plan included improving communications, culture and morale, resources and capacity, team structure, policies and processes, performance management, learning and development, technology, customer journey and commercialisation.
- The key areas of focus included team culture, member engagement, customer service, planning committee training programme, pre application and PPA service, planning enforcement, ongoing recruitment and a commercial plan.

2. Questions/Comments

- 2.1 Thanks to the officers for the report and support for the proposals to address the problems, as there was a feeling that significant improvements were needed, particularly in customer service. Many residents complained that they were unable to speak to planning officers in person.
- 2.2 Concern in relation to the culture of the organisation and its perceived neutrality. There was a perception that Council favoured private developers. This was not the case.
- 2.3 Concern that the Council was too slow to address enforcement issues and that developers were able to game the system and get away with inappropriate development.
- 2.4 Progress on improving the culture of planning had been made, starting by bringing together the whole team, combining the expertise of existing officers as well as bringing in new people.
- 2.5 Neutrality was key to the planning process. It was essential that officers should be seen to be impartial. All assessments were made against approved policy. However, it was also important to be positive and pro-active and to optimise any possible planning gains.
- 2.6 When enquiries were made it is best to work with developers and to help make sure everyone can benefit from any scheme. The pre-application process can be very valuable for shaping development.
- 2.7 Improving responsiveness was important and was a focus for improvement. Any delays were not a result of a lack of professionalism but a result of work pressures.
- 2.8 Andy Higham and Jeannette Walsh were working on improvements to the enforcement service.

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- 2.9 Focus had been put on improving the speed of determination of applications rather than the pre-application stage as this was what was measured in Government statistics. But focussing more on the pre-application stage would enable decisions, once submitted, to be made more quickly. Issues often arose from trying to negotiate in too short a timescale, after an application had been submitted.
- 2.10 Recruitment problems were not unique to Enfield but were an issue across London and the whole country as there was a national shortage of skilled staff. Enfield had done well to recruit as many new staff as it had. It was now important to make sure that they stayed.
- 2.11 Councillor Greer agreed that the questions identified at the end of the presentation were relevant. Perception, image, customer service and member engagement were key.
- 2.12 There was a perception from some residents that it was easier to gain planning permission in the east of the borough than in the west. Officers affirmed that this was not the case, but it was something that it was useful to be aware of. If there were similar perceptions around, they would like to know.
- 2.13 Introducing more customer satisfaction surveys was something that was being considered. A survey had been carried out last year and several things acted upon as a result, including improvements to the website and to help ensure that the process was clear, timely and efficient.
- 2.14 The statutory timescales were for a decision to be determined within 8 - 13 weeks - dependent on extension. However, if a scheme were appealed it could take many months or even years before a final decision was made. This would depend on the scale and complexity of the proposals. A public enquiry would extend a timescale considerably.
- 2.15 A new pre application service had been introduced, formalising what had previously happened informally. This was now subject to a fee, but it was hoped that formalising the service would lead to improvement and enable more resources to be attached to this area. Better consideration at a pre-application stage would save time and problems later on.
- 2.16 It was important to emphasise that consideration of planning applications always had to take account of planning policy. People were often concerned about issues that were not planning matters and did not understand why they could not be taken into account when decisions were made.
- 2.17 Covid had had a big impact on the service during the first lockdown but not so much since, as risk assessments had been carried out and work

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had continued. Community engagement had been confined to online as face to face meetings had not been possible.

3. Summing up by the Chair

The Chair summed up by thanking the officers for their presentation and work to improve the service. She looked forward to a future update which she hoped would show further improvement.

6. JOYCE AND SNELLS ESTATE REGENERATION

The panel received and noted the report updating members on the Joyce and Snells Estate regeneration scheme. The project had been delayed due to the pandemic, but a report was due to go to Cabinet in July and a further update would be provided to the panel later in the year.

7. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 FEBRUARY 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2021 were received and agreed as a correct record.

8. WORKPROGRAMME 2020/21

NOTED

1. The work carried out over the past year from the 2020/21 work programme.
2. The view of the chair that she felt that the year had worked well. Members had been able to make in depth and insightful commentary on the issues under review and to pose challenging questions.
3. Any suggestions for items to be considered as part of next year's programme should be emailed to the Chair or the committee secretary. They would then be considered for inclusion in the work programme by next year's panel.
4. There would be an additional meeting to consider local plan policy at a workshop session on 14 April 2021.

9. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

NOTED the dates scheduled for future meetings:

- Wednesday 14 April 2021 - workshop on Local Plan policies.

The chair thanked everyone for their help and support over the past year and said that she had enjoyed being chair of this committee. It had been an insightful and engaging experience. Members, in turn, thanked the chair.

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