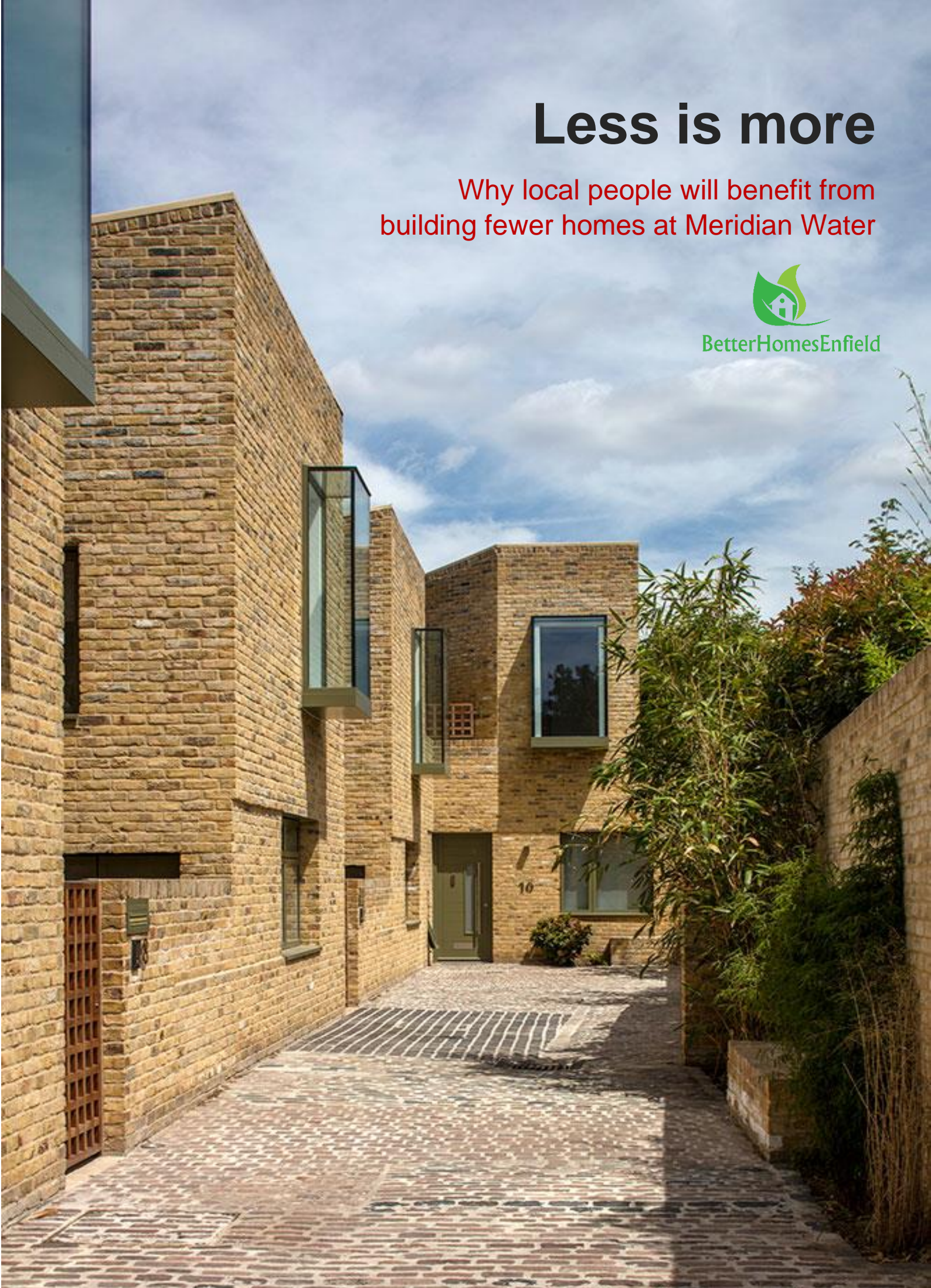


# Less is more

Why local people will benefit from  
building fewer homes at Meridian Water



BetterHomesEnfield





# Less is more.

Meridian Water is one of the largest regeneration projects in London. Over the next 25 years, Enfield Council plans to build 10,000 new homes on the 85-hectare brownfield site in Edmonton. In this report, we will show how building *fewer* homes (e.g. 8,000 homes) would be more beneficial for local people. In other words, we will show that less is more.

In the first section of this report we set out some of the challenges faced by people living in Edmonton, most notably the serious problems associated with the extremely high levels of overcrowding in the area. Simply put, there are currently not enough homes with three or more bedrooms in Edmonton, especially given the number of families with children living in the area. Overcrowding is disproportionately experienced by people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds and is linked to a number of poor health outcomes and social disadvantages. The health inequalities and social disadvantages linked to inappropriate housing are clear to see and must not be ignored.

In the second section of the report we show how far more family sized homes could be built at Meridian Water by lowering the overall housing target. This would have enormous benefits for people living in Edmonton. It would help to reduce overcrowding; it would enable people to remain in the area - close to family and support networks, and it would have significant benefits for the health and wellbeing of local residents. In short, we feel that far greater benefits and better value could be achieved for local people if fewer homes were built - that less is more.

This is the first of three reports about Meridian Water. In 2021 we plan to release a further two reports. The second will look at the greenspace provision at Meridian Water. The third will look at the council's role as developer and how this has impacted decision making, transparency, and the scrutiny process.

All the references, charts and evidence that support this report can be found in the appendix available on our website.



BetterHomesEnfield

# **1 | The challenge: An urgent need for more family sized homes**

## **1.1 Addressing the high levels of overcrowding in Edmonton**

More than 15% of households in Edmonton are overcrowded, nearly five times the national average. This means there are over 6,400 overcrowded households in Edmonton. <sup>(1)</sup>

## **1.2 Overcrowding leads to poor health outcomes**

Overcrowding is linked to poor health outcomes and psychological distress, including: <sup>(2)</sup>

- Respiratory/breathing issues
- Higher risk of catching infectious diseases
- Poor mental health
- Increased stress and anxiety
- Reduced sleep and poor sleep quality
- Higher accident rates
- Lack of space to play or study
- Lack of privacy
- Strain on family relationships

## **1.3 Overcrowding disproportionately impacts Black, Asian and minority ethnic households**

Overcrowding affects a wide cross-section of people. However, lower income households and Black, Asian and minority ethnic households are more likely to be overcrowded. <sup>(3)</sup>

Covid-19 has shone a light on the serious health issues associated with overcrowding, and also that these health issues are disproportionately experienced by people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic households.

Across the UK, the households with the highest rates of overcrowding are in the Bangladeshi (24%), Pakistani (18%), Black African (16%), Arab (15%) and Mixed White and Black African (14%) ethnic groups. Only around 2% of White British households are overcrowded. <sup>(4)</sup>

A Public Health England report noted that:

*“... people of BAME communities are likely to be at increased risk of acquiring the infection. This is because BAME people are more likely to live in urban areas, in overcrowded households, in deprived areas, and have jobs that expose them to higher risk”* <sup>(5)</sup>

## **1.4 Edmonton needs far more homes for families**

There are more families with children living in Edmonton than in other parts of Enfield, but the area has far fewer homes with three or more bedrooms. <sup>(6)</sup> Edmonton needs more homes that are big enough for families with children. These homes are also needed to help maintain a stable and supportive community, to help people to stay in the area they grew up in, and to respond to an increase in home working. <sup>(7)</sup> Enfield's planning standards say that 60-65% of new homes on developments such as Meridian Water, should have at least three bedrooms. <sup>(8)</sup>

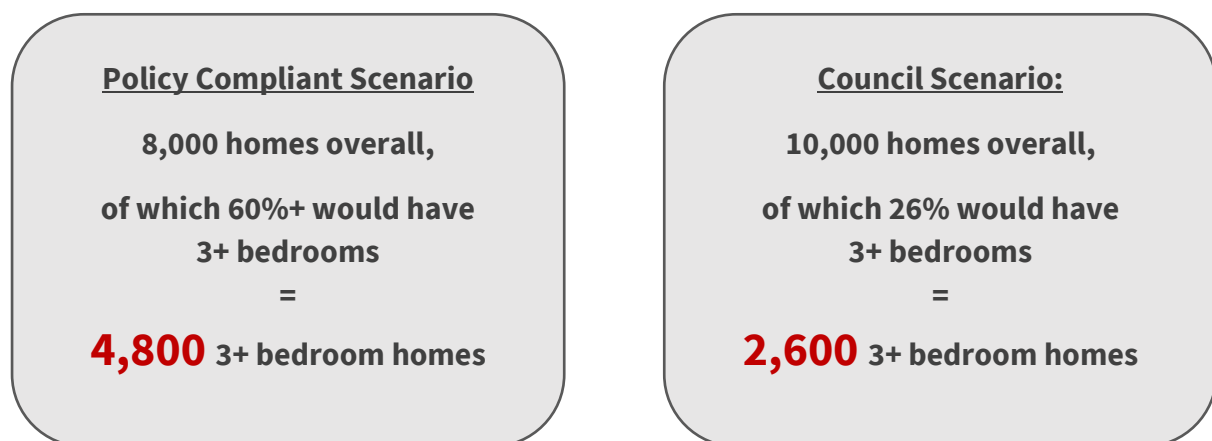
## **2 | The solution:** How Meridian Water could respond to the urgent need for family sized homes in Edmonton

### **2.1 Many more family sized homes could be built at Meridian Water**

Currently, Enfield Council are proposing that only 26% of the homes built at Meridian Water will have three or more bedrooms.<sup>(1)</sup> However, a report commissioned by the council in 2016 has demonstrated that far more family sized homes could be built as part of the scheme.

Karakusevic Carson Architects conducted “scenario testing” to calculate how many homes could fit into the Meridian Water site. They assessed 32 scenarios, looking at different types of homes, and concluded that the maximum number of homes the site could accommodate and still conform with local planning standards was **8,000**. Of these, 60%-65% could have three or more bedrooms.<sup>(2)</sup>

The diagram below sets out two possible scenarios. The first illustrates that building 8,000 homes will provide 4,800 homes with three or more bedrooms. The second scenario illustrates the Council’s plan to build 10,000 homes, which will only provide 2,600 homes with three or more bedrooms.



### **2.2 The opportunity to build family sized homes must not be missed**

Research shows that privately funded developments across Enfield are unlikely to deliver the family housing that Enfield needs.<sup>(3)</sup> However, Meridian Water is a council led development on publicly owned land, and as such, it offers a huge opportunity to take a far more strategic view, and deliver the type of housing that local residents need.

Meridian Water is public land which needs to be developed by local people and the local authority in partnership. It needs to have a long-term outlook that focuses on the type of community benefits that are so often missing from privately funded developments.

Currently, there is an unmet need for family sized homes in Edmonton, and the Meridian Water project is an opportunity to meet this need. The unique opportunity Meridian Water offers to build the homes local people need must not be missed.

### 2.3 Meridian Water could deliver the homes Edmonton urgently needs quickly

The negative effects of overcrowding are being felt by people living in Edmonton and Enfield right now, especially with the restrictions of lockdown. The regeneration of Meridian Water needs to respond to this urgent need by significantly increasing the number of family homes built in the early stages of the development.

The first stages of the development are called Meridian One and Phase Two. Building work is scheduled to start early in 2021, with the first homes completed in 2022. More than 2,500 homes are due to be completed by June 2026. <sup>(4)</sup>

Given the timescales involved, and the urgent need for family housing in Edmonton, it is important that the early stages of the regeneration deliver large numbers of family homes. The delivery of more family homes in the early stages of the regeneration would be a significant benefit to local people.

The current plans for Meridian One and Phase Two would deliver approximately 821 homes with three or more bedrooms. However, far more larger homes could be delivered in these early stages. Set out below is our proposal for a more “needs-based” approach, which would increase the number of homes with three or more bedrooms to 1,537 - but would still be achievable within the land available.

**Table 1: Better Homes for Enfield ‘Needs based approach’ for Meridian One housing mix <sup>(5)</sup>**

	<b>Current plan*</b>	<b>Needs based approach</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Studio / 1-bed	514 (54%)	177 (23%)	- 337
2-bed	305 (32%)	216 (28%)	- 89
3-bed	119 (13%)	341 (44%)	+ 222
4-bed	12 (1%)	46 (6%)	+ 34
<b>Total</b>	<b>950</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>- 170</b>

\* estimate based on 16/01197/RE3 approval for 725 homes as plans for the 950 homes are not available

**Table 2: Better Homes for Enfield ‘Needs based approach’ for Phase 2 housing mix <sup>(6)</sup>**

	<b>Current plan</b>	<b>Needs based approach</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Studio / 1-bed	690 (30%)	350 (18%)	-340
2-bed	920 (40%)	500 (25%)	-420
3-bed	460 (20%)	750 (38%)	+290
4-bed	230 (10%)	400 (20%)	+170
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,300</b>	<b>2,000</b>	<b>-300</b>

## 2.4 Building more family homes could increase the proportion of affordable homes

The proportion of affordable homes is likely to increase if more family homes are built at Meridian Water. London wide research conducted on behalf of the GLA and our own research, shows that **the proportion of affordable homes tends to increase as density decreases**. This happens for a number of reasons e.g. building costs can be disproportionately larger in higher density developments. <sup>(7)</sup> Lowering the number of smaller flats at Meridian Water should reduce the density at Meridian Water. As a result, there is likely to be a greater proportion of affordable homes for the benefit of local people.

## 2.5 The benefits for local people

In summary, the benefits to local people of building more homes with three or more bedrooms at Meridian Water, include:

1. Improved physical and mental health
2. Improved social outcomes (e.g. space to study)
3. Reduction in healthcare usage and costs
4. Positive outcomes for local BAME communities
5. Reduction in temporary housing usage and costs
6. Reduction in housing waiting list times
7. More balanced local housing portfolio/mix
8. Stability - families able to stay in local area / near friends/family/support networks
9. Does not undermine council planning standards - builds trust in local planning authority
10. Increased proportion of affordable housing

This is not an exhaustive list. There are other benefits associated with a less is more approach that we will explore in more depth in forthcoming reports (e.g. improvements linked to the amount of greenspace, and benefits for the future residents of Meridian Water).

## 2.6 The risks/harms associated with not building more family sized homes

If we do not build more homes with three or more bedrooms at Meridian Water, this will lead to a number of risks and harms including:

1. Increases in poor health and social disadvantages as a result of ongoing overcrowding
2. Increased health service usage and healthcare care costs
3. Significant increase in the risk of overcrowding at the new development <sup>(8)</sup>
4. Will not reflect local housing need
5. Undermines evidenced based planning standards
6. Will not reduce temporary housing costs or waiting list times
7. Missed opportunity – the family homes needed are unlikely to be built elsewhere in Edmonton on this scale or in this timeframe
8. Over emphasis on smaller flats means it is less likely to attract mixed income families
9. Over emphasis on smaller homes will risk the stability and cohesion of both the existing local communities and new residents living at Meridian Water

### 3 | A request for Enfield Council

We are asking Enfield Council to seize the opportunity Meridian Water offers and commit to building a far larger number of homes with three or more bedrooms in the first stages of the building work, even if this requires reducing the overall number of homes built.

### A | Appendix

The appendix containing references, analysis and other evidence is provided as a separate report and can be downloaded from our website <https://betterhomes-enfield.org/>.

*"It is not even a question of how much we are to do, but of how it is to be done; it is not a question of doing more, but of doing better". John Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture*

**Ends**