

Erbil's housing promises fall apart under scrutiny

With seven days until polling day, Enfield voters are being asked to believe a series of major housing promises that do not survive basic scrutiny.

Cllr Ergin Erbil has claimed Enfield Labour can build 6,000 council homes at Crews Hill Golf Course, give Enfield residents “first dibs” on new town homes, deliver “thousands of jobs”, and cap HMOs.

But when tested, the claims fall apart.

The issue is not whether Enfield needs more homes and jobs. It clearly does. The issue is whether voters are being offered credible solutions, or campaign slogans masquerading as policy.

Worse still, these promises are not harmless. They raise hopes that are unlikely to be met. And in doing so, they distract from practical policies that could genuinely help people now.

The most serious example is the claim about 6,000 council homes at Crews Hill Golf Course. When asked for the recorded evidence behind it, Enfield Council confirmed it held no calculations, no capacity assessments, and no planning evidence to support development on that scale.

That should alarm voters.

The 6,000 council homes claim is a serious red flag

Cllr Erbil has repeatedly claimed that Enfield Labour will build 6,000 council homes on Crews Hill Golf Course.¹

That is a very big claim.

Crews Hill Golf Course is not just a golf course. It is **publicly accessible green space** and is classified by the council as a **Site of Importance for Nature Conservation**.²

The new Local Plan, which Cllr Erbil voted in favour of, allocates **200 homes** to the northern part of the golf club site, where the clubhouse and car park are located, with the remainder identified as a new public park.³ That approach at least appears to reflect the council's own ecology evidence and the site's importance for nature conservation.

If the leader of Enfield Council is now publicly claiming that thousands of council homes can be built there, residents are entitled to assume that claim is based on evidence. That is especially true given he is also the Cabinet member responsible for Strategic Planning, Development and Regeneration.

But when we asked the council for the basis for the 6,000 council homes claim, it could not provide one. It also confirmed it held no recorded planning evidence, capacity studies or modelling identifying Crews Hill Golf Course as having development capacity on that scale.⁴

This is not a minor error. Cllr Erbil is making a major claim about a specific site, apparently without planning evidence to support it.

If Cllr Erbil can claim thousands of council homes will be delivered without producing the evidence for it, why should voters accept his other claims?

“First dibs” is not a credible policy

Enfield Dispatch reports that, in defending the proposed new town at Crews Hill and Chase Park, Cllr Erbil said Labour would give Enfield residents “**first dibs**” on new homes.⁵

The Enfield Labour manifesto says: “*We will set up a New Towns team to make sure the New Town works for local people. We will introduce a “**first dibs**” policy for first time buyers already living in Enfield for affordable homes.*”⁶

That sounds good. But it is not credible. There are three main issues.

Timing is a problem

First, building homes at the new town is unlikely to even begin at a meaningful scale for at least the next five to ten years. That means only a tiny handful of affordable homes to buy, if any, are likely to be built before the next local election in 2030.

A new town of 21,000 homes would take decades to complete.

Even if it averaged 600 homes a year, which the Government’s own New Towns Taskforce identifies as the kind of rate associated with development corporation-led new towns, it would still take 35 years to build out.⁷ That is before allowing for planning, land assembly and infrastructure delays.

That would also be an unusually high rate of sustained delivery. The latest planning industry research found that large schemes typically delivered an average annual build-out range of 100 to 188 homes, with the highest at a little over 300 per year.⁸ And Enfield Council has itself described the proposal as requiring a framework capable of evolving over 50 to 100 years.⁹

The Enfield Labour manifesto also promises “infrastructure first” at the new town. That’s fair enough. But “infrastructure first” also means homes later.¹⁰

In short, “first dibs” on new town homes is meaningless for people looking to buy their first home within the next five to ten years.

Enfield Council may not have control over the new town

A second problem is control. No decision has yet been taken about whether the new town will go ahead, or who would be responsible for delivering it. It could be led through a separate development body rather than directly by the council.¹¹

That means the council’s influence over the new town could be limited, including over who gets “first dibs” for the homes.

“First dibs” does not solve the affordability problem

The problem facing many of Enfield’s first-time buyers is not simply access to homes for sale. It is affordability. That includes the asking price and ongoing costs of homes marketed as “affordable”, such as shared ownership.

Having “first dibs” is meaningless if local first-time buyers cannot afford the property.

We have seen similar promises before, which have failed to deliver.

The council repeatedly said Edmonton residents would be the primary beneficiaries of the homes built at Meridian Water, its own flagship development. Yet when we asked, we found there was no monitoring to check whether sales of “affordable” or market tenure homes were to Edmonton residents. We also discovered that three-quarters of “affordable” sales had been to households from outside Enfield.¹²

In short, “first dibs” for homes at the new town is not a credible housing policy for the 2026-2030 election cycle. It looks more like a misleading slogan than a serious policy.

That is the real problem with the “first dibs” new town promise. It raises hopes among first-time buyers when the homes are unlikely to be built at scale for many years, while distracting attention from policies that could help sooner.

A more tangible policy would have started with homes the council can influence in the short term. Some affordable homes to buy at Meridian Water, and other council-controlled schemes, are due to be delivered within this election cycle. Labour could have committed to a clear local priority policy for homes on those schemes. **Why has it not done that?**

“Thousands of jobs” at the new town is an empty promise

In the Dispatch article, Cllr Erbil argued that the proposed new town for Crews Hill and Chase Park would create “thousands” of jobs.¹³

That sounds positive. But what does it really mean?

What jobs? Where? When? Are they construction jobs or permanent jobs? Are they full-time jobs? Are they jobs for Enfield residents? Will they pay enough for people to live locally?

None of this is explained. And importantly, none of it is backed by evidence. Even the Government’s own assessment of the new town proposal does not identify the precise scale or nature of future employment.

This lack of clarity is concerning because, as we have previously [written](#), Enfield’s track record for employment over the last ten years is poor, especially compared to other London boroughs.¹⁴

Again, Meridian Water should be the warning.

That scheme was also sold with promises of thousands of jobs for local people. But large areas of employment land were cleared, businesses were displaced, and the borough is still waiting for the promised replacement jobs to arrive. After more than a decade, well over a thousand jobs have been lost, not gained.¹⁵

Like Meridian Water, Crews Hill and Chase Park are not empty sites. They support businesses, livelihoods, skills and local spending. Garden centres, nurseries, horticultural firms, cafés, workshops, warehouses, retailers and other employers are an important part of the existing local economy.

Enfield needs homes. But it also needs places to earn a living. Any jobs claim about the new town must therefore answer two questions.

First, what happens to the jobs already there, and why is Enfield Labour not fighting to protect them?

Second, what future jobs are being promised and when?

If Cllr Erbil wants to claim the new town will create “thousands” of jobs, he should publish his assumptions and evidence.

Any serious new town proposal would begin by protecting existing businesses as placemaking assets, to be incorporated into the new town, not treating them as an inconvenience to be cleared away.

Enfield has an employment problem. It needs a council that fights for local businesses and livelihoods, not one that so casually undervalues them.

Meridian Water is not a success story. It is a costly warning

A revealing claim in the Dispatch interview is Cllr Erbil’s description of Meridian Water as “an effective scheme.”

Effective by what measure?

Meridian Water has been in planning for well over 15 years. Enfield’s 2010 Core Strategy said the area would provide around 5,000 homes by 2026.¹⁶ Since then, the ambition has grown, with later claims of 8,000, 10,000 and 13,000 homes.¹⁷

But the delivery has not matched the hype. Enfield is nowhere near the original 5,000 homes target. Nor is it remotely close. Only around 300 homes have been built.

There have been repeated delivery problems.

The presence of a **strategic water main** that crosses part of the site was overlooked by the council, despite being warned about it by Thames Water.¹⁸ This affects what can be delivered and when.

The recent Local Plan examination revealed that **housing plots at Meridian Water, owned by the council and capable of delivering around 700 homes, had also been overlooked.** This was a staggering oversight.¹⁹

The council has faced **financial penalties for delays.** For instance, a bridge design problem, caused by failing to accurately measure the width of the river, is now expected to cost up to £11 million.²⁰

There has also been **ongoing uncertainty and changes in direction,** which is likely to weaken confidence among potential investors.²¹

No new masterplan for the entire site has been published, despite being promised.²² There is almost **no proper scrutiny** of the project.²³ And there is a gap between the council's claims for the site and what its new Local Plan says can be delivered.²⁴

Yes, there have been challenges outside the council's control. But inflation, construction costs and building safety changes do not explain why Enfield's record on housebuilding is so much worse than other London boroughs facing the same pressures.

Nor can it simply be blamed on "Tory failure", as Cllr Erbil indicates in the Dispatch interview.

There is an awkward fact here. Whatever else can be said about the previous Conservative government, Meridian Water was not starved of government support. The previous government backed the project with nearly £200 million of Housing Infrastructure Fund money.²⁵ That money has helped pay for infrastructure, including a new park, roads, and bridges.

So, when Cllr Erbil calls Meridian Water "effective", voters are entitled to ask what he means. If the test is delivery of homes or jobs, then Meridian Water is not a success story. It is a warning. A very big and very expensive one.

The HMO promise comes too late

We have already [written in detail](#) about Labour's HMO pledge. Many residents will understand why stronger controls are needed. Poorly managed HMOs can mean overcrowding, waste problems, parking pressure, noise and poor living conditions.

But the problem is whether Labour can now deliver the specific cap it is promising. When asked by Dispatch how Labour would cap HMOs, Cllr Erbil pointed to government action or to putting it into the Local Plan.

That raises two obvious problems. If it depends on government action, Enfield Labour cannot promise to deliver it. And if it is meant to be in the Local Plan, why is it not already there?

Labour has controlled Enfield Council since 2010. It has taken around nine years and spent more than £7 million preparing its new Local Plan, which is now in its final examination stages. But the Plan does not contain the HMO cap Labour is now promising.

At this late stage, it cannot realistically be added in any meaningful way. That means the promise is unlikely to be delivered, at least within the 2026 to 2030 election cycle.

Serious challenges require serious answers

None of this means Enfield does not need more homes and jobs.

Enfield faces major challenges. It needs more genuinely affordable homes and more job opportunities. Fewer families trapped in temporary accommodation. Stronger protections for renters. Homes for people to comfortably downsize to, alongside homes for first-time buyers. And proper planning for an ageing population and future generations.

These challenges are serious and difficult to solve. They require serious answers, serious leadership, and a council willing to learn from past mistakes and face fair scrutiny.

They require a council that designs policy and acts on sound evidence, not one that appears to make decisions first and then look for supporting evidence later.

But instead, what we see is a familiar pattern. Slogans. Big claims. Missing evidence. Promises that raise hopes without showing how they will be delivered. And distractions from practical policies that could help now.

Enfield's voters deserve better.

A lot better.

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