

**Draft Waste Strategy for Essex
Consultation Focus Groups**

Report

Prepared for

Essex County Council (on behalf of Essex Waste Partnership)

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This is a report on a series of focus groups commissioned by Essex County Council (ECC) to support the Essex Waste Partnership (EWP) waste strategy work.

It was commissioned as a part of the County wide consultation being carried out to allow people to have their say on a new draft waste strategy for Essex. The primary consultation route was a survey questionnaire set up and managed by ECC. This was provided in a number of ways including, online, print and via telephone. The strategy documents and consultation survey was also made available in the council's 74 libraries throughout Essex.

However, the partnership wished to support the survey with a more in depth exploration of specific aspects of the draft strategy. As a result, ECC (on behalf of the EWP) commissioned Fieldwork Assistance to carry out a short series of focus groups to gain a better understanding of residents' views on the following key priorities:

- Vision and Zero Waste
- Waste Reduction
- Waste Treatment Technologies
- Reuse and Recycling

There were five focus groups which were held online as follows:

- Group 1 Waste Treatment Technologies. 30 October 2023 early evening
- Group 2 Vision and Zero Waste. 30 October 2023 late evening
- Group 3 Waste Reduction. 31 October 2023 early evening
- Group 4 Reuse and Recycling. 31 October 2023 late evening
- Group 5 Waste Treatment Technologies and Recycling. 2 November 2023 late evening

The participants were recruited, and the moderation of the groups was carried out by Fieldwork Assistance.

Participants were recruited to meet the quota specified. This required participants to be drawn from across the county, to represent the full range of age groups, with a variety of attitudes to waste and recycling based on their current habits.

In particular, participants were to be those who had a 'normal' interest and involvement in recycling and waste, as opposed to those who had a higher level of awareness or possible vested interest. A screening questionnaire was used to select participants.

A full analysis of the participants is included as an appendix to this report.

Topic Guides were used by the facilitator for each session. The topic guides used during the focus groups were developed in conjunction with the waste strategy project team. Using topic guides

helped participants provide an informed response during the group discussion. The topic guides used for each focus group are included as an appendix to this report.

Participants were given pre-learning to complete prior to attending the focus groups to help build their understanding of the topic and the draft strategy. The content of the sessions incorporated engaging with informative content and guided discussion and activities. Each session concluded with signposting to the consultation survey to encourage participants to have their say on the draft strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS

In this section, we have collated key observations and conclusions arising from the focus group activity. These observations represent the views of the participants gathered through a blend of activities, guided discussion, and open questions.

The public consultation process

There was an overall lack of awareness of the consultation. None of the participants had completed the consultation survey prior to attending the focus groups. Respondents' views were therefore drawn from a low level of engagement. Although the small number of focus group participants means the results are not statistically valid, these views may provide insight into views held by the residents who did not engage in the consultation.

Recycling and waste communications

Participants told us that communication from councils on waste and recycling was often in the form of leaflets or newsletters. Education to heighten awareness was deemed an overarching need and the Essex Waste Partnership would need to run more visible campaigns to secure engagement. There were concerns that as many residents as possible need to be made aware of initiatives as every household needs to get involved.

Waste Treatment Technologies

- “Anaerobic Digestion” as a treatment technology for food recycling was a completely unknown term. A few participants thought it could be a form of composting.
- When reviewing possible communications messages, participants told us that the ‘One kettle from 6 tea bags’ as an illustration was very impactful and clearly demonstrated the benefits of Anaerobic Digestion. This was seen as an excellent slogan to use as it was motivating and relatable to all.
- The concept of Energy from Waste (EfW) for residual waste was clear to all.
- When discussing EfW and the efforts that would be required, it was suggested that incentives could be offered to households such as a reduction in council tax bills or lower energy bills in order to encourage engagement and participation.

Vision and Zero Waste

- The content of the draft waste strategy was deemed to be important, but not always fully engaging.

- It was something that was expected to be already in place, but participants felt that the strategy did not meet the current reality on the ground. The differences between councils experienced by some participants in sorting the various types of waste, and the perception held by some that some types of waste were not kept separate after collection has reduced their level of enthusiasm. This perception held back the level of potential engagement.
- The vision statement was successful in terms of setting a direction of travel.
- The phrase “Working Together” was seen as a stand-out positive that helped residents feel engaged.
- It was felt that a collaborative approach would be key in making any initiative work.
- There was a lack of clarity as to what “zero-waste” meant. Consequently, some participants felt that a zero-waste county seemed too ambitious and somewhat unrealistic. Participants suggested that adding a date to the vision statement for becoming a zero-waste county could add credibility. This suggestion was received very positively by other participants.
- Some participants felt that saying ‘we aspire’ provided a ‘get out of jail card’, meaning that the statement might be more a wish than a promise. However, others felt that using the word aspire was fitting for a mission statement and fulfilled its role.

Waste reduction

- National targets were not deemed to be trustworthy as these were not seen to be set in stone and may change depending on the political mood and changes of government. There appeared to be more trust at local government level. However, this was sometimes let down by the experiences of waste collection services. Participants felt that more details were required to make these targets and ambitions credible.
- All participants believed that waste prevention was the ideal measure. However, there was a misunderstanding that waste prevention means that nothing would go into general rubbish rather than reducing or preventing all types of waste. This may be a useful distinction to highlight in future communications. Participants felt it would not be possible to completely remove general rubbish, as manufacturers often had their own agenda and not all households would comply without some form of incentive.

Reuse and recycle

- Reuse was deemed to be a personal choice, but participants felt it should be encouraged.
- Participants felt that recycling should be something that ideally everyone engages in.

- When discussing practical barriers to uptake of recycling services, lack of space in smaller households for storage was highlighted as an issue.
- Composting was generally seen as a good message for garden waste, but participants felt that the credibility of this initiative was undone by recently announced collection service changes as residents in some areas now have to pay for the collection of garden waste.

The role of councils

There was some degree of confusion on waste management policies and differing services offered between different local councils in Essex. The concept of a common strategy for Essex was well received as it was expected to standardise services across the County. However, it was felt that it should go beyond county level and that a common strategy would be needed at a national level.

The role of councils was seen as important as a force for change in order to effectively lobby national government. It was considered that it was national government who could pass legislation and thus influence manufacturers.

Residents wanted to see benefits at household level and gain a better understanding of how any initiative would impact households.

Participants felt that transparency was important in order to build trust. Suggestions included publishing information about how much waste is recycled or what happens to recycling and examples of what had been achieved against targets. Clear infographics and measurable targets were deemed influential in order to increase understanding and gain traction from residents.

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CURRENT SITUATION

At the beginning of each group participants were asked for their thoughts and opinions on their current waste and recycling services: What did they like, what they didn't like, who recycles, are there things they didn't understand or concerned them.

They were also shown a brief animated video about recycling. This can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYrhgAtSs-s&list=PL09tfL-lkZRm4aTK2UNDeVXydfZxKai-6&index=2>

The themes arising from participant discussion were:

- The level of satisfaction with current services impacted strongly on residents' reaction to proposed initiatives. Residents from different areas and households had different levels of satisfaction with the services currently being offered. Those with communal waste facilities, such as in apartment blocks, mentioned that there might just be 2 large bins – one for general rubbish and one for recycling.
- A limit of 3 black bags for general rubbish was not deemed sufficient in many cases. Participants felt that flexibility is needed for larger households.
- Residents did not like leaving black bags on the street as they felt that they attracted foxes, badgers and rodents.
- There were several mentions of seeing recycling and general waste bins being emptied into the same bin which reduced trust in what happens to recycling collected at kerbside.
- Participants felt that councils should be seen to demonstrate best practice through managing their contractors and staff to achieve the expected service level.
- There was disappointment that garden waste collection was being charged for in some areas, whereas it was felt that it should be part of the council tax bill.
- It was stated that storage space was needed in order to be able to sort waste into different containers. This was particularly an issue for those in flats or smaller dwellings.
- The need to book a slot in a recycling centre was mentioned, but this did not appear to be a major concern for participants.
- Participants talked about some materials that they would like to recycle, for which collection services aren't currently available, such as glass and blister packs.

ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL'S ROLE

During each focus group, the role of councils was discussed. Participants were asked for their thoughts on the councils' role in delivering waste and recycling services, working with manufacturers and retailers, and setting long term plans.

The themes arising from participant discussion were:

- It was felt that Essex County Council had a key role in bringing all the councils in Essex together to follow a common strategy.
- Participants were aware of different recycling practices between Essex councils. They felt that councils could work together to standardise waste services across Essex, which they felt was important if the amount of waste was to be reduced.
- To make a real environmental impact it was felt that a strategy had to be at a national level, as any local efforts would make minimal differences unless the rest of the country followed suit.
- Participants felt that supermarkets could be quite influential in terms of demanding that manufacturers limit wasteful packaging.
- Participants felt that the EWP could have an important lobbying role to government. Central government was viewed as having more clout to influence manufacturers with regard to packaging. It was recognised that government also have the power to pass appropriate legislation, however, there was distrust of central government to stick to what they set out to do.
- The EWP's initiatives could provide a template for best practice which could then be rolled out to other areas. In order for this influence to be credible councils in Essex had to be seen to be collaborative and sensitive to residents' needs.
- Many felt that residents should be rewarded if they put in extra effort for taking a greener approach. Participants felt that residents should not have to pay any more to achieve the targets and ambitions.
- Some hoped that a reduction in council tax could be a tool to incentivise good behaviour and encourage any extra perceived effort.
- Many felt that residents were struggling currently with the cost of living and in consequence most could ill afford to pay for services that they felt should already be included in their council tax bill.

DRAFT WASTE STRATEGY FOR ESSEX

During each group, participants were asked for their thoughts on the draft waste strategy for Essex.

To inform the discussion, a video explaining the draft waste strategy was played to participants. This video, produced by ECC can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYrhgAtSs-s&list=PL09tfl-1kZRm4aTK2UNDeVXydfZxKai-6&index=3>

The summary themes arising from participant discussion were:

- The draft waste strategy was deemed to be important, but not always fully engaging.
- The strategy was something that participants expected to be already in place, but residents felt that they did not receive enough information about what was going on, and what was expected of them in terms of waste collection and recycling.
- Many did not know where to find information about waste and recycling plans and performance, and had only limited recollection of communication from ECC or their council about waste. As a result, this held back the level of potential engagement.

Some of the participant comments were:

"I expect it, I don't understand what is new...."(G1)

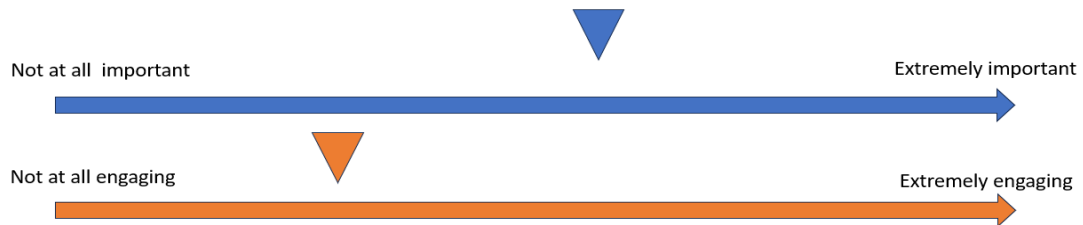
There needs to be more for younger people....(G4)

"It's a nice thought, but not everyone is going to do it, so what's the point?"(G5)

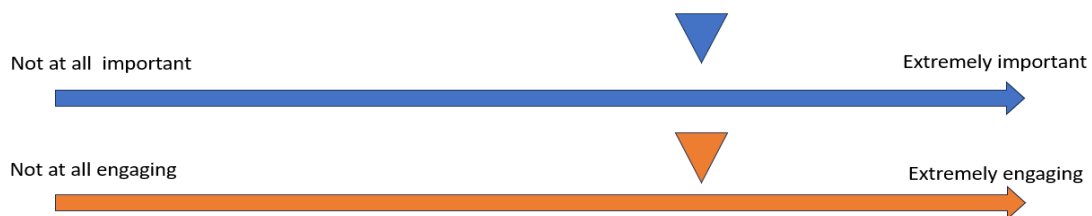
"It shows local government are getting on board..".(G3)

Participants were asked to indicate how important they felt the strategy was, and how engaging they found the content. The charts below illustrate graphically the overall sense of importance and engagement expressed within each group.

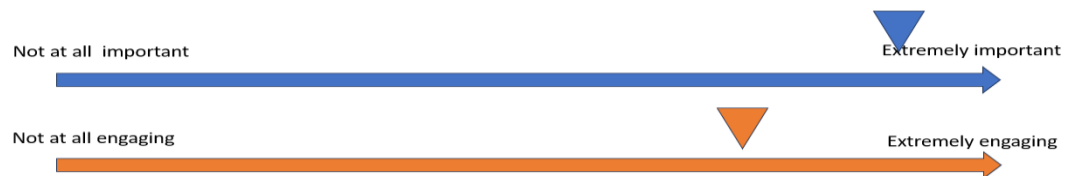
Group 1



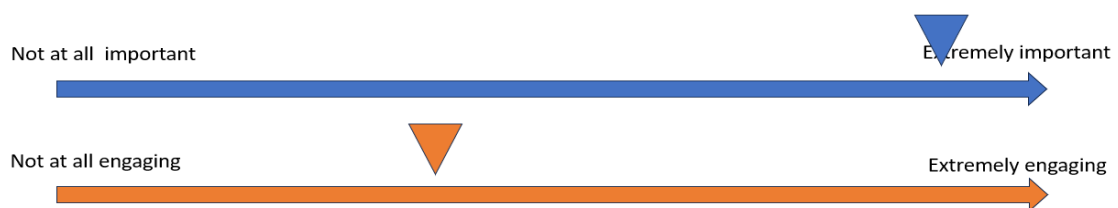
Group 2



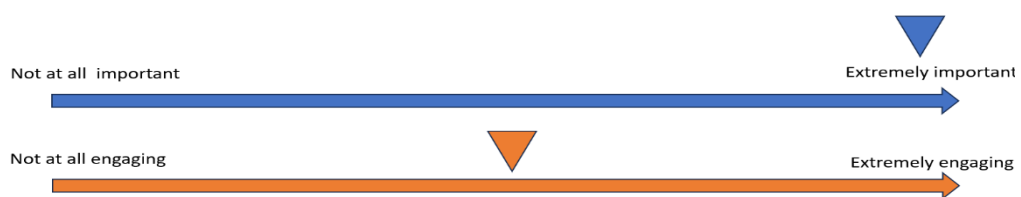
Group 3



Group 4



Group 5



As can be seen, the general level of engagement with the strategy within the groups did not match the level of importance that residents attached to it, sometimes significantly. These differences were explored and discussed in more detail in each group

Whilst they felt that the strategy, once explained, was important, their low current awareness of the strategy, and knowledge of how successful current processes are, has resulted in a sense of not feeling engaged in the process.

More information on what was currently taking place, along with awareness campaigns and education, were seen as important components for improving the participants' and the wider community's engagement.

Households had different levels of satisfaction with the services currently being offered, which meant there was initially some doubts and resistance to this initial exposure to the strategy. There was some distrust based on the current waste collection practices. It was stated that this strategy was nothing new and that it was as expected. Some felt it was too generic and that one approach didn't fit all needs and communities.

It was felt that there was a need to explain what was new compared to what is already being done.

It was felt strongly that all residents had to be involved, otherwise the strategy was unlikely to be fully effective.

Many stated that they should have some form of incentive offered that would encourage all residents to really be involved.

VISION STATEMENT

Following opening discussions on the Current Situation and the general content of the draft strategy, focus Group 2 addressed the proposed vision statement and priorities included in the draft strategy.

Participants were presented with the following graphic, and the facilitator moderated a discussion that asked participants to share their thoughts on: What does it mean to you? Is there anything you don't understand? How important is a vision statement to you? How important is it to set the direction of travel?



The responses broadly separated into positive and negative reactions which are summarised below.

The positive themes arising from participant discussion, which could be developed in future communications were:

- The vision statement was viewed positively and can be regarded as successful in terms of setting a direction of travel.
- **Working Together** was seen as a stand-out positive phrase that helped residents feel engaged.
- A collaborative approach would be key in making any initiative work.

The negative themes arising from participant discussion, which should be addressed when developing future communications were:

- A zero-waste county was seen by many as being too ambitious and somewhat unrealistic.
- There was a feeling that there was lack of clarity as to what zero waste actually meant.
- Some felt that saying 'We aspire' provided a 'get out of jail card', meaning that the statement might be more a wish than a promise. However, others felt that using the word aspire was fitting for a mission statement and fulfilled its role.

Participants in Group 2 on the whole felt that the statement was not defined enough and should be made more tangible by adding a targeted timeline. They felt that adding a date to becoming a zero-waste county could add credibility to this vision statement.

Some of the participant comments were:

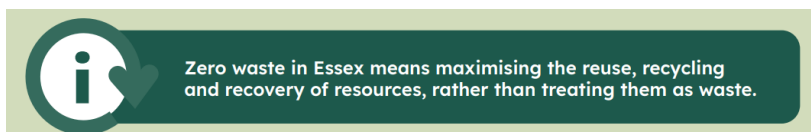
“Clear and to the point...”.(G3)

“Zero waste – what happens to the waste...”.(G4)

“Need to set targets...”.(G 2)

“Add timeline of what will be achieved by year...”.(G 2)

Participants were then presented with and discussed the following explanatory graphic:



It was felt that maximising reuse and recycling were clear and credible aims. Recovery of resources was not always viewed as clear.

The explanation of zero-waste county helped to clarify the meaning. However, the phrase “rather than treating them as waste” triggered some doubts and concerns. There was a need to explain what this actually meant.

It was felt that there would still be some left-over waste and there was a need to provide more details.

One suggestion was to say “rather than sending to landfill”. However, there was some concern expressed that it could mean that boats full of non-recyclable waste might be sent overseas and this was not seen as being a sustainable solution.

Group 2 felt the word “ethical” could be used in this context. For example, saying that “left over waste would be treated ethically”.

Participants were then presented with and discussed the following graphic:

OUR PRIORITIES

To deliver our vision, the EWP has identified the following priorities for Essex:

Move to a circular economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Realise the opportunities arising from the circular economy model that will bring wider benefits to Essex.
Deliver the waste hierarchy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Deliver a system that puts waste reduction at its centre. ■ Work together to encourage and support reuse and repair initiatives. ■ Increase recycling by delivering comprehensive services and supporting residents to recycle as much as possible. ■ Use technologies for the treatment of food and non-recyclable waste that aim to minimise the environmental impact of waste and maximise energy and material recovery.
Collaborate and innovate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Innovate and work collaboratively with each other and with government, business and institutions to create a more sustainable waste system.
Educate and engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Listen to residents and deliver information and initiatives to encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour to reduce waste and recycle more.

It was felt that the priorities were the right ones. Education and collaboration were seen as the most important elements with a recognition that everybody had to be on board in order for any strategy to be fully successful. The sense of collaboration resonated with most participants.

There was limited awareness of the circular economy and they felt that a clear explanation was required.

Credibility was held back by the lack of clarity on the concept of zero-waste as many participants believed that it was unlikely that this could actually be achieved.

Explanations and reasons to believe were required to increase engagement with the priorities.

Some of the participant comments were:



“Need to set targets...” (G 2)

“Add timeline of what will be achieved by year...” (G 2)




REUSE, RECYCLING, TARGETS AND AMBITIONS

Participants in Group 3 and 4 were asked to share their thoughts on the draft strategy principles of waste reduction, reuse and recycling, and the proposed targets and ambitions.

In Group 3, participants were shown the following graphics setting out the proposed targets and ambitions for waste reduction.

-  TARGETS: these are the national targets and are the minimum we need to achieve
-  AMBITIONS: this is where we believe we need to go further or faster to achieve the vision

Waste reduction

-  We will halve the amount of residual waste produced per person by 2042.
-  We aim to reduce waste by 10% by 2030.
-  We aspire that Essex will be a zero waste county by 2055.

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on: whether the targets and ambitions were clear, whether they were achievable, what barriers there may be to achieving these aims. How clear they are, what you understand by residual waste and Zero Waste, how you feel about going beyond these targets, what are the main benefits, what concerns you have.

The key themes arising from the discussion were:

- National targets were not deemed to be trustworthy as these were not seen to be set in stone and may change depending on the political mood and changes of government.
- This suggests a lack of trust which will need to be addressed and remedied. There were some concerns that everything would end up into landfill or being shipped out to the Far East.
- Improving on national targets was generally well received, but details were required to make these ambitions credible.
- There were some concerns of what the targets and ambitions could mean in terms of costs to residents, and how it may impact on residents if required to change behaviour.
- Information and education was key to get everyone involved and engaged. Transparency with published statistics would be useful and motivating.
- Although engagement was high, the concept of zero waste was not always seen as being realistic.

Some of the participant comments were:

“Is it realistic? Need statistics showing past/present and targets...” G4

“Ambitions are good, but is it possible?” (G3)

Participants in Group 4 were shown and discussed the following graphics setting out information about priority to move to a Circular Economy and to deliver a system that puts waste reduction at its centre.

PREVENTION

The preferred option on the waste hierarchy is to prevent waste being produced in the first place.


Deliver a system that puts waste reduction at its centre.

Businesses can help by reducing the amount of packaging used in products and services to improve circularity and increase reuse of products and materials.

Residents can help by only buying what they need and reusing what they already have.

To deliver this priority, the EWP will:

- develop and deliver information and activities to help and inspire residents to reduce their waste
- design future waste collection services to encourage residents to reduce their waste
- work with government to seek stronger legislation and regulation to hold businesses to account
- support local businesses that operate sustainably or encourage waste reduction




Residual waste

Waste that is not reused, recycled, composted or anaerobically digested.

Our approach to addressing the waste management challenge and to achieve the vision, targets and ambitions of the Essex Waste Partnership (EWP) is built upon:

- supporting the move to a circular economy
- services that deliver the waste hierarchy
- driving down cost and environmental impacts
- partnership working to maximise the impact of our work
- supporting residents to reduce their waste and recycle more

The EWP is committed to continuously reviewing good practice to inform our approach and publishing our plans, progress and performance.



MOVE TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The best way to deliver change is to rethink our waste and embrace a circular economy where our finite resources are conserved and used efficiently.

There are clear environmental benefits from reducing waste during manufacture and by designing products that are easy to repair and recycle. The transition to a circular economy can also deliver opportunities for green growth and jobs.

Realise the opportunities arising from the circular economy model that will bring wider benefits to Essex.

To deliver this priority, the EWP will:

- encourage the growth of the green business sector and jobs in Essex to deal with waste in innovative ways
- support businesses to adopt circular economy principles and practices
- integrate the principles of the circular economy in council strategies and policies
- support communities to reduce their waste and reuse and repair more
- design services that increase closed-loop recycling where waste is collected and recycled to make the same type of product

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on: how achievable do you think this target and ambition is, whether these priorities are clear, what are the barriers, are there any targets/ ambitions that are missing here, are the EWP missing anything.

The key themes arising from the discussion were:

- All believed that prevention was the ideal measure, but interpreted prevention as meaning that no waste would go into general rubbish rather than reducing all types of waste and recycling. Participants felt that preventing all general rubbish is not possible as manufacturers often had their own agenda and it was felt that not all households would comply without some form of incentive.

- Participants felt that the graphic representation of the circular economy model helped to clarify and explain the concept. However, there were doubts expressed about the level of involvement and commitment that could be expected from each stakeholder to achieve the move to a circular economy.
- It was also felt that manufacturers did not make products to last as it did not fit their business model. Consequently, it was often cheaper and easier just to replace an item instead of repairing it.
- It was stated that the move to a circular economy needed to be adopted on a much wider basis than just Essex.
- It was felt that to add credibility everyone had to be onboard; residents, council and manufacturers.

Some of the participant comments were:

“What about what goes into the bins on the street?” (G3)

“You need to educate...”(G3)

“Need to work together nationally...”(G3)

Participants in Group 4 were shown and discussed the following graphics setting out information about priority to encourage reuse and repair initiatives, and to increase recycling. Participants were asked to share their thoughts on whether these priorities are clear and how achievable they are, what could you do differently, what support would you need, what are the barriers.

REUSE

The next best option is to reuse products as much as possible.

Work together to encourage and support reuse and repair initiatives.

Businesses can help by designing products that are durable, easy to maintain and repair.

Residents can help by using repair services, borrowing rather than buying and renting or buying second-hand.

To deliver this priority, the EWP will:

- support business to deliver reuse and repair services
- support communities to deliver local reuse and repair initiatives
- develop and deliver information and activities to help and inspire residents to reuse and repair more
- support sharing platforms that promote reuse
- develop enhanced reuse services through Essex County Council's network of recycling centres
- lobby government to accelerate a repair and reuse culture within business



RECYCLING

If waste cannot be prevented or products and materials reused, then turning materials into new products by recycling is the next option on the waste hierarchy.


Increase recycling by delivering comprehensive services and supporting residents to recycle as much as possible.

Businesses can help by designing products and packaging using materials that can be easily recycled and by providing community collection points and return initiatives.

Residents can help by making full use of the recycling services provided at home, in community collection points, out and about and at recycling centres.

To deliver this priority, the EWP will:

- provide collection services, recycling centres and local community recycling facilities that deliver high quality material for recycling
- ensure that all Essex residents have access to separate food waste collections
- ensure that all Essex residents have access to frequent and comprehensive services for recycling plastic, paper and cardboard, metal, glass, food and composting garden waste
- continue to explore extending the range of materials that can be collected for recycling
- ensure residents have the right information to recycle as much as possible
- continue to support home composting



The key themes arising from the discussion were:

- that these were important changes in behaviour that should be encouraged.
- Reuse was deemed to be a personal choice, but participants felt it should be encouraged.
- Participants felt that recycling should be something that everyone engages in.
- Repair centres were well received, but it was felt that it had to make economic sense.
- Lack of space in smaller households for recycling would be an issue for some.
- It was strongly felt that manufacturers and retailers still had work to do in terms of preventing waste by redesigning packaging and making longer lasting items.

Participants were asked to contribute their ideas for how reuse and recycling could be promoted to residents. The key themes arising from the discussion were:

- It was mentioned that schools could be an important hub for reuse as schools often had projects based around reusing items for projects.
- Participants in Group 4 felt that engagement with recycling would be driven by publicity and information about the services that would be provided. This would enable and encourage residents to reuse and recycle.

- The concerns expressed were often around the potential extra cost to residents. It would often be cheaper to buy a new item than getting it repaired. Although some already used charity shops or buy second hand, it was expected that there might be some resistance to this.
- There was a general feeling overall that more information would be welcomed.

Some of the participant comments were:

"It feels bigger than county level., Tesco and manufacturers have to be approached on a National level..."(G4)

"It's the right thing to do, you need to educate and be consistent..."G4)

WASTE TREATMENT TECHNOLOGIES

A video explaining the Waste Hierarchy and Energy from Waste (EfW) was shown to participants in Groups 1 and 5.

This video, produced by ECC can be viewed at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNJ_AOHW6TM&list=PL09tFL-lkZRm4aTK2UNDeVXydfZxKai-6&index=6

Participants were asked to share their thoughts on: is there a main recycler at home, what is the level of participation, how do you go about it, how much do you trust what happens with recycling,

The key themes arising from the participant discussion, which focussed on the individual elements of the Waste Hierarchy were:

- The concept of Energy from Waste was clear to all.
- Participants clearly understood both the concept AND the benefits that they would receive.
- Some wanted to know more about how it would affect them – for example: would they have to carry out more sorting and separation of household waste?
- If energy was produced from the efforts of residents, many would expect lower energy bills and not just be benefitting energy companies.
- It was felt that the target of zero waste to landfill by 2030 did not always seem achievable.
- The Waste Hierarchy diagram was not seen by participants as a whole. Rather, they were drawn to the individual elements within the diagram. Neither the diagram as a whole nor the title were mentioned, or discussed per se during the discussion.

Some of the participant comments were:

“Zero landfill is new “...(G1)

“Food waste into liquid fertiliser a great idea”...(G 5)

“2030 goal is amazing, but it’s not going to happen...”(G 5)

A video explaining Anaerobic Digestion for the treatment of food waste was shown and discussed by participants in Groups 1 and 5. Participants were asked to share their thoughts on Anaerobic Digestion for recycling food waste.

This video, produced by ECC can be viewed at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_eGAaO1DHI&list=PL09tfl-lkZRm4aTK2UNDeVXydfZxKai-6&index=4

The key themes arising from the participant discussion were:

- The term “Anaerobic Digestion” was completely unknown term to participants. A few thought it could be a form of composting.
- However, once shown the video, participants understood the process of breaking down biodegradable waste to produce energy and fertiliser.
- It was felt that another name should be used or developed as this would probably help in acceptance and understanding to make people think along the lines of composting “like your grandfather used to do...”
- The ‘boil one kettle from 6 tea bags’ message was very impactful and clearly demonstrated the benefits of anaerobic digestion. This was seen as an excellent slogan to use as it was motivating and easily relatable to all.

There were differences in the level of engagement with anaerobic digestion between the two groups:

- The anaerobic digestion initiative drove the level of engagement and credibility for participants in Group 5. It was felt quite strongly that the Tea Bag message helped to convey the idea clearly and impactfully.
- However, there was some resistance from Group 1 participants where there was concern about having to do more sorting. They felt that they were struggling with the current sorting requirements due to busy lives and other priorities.

Participants were asked to contribute their ideas for how food recycling could be promoted to residents. The key themes arising from the discussion were:

- It was felt that raising awareness using examples such as the tea bag message was key. It was mentioned that a campaign could be targeted at schools, hospitals and public areas.
- It was suggested that in order to further potential buy in, events could be organised including trips to recycling centres.
- In terms of messaging, it was deemed too high level and it was felt that it needed to be brought back down to the impact it would have at household level.

Some of the participant comments were:

"Anaerobic digestion is jargon..."(G5)

"Composting is an old school idea, grandad does it on a Sunday..."(G1)

"6 tea bags = 1 kettle, it helps to understand how much energy can be created..."(G5)

RECYCLING

An animated video explaining how recycling works was shown and discussed by participants in Group 5. Participants were asked to share their thoughts on: their current recycling behaviour at home and what challenges they experience when recycling.

The animation video can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKv-7CB1pOQ&list=PL09tfl-lkZRm4aTK2UNDeVXydfZxKai-6&index=3>

Recycling services were not examined in depth during this research.

The key themes arising from the discussion were:

- The video was generally seen as a good message.
- Participants were able to relate to composting as they were already fully aware of the practice, especially amongst gardeners.
- They were aware that this is a well-established tried and tested process already commonly used domestically.
- The scaling up to use composting on a larger scale was welcomed.
- Participants felt that credibility around composting of garden waste collected from households was reduced by the fact that residents in some areas are now required to pay for the collection of garden waste.

CASE STUDIES

During the focus groups 4, four case studies were shown, relating to the group topic and the facilitator asked participants to share their thoughts on the case studies and whether they were useful when engaging with the draft strategy.

The case studies were prepared by the waste strategy project team and are shown below.
Groups 1 and 2

Case study:

If you recycle food waste in your kitchen caddy, we send it to anaerobic digestion plants. Recycling food creates renewable energy for homes and businesses and fertiliser for agriculture. Food recycling also eliminates greenhouse gas emissions released by food waste in landfill.



Group 3

Case study:

Through microgrants and promotional activity, we have supported local organisations, individuals and schools with projects that create or inspire a reduction in household waste. Refill shops, clothes swaps and repair services across the county are just some of the activities that have received support. These initiatives help and inspire people and communities to reduce their waste and be more sustainable.



Group 4

Case study:

In 2023, the partnership is working together to tackle food waste. Roughly 25% of waste thrown away in the general rubbish bin is food. Throwing away food that could have been eaten adds £60 a month to the average food shopping bill. Not only is this a waste of money but it also damages the environment. Funded and delivered by the partnership, households in Essex will receive support to reduce food waste and recycle more.

Through the year-long Love Essex, Love Food campaign, the partnership is providing ideas and inspiration to help residents reduce food waste at home. By replacing lost food caddies, providing a roll of free caddy liners and providing information and tips, the partnership aims to increase the proportion of food waste recycled. We have also secured long-term treatment options for separately collected food recycling, so we can generate renewable energy from this waste.

Group 4

Case study:

The Essex Waste Partnership has funded and promoted the provision of a free-to-use online platform for reuse that enables residents to give and get items for free. With nearly 90,000 members in Essex, this initiative helped households swap 14,000 items in 2022-23.



Group 5

Case study:

In January 2023 Maldon District Council launched a pilot for the collection of plastic bags and wrapping as part of normal recycling collections. Plastics such as plastic bags, confectionary wrappers, foil-lined packaging, plastic film, bubble wrap, pet food pouches and more will be collected from approximately 6,500 households. If successful, the service will expand to all residents in the district by 2025. This trial will help make recycling plastic bags and wrapping more convenient, increase the amount of plastic packaging recycled and reduce the amount of plastics going to landfill.



- The case studies were generally well received by participants and proved a very useful stimulus for the discussions.
- They were seen as a useful aid which helped to solidify and explain the reasoning behind an initiative. It also provided more background information and demonstrated the benefit of activities. This in turn helped to add impact and relevance to the initiatives.
- Participants liked the brevity and clarity of the examples, and these could be a useful addition to future communication strategies.