



Draft Waste Strategy for
Essex

Draft Executive Summary
Report

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Executive summary

Background

The Essex Waste Partnership (EWP) is made up of Essex County Council, and the 12 district, city and borough councils in Essex. The EWP is developing a new joint Waste Strategy for Essex which outlines a high-level, strategic framework for managing the waste and recycling produced by homes and businesses in the county for the next 30 years.

On behalf of the EWP, Essex County Council (ECC) facilitated a public consultation in autumn 2023 asking for views and feedback from residents, communities, businesses and councils on the proposals in the strategy.

To ensure independent and impartial analysis of the consultation responses, the Council commissioned Enventure Research to analyse and evaluate the responses to the consultation and prepare this report.

Approach summary

A webpage on the Council website hosted all the consultation documentation and a survey.

The online survey was hosted by Essex County Council using Citizen Space, which allowed respondents to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with each part of the draft strategy. Respondents were also provided with the opportunity to provide comments on each part of the draft strategy. This survey is referred to as the full survey in the report. Respondents were able to access a suite of documents online alongside the draft strategy to support them in providing an informed response to the consultation.

In the full survey, respondents were also able to provide their views on the accompanying Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The survey could also be completed in an Easy Read format, which was an accessible version of the questionnaire using simplified question and response wording and images. More information about the Easy Read Survey can be found in the Consultation Approach section in the full report.

Paper copies and large print versions (including the Easy Read version of the questionnaire) were made available upon request. Copies of the draft strategy and supporting documentation were made available in all Essex County Council libraries. A copy of the full survey can be found in the appendices.

A series of online and face to face events were also held for the public and key stakeholders to provide an overview of the draft strategy proposals.

Essex County Council commissioned a series of five online focus groups in October 2023 to support the consultation. Findings from the focus groups can be found in a separate report by Fieldwork Assistance.

A communications and marketing strategy was created to support the rollout of the consultation, aiming to make as many people as possible aware of the consultation and able to submit an informed response.



Response summary

A total of **4,545 responses** to the consultation were received. This included 4,224 responses to the full survey and 321 responses to the Easy Read survey. Only 16 paper copies were received, with the rest captured online. Of the 4,545 responses, 24 were received from organisations.

The survey allowed respondents to provide their comments on each part of the draft strategy. Between 20% and 39% of respondents provided comments for each open-end comment question in the full survey (with the exception of the questions related to the Strategic Environmental Assessment) and between 26% and 43% provided comments in the Easy Read survey.

7% of respondents (288) in the full survey gave their feedback on the Strategic Environmental Assessment. See the Strategic Environmental Assessment section of the full report for more information.

Summary of key findings

Vision

Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the vision statement: *We aspire to be a zero waste county. By working together we will reduce waste, protect the environment and conserve resources.*

- In the full survey, a larger proportion agreed with the vision statement than disagreed.

Figure 1 – Vision summary

Question	Base	% Agree	% Not sure	% Disagree
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this vision statement for the Waste Strategy for Essex? (Q8)	4,203	67%	7%	26%

- In the comments about the vision, the most common themes were:
 - It is too ambitious or unachievable, or that zero waste is unrealistic
 - Services need to be easy to use or convenient
 - Businesses need to do more, particularly to reduce packaging
- In the Easy Read survey, 70% said becoming a zero waste county is important to them, compared with 15% who said it was not.

Targets

The draft strategy sets out targets to commit to as a minimum in line with achieving national waste targets set by the government.

- In the full survey, 48% thought the targets are about right, which was the most common response. A further 28% would prefer more ambitious targets and 13% would prefer less ambitious targets.



- Respondents who would prefer more ambitious or less ambitious targets were given the opportunity to indicate if they thought the timelines for achieving them should be shorter or longer or whether the targets themselves should be higher or lower.
- Amongst those who would prefer more ambitious targets, 43% would prefer higher targets that are achieved sooner, which was the most common response, closely followed by 41% preferring targets to be achieved sooner, and 16% would prefer higher targets.
- Amongst those who would prefer less ambitious targets, similar proportions would prefer lower targets and would prefer lower targets that are achieved at a later date (37% and 36% respectively). A further 27% would prefer the targets to be achieved at a later date.
- In the comments about the targets, the most common themes were:
 - The targets are unachievable or will be difficult to achieve
 - Services need to be easy to use or convenient
 - The targets are not ambitious enough or need to be achieved sooner
- In the Easy Read survey, 65% said they agree with the targets, which was a larger proportion than *not sure* (18%) and that said they *disagree with the targets* (17%). Amongst those who said they disagreed, 53% said there should be less targets and 47% said there should be more.

Ambitions

Whilst the targets are the minimum that need to be achieved and are in line with the government's national targets, the draft strategy includes ambitions that aim to deliver greater change and impact more quickly.

- In the full survey, 49% thought the ambitions are about right, which was the most common response. In contrast, 27% would prefer higher ambitions and 13% would prefer lower ambitions. Smaller proportions would prefer none at all (6%) and were not sure (6%).
- Respondents who would prefer higher or lower ambitions were given the opportunity to indicate if they thought the timelines for achieving them should be shorter or longer or whether the ambitions themselves should be higher or lower.
- Amongst those who would prefer higher ambitions, 41% would prefer higher ambitions that are achieved sooner and 36% preferred the ambitions just to be achieved sooner. A further 23% said they would prefer higher ambitions achieved within the proposed dates.
- Amongst those who would prefer lower ambitions, 38% preferred lower ambitions that are achieved at a later date, 34% would prefer lower ambitions achieved within the proposed dates, and 27% would prefer the ambitions to be achieved at a later date.
- In the comments related to the ambitions, the three most common themes were:
 - The ambitions are unachievable, unrealistic or difficult to achieve
 - Zero waste is not possible or is too ambitious
 - The ambitions are not ambitious enough or there is a need to act sooner
- In the Easy Read survey, 69% said they agree with the aims, which was higher than the 17% who disagreed and a further 14% were not sure.
- Amongst those who disagreed, 57% said we need less aims and 43% said more.



Move to a circular economy

The EWP believes that the best way to reduce the environmental impact of waste is to embrace a circular economy, in which finite resources are conserved and used efficiently.

- In the full survey, overall agreement was higher than overall disagreement for this priority.

Figure 2 – Move to a circular economy summary

Question	Base	% Agree	% Not sure	% Disagree
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? (Q18)	4,196	63%	15%	22%

- The three most common themes in the comments related to the move to a circular economy were:
 - Concerns about costs or additional charges
 - It's unachievable, unrealistic or difficult to achieve
 - Further education, training or support for residents are needed
- In the Easy Read survey, 78% said using a circular economy in Essex is important to them. A further 11% were not sure and 10% said it was not important.

Waste hierarchy

The waste hierarchy sets out the order in which options for waste management should be considered based on environmental impact. The EWP proposes to apply the waste hierarchy prioritising waste prevention and minimising disposal when designing services and making decisions.

- The majority of respondents agreed with the waste prevention, reuse and recycle priorities in the full survey.
- Disagreement was higher for the waste prevention priority than for the reuse and recycle priorities.

Figure 3 – Waste hierarchy summary

Question	Base	% Agree	% Not sure	% Disagree
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? – waste prevention (Q20)	4,186	65%	11%	24%
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? – reuse (Q22)	4,178	71%	9%	19%
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? – recycle (Q24)	4,168	77%	5%	18%

- In the comments about the waste prevention priority, the most common themes were:
 - Businesses need to do more, particularly to reduce packaging
 - Don't reduce service or frequent collections are needed
 - Concerns about cost or additional charges



- In the comments related to the reuse priority, the most common themes were:
 - It needs to be easier or cheaper to repair items
 - There is a need to change mindsets or address throwaway culture
 - It's a good priority or agree generally with it
 - Businesses need to do more, particularly to reduce packaging
- In relation to the recycle priority, the most common themes all related to waste and recycling services and included:
 - Services need to be easy to use, convenient and at the kerbside
 - More materials should be collected for recycling
 - There is a need for easy access to recycling centres and no booking ahead
 - Don't charge for garden waste collection
- In regard to the recovery priority, again majority proportions agreed with reducing the use of landfill, adopting the use of anaerobic digestion and adopting Energy from Waste for residual waste.
- However, it should be noted that for the priority related to anaerobic digestion, a larger proportion of respondents were not sure than for the other questions, which explains why a lower proportion agreed with this priority in comparison with the other recovery questions.

Figure 4 – Recovery summary

Question	Base	% Agree	% Not sure	% Disagree
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the EWP should reduce the use of landfill? (Q26)	4,175	78%	8%	14%
To what extent do you agree or disagree that adopting the use of anaerobic digestion for the treatment of food waste is the right solution? (Q27)	4,131	61%	26%	12%
To what extent do you agree or disagree that, after recycling everything we can, adopting Energy from Waste (EfW) for residual waste is the right solution? (Q28)	4,166	69%	17%	14%

- In the comments related to the recovery priority, the most common themes were:
 - Not being able to understand it, too much jargon used or not enough information provided
 - No Basildon incinerator or disagree with incineration process
 - Concerns about environmental impact, pollution or emissions
- In the Easy Read survey, 76% said that using the waste hierarchy system in Essex was important to them. In contrast, 11% said it was not important and 13% were not sure.

Collaborate and innovate

The EWP proposes to: *Innovate and work collaboratively with each other and with government, businesses and institutions to create a more sustainable waste system.*



- In the full survey, overall agreement was much higher than disagreement for the collaborate and innovate priority.
- In regard to achieving collaboration and innovation, all statements saw majority proportions agreeing – agreement was highest for *Work together and maximise opportunities to increase recycling in public spaces and reduce litter* and lowest for *explore carbon capture, utilisation and storage, and carbon offsetting to mitigate unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions*. In relation to *explore carbon capture, utilisation and storage, and carbon offsetting to mitigate unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions*, a slightly larger proportion of respondents were not sure than for some of the other questions. This explains the corresponding lower level of agreement.

Figure 5 – Collaborate and innovate summary

Question	Base	% Agree	% Not sure	% Disagree
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? (Q30)	4,151	75%	10%	15%
<i>To what extent do you agree or disagree that collaboration and innovation should be achieved through...</i>				
Work to reduce the carbon impact of waste operations by increasing use of alternative fuels for our vehicles and equipment, and making waste transport routes as efficient as possible? (Q31a)	4,148	74%	10%	16%
Work together to make the network of recycling centres, waste transfer stations and depots as efficient as possible? (Q31b)	4,135	82%	6%	12%
Explore carbon capture, utilisation and storage, and carbon offsetting to mitigate unavoidable greenhouse gas emissions? (Q31c)	4,139	67%	16%	17%
Stay abreast of innovation, trends and examples of best practice to shape service design? (Q31d)	4,137	78%	10%	12%
Work together and maximise opportunities to increase recycling in public spaces and reduce litter? (Q31e)	4,145	86%	4%	11%
Be an active voice striving to shape government policy, legislation, and regulation through engagement, consultations, and lobbying? (Q31f)	4,142	73%	12%	15%
Work together to develop opportunities for employment, environmental benefit, and reduced costs? (Q31g)	4,138	80%	9%	11%

- In the comments related to the collaborate and innovate priority, the most common themes were:
 - A need for easy access to recycling centres and no booking ahead
 - Concerns about cost or additional charges
 - Concerns about litter or fly tipping



- It should be noted that a consultation on booking processes for recycling centres in Essex was taking place at the same time as this consultation, which may have influenced the results.
- In the Easy Read survey, 87% said it was important to work together to make a better waste system, 6% were not sure and 7% said it was not important.

Educate and engage

The EWP proposes to: *Listen to residents and deliver information and initiatives to encourage changes in attitudes and behaviour to reduce waste and recycle more.*

- In the full survey, a much larger proportion agreed overall with the educate and engage priority than disagreed.

Figure 6 – Educate and engage summary

Question	Base	% Agree	% Not sure	% Disagree
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority? (Q33)	4,170	77%	8%	15%

- In the comments related to the priority, the most common theme was that communication with residents should be improved, they should be listened to, and feedback should be acted on.
- In the Easy Read survey, 87% said it was important to teach people how to reduce their waste and recycle more, 5% were not sure and 8% said it was not important.

Research, planning and performance monitoring

The EWP proposes to: *Comprehensively review this strategy every five-years to ensure alignment with any changes in national policy and legislation, trends in waste generation, and the development of new approaches and technologies.*

- In the full survey, overall agreement was higher than disagreement in relation to the approach to research, planning and performance monitoring.

Figure 7 – Research, planning and performance monitoring summary

Question	Base	% Agree	% Not sure	% Disagree
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this approach to research, planning and performance monitoring? (Q35)	4,158	70%	14%	16%

- The most common theme in the comments related to the approach to research, planning and performance was that more frequent reviews were needed or that the five-year period is too long.
- In the Easy Read survey, 87% said it was important that they are kept up to date, 6% were *not sure* and 7% said it was not important.



Other comments

At the end of the survey respondents were asked if there was anything else that needs to be considered around the draft Waste Strategy for Essex.

- The most common theme was that services need to be easy to use or convenient in both the full survey and the Easy Read survey.
- This was followed by general agreement with the strategy or the aims in both surveys.
- Concerns about costs and additional charges were also common.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

The EWP commissioned a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to ensure a high level of protection for the environment and that sustainability is placed at the forefront of the strategy. The findings from the SEA were presented in an Environmental Report, which was prepared in accordance with the SEA regulations.

Three statutory bodies were invited to give statutory responses to the Environmental Report.

- Natural England confirmed that, in their view, the proposals contained within the plan will not have significant effects on sensitive sites that Natural England has a statutory duty to protect.
- The Environment Agency noted that the strategy was not intended to consider new, or increased use of existing waste management facilities and therefore had no comment to make on the documents.
- No response was received from Historic England.

In the full survey, respondents could provide their feedback on the Strategic Environment Assessment and the Environmental Report.

- A small number of respondents (288) answered the questions on the Strategic Environmental Assessment.
- Of those who gave feedback on the Strategic Environmental Assessment, 54% thought the Environmental Report correctly identified the likely significant effects of the draft strategy and 46% thought it did not.
- When asked for their views on the likely significant environmental effects of the draft strategy, the most common theme was disagreement with incineration, particularly from residents in Basildon.
- Little or no impact, and uncertainty, not enough information or information that is too complicated to understand were also common themes in the comments.
- When asked if there was anything else to say about the Environmental Report, the most common theme was again disagreement with incineration, particularly from residents in Basildon.

Although many comments were made relating to incineration when asked if there was anything else to say about the Strategic Environmental Assessment, it should be noted that there was widespread support seen for Energy from Waste in the wider consultation response.



Location differences

In the full survey, the majority of respondents in each district, city and borough agreed with the different parts of the strategy and feelings that the targets and ambitions were about right were most common for all areas. However, there were some differences by location which are noted below.

- Analysis shows that **Basildon** was an outlier, with residents more likely than those in the other areas to disagree with the vision statement, the priorities, the ways in which the collaborate and innovate priority can be achieved and the approach to research, planning and performance monitoring.
- There were also many comments in the survey that related to Energy from Waste, in particular related to incineration, particularly from residents in Basildon.
- Residents in **Brentwood** were also more likely than residents in some other areas to disagree with the ways in which the collaboration and innovate priority can be achieved and to disagree with the educate and engage priority.
- There was also some difference by location in comments related to waste services, which is likely to reflect variable kerbside waste services in each area. For example, concerns about accessing recycling centres were particularly common in **Uttlesford** and comments related to not charging for garden waste collections were common in **Braintree**.
- It should be noted that the concurrent consultation on retaining a booking process at recycling centres in Essex may have influenced this outcome, and recent service changes introducing a charge for garden waste services in Braintree are likely to have impacted on resident feedback in this location.
- In the comments about the vision, the most common theme for **Tendring** residents was a desire for more materials to be collected or recycled.

Demographic differences

In the full survey, the majority of respondents in each subgroup agreed with the different parts of the strategy and feelings that the targets and ambitions were about right were most common for all demographic groups. However, there were some subgroup differences which are noted below.

- **Males** were more likely than females to disagree with the vision statement, disagree with many of the priorities and how the collaborate and innovate priority can be achieved, and to disagree with the approach to research, planning and performance monitoring.
- A few differences were also seen by age group, with those aged **65+** (particularly compared with 45-64) more likely to agree with the recycle priority, elements of the recovery priority, the collaborate and innovate priority and how it can be achieved, the educate and engage priority and the approach to research, planning and performance monitoring.
- In comparison with those aged 65+, those aged **25-44 and 45-64** were more likely to disagree with the vision statement, prefer more ambitious targets and higher ambitions and to not be sure that adopting the use of anaerobic digestion for the treatment of food waste is the right solution.
- In comparison with those aged 65+, those aged **45-64** were more likely to disagree with a number of the priorities and how the collaborate and innovate priority can be achieved.
- In comparison with older age groups, those **aged under 25** were more likely to think the targets and ambitions are about right and agree with the waste prevention priority, but it should be noted that the base size for this age group is smaller than for the other age groups.
- In comparison with White British respondents, those from **other ethnic groups** were more likely to disagree with the vision statement, the waste prevention, re-use and recovery priorities, the



educate and engage priority and the approach to research, planning and performance monitoring.

- Those from other ethnic groups were also more likely to disagree with the collaborate and innovate priority and how it can be achieved, and to prefer no targets or ambitions at all.
- In comparison to those who did not have an impairment, those who **had an impairment** were more likely to prefer no targets or ambitions at all.

Respondent comments

Whilst respondents were able to give their comments on each part of the strategy, it is interesting to note that there were similar themes that spanned across all the response to each comment question. These themes most commonly related to the **availability and accessibility of services**, and the **achievability of the strategy and the need for clear actions**. Other common high level themes seen related to:

- Informing, educating, supporting and enforcing
- The role businesses can play
- Concerns about costs
- Concerns about the environmental impact of incineration
- The need for leadership
- General agreement or disagreement with the strategy
- Working collaboratively

Responses from partners

There was widespread agreement for the different areas of the strategy amongst the five Essex Waste Partnership member organisations that provided a response to the consultation, although it should be noted that one preferred higher targets and one would prefer lower ambitions to be achieved at a later date.

Responses from businesses

Five businesses took part in the consultation. Four out of five businesses agreed with most elements of the strategy, whilst one tended to disagree. There was some appetite amongst these businesses for more ambitious targets and higher ambitions. Comments related to how manufacturers can reduce packaging or make it biodegradable, as well as highlighting necessary support for businesses and residents to reduce waste, amongst other themes. For more information about these responses, see the full report.

Enquiries and other submissions

Essex County Council kept a log of all enquiries that came through to the Waste Strategy inbox. These enquiries have been reviewed by the report author and themed for inclusion in this report. In total, there were 45 queries submitted: 4 were themed as positive, 13 as negative and 28 as neutral. These enquiries were responded to in full to allow respondents to actively participate in the survey.



Summary of conclusions

- There was a large response to the consultation across the county, with all districts, cities and boroughs represented in the response.
- Response to all aspects of the draft strategy saw larger proportions agreeing overall than disagreeing, whilst feelings that the targets and ambitions are about right were most common.
- However, there is some preference for the ambitions and targets to be achieved sooner.
- Some also believe that elements of the strategy, particularly zero waste, are unachievable or too ambitious, which has led to some disagreement, although these are minority proportions.
- There is widespread acknowledgement that waste collection and recycling services need to be convenient and easy to use if the targets and ambitions are to be met.
- There is a widespread belief that businesses and manufacturers need to do more particularly in relation to reducing packaging and ensuring that items can be repaired easily and cost effectively.
- Although there is widespread support for Energy from Waste, there is some concern related to the environmental impact particularly in Basildon that is leading to higher levels of disagreement in that district compared with other areas. More information about this can be found in the key findings above.
- There are some concepts in the recovery priority that are hard for some people to understand, particularly the use of anaerobic digestion for the treatment of food waste.
- Some respondents worry there will be increased costs in the future that will be passed onto taxpayers. These concerns were particularly seen in relation to the move to a circular economy and collaborate and innovate priorities.
- Education and support for residents with their waste and recycling is viewed as important and this should also include engaging with residents and listening to their feedback.
- Although the majority agreed with the approach to research, planning and monitoring, there is some belief that more frequent reviews of the strategy will be necessary than the five year cycle proposed.
- Although a much smaller number of respondents gave feedback on the Strategic Environmental Assessment, there was a split in opinion on whether it correctly identifies the likely significant effects of the strategy.
- Comments in relation to the Strategic Environmental Assessment suggested that some respondents found it hard to engage with and to understand, which may have influenced this outcome.

More information about these conclusions can be found in the summary at the end of the full report.

