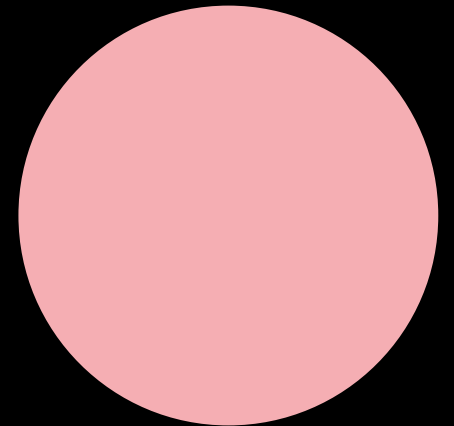
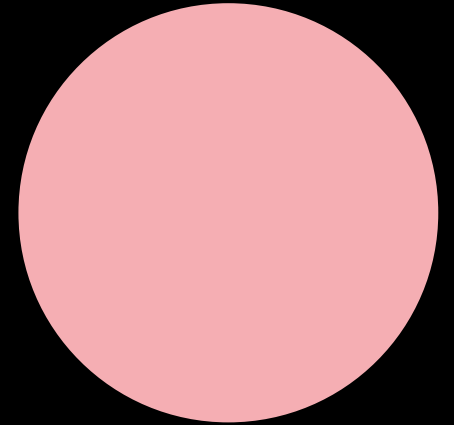


Essex County Council

Resident attitudes towards waste and recycling

Final report



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Background and objectives

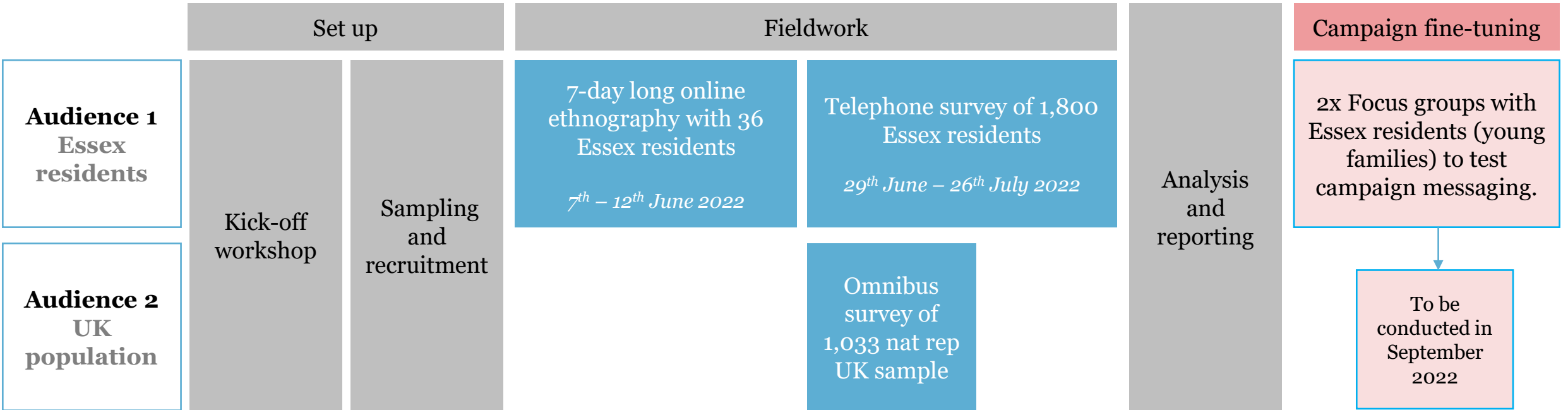
The Essex Waste Partnership is currently developing a new joint Waste Strategy to support its ambitions to deliver a circular economy and achieve net carbon neutrality. In large part, its success in meeting these goals will require significant service redesign as well as behaviour change from residents.

Essex County Council have therefore commissioned Savanta to conduct a large-scale programme of research to equip the Essex Waste Strategy team with the insight needed to create successful behaviour change and communication campaigns among residents. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Measure public awareness and personal attitudes towards waste management
2. Understand support / opposition to waste treatment technologies
3. Explore resident behaviour across reduction, reuse and recycling, including drivers and barriers to participating in Essex waste services e.g., kerbside collection, recycling centres etc.
4. Test which information and messaging is more (or less) likely to engage residents and lead to positive action/behaviour change?

Methodology

Savanta designed a multi-stage approach to explore the topic of waste reduction and recycling:



Key definitions - life stage

Throughout the report, 'life stage' is a key unit of analysis. Using the demographic data relating to household composition, we have grouped respondents in the quantitative and qualitative research into six broad categories which are indicative of their life stage, and the opportunities/constraints they may face:

Young Solitaries – respondents aged under 45, living alone, with relatives, or in a flat share

Older Solitaries – respondents aged 45 and over, living alone, with relatives, or in a flat share

Couples without children – respondents living with a spouse/partner, and without any children

Families – respondents living with any children under 17

Young Families – respondents living with any children under 6

Empty nesters – respondents aged 45 and over, with children 17 and over only

Story on a page

Reduction is not on the radar ...

Value for money/price and quality dominate residents' decision making when shopping; packaging is usually an afterthought.

...and 'out of their hands'

Reduction feels like an impossible or unrealistic task. Loose or unpackaged options are not widely available, and even so most residents expect them to be more expensive. Residents largely see their responsibility as limited to checking items in-the-moment or recycling correctly.

Reuse is booming

94% of residents have engaged in at least some form of reuse and/or repair in the last 3 months, facilitated by the explosion in online marketplaces. Reuse has clear personal benefits – saving money and a 'feel good' factor from helping others.

Recycling is habitual

Recycling is a deeply embedded social norm, particularly around dry materials such as paper/card. Not to recycle at all is seen as careless, but most residents expect other people to be trying their best and to do it correctly.

...so residents rarely question their behaviour

Residents rely on rules of thumb which are inadequate for dealing with soft plastics and mixed materials. The impact of food waste on the environment is unclear, with a belief that recycling food waste is inconvenient.

Councils are mostly trusted to do the right thing...

There is high satisfaction with the current services provided, and most residents – who do not think about the topic generally – assume councils dispose of things in the most appropriate way.

But some negative perceptions persist

Young families tend to be both more knowledgeable and more cynical about the recycling system, and in particular are more likely to hold negative perceptions of incineration as a pollutant.

The waste hierarchy builds support for change

Clarifying the waste hierarchy with clear prioritisation reassures residents that their efforts around reduction, reuse and recycling are 'worth it', and that recovery and disposal are necessary parts of the journey.

...But keep it simple and relatable

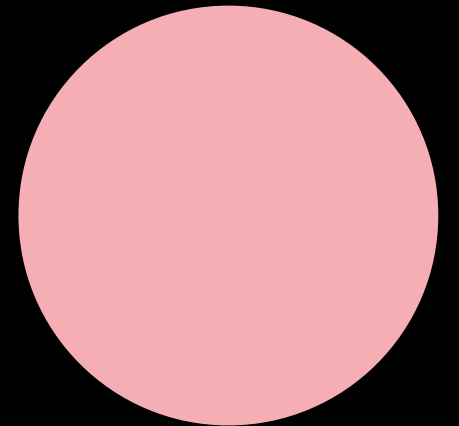
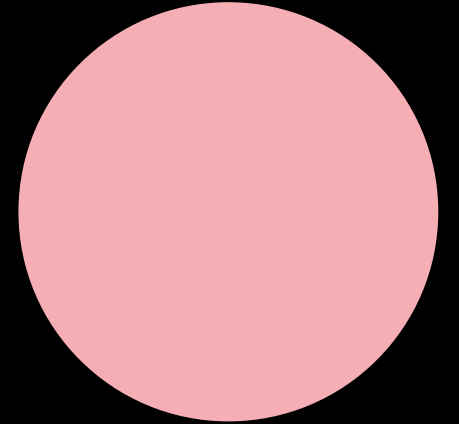
However, the information needs to work harder to convince residents of the tangible benefits of recovery – otherwise there is a risk of falling back on negative perceptions.

Positivity is key

Above all, residents want to hear positive and motivational stories of how their behaviour can make a difference, and feel 'we're all in this together' by seeing steps being taken by government and business.

Section 1

*Overall attitudes towards Essex
waste management*



Residents generally see themselves simply as service users, so their knowledge of the broader waste management system is low

Most residents tend to **only think of waste and recycling in terms of the services they personally use** – namely kerbside collection and recycling centres. That said, young families* are more likely to be informed about the overarching role of local government.

Local councils are seen as responsible for running these services efficiently, and providing guidance to residents on how to use them correctly. Beyond this, there is **very limited understanding of a broader ‘strategy’ for waste management** and Essex County Council’s role in this.

“I mainly expect for them not to leave any rubbish laying around and for them to put the bins back where they came from, but also to come on the days they say as well.”

Uttlesford, Female, 18-34 years old

“Seems well run and fairly broad range of things to recycle. Good paper and plastic in one collection - makes it more manageable than having a fifth bin in the house and outside.”

Epping Forest, Male, 35-54 years old

64%

Feel **informed** about the **role of the local district, borough or city council** in waste management

▲ Life stage – young families: 67%

53%

Feel **informed** about The **role of Essex County Council** in waste management

▲ Life stage – young families: 61%

* See key definitions – slide 4

Residents are even less likely to be informed about what local councils do with the waste and recycling they collect

Little spontaneous consideration is given to the broader waste hierarchy. There is **basic awareness that ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’** are key elements of the system, but it is not always clear how these are interrelated or impact local services.

In particular, **residents have little understanding of how waste is processed** – although young families continue to stand out as having higher knowledge. Brentwood residents feel particularly uninformed (62%) compared to other districts. Most residents assume general waste is sent to landfill and/or incinerated, and ‘hope’ dry recyclables such as plastics and metal are sent for ‘further recycling’, and there is **even lower knowledge of what happens to food and garden waste.**

“I imagine the recycling is taken to a sorting plant and then recycled. The general rubbish could either be burned in a power station or placed into landfill.”

Tendring, Male, 35-54 years old

“I actually have no idea. General rubbish goes to landfill? Recycling I think goes to private companies or is sent overseas to recycle. I suspect a lot of plastic just isn't recycled.”

Brentwood, Female, 18-34 years old

57%

Feel **informed** about Essex's **waste management system** as a whole

▲ Life stage – young families: 62%

51%

Feel **informed** about what happens to **waste and recycling** collected from the **kerbside**

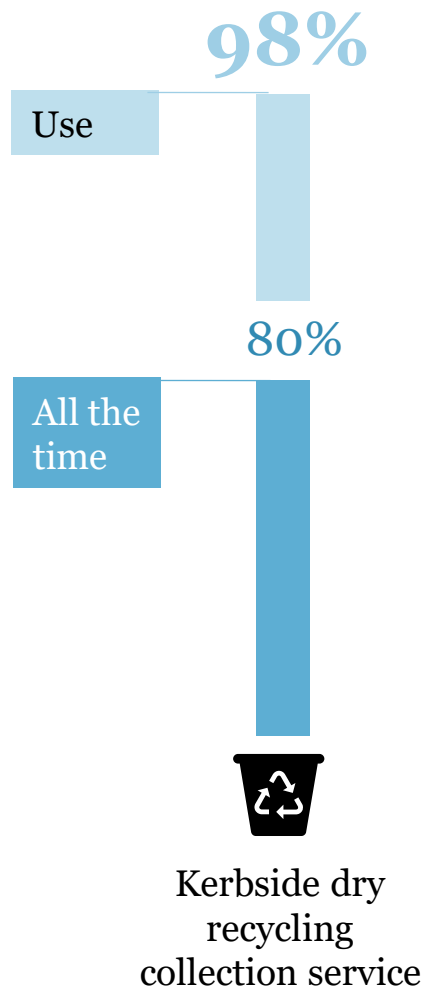
▲ Life stage – young families: 66%

45%

Feel **informed** about what happens to **waste and recycling** collected at **recycling centres**

▲ Life stage – young families: 56%

Recycling is an established social norm, with almost all residents claiming to use their kerbside dry recycling collection



Despite low knowledge of waste management overall, **most residents can correctly identify if and how to recycle the main categories of material** (e.g., glass, plastic, cardboard etc.) via their kerbside collection.

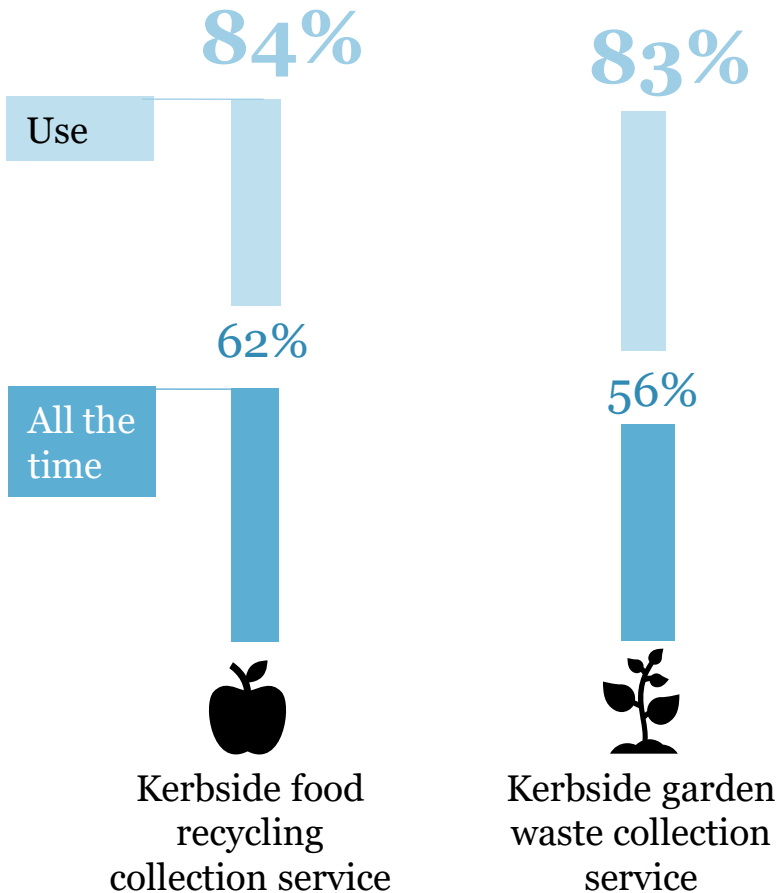
For the vast majority of residents **recycling is a deeply embedded social norm**, particularly around dry materials such as paper/card. Not to recycle at all is seen as careless, but most residents expect other people to be trying their best.

Reflecting this, **eight in ten (80%) residents claim to use their kerbside dry recycling collection services all the time**. However, in reality, there can often be a potential discrepancy between claimed behaviours and actual behaviour, and the qualitative research indicates many residents are selective about the materials they recycle or still incorrectly recycle materials – often younger, pre-family residents living alone, who are time-poor and whose lifestyles lack routine compared to families and older residents.

“Recyclables go into the blue bin, non-recyclables go into the black bin and food into the food bin, as they are collected bi-weekly we sometimes have an overflow; this gets put into the council approved bags.”

Harlow, Female, 18-34 years old

Claimed usage of food and garden waste collection services is also high, but less importance is placed on recycling these materials



Social norms around recycling food and garden waste are more ambiguous. There is a resistance to storing food waste which is ‘messy’ and ‘smelly’, and residents are more comfortable admitting that they do not use this service. Usage of garden waste collection is more ad hoc.

A far lower proportion therefore report using these kerbside services ‘all the time’ compared to dry recyclables. A small minority of residents (usually those who are older) chose to recycle these materials via their own compost, but in general recycling these materials is seen to be of lower importance.

“We use general waste, glass and recycling. Brentwood council gives us boxes for glass and food waste. They are large and ugly and makes the kitchen feel like it's a bin area so we put the food waste bin in our carpark outside and don't use it.”

Brentwood, Female, 18-34 years old

There is high satisfaction with kerbside collection, so any changes to encourage more sustainable behaviours need to be carefully managed

Satisfaction with kerbside collection services in Essex

Showing % NET Satisfied



Dry recycling

91%



General rubbish

90%



Food waste

84%



Garden waste

79%

The **majority of residents are satisfied with the current kerbside collection service**, with most saying:

- Collections are regular enough to meet their needs (and very few participants in the qualitative research felt they could cope with less frequent general rubbish collections)
- A good range of materials are accepted for dry recycling
- Staff are quiet and leave areas clean
- There is good communication in event of non-collection

Residents who are more engaged with recycling (typically young families) suggest materials such as soft plastics and food and drink cartons should be collected, and say they want more information on how waste and recycling are processed by the Council.

“The service has always been really good, however more information on how the council runs waste management would be useful.”

Harlow, Female, 18-34 years old

“My perception is that Braintree runs a good service. Their contractors at the tip are polite and helpful.”

Braintree, Male, 55+ years old

Most residents feel that their council meets their expectations of having a ‘regular and reliable’ waste collection service with polite and considerate staff

7.7 / 10

Average level of confidence in the local council to run a ‘good’ waste and recycling service*

Residents broadly expect the same qualities from their waste collection service, which fall into the following three areas:

- **A regular and reliable service** that runs according to schedule.
- **Polite, friendly and helpful staff** that are considerate of not being too noisy and leaving the area clean and tidy after collection. Ensuring the bins are left in front of the correct houses and not up the road is also important for many residents.
- **An easy to use/understand system** that collects and encourages recycling of all types of waste rather than refusing or charging for certain types. Residents want to trust that the waste is **disposed of and sorted responsibly** for reuse and recycling. Lower levels of confidence tend to be due to a lack of trust and information regarding how it is processed.

“I expect it to be a clean service and on time. In general, our collection is all of the above. Occasionally, a bit of rubbish is left on the ground.”

Epping Forest, Female, 55+

“It’s very rare that they ‘forget’ to collect a particular bag. Going online soon fixes the problem once reported.”

Chelmsford, Male, 55+

“Putting the bins back in front of the right house can sometimes be a pain, but I understand the people collecting are on a schedule and that is an absolute 1st world problem! It shows consideration for people that need to use the path and cannot move the bins themselves (wheelchair users, buggies...)”

Rochford, Female, 18-34

While most are happy with the service, some suggest a range of improvements to the collection system

More frequent collection of certain pre-existing services, e.g., weekly green waste, particularly in the school holidays and summer when there is more waste and it can smell worse.

Start collecting certain items from the kerbside on a less frequent basis (e.g. monthly), without having to pay extra. This is requested more commonly from those living in rural areas who have to travel longer distances to process these items:

- Soft plastics and TetraPak
- Bottles and glass (mentioned in Braintree, Tendring)
- Domestic items (e.g., batteries, electrical items, paint)
- Clothes, shoes
- Bulky items (e.g. furniture, old mattresses)

More information about what happens to each category of waste, Essex's statistics on landfill and recycling outputs, and the steps ECC are taking. This would increase trust and encourage better recycling. Information could be delivered electronically rather than in print form in order to reduce paper/energy usage.

Improvements to the recycling infrastructure itself are also suggested, such as delivering recycling sacks to the house, providing sturdier sacks that don't blow away in the wind, providing free liners for food waste caddies, and putting bins back in front of the right house after collection.

"I actually think we could do with more regular recycling collections, so people don't have to store it for long. I really think Essex need to start recycling tetra-paks kerbside again as there is such an increase in their use with all the vegan milks people use."

Braintree, Female, 35-54



"It takes a lot of time for us to go through all our waste, especially [cleaning the food from] the recycling waste... Therefore, if they told us what they do with our waste, we would be assured that they are doing something positive with it and not landfilling it or sending it to a third world country."

Rochford, Female, 35-54

Perceptions of recycling centres are more mixed – typically dictated by distance from the centre, its capacity, and available staff

Half (51%) of residents have used a recycling centre in the last three months, and these are mainly used when decluttering and ‘enough’ bulky items (e.g., broken electricals, homeware) have been amassed to make the trip worth it.

These trips often take some planning, so physically and mentally take more effort than other forms of disposal. For example:

- Opening hours mean residents working full-time need to take time out of their day to make the trip (with weekends expected to be extremely busy)
- Long queues / waiting times mean it is difficult to estimate how long the trip will take
- Those without a car will need to organise transport

These trips are not only time consuming, but **can also be daunting and stressful for less confident residents**. Inefficient queuing systems, unclear signage and lack of staff can make these residents worry about getting disposal at the centre ‘wrong’.

51%

Have used a **recycling centre** in the past three months

Highest rates:

Uttlesford (62%)
Braintree (59%)
Tendring (59%)
Castle Point (58%)

Lowest rates:

Harlow (38%)
Chelmsford (41%)

“I used to hate the Canvey / Benfleet tip with a passion. They had a two lane system which people jostled for position and when busy was just stressful. More recently it’s been singled laned with someone controlling traffic which is much better.”

Castle Point, Male, 18-34 years old

The more ‘informed’ residents appear to be about waste and recycling, the less they instinctively trust their local council

In the absence of an informed view of the waste management system, **the youngest and oldest residents tend to trust Essex councils to manage waste appropriately** despite being less engaged and informed.

Trust drops off among residents aged 35-64 (down to 52%) and among families; they tend to be both **more knowledgeable and more cynical about the recycling system**, often believing:

- Most other residents do not recycle correctly
- The Council does not separate materials correctly
- Recyclables are shipped to other countries, negatively impacting the environment
- Many recyclables collected are not eventually recycled, and/or incinerated (which is also perceived to negatively impact the environment)

These residents claim this has an impact on their willingness to participate in recycling fully, but in reality they are the most engaged residents.

61%

Trust the council to manage waste in the most appropriate way available

▲ 18-24: 76%

▲ Life stage – young families: 71%

“When I put out my refuse, I trust that the council deal with the waste appropriately - I don’t really know what Essex should consider on how to manage local waste.”

Brentwood, Female, 35-54 years old

“I’ve heard that a lot of recycling is sold to other countries and is left in huge piles and not actually recycled.”

Castle Point, Female, 18-34 years old

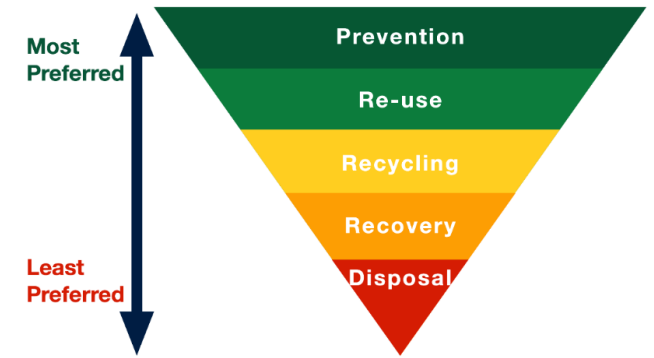
There is some basic awareness of the waste hierarchy, but residents respond positively to having it clarified with clear prioritisation

Most residents feel they have heard of at least some elements of the waste hierarchy before (e.g., ‘reduce, reuse, recycle’) but the extra information and **the triangular graphic helps them understand the relative importance and impact of each stage.**

Above all, it **clarifies the importance of reduction**, and many say they would like the Council to follow the hierarchy rigidly. However while residents generally agree everyone is responsible for achieving this in theory, in practice they see themselves as already doing all they can.

More specifically, when communicating with residents about **the first three levels residents would expect:**

- A positive, encouraging tone in all communications (e.g., ‘prevention’ makes waste feel like a crime, when residents see it as unavoidable)
- To be provided with more information on the hierarchy and new guidelines for how they should sort and dispose of waste
- The Council to show how it is encouraging businesses to reduce packaging / make packaging more environmentally friendly
- An expansion of kerbside services so more materials can be recycled in-home



“I had seen reduce, reuse, recycle before - this fits with that so not fully new but the emphasise on the preference is clearer with the triangle.”

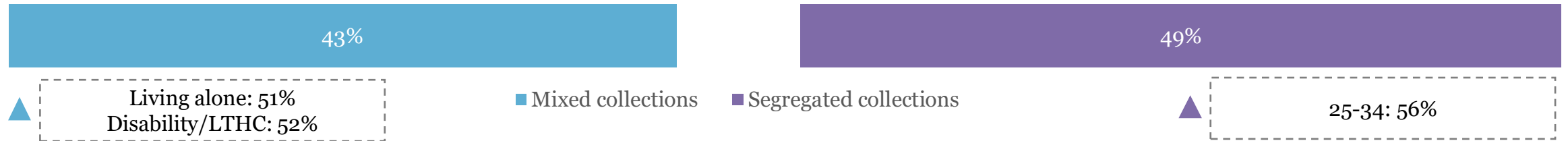
Epping Forest, Male, 35-54 years old

“I had never seen this structure before, but in fairness it makes perfect sense. Needs to be implemented ASAP.”

Tendring, Male, 35-54 years old

Understanding the waste hierarchy broadens support for segregated kerbside collections

Spontaneous support for mixed versus segregated collections



Only 6% of residents spontaneously suggest they would recycle more with mixed collections, but when prompted residents are relatively divided about the form collection should take:

- Segregated collections tend to be preferred by the more engaged residents (e.g., families, those who feel personally ‘responsible’ for reducing waste and those who are more informed about the waste management system)
- Mixed collections tend to be preferred by less engaged residents or those who are likely to find sorting more time consuming and difficult (e.g., those living alone and/or with a disability or long-term health condition)

“I think the fact that UK based recyclers can access these materials if they're segregated and they're more likely to be turned into new products is a massive positive for this type of collection.”

Castle Point, Male, 18-34 years old

In line with this, as participants in the qualitative discussions became **more informed** about the waste hierarchy, they **tended to show greater support for segregated collections**. The idea that materials would be of higher quality and therefore would be more attractive to UK recyclers had strong resonance, and galvanised residents to ‘do their bit’ via separation.

Residents are generally supportive of ‘Energy from Waste’ (EfW) via incineration, but need more information to truly engage

85%

Agree that “Once the Council has recycled all it can, I would support it using technologies such as incineration to produce electricity, heat and transport fuels from residual waste.”

Men: 88%
75+: 92%

vs. 77% of
UK adults

There are similar levels of overall support across Essex districts – with those living in Uttlesford (65%) or Brentwood (58%) more likely to *strongly agree*. One in ten of those in Braintree (9%) or Maldon (12%) say they ‘don’t know’ whether they would support this.

‘Recovery’ was new information for most, but **the word itself is not very relatable** and does not spark immediate associations with the technologies involved – it therefore takes extra effort for residents to put recovery into context.

Changing waste into fuel intuitively **‘makes sense’** and more informed residents spontaneously make connections with achieving **self-sufficiency**; recovery is therefore a positive innovation in response to the war in Ukraine and the pressure on global energy supplies. However, residents who have a low knowledge of how the Council deals with waste **can still find the information too technical**; this risks them falling back on previous perceptions that incineration causes pollution leading to significant environmental impacts.

“I don't know enough about the technology - but as it gets cost efficient recovering energy from waste it will be really important so good to adopt it as a principle for the council.”

Epping Forest, Male, 35-54 years old

“I do not think that I know enough about recovery of waste to have strong opinions. I think that biogas is a preferred option, as I know most about it and it doesn't require incineration and therefore release of as many pollutants.”

Harlow, Female, 18-34 years old

Anaerobic digestion is seen as innovative and cleaner, but the mechanics are even more technical than incineration

Participants were **less likely to have established opinions** on anaerobic digestion – the method itself is more abstract (bacteria not visible, people not aware of biogas) compared to incineration, which many had seen in other contexts before.

“I have also heard of anaerobic digestion but mostly associate that with livestock farms, some of which use this method to get biogas.”

Epping Forest, Female, 55+ years old

This was seen as **innovative and futuristic, fitting with the broader picture of moving away from ‘burning things’ to create energy.** Generally, residents do not have enough knowledge to engage deeply with the idea that these plants only ‘recover’ energy from food. For example, one respondent suggested they would support anaerobic digestion as it would be **cheaper to run in the long-term** than incinerators, indicating some potential for confusion.

“I would say the digestion one as this appears to be better for the environment as we are supposed to be moving away from burning things to create energy.”

Tendring, Male, 35-54 years old

Nevertheless, residents are still uncertain about:

- The tangible benefits in terms of energy produced (e.g., how many homes it can power)
- Whether processing plants would create an off-putting smell for residents living nearby (due to associations with composting)

Future communications should focus on making EfW more relatable and speak directly to lingering concerns about pollution

The waste hierarchy makes clear recovery is preferable to landfill, **but some residents fall back on initial reservations that incineration causes pollution** – and residents are left **unsure as to how much ‘better’ it is** for the environment, and for the community.

Future communications and education should focus on:

- Proactively addressing the issue of emissions from EfW facilities, what they are, how they are managed and the impacts on the environment
- How the emissions and operational impacts from EfW compare with other waste management practices and industrial processes
- Making the benefits of energy from waste more tangible by telling residents positive stories of how power will be used (e.g., how many homes/businesses it will power)
- Emphasising the importance of energy ‘self-sufficiency’, which has particular resonance in the current energy context

Communications should also be combined with restating the Essex Waste Partnership’s commitment to the waste hierarchy as a whole and other initiatives it is investing in, to reassure waste minimisation remains the primary aim.

“I believe the incineration plants are the best way forward providing that the emissions from them are filtered as much as possible. This is a much better way than burying the waste into landfill because of the then limited use of the land and the release of methane gas associated with landfill.”

Tendring, Male, 35-54 years old

“My main concern over incineration is that individuals, families as well as councils will use incineration as an excuse/solution that encourages everything to be thrown in and incinerated.”

Female, 35-54 years old

Section summary: overall attitudes to Essex waste management

Residents are first and foremost service users...

They tend to only think about the services they use personally, and are mainly concerned with how efficiently they are run.

...So knowledge about waste management and the recycling process is very low

In particular, residents have little understanding of how waste is processed – they only ‘hope’ dry recyclables such as plastics and metal are sent for ‘further recycling’.

Nevertheless, **recycling dry materials** is an established social norm

Eight in ten (80%) residents claim to use their kerbside dry recycling collection services all the time. However, in reality residents are selective with which specific bins and sacks they use.

Less importance is placed on recycling food and garden waste

When it comes to food waste, a far lower proportion report using kerbside collection ‘all of the time’, reflecting that residents are more comfortable admitting they find it too ‘messy’ and ‘smelly’

There is high satisfaction with kerbside collection

Residents generally see current services as reliable, clean, and accepting of a good range of materials. That said, some may still want more frequent collections, and for the range of materials to be expanded further (e.g., to include soft plastics).

Perceptions of recycling centres are more mixed

Trips to recycling centres are seen as time consuming with queues and unclear signage noted. Residents are reassured by staff supporting them with correct disposal advice, with some noting that they would like to see greater levels of staffing’.

The more informed residents are the less they instinctively trust their Council...

Young families tend to be both more knowledgeable and more cynical about the recycling system, and in particular are more likely to hold negative perceptions of incineration as a pollutant.

..But understanding the waste hierarchy builds support for change

Clarifying the waste hierarchy with clear prioritisation reassures residents that their efforts around reduction, reuse and recycling are ‘worth it’, and that recovery and disposal are necessary parts of the journey.

Residents are generally supportive of EfW

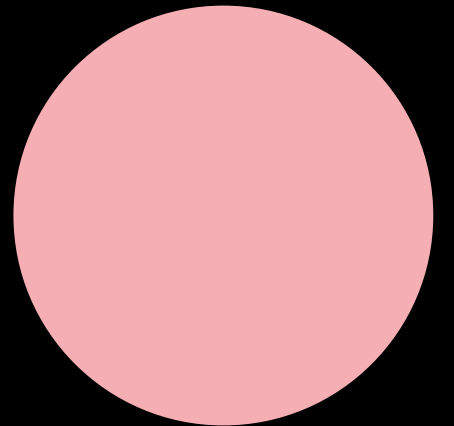
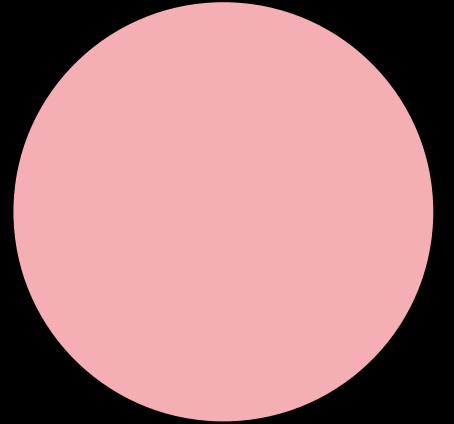
Residents like the connection to ‘self-sufficiency’. However, the term ‘Energy from Waste’ and current descriptions are often not relatable enough to truly engage residents in the idea.

Future communications should focus on making its benefits more relatable

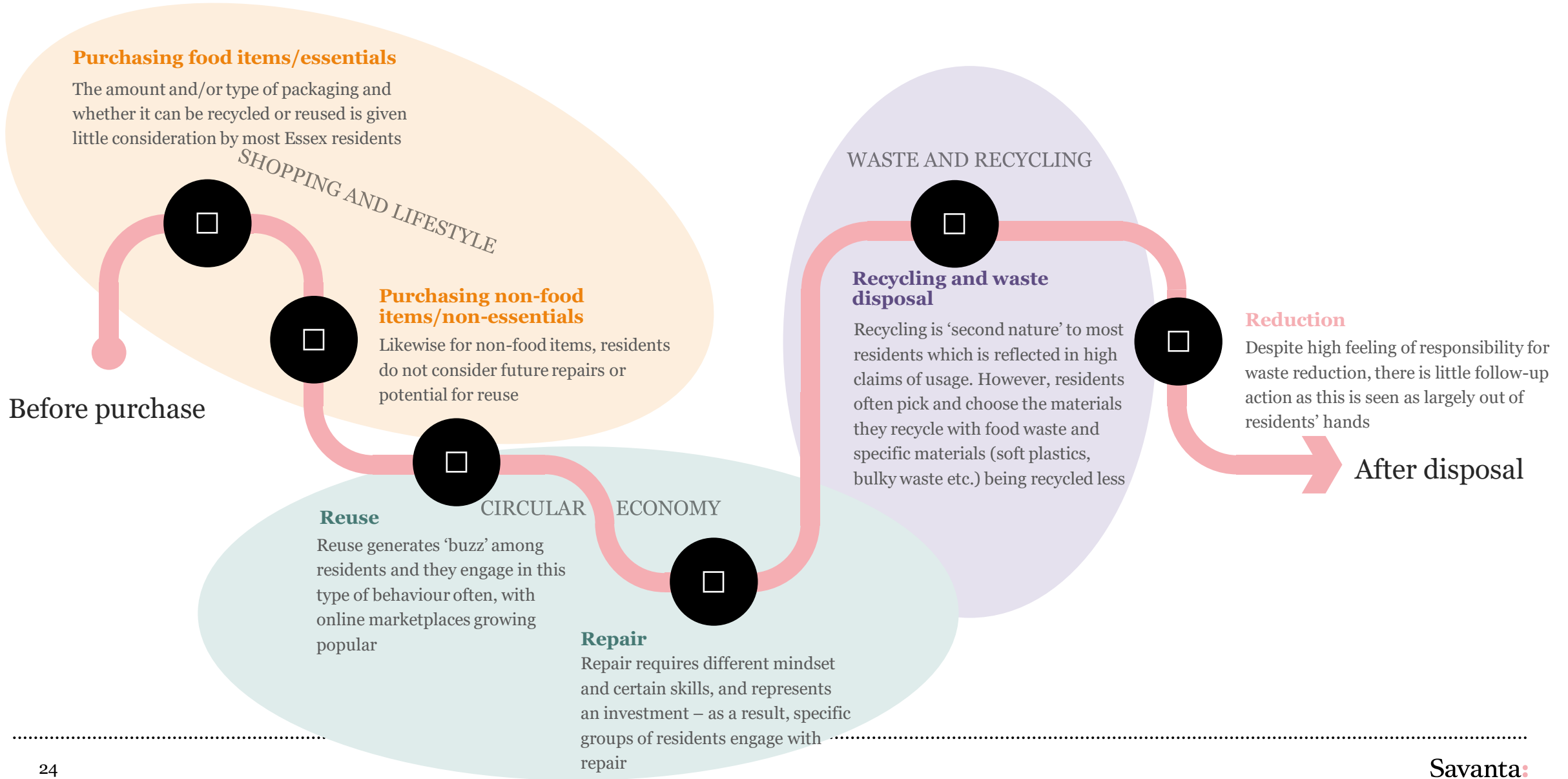
The information needs to work harder to convince residents of the tangible benefits of recovery – otherwise there is a risk of falling back on negative perceptions..

Section 2

Resident behaviour across the waste journey



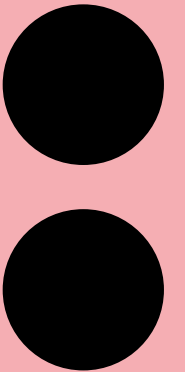
Section summary: the waste journey



Overview of residents' waste behaviours in each stage of the waste journey

	Purchasing food items/essentials	Purchasing non-food items/non-essentials	Reuse	Repair	In-home recycling and waste disposal	Out-of-home recycling and waste disposal
More sustainable behaviours	<p>Longest sell by date considered by 18-34 year olds</p> <p>'Rules of thumb' used to discern different types of packaging, although often an afterthought</p>	<p>Sustainable factors given little consideration (e.g. packaging and whether it can be repaired)</p> <p>Where they are considered, it is mostly by residents in the family life stage</p>	<p>Feel good factor, supporting and interacting with local community</p> <p>Decluttering home</p> <p>Saving money</p> <p>Environmental benefits considered by 25-34 year olds</p>	<p>If they can do it themselves, cheaper to repair than buy a replacement</p> <p>Can be inspiring</p> <p>Environmental benefits</p> <p>May have a sentimental value</p>	<p>Feels like second nature</p> <p>Effort put into sorting and cleaning dry recyclables</p>	<p>If facility located nearby / in the supermarket they go to frequently</p>
Less sustainable behaviours	<p>Environmental certifications/locally grown not considered</p> <p>Shopping done in a rush</p> <p>Value for money and quality dominate decision making, especially during a cost of living crisis</p>	<p>Brand and reviews from others are prioritised over sustainable factors</p> <p>Value for money, quality and durability dominate decision making over and above sustainable factors (e.g. packaging)</p>	<p>Older people less frequently use online marketplaces</p>	<p>If needing to find someone else to do the repair, can more financial and time investment than buying a product new</p> <p>Requires skill – not attainable for many</p> <p>Might not work like new</p>	<p>Lack of time and knowledge to seek out kerbside services available</p> <p>Lack of space for all the recycling bins/bags</p> <p>Food waste is messy/smelly</p> <p>Bulky collection requires additional cost</p>	<p>Lack of time to seek out out-of-home services available</p> <p>'Not enough' waste to warrant a trip</p> <p>Viewed as producers' responsibility</p> <p>Lack of transport and accessibility issues impede residents ability to access these services</p>

Exploring the typical journey: stage by stage

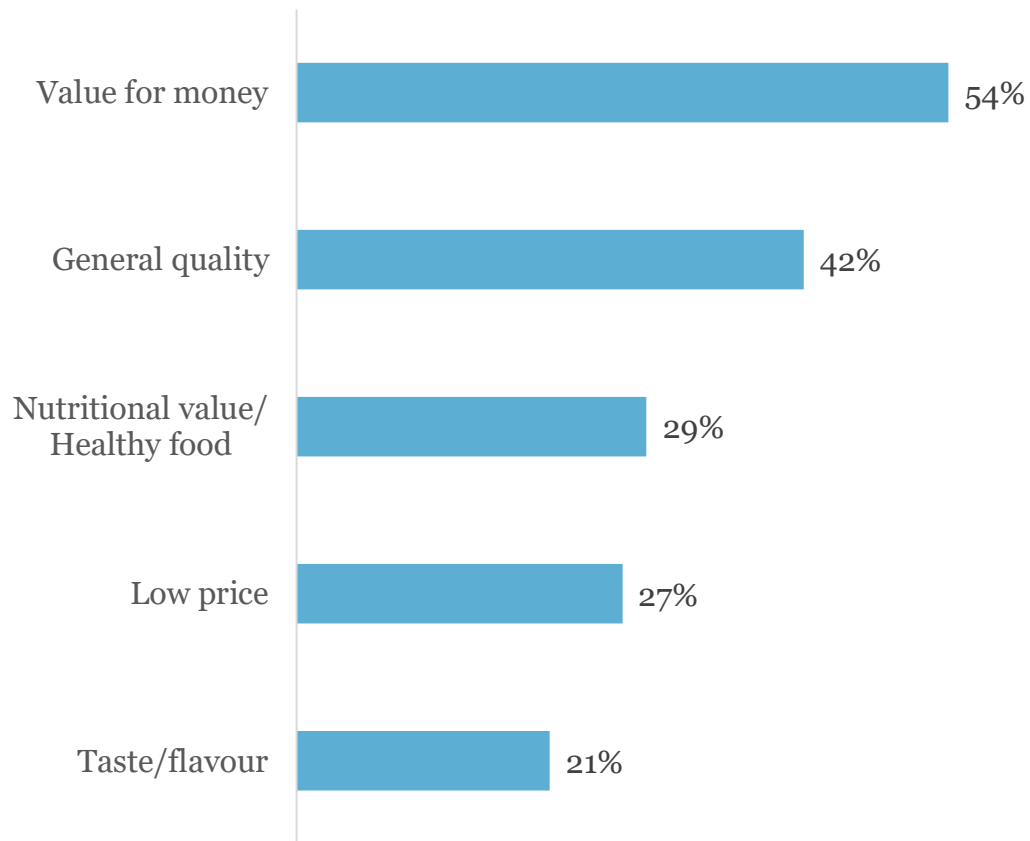


Shopping for food and essentials is often done in a rush, squeezed in around other tasks.

This means that, on average, residents are making quick decisions and only weigh up one or two factors.

Value for money, quality and nutritional aspect dominate residents' decision making when shopping for food products

Factors influencing purchase decisions – food (Top 5)



Value for money, quality and nutritional value are considered the most important factors by far across all groups of residents. Residents are already feeling the **squeeze of the cost of living crisis**, and low prices are particularly important to those from lower social grades.

Nutritional value and taste/flavour are important in general, but particularly to parents with young children. **Food is often a relatively low-cost treat**, and parents often prioritise buying a 'favourite' brand or item they know their children like above concerns about packaging.

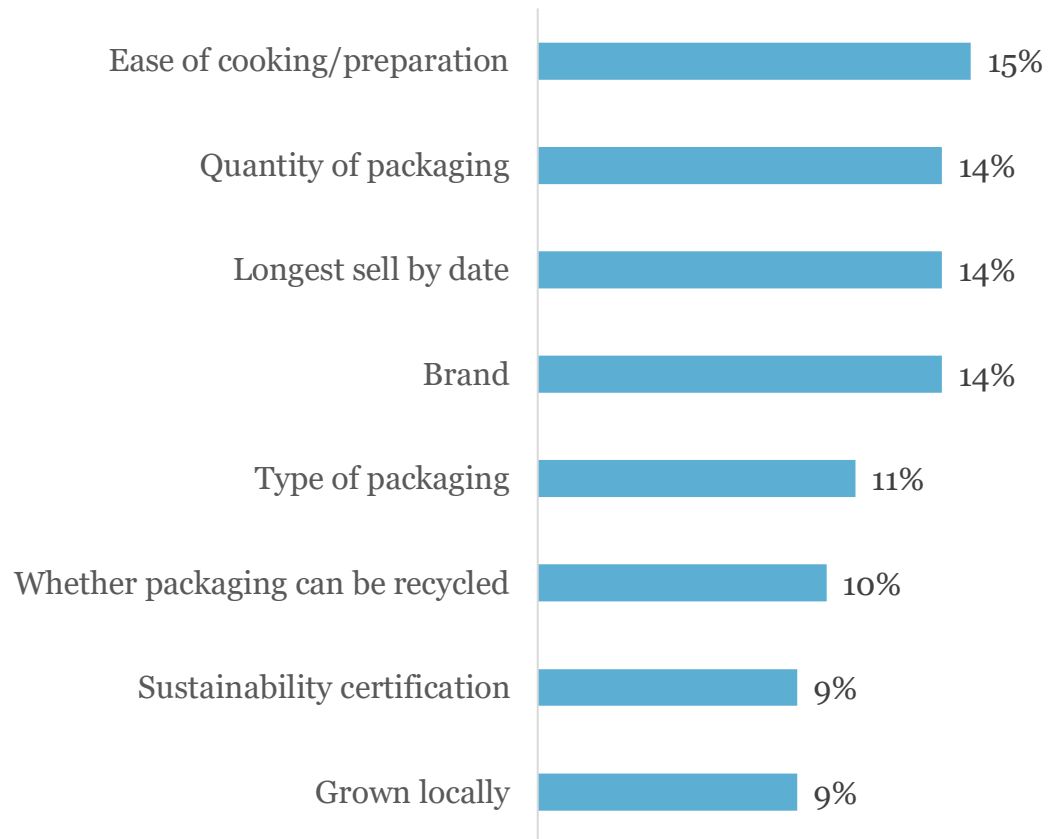


"My daughter was a bit down today, so I got her favourite lunch. We both had a sandwich, crisps and a drink. Dinner was a treat, so I got us all a takeaway pizza."

Chelmsford, Male, 35-54 years old

Packaging is often an afterthought, competing for attention with brand and convenience

Factors influencing purchase decisions – food*



Convenience (e.g., buying items that are premade or easy to prepare) is a significant driver for those who feel too time-poor to cook meals from scratch or need to eat when out and about, often younger residents and those in work.

Residents tend to **observe the extent of packaging** in their food shops, but their decision-making does not appear to be strongly influenced by it. In the moment, **packaging is normally an afterthought** and/or is disregarded when weighed up against other factors deemed more important.



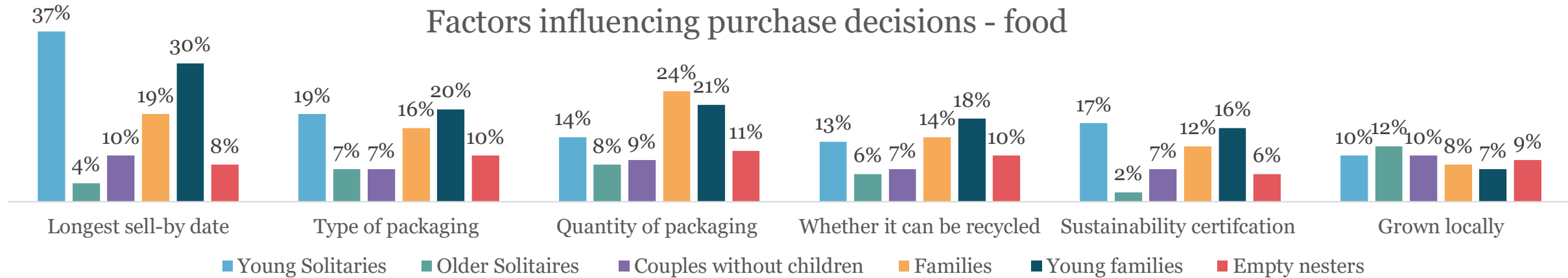
“I bought a Chinese takeaway for dinner. We did not fancy cooking plus I have not been grocery shopping yet, so there isn't anything we wanted from the freezer/pantry. I realised when I bought the takeaway there will be a lot of recycling and general waste.”

Rochford, female, 35-54 years old

* Reporting only categories with 6% or more.

Pro-climate shopping habits are emerging among younger residents with families, but are not yet widespread

Pro-climate shopping behaviours are currently concentrated among residents aged 25-34 with young families; they are more likely to have learnt positive habits whilst growing up compared to older residents, and have higher incomes and more established routines than the very youngest residents.



As residents became more conscious of packaging over the course of qualitative discussions, they used **rules of thumb** of what they believe is easier to recycle, rather **than only checking labels**: for example, opting for food items packaged in paper or tins, rather than plastic. Online shopping also emerged as a tool used by wealthier, more routine-based residents to help with bulk shopping, thinking about quantities and planning (though they also admit they have **less control over the packaging** of items).

Residents express frustration at the amount of plastic waste food and essentials have, but feel there are few realistic alternatives

When prompted to think about packaging, most residents express frustration at the amount produced, and at most **largely see their responsibility as limited to checking whether something can be recycled** – though this is a ‘nice to have’ rather than something used to weigh up which brand to purchase.

Most residents **only look for overt signs and symbols on packaging**; it is now common knowledge that soft plastics are not often recyclable at the kerbside, but beyond this **few have the knowledge or established ‘rules of thumb’ to discriminate between different types of packaging**. When recyclability is too difficult to decipher, residents are likely to fall back on their other priorities.

Reducing the amount of packaging purchased feels like an impossible or unrealistic task for the consumer. Unpackaged options are not widely available for many products, and even when they are most residents expect them to be more expensive (refill shops have not gained traction even with wealthier respondents). Beyond communicating ‘quick wins’ which come with no extra cost to consumers, behaviour change here is likely to require high incentives and/or packaging itself to be adapted on a large scale.



“I bought: mango, blueberries, apples, nectarines and strawberries, ready meal & prepared salads, loaf of bread, pretzels. I bought it based on what members of the family like to eat and quickly picked things that were healthy and quick to prepare...I didn't really factor packaging into the shop as there wasn't much difference in the packaging in the food available in the shop.”

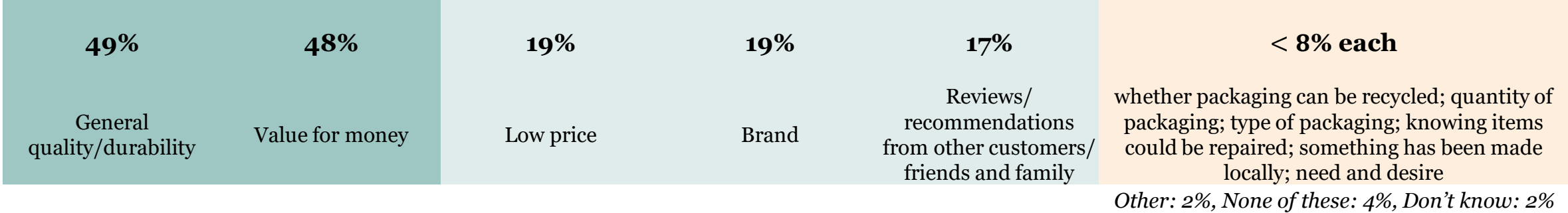
Epping Forest, Male, 35-54 years old



Video: A resident from Brentwood brings to life some of these trade-offs and challenges when it comes to shopping for food items more sustainably

Packaging and other pro-climate considerations feature to an even lesser extent when it comes to purchasing non-food items

Factors influencing purchase decisions – non-food



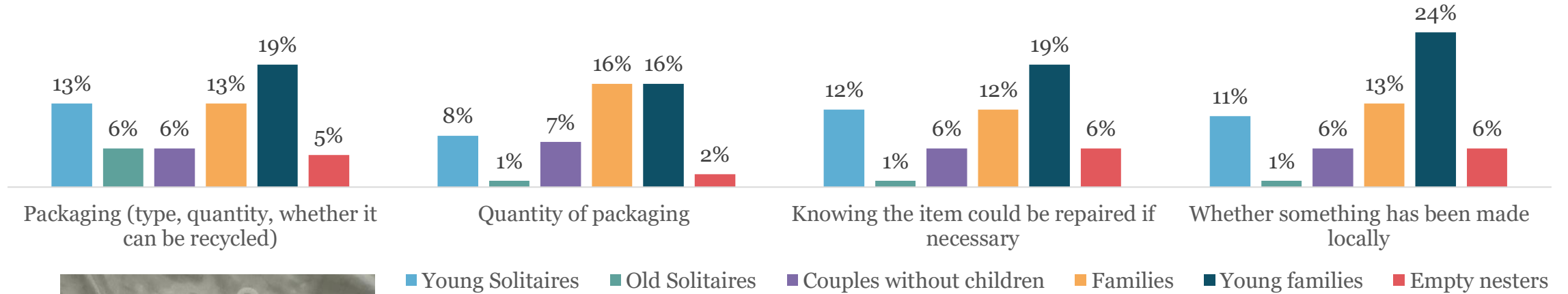
Quality and value for money are even more dominant as considerations for non-food items, while low prices, brand, reviews and recommendations are also important.

Most residents give packaging or pro-climate factors little consideration. Moreover, larger items are often ordered online, meaning residents feel they have even less control over the packaging items arrive in.

“I needed lights for a couple of bikes I’ve acquired and that I’m fixing to be roadworthy. The lamps came in cardboard and plastic packaging that has now gone into the approximate recycling containers. Yes, [this purchase was] important, as it’s illegal to ride a bike without suitable lighting.”
Chelmsford, Male, 55+ years old

As with food, residents in the ‘family’ life stage are more likely to factor sustainability into their decision making

Factors influencing purchase decisions – non-food



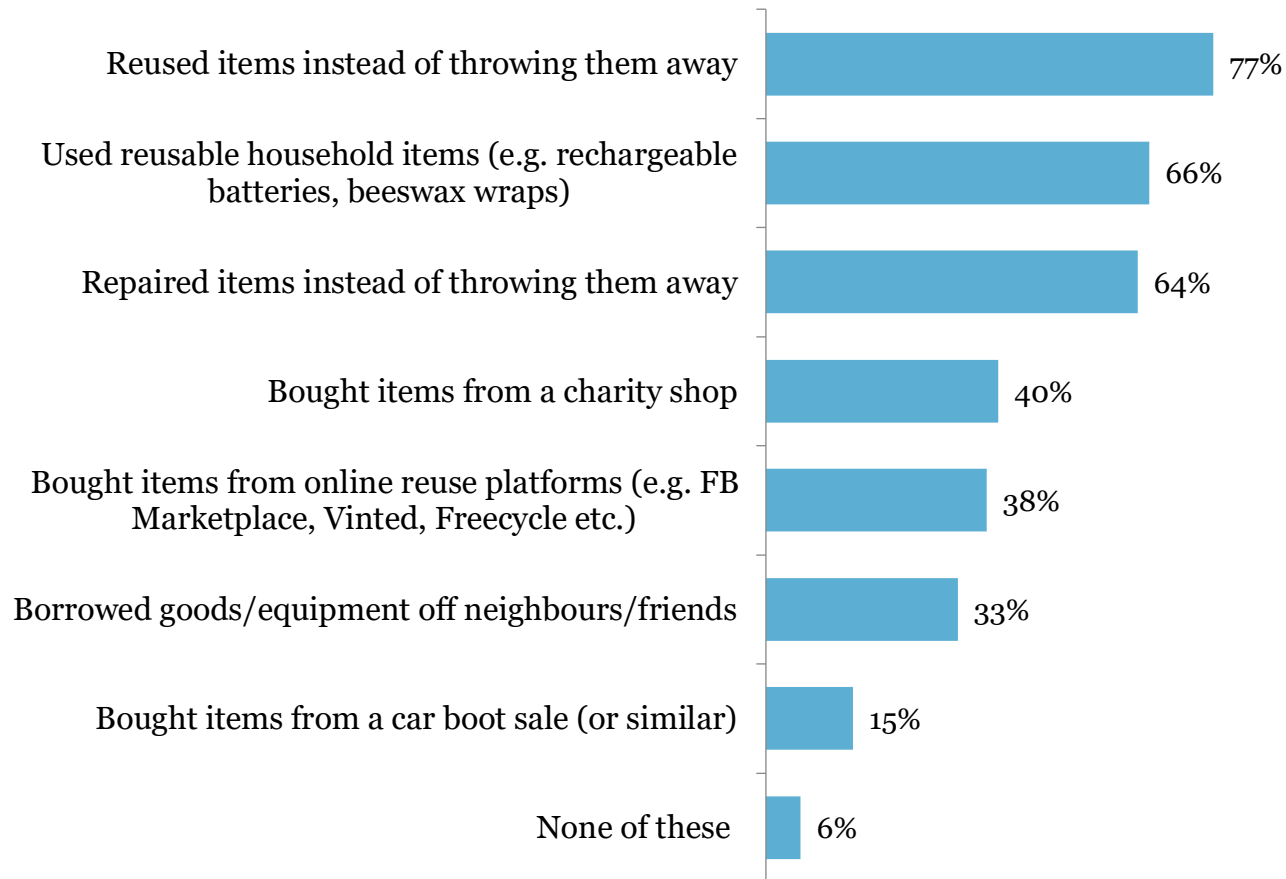
*“Today I went shopping and bought some baby clothes from Marks and Spencer after using the **Good on You app**, which details how ethical each high street retailer is. M&S had a higher score than others. I also chose options in store that stated they were made from **responsibly sourced materials**, as this is very **important to me**. What is disappointing though, is the amount of plastic packaging that the clothes come in. I would have preferred to have bought them on a reusable hanger and **did consider whether I should buy them or not given how much plastic was involved.**”*

Harlow, Female, 18-34 years old

Participation in the circular economy is gaining significant momentum, with **94%** of residents having engaged in at least some form of reuse and/or repair in the last 3 months.

There is a growing ‘buzz’ around buying and selling items second-hand

Engagement in reuse and repair in the last 3 months



On average, residents reporting doing **3.6** of the activities tested – with the focus being on clothes, furniture, and children’s toys.

Residents aged 65+ are much less likely to be engaging in reuse and repair, particularly via online marketplaces or borrowing from family and friends.

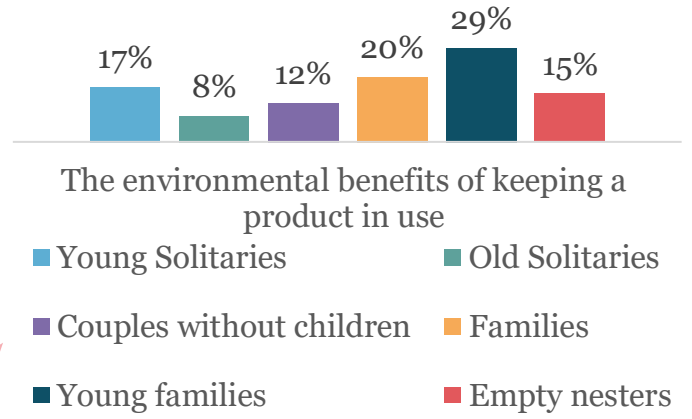
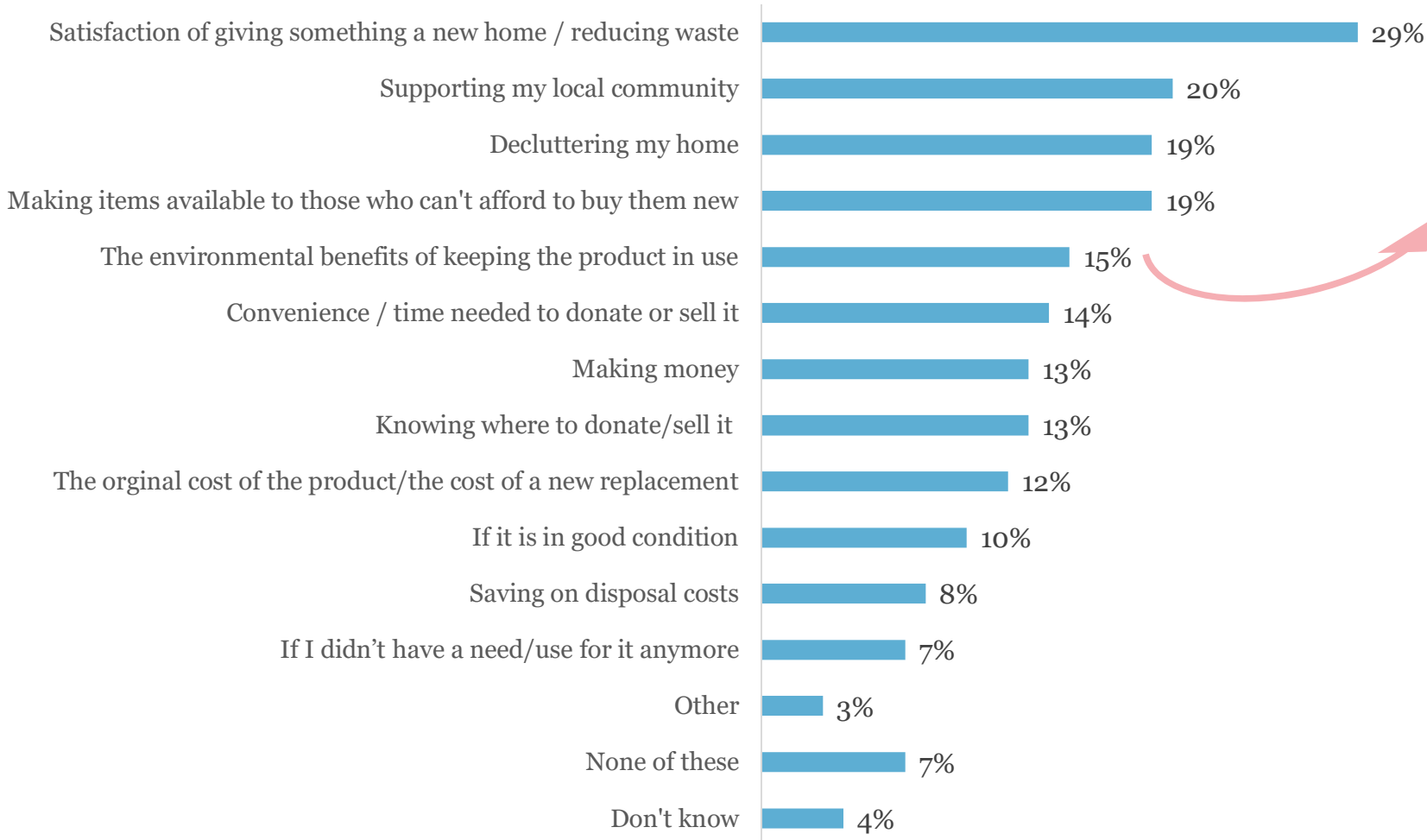
Residents report frequently seeing adverts from a range of companies that enable reuse and resale of items, such as Freecycle, Freegle and Vinted, while some note that the **rejection of ‘fast fashion’** has become a particularly hot topic recently.

“I heard on the news today that Love Island is sponsored by eBay this year and all of the islanders outfits are second hand, which is a refreshing change from the fast fashion partnerships of previous years.”

Harlow, Female, 18-34 years old

Feel-good factor and community are the key motivators for donating or selling an item for reuse

Motivators for donating or selling an items for reuse*



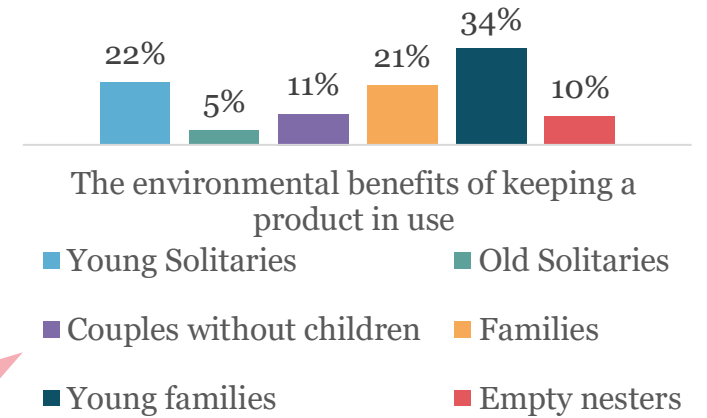
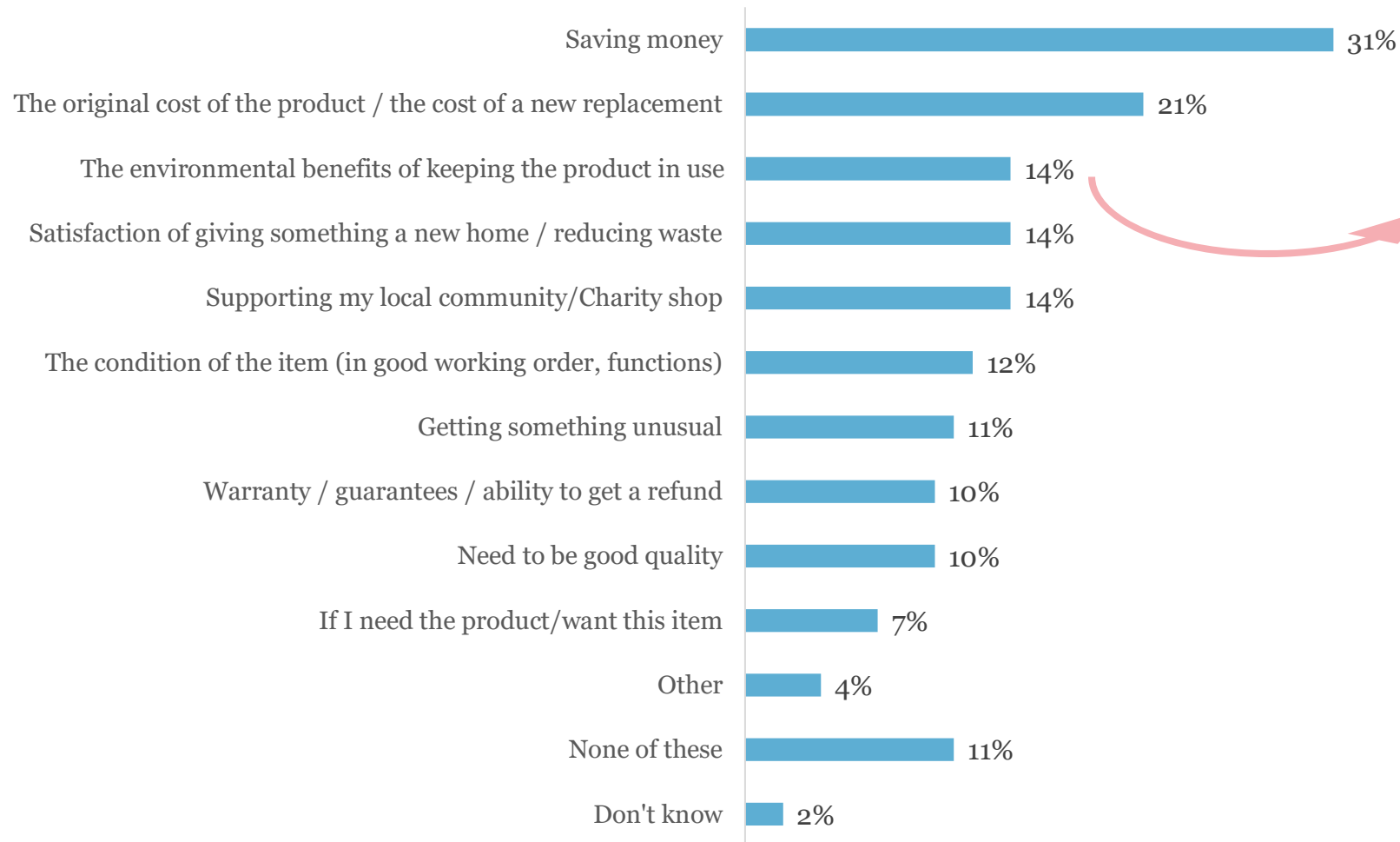
"I am a member of several sites and groups that promote upcycling and rehoming things you no longer need. I typically check in a couple of times a week to see if anyone is looking for something I might have. I find this a great way to declutter. I have gotten rid of furniture, clothes, toys, and electricals this way. We also bag up any unwanted food that is still in date and offer that to neighbours or local homeless charities... I absolutely hate wasting food! It's always best to offer it to someone else who might need or appreciate it more."

Rochford, Female, 18-34 years old

* Reporting only categories with 5% or more.

Saving money is the main motivator for buying second-hand, but pro-environment considerations feature more prominently

Motivators for buying an item second hand*



“Had to attend an appointment this afternoon, so popped into the charity shop for a browse as I went past and came out with the perfect bag for the wedding this weekend. Result! I was rather pleased that something could be reused and delighted that it matched perfectly with the (borrowed) wedding outfit. And it only cost £3.”
 Epping Forest, Female, 55+

* Reporting only categories with 5% or more.

The motivators for engaging in reuse vary considerably across age and life stage

Reuse is already an established behaviour to some extent, with almost all residents involved in qualitative discussions having passed on or received unwanted items from family and friends. However, motivation to make this habitual varies across different types of resident.

Young solitaires/ Couples without children

- Stronger interest in fashion/aesthetics but lower income, so looking for ways to save money and get something 'unusual' by buying second-hand (clothes in particular)
- Decluttering a key motivator of selling/donating; prospect of making money also appeals, but to a lesser extent

Families with school-aged children

- Most community-minded so more likely to get satisfaction from helping others – they are also more likely to have items other residents commonly need (e.g., children's clothes, toys and buggies)
- For purchases, environmental considerations almost on a par with saving money

Empty nesters

- Benefits of engaging in reuse least obvious to this group, and they tend to have fewer connections in the community to facilitate this and less 'need' for new items
- That said, those who are engaged tend to have more time to invest in 'shopping'/ searching for second-hand items

Across all groups, women appear more likely than men to be interested in reuse

The explosion of online marketplaces and reuse platforms is facilitating reuse among younger residents in particular

The **rise of Facebook Marketplace and similar online groups/apps** has made reuse more accessible. There is also awareness that you can **donate/collect unwanted food** via apps such as TooGoodToGo and Olio, but some mention that these can be difficult to engage since the need for food items is often more immediate.

Moreover, these platforms underscore the community aspect of reuse and heightens the ‘feel good’ factor residents get from buying and selling second-hand.

Essex swapping events were also mentioned positively by some participants, who would like to see these return following the pandemic (and could act as an offline equivalent to marketplaces for older and digitally excluded residents). There is some awareness of the ‘**Library of things**’ but some cite infrequent opportunities to use it and concerns about the conditions of the items.



“I saw an appeal on the West Horndon Community page asking to borrow a wheelchair recently - someone in the village was able to accommodate the request. We feel lucky to be part of a caring community that helps each other out.”

Brentwood, Male, 35-54

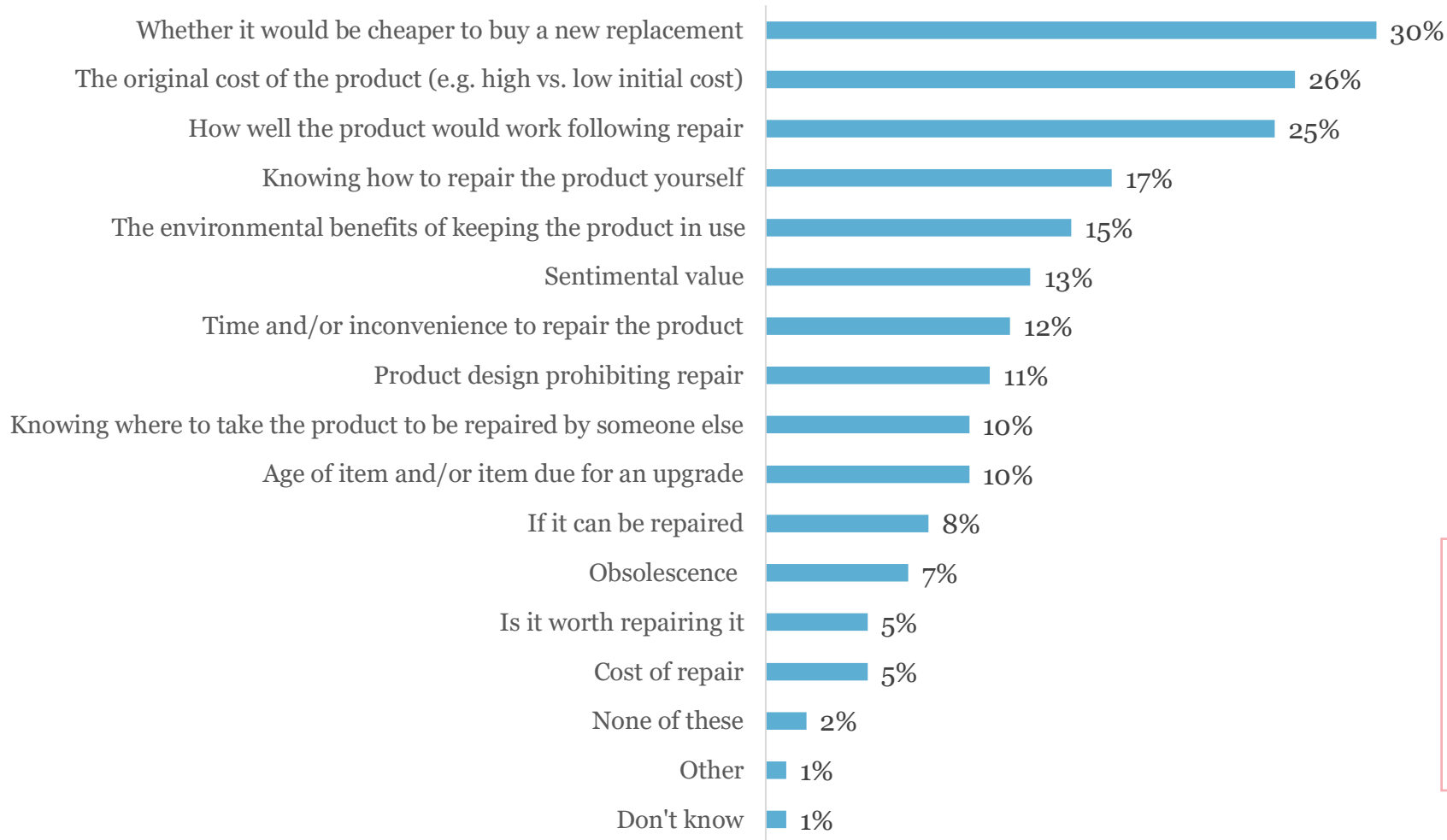


“I am aware that some Essex libraries have a system where people can borrow household items, like carpet washers, but I have not used it myself although if I have a need for anything then I would consider using it. I am also aware of the app Olio where items come up for borrowing or requests can be made to borrow off someone local.”

Maldon, Female, 55+

Repairing goods can feel like more financial and time investment, for potentially little return if the item does not work ‘like new’

Considerations for repairing an item*



Some participants voiced concerns that repairing things takes **too much ‘effort’** / more effort than going out to buy something new, especially if it still won’t function as well as before. On balance, it therefore appears to be ‘cheaper’ to purchase a replacement brand new.

“I always have a go at trying to repair something if I can - like fixing my bathroom tap with a new washer or cleaning the showerhead with vinegar (sort of stuff my parents used to do!). I will also do things like getting my shoes resoled. I am a firm believer that if you look after things they will last longer anyway!”

Basildon, Male, 55+

* Reporting only categories with 5% or more.

Repairing items can be very inspiring, but does not feel attainable for most residents with their current level of knowledge/skill

- Many residents, typically those who are younger, say they simply do not have the knowledge and/or skills to repair different items to the right standard. While craft, repair and upcycling is seen as ‘cool’ and ‘inspiring’, it would take some time to learn these skills from a low base and also requires residents to have the right tools (e.g., a sewing machine).
- When the need for repair arises, instead of repairing items themselves, younger residents will often take items such as clothes to be repaired by parents/grandparents.



“Today I saw a TikTok where a girl transformed an old dress she brought from the charity shop into a lovely top and skirt. I thought the end result looked great and was impressed. If I was able to sew I would definitely do this but I don't have a sewing machine. In the past though I have altered items to make them wearable, such as trousers that are too long.”

Rochford, Female, 18-34

“Repair shop was on TV today. I love that programme; watching such skilled crafts people bringing people's treasures back to life is amazing!”

Braintree, Female, 35-54

89% of Essex residents say they ‘always’
use their kerbside recycling

However, residents can also be
selective with the kerbside services
they choose to use

Despite the high claims of usage of recycling services overall, residents often pick and choose the specific services they want to use

Among residents, there is a **relatively high awareness of what kerbside collection services are available** to them and how they should use them.

Most residents report using all of the bins, boxes, and sacks that are available to them (differences depending on each district) and what is accepted through their local kerbside collection (e.g., green/ black/ grey/ brown/ yellow bin, orange box, pink sacks).

However, **some residents pick and choose** the services they want to use - tending to rely on general waste and recycling as their two core services, and avoiding others (food waste, garden waste etc.).

Reasons for not using all services can be due to a **lack of motivation** to seek out the breadth of services available, a **lack of space available**, or a preference to use one service over another.



“Brentwood council gives us boxes for glass and food waste. They are large and ugly, and we can't fit them in the kitchen. Makes the kitchen feel like it's a bin area so we put the glass and food waste bin in our carpark outside and don't use it. Glass we often carry down without the box (we don't use much glass) and we don't do food waste. It's too messy and smelly. It's hard for us to regularly take bins out because we can't leave our daughter alone in the flat, so food waste is just too hard.”

Brentwood, Female, 18-34

Recycling feels like ‘second nature’ ...

Participants describe recycling as ‘automatic’ or ‘**second nature**’, something they ‘know from experience’ and ‘comes naturally’ to them, especially for broad categories of material (e.g. cereal boxes, milk cartons, cans).

For dry recyclables, most will put effort into sorting and separating into the main categories. Separation makes residents feel they are ‘doing their bit’ and the process itself is not onerous, although complaints about the amount of space they take up and the different ‘unsightly’ bins and boxes are common.

There is also a risk rules of thumb can be applied too widely. For example, many understand that mixed material items need to be stripped down, but this left one resident feeling confused about how to approach hard to remove labels on glass/plastic*. Councils should therefore also be clear about the parameters of rules and where they do/don’t apply to reassure that recycling is practical.



“I am aware that the glass needs to be clean and dry for it to be properly recycled. However, sometimes the labels are really difficult to remove, or there is a plastic lid attached. I try my best to clean them but sometimes it's too time-consuming and frustrating and I give up and throw it in the general bin, I don't want to waste my time scrubbing at a bottle.”

Uttlesford, Female, 18-34

“I've been recycling now for a long time. I know what goes into which bags / boxes so it comes naturally now.”

Castle Point, Male, 18-34

... but this can mean sorting is automatic and relies on rules of thumb

Most feel confident they are sorting items into the broad categories correctly (e.g., metal/cans vs. cardboard vs. plastic), but this means they no longer check labels and recycling takes place using rules of thumb unless confronted with a new material.

- The majority look for **recyclability symbols** on food packaging either at home or in store, but these are not always felt to be clear enough or easy to find.
- If unsure, most put the waste into the **black bin**. Mixed packaging or things that are difficult to separate or to wash often end up there too.

As a result, some participants practice ‘**wish-cycling**’ or only recycle if they have time or the energy to think about it. Moreover, many residents have reported **problems with stripping down materials** and removing labels on the packaging. This highlights that councils need to improve and update communications, as labels and lids no longer need to be removed before recycling.

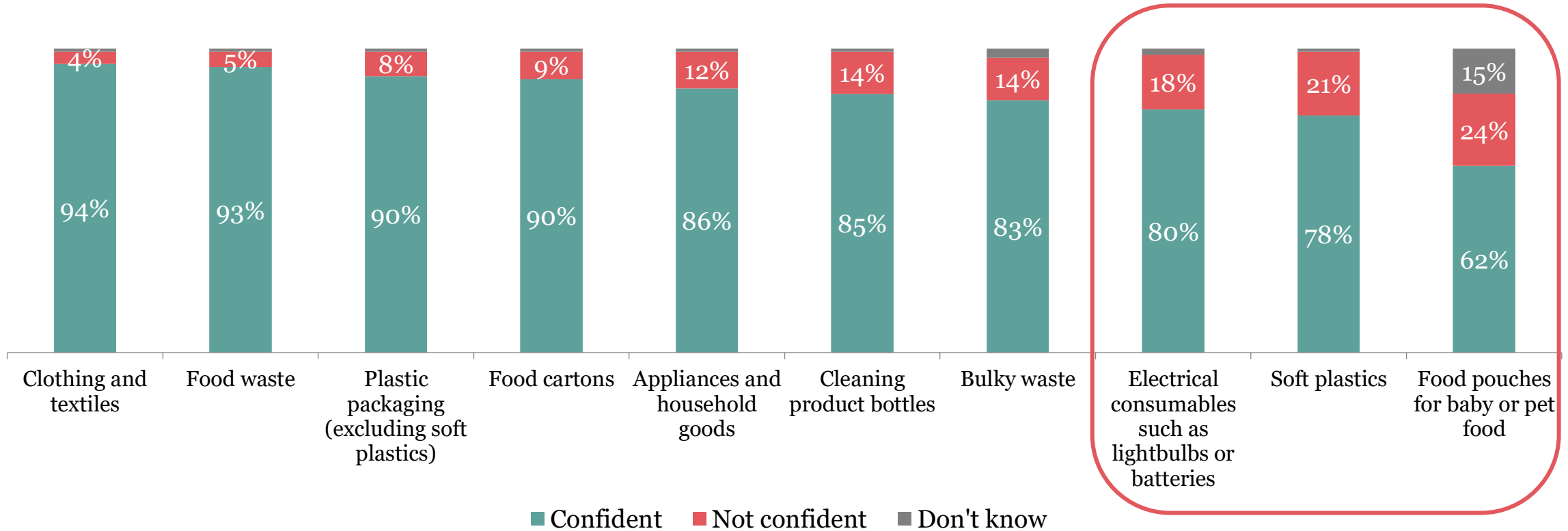


I'm quite careful to look at the packaging, however my husband just assumes anything plastic, paper, cardboard, etc. can just be recycled.

Harlow, Female, 18-35

Most residents feel confident about how to recycle broad categories of material, but less so small, mixed-material items

Confidence recycling each item in the correct place / in the right way



Electrical recyclables stand out as particularly challenging to recycle or dispose of correctly

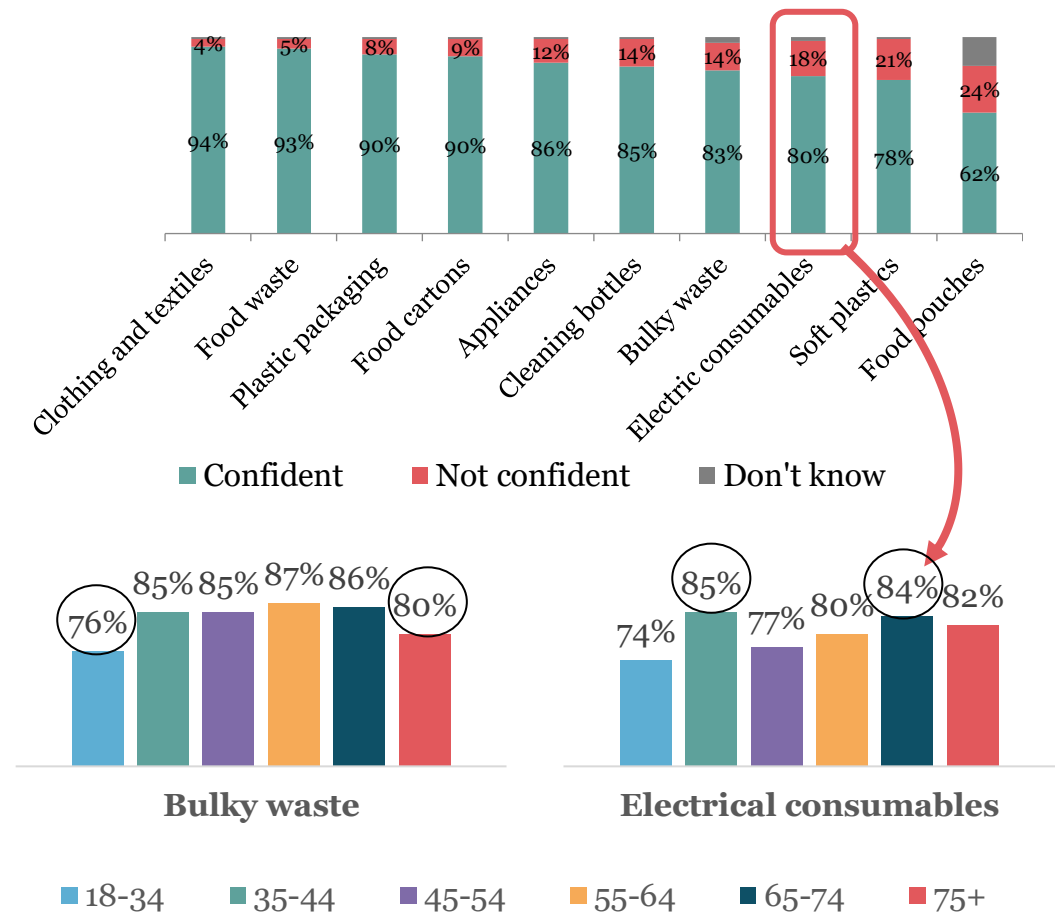
Electrical consumables such as lightbulbs or batteries are seen as more difficult to recycle, with one in five (18%) residents reporting not being confident about recycling these correctly.

- Confidence is highest among 35-44 (85%) and 65-74 (84%) year olds
- Those who are disabled (23%), and those aged 18-24 (39%) are more likely to say they are not confident.

Eight in ten (83%) residents are confident in disposing of or recycling **bulky waste** (e.g., mattresses, furniture) – rather than being an issue of knowledge, (lack of) access to transport appears to be biggest barrier to correctly recycling or disposing of items in this category:

- 18-24 (50%) and 75+ (80%) year olds are least likely to be confident, likely reflecting the groups which are least likely to have access to a car.
- Out of the districts, those based in Basildon (92%) are most likely to be confident and those in Harlow (73%) the least.

Confidence recycling each item in the correct place / in the right way



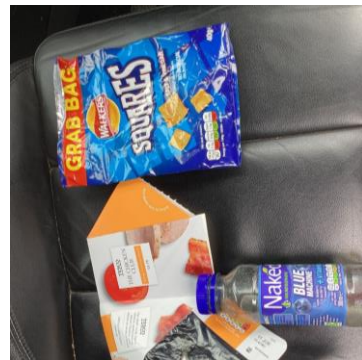
Residents feel lost about how or where to recycle soft plastics and mixed-material items

While most are aware that **soft plastics** cannot generally be recycled via kerbside collection, this material stands out as one that residents of all ages struggle to know *how or where* to recycle. Confidence is lowest in Tendring (66%) and Maldon (64%), and highest in Castle Point (85%).

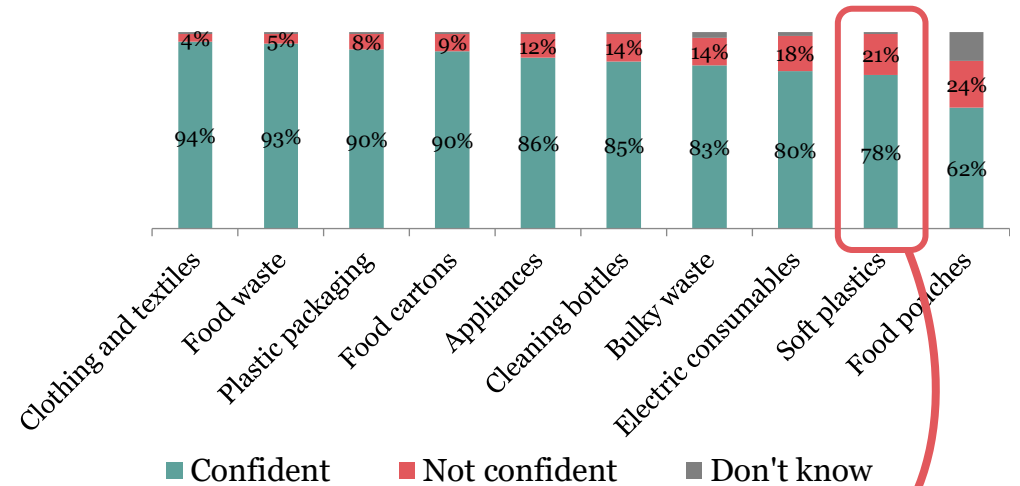
Similar barriers and challenges are experienced for **mixed material packaging, TetraPak, crisp packets and food pouches for baby/pet food**. Confidence of the recyclability of these items is even lower than soft plastics, and specific to whether they are used by the household often (e.g., families show higher confidence recycling food pouches)

Soft plastics I am not clear about, e.g. bubble wrap, plastic bags etc.
Braintree, Male, 55+

To be honest, I get quite frustrated nowadays when I can't recycle things. I feel confident in recycling and more frustration at how much plastic is still used in a lot of items.
Castle Point, Male, 18-34



Confidence recycling each item in the correct place / in the right way



Soft plastics – Not confident

Tendring (33%)
Maldon (31%)

Low knowledge of recycling points and reluctance to store soft plastics up means they normally end up in the general waste

Other than the engaged minority who are aware of recycling points for soft plastics, there is a **low level of awareness of where these are located** and/ or what they look like.

People living alone or in small households **don't feel like they have 'enough' soft plastics to warrant a trip** to an out-of-home facility (e.g., only two crisp packets a week). They also may not want – or have the space for - the material to build up in their household, so it predominantly ends up going into the general waste.

Some participants avoid buying things which are not recyclable, or where packaging mixes up recyclable and non-recyclable materials. However, by in large it is seen as **producers' responsibility** to change the design of their packaging.

Most supermarkets now have soft plastic recycling. I tend to use Sainsbury's because it's our closest and they recycle a wide range of things.

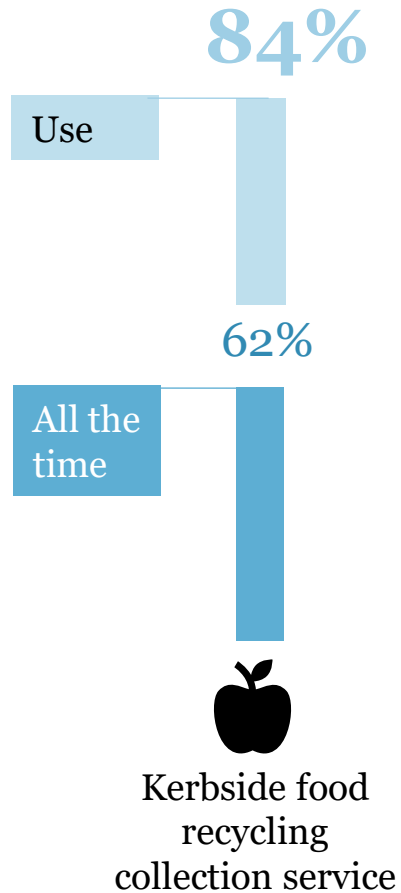
Braintree, Female, 35-54



*I think a lot of the issue is manufacturers and supermarkets. It annoys me the amount of plastic that cannot be recycled being on the products. **We stopped shopping at Lidl mainly due to the amount of soft plastics that cover their items.***

Castle Point, Male, 18-34

Despite high levels of confidence in, and claimed usage of, food recycling, in reality it does not appeal to everyone



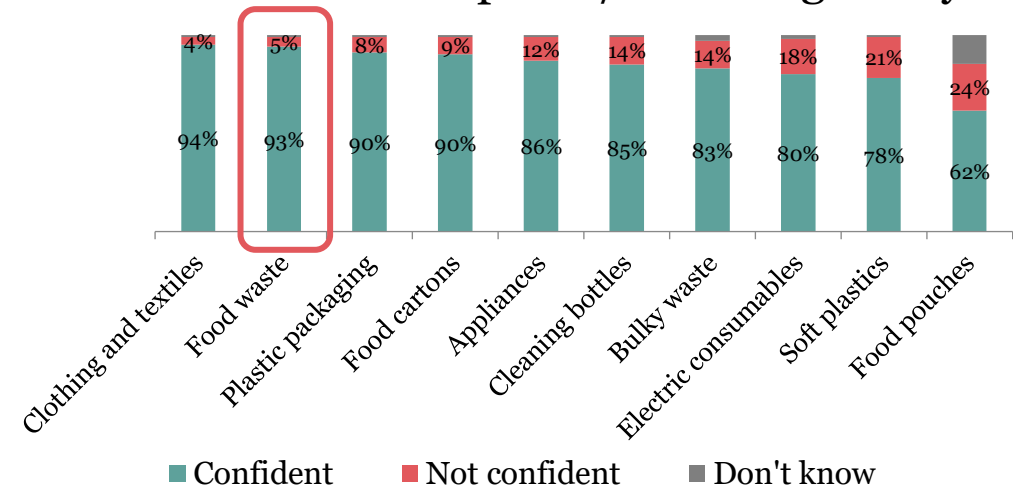
Some residents are reluctant to have a **food waste caddy** in their kitchen because of the **smell and mess** it creates, meaning engagement with food waste recycling is far less common, even though confidence of how to do so is high.

Only a small minority use **alternative methods to deal with food waste**, such as a wormery, feeding it to their dog or using any leftovers for another day.

The majority of respondents believe that free liners for their kitchen caddy would encourage them to recycle more food waste.

Confidence of how to recycle food waste correctly is **lowest in Brentwood (82%)** and **highest in Rochford and Braintree (both 98%)**. In addition, Brentwood (73%) and Tendring (71%) residents are particularly less likely to be satisfied with their food waste collections service.

Confidence recycling each item in the correct place / in the right way



With regards to food waste collections, these get messy and are a pain to maintain. Something to avoid a bad smell would be helpful.
Harlow, Female, 18-34



Council website and a simple Google search are the two key channels residents would consult when looking for information about recycling

Channels to consult for more information*



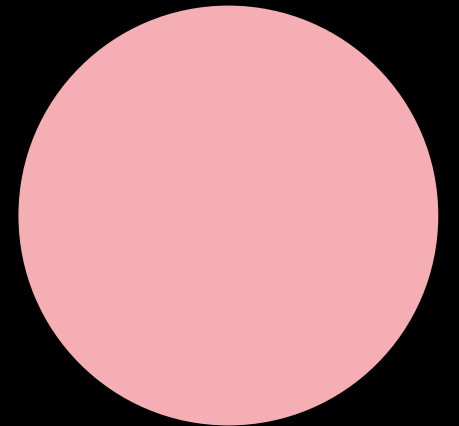
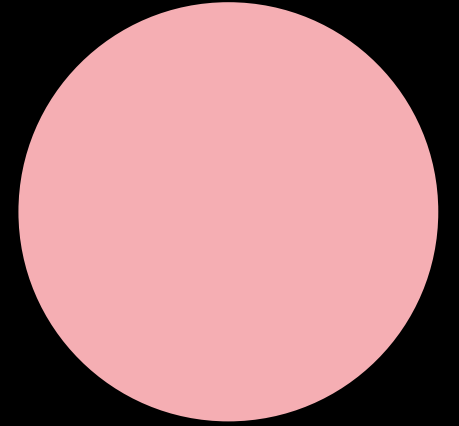
Compared to other life stages, **young families are particularly engaged** and would consult the highest number of channels (2.7 on average). They are more likely to check the Council's recycling calendar or Council's newsletter, visit the Love Essex website, ask friends or family, and consult their local newspaper.

Those based in Castle Point are more likely to say they don't know (8%) while Epping Forest residents are particularly knowledgeable with at least 3 channels selected, the highest number of all districts. Those living in Maldon, Rochford and Tendring select a very low number of channels (1 on average) compared to other districts.

* Reporting only categories with 4% or more.

Section 3

*Opportunities for behaviour change
and communications*

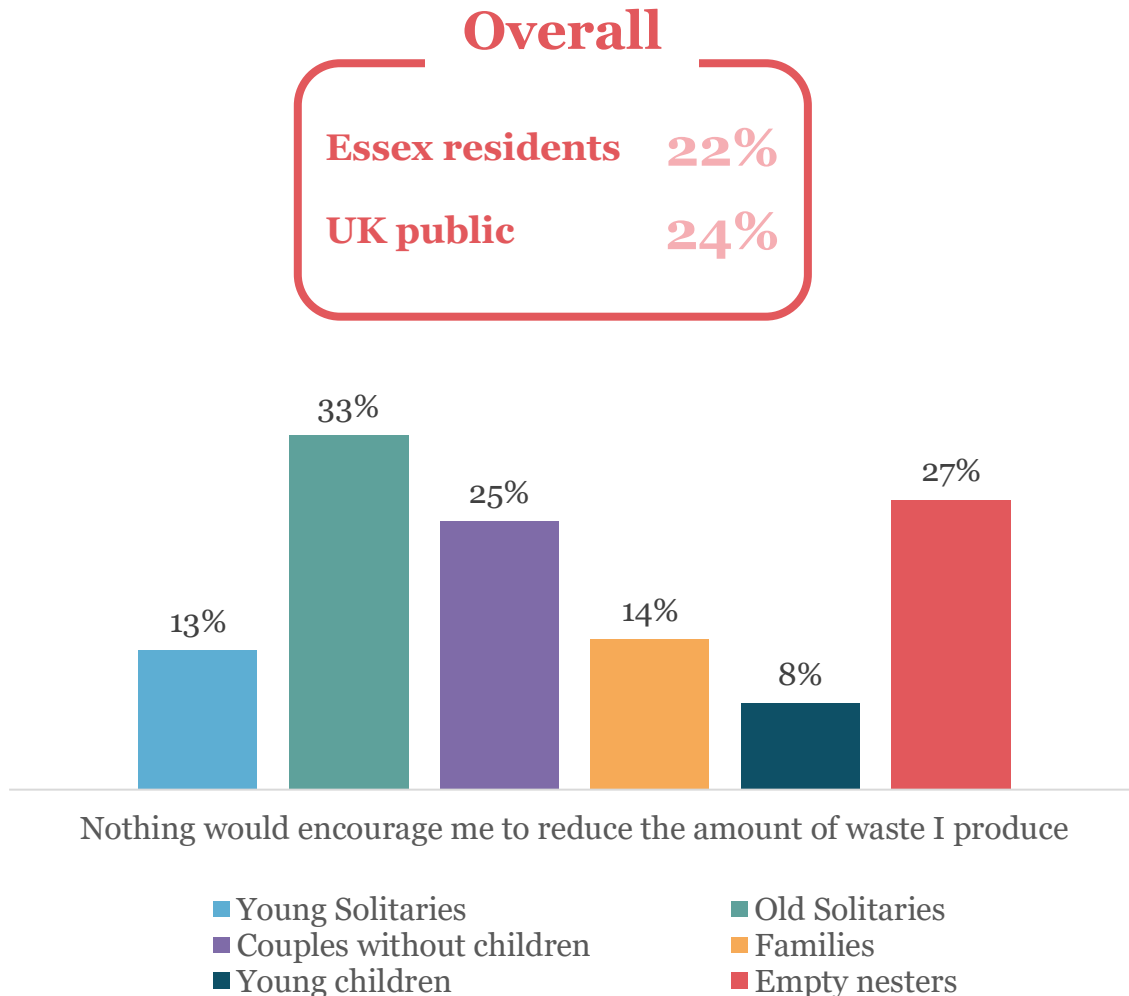


95% of Essex residents feel responsible for reducing the amount of recycling and general rubbish their household produces*

And three quarters see opportunities for where they can be supported in waste reduction

* In comparison, 85% of the UK public say they feel 'responsible' for the amount of recycling and general rubbish they produce

Older residents appear more likely to believe they are already doing all they can on waste reduction



“For many things it is difficult to know how things might change. I suppose one could buy apples in paper bags but as we have deliveries, the grocery company send stuff out in whatever packaging it likes. For us to go to the shops would require the use of the car and burn up fuel.”

Chelmsford, Male, 55+

Residents believe in the value of waste reduction, but see it as largely out of their hands

22%

Say ‘**nothing**’ would encourage them to reduce the amount of general rubbish and recycling they produce for kerbside collection

Residents can quickly **become defensive** at the suggestion that they should change their shopping behaviour to **reduce packaging**. With the cost of living crisis already being felt, they feel they lack the resources to make more sustainable choices. While reducing plastic packaging is a key association with reduction, some residents admit it is difficult to **change their lifestyle and purchase less** – usually they are the ones who already try to engage with this type of behaviour.

30%

Say items in no / less packaging being more widely available would **encourage reduction**

Moreover, in the **absence of visible progress from supermarkets and manufacturers**, even the most engaged can feel it is an ‘**uphill battle**’ and are **tired of being told what to do** (in a broader universe of climate action). First and foremost, residents want to see businesses take the lead on switching to sustainable packaging while keeping prices down.

“[My concern is] that we will be out of pocket for another recycling, save the world project. e.g. when driving through London being charged for it, like the money is going to repair the holes in the ozone layer. I think producers of the products that can’t be recycled that are filling landfills should stopped. Instead of the buck being passed to the consumer who could be none the wiser.”

Basildon, Female, 35-54

Behaviour change initiatives at the individual level should focus on the ‘carrot’ rather than the ‘stick’ to keep residents on side

As well as continuing to build motivation (particularly among older residents), barriers to behaviour change around reduction can primarily be addressed with creating more ‘opportunities’ for change:

- 1 Compiling a list of easy product swaps which are ‘quick wins’ for reducing packaging** – there is already some appetite for this type of resource; one in ten (10%) residents say they would be encouraged to reduce waste if the council provided more information/tips about how to do this, rising to more than a quarter (28%) among those aged 25-34.
- 2 Communicating the natural incentives of waste reduction** – one in ten (9%) spontaneously say they would be motivated by knowing how much money it could save them in a relatable way. This approach is likely to be most impactful among young families and budget-conscious young people. Stressing the positive impact on local communities would also appeal to the more community-minded families.
- 3 Creating new incentives** – Using incentives may work in the short run before households find how reduction aligns with their values, become competent and feel connected. This could include tangible rewards such as prizes, cashback schemes or ‘carbon points’.

Only 6% of residents spontaneously say that reduced frequency of collections would encourage them to reduce the amount of waste they produce, and would heavily jar with their perception of themselves as ‘trying their best’.

Motivation for change and consideration can also still be improved further, particularly among the oldest and youngest residents

For most residents, waste and recycling are not front of mind at the point of purchase for food and everyday essentials*. Financial incentives (e.g. prizes, cashback schemes or ‘carbon points’, or information explaining the potential cost savings/challenging preconceptions of sustainable options as the ‘premium’ choice) should help shift this up their list of priorities, but future campaigns could also consider ways to **make residents reconsider or question their own behaviour in-the-moment**, and eventually build a habit of asking themselves ‘do we really need to buy this?’ or ‘could I buy this with less packaging?’.

It is notable that **appetite for change is higher among residents with school-aged children**, who are often exposed to more information on the topic via their children’s curriculum and are more susceptible to messaging around protecting the planet for future generations.

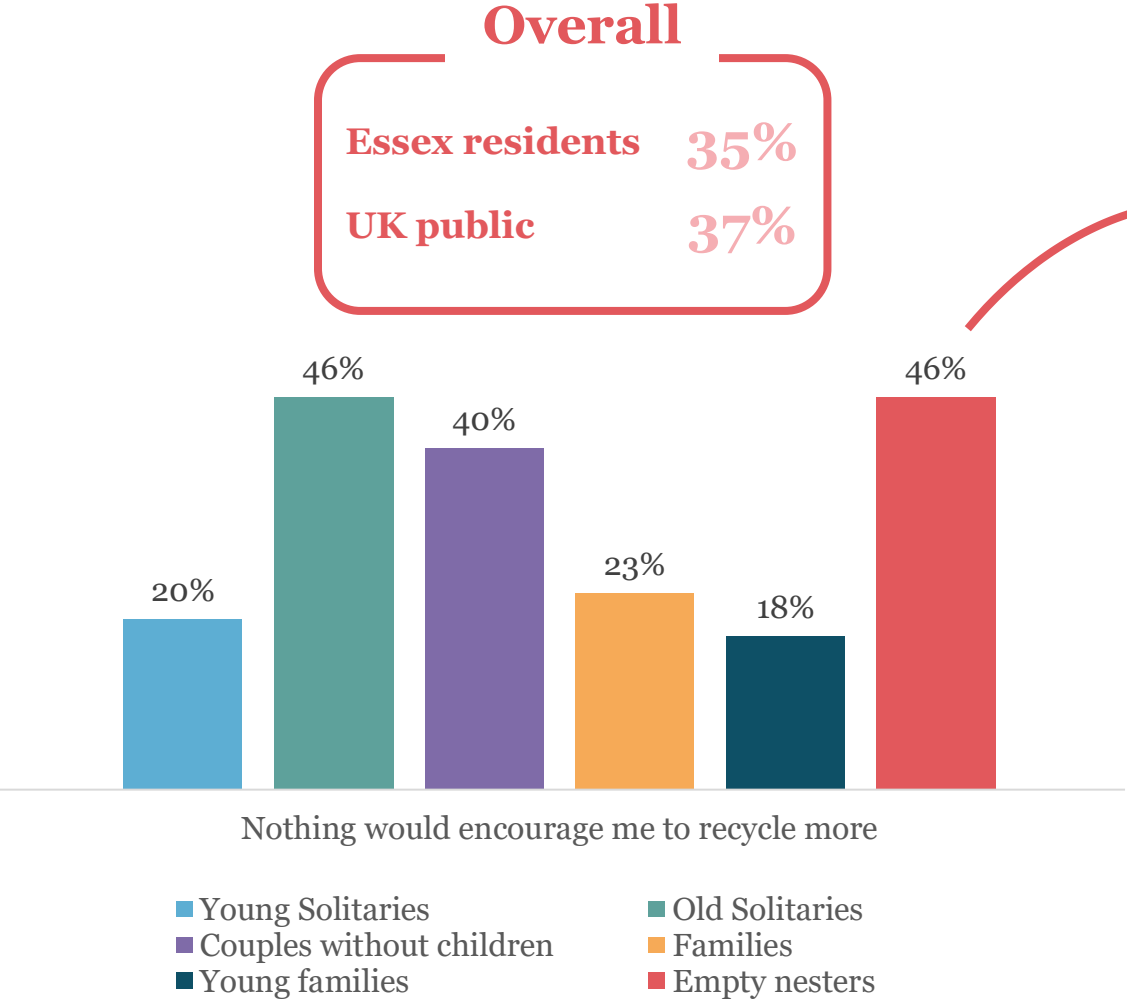
Messaging should now focus on:

- **Helping older, post-children residents relate to the problem** when they have already set themselves apart from the ‘throw away’ generation
- **Identifying quick-wins for the youngest and lowest income residents**, who are less likely to feel responsible for reduction

35% of Essex residents say ‘nothing’
would encourage them to recycle more via
kerbside collection

Making residents question their
own knowledge and behaviour is
the key challenge

This challenge is once again more pronounced among older residents, whose belief they are already doing their bit is most entrenched



Older residents are indeed more likely to report using their dry recycling and food collection services ‘all of the time’ compared to younger age groups – so this resistance may reflect better engagement more generally. That said, data also indicates they still lack confidence when it comes to disposing more niche items (e.g., electrical consumables, soft plastics) and therefore there is room for improvement.

“I try my hardest to support Essex following the ‘waste hierarchy’ by composting at home, reusing bags or other items where possible, and not wasting food (just buying what I need). This all helps reduce the waste which Essex has to deal with and would be good if everyone did so.”

Brentwood, Female, 18-34

Lack of available space for recycling bins is a common barrier, and one in five residents suggest more frequent collections would help

20%

Say **increased frequency of recycling collections** would encourage them to recycle more

Living in flat: 40%

10%

Say **smaller containers/having more space for multiple bins** would encourage them to recycle more

Living in flat: 23%

Residents often find that they produce too much recycling for collection, and one in five (20%) say increasing the frequency of this would encourage them to recycle more.

Compounding this, **residents in flats or smaller dwellings are reluctant to use up precious space storing recycling boxes or bags.**

To keep emphasis on reduction, any service changes could be **targeted** at those with the greatest need for frequent collections i.e., districts with a high proportion of flats and / or residents on low incomes. A **voucher or discount could also be offered to lower income residents to help them switch to a segregated bin**, which some wealthier and more engaged residents had purchased to make separation quicker and easier. This might be the case of Tendring residents who are more likely to say free service would encourage them to recycle more.

“We don't use the boxes. They take up too much space in our kitchen which is very small and they look ugly. We do sort into recycling and general, plus we do put glass just next to the recycling and take it downstairs to the main apartment glass bin.”

Brentwood, Female, 18-34



More needs to be done to make recycling food waste feel more urgent, and more attractive

63%

Agree that “I would recycle more food waste if I was provided with free liners for my kitchen caddy”
(Prompted)

▲ 18-24: 74%
25-34: 84%
Living in a flat: 82%

▼ 65+: 50%

Residents are **more comfortable admitting they ‘skip’ on recycling food waste** and few express the same ‘embarrassment’ or ‘frustration’ at disposing of this compared to dry recyclables – indicating there isn’t as strong a social norm around this material.

Residents therefore need to be **educated about the impact of food waste on the environment**, and how its reduction could save both households and the council money, to elevate it to the same level of concern as plastic.

Along with increased communications around the issue in general, other practical steps could help reduce barriers:

- Being clear about exactly how free liners will help with the smell of food waste which is a common barrier to using this service.
- **Distributing free caddies as well as liners** for those in flats / renters who may be new to the area, whose kitchen caddy may have been ‘lost’ between tenancies, and/or who are less likely to have a garden to engage in composting.
- Improving food waste collections (i.e. making sure staff empty the caddy completely, offering more frequent collections in the summer)

Residents are open to receiving more guidance from the Council, with soft plastics being the highest priority

13%

Say if the council gave them more information / tips they would recycle more (*spontaneous*)

65+: 5%

11%

Say if it was easier to find out if an item could be recycled they would recycle more (*spontaneous*)

In qualitative discussions around the waste hierarchy, **most residents said they would appreciate more guidance from the Council.** The biggest gap in knowledge is around soft plastics or mixed-material items, which is therefore the biggest opportunity for improving residents' capability to recycle, although this would require residents to use out-of-home recycling facilities, such as those seen in supermarkets.

Beyond expanding the range of materials collected from kerbside (which is most preferred), residents would appreciate:

- More information on the **types of plastic that can or can't be recycled**, with examples of the everyday products these relate to.
- **Centralised out-of-home disposal points** in town centres/near supermarkets for more 'niche' materials so people can dispose of them easily in one trip

"I am aware that the glass needs to be clean and dry for it to be properly recycled. However, sometimes the labels are really difficult to remove, or there is a plastic lid attached. I try my best to clean them but sometimes it's too time-consuming and frustrating and I give up and throw it in the general bin, I don't want to waste my time scrubbing at a bottle."
 Uttlesford, Female, 18-34

Communicating how materials will be processed in the UK is the most unifying message for encouraging residents to recycle more

Motivators of waste reduction / recycling – prompted

Showing % who NET Agree with each of the following

	I would recycle more if I knew materials would be processed within the UK	I would reduce waste and recycle more if I knew how much money I personally could save (e.g., through wasting less food)	I would reduce waste and recycle more if I knew how much money the Council and taxpayers would save from reduced disposal costs	I would recycle more if I knew materials would be processed within Essex
Essex residents	75%	72%	70%	65%
Young Solitaires	79%	82%	78%	70%
Old Solitaires	71%	65%	63%	55%
Couples without children	78%	66%	68%	65%
Families	77%	80%	76%	69%
Young families	80%	90%	81%	75%
Empty nesters	78%	71%	73%	68%
UK public	64%	62%	63%	59%

12% spontaneously mention that they **would be more inclined to recycle if they know the council recycled materials properly** – and communicating about the waste hierarchy and new technologies should also help reinforce this.

The positive economic impact on Essex could also be **better communicated through showing how jobs are created across the waste hierarchy** (e.g., processing / incineration in Essex, repair shops and cafes).

Food waste campaign feedback: social media tiles



Do's

- ✓ Figures and statistics can help messages 'hit home' and communicate personal benefits (e.g., saving money)
- ✓ Emphasising 'togetherness' and collective responsibility is inspiring
- ✓ Incorporating humour with 'lettuce' play on words
- ✓ The Love Essex Logo
- ✓ Ensure the accompanying description includes clear information on how to take action – for the second tile in particular, many find it unclear whether the take-away should be to use the food caddy, or buy less food

Don'ts

- Pointing to households only makes residents feel defensive and 'shamed'; some react by saying businesses and producers are primarily responsible
- The lettuce image is 'scary' and 'ugly' (though perhaps still memorable)

"Very relevant as my household throws away food in the general waste bin. [Main message is] that people should use the food waste bin more as it saves you money..start using the food waste bin as it can save my household a lot of money."

Chelmsford, Female, 18-34

"It feels like it is not true...I would think most food waste is generated by farmers being forced to dispose of wonky veg, manufacturers, supermarkets, restaurants, etc.. I would think consumers, while they play a part, are not the main part of the problem.."

Braintree, Female, 35-54

Food waste campaign: poster feedback

Working well:

- ✓ Leading with a question makes readers want to find out more
- ✓ '5 top tips' stands out and makes clear what the message is
- ✓ Residents felt 'inspired' and 'intrigued' by the Kitchn App
- ✓ The imagery and icons work well (particularly the fridge)

To improve:

- The poster feels 'busy' and it is difficult to know what to focus on
- Many residents were unsure how to check the temperature of their fridge, and/or it wasn't clear why $<5\text{ C}$ is important
- Telling residents to check use by dates and use leftovers feels like common sense to many, especially amid the cost-of-living crisis
 - Although, some felt encouraged knowing they are doing some things right already!
 - Some wanted more information on how to act (e.g., guidelines for how long past the sell-by date different items could be eaten, a reminder to move things to the freezer) – most didn't notice the web link at the bottom



Section summary: opportunities for behaviour change

The vast majority of residents say they feel responsible for reducing the amount of waste they produce...

And three quarters see opportunities for where they could be supported with waste reduction.

...but behaviour change communications need to be careful not to make residents feel 'defensive'

In particular, residents want to know what producers of the goods they buy are doing to reduce the packaging of products.

The focus should therefore be on 'carrot' rather than 'stick' incentives

Residents want to feel like the Council is on their side, so helpful nudges like reminders of the personal benefits of reduction or tips on 'quick wins' are likely to be most effective in the short-term.

Residents are less likely to be aware of the need for change when it comes to recycling...

Most people see themselves as good recyclers, and say they are already doing all they can to make sure materials are ready to be recycled.

The key challenge will therefore be getting residents to question their own behaviour again

Soft plastics is the area where new guidance and rules of thumb are needed, while the food waste problems should be made to feel as urgent as plastic.

Collection frequency and space continue to be tangible barriers

Those living in smaller dwellings, often those on low incomes, struggle to store all of their recycling. Targeted service changes or support with purchasing segregated bins may help ease these pressures.

Across reduction and recycling, older residents look to be the most challenging to engage

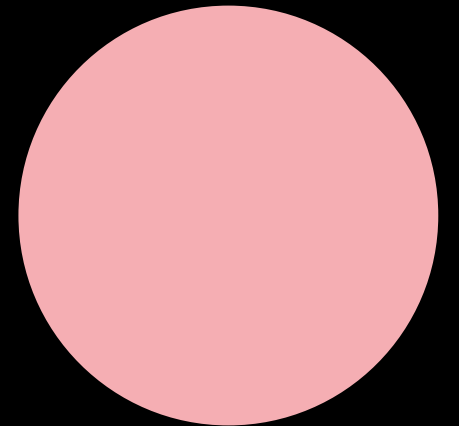
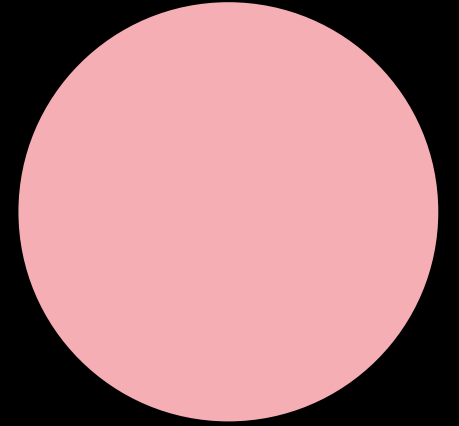
They are least likely to question their own behaviour, whereas young families have the strongest understanding of the need for change.

Communicating how materials will be processed in the UK is the most unifying message for encouraging residents to recycle more

This should be supported with messaging around how the council ensures materials are recycled 'properly', and what they are turned in to.

Section 4

*Testing communications concepts
with young families*



Confirming earlier qualitative findings, young families show higher awareness of reduction, reuse and recycling than other groups

1. Prevention: Due to the **increase in online orders over the pandemic**, several became more aware of **excess packaging** used. Some have begun planning ahead and shopping in-person as this can lead to fewer ‘impulse’ purchases and less waste.

2. Reuse: Having **children and the rising cost of living are the main motivators to reuse** items, and they do this regularly via buying/selling second-hand. Firstly, children grow out of clothes/get bored of toys so they want to declutter. Secondly, they want to show children that reuse is a responsible behaviour (e.g., saving toilet rolls for crafts). Thirdly, they want to save money, especially given the rising cost of living.

3. Recycling: They feel personal responsibility to **‘do the right thing’ to solve the climate crisis** – leading them to recycle more. Most feel they are good recyclers, checking labels, stripping down mixed material items, and washing before disposal. Some mention using recycling points at supermarkets when shopping, allowing them to fit in positive behaviours around their daily routine.

4. Recovery/ Disposal: No one fully understands recovery, but the idea is felt to be exciting. Messaging which shows exactly what happens to their recycling/ waste motivates participants to continue recycling. If they saw **messaging which clearly demonstrates that energy or value could be recovered from waste– this could motivate them to do more.**

“I only [get it online] if I really really need it and it's not to say I haven't done an emergency online order, but I feel like if you kind of plan it a little bit better and then you're not having all that packaging turning up.”

“I kept all the toilet rolls and lots of other materials like bottles around the house and we use them to fill up, or we use them all for arts and crafts/ to play with. They get a second life.”

Lacking the time and knowledge to ‘ladder up’ behaviours around recycling and reduction are key barriers to improvement

1. Prevention: Most feel this is not all their responsibility and big changes need to come from producers/ retailers first to make this easier. **They don’t always have time to reduce packaging**, and they want to see big companies taking responsibility as well as consumers.

2. Reuse: Families feel they are already consistently practicing reuse. **They could be open to further tips from ECC on how to be more efficient at ‘reuse’, beyond simply purchasing items secondhand.** There are significant knowledge gaps around repair, whether it be how to do it themselves, or which items can be repaired cost-effectively.

3. Recycling: They often feel **they are already doing everything they can in the time they have**, as segregated collections are more time consuming and require a lot of space. This can impact their willingness to go the extra mile / recycle correctly all of the time. Some have read negative press about recycling being ‘dumped’ in the same place as general waste.

4. Recovery/ Disposal: They are aware of landfill but it is ‘out of sight, out of mind’, and few had an idea of what happens to their general waste. 1-2 participants mentioned incineration spontaneously but did not have strong feelings. **Disposal is generally disengaging; recovery feels motivating and they want more information about it.**

“I do try and make the effort to sort of separate things out where I can and I’d like to think that that effort is appreciated by the Council in that hopefully if you pass them things for the recycling, then it will get recycled. But I’d heard so some negative stuff about everything, just kind of all being dumped together.”

“I’m a member of a few like FreeBay type groups on Facebook, and so sometimes I’ll give things away on there and sometimes I’ll sell things so like things like kids’ clothes and stuff. And I buy and sell, usually on Facebook or Vinted, something like that.”

Young families therefore have more intrinsic motivations to improve their behaviour than other groups...

...But they often lack the time and knowledge to identify opportunities themselves, so would welcome 'quick tips' and guidance from councils

The remainder of this chapter explores how focus group participants responded to draft creative assets

Two online 90-minute focus groups were conducted with 7 participants each, all who had children under 6. Participants did not see the creative assets before the focus group.

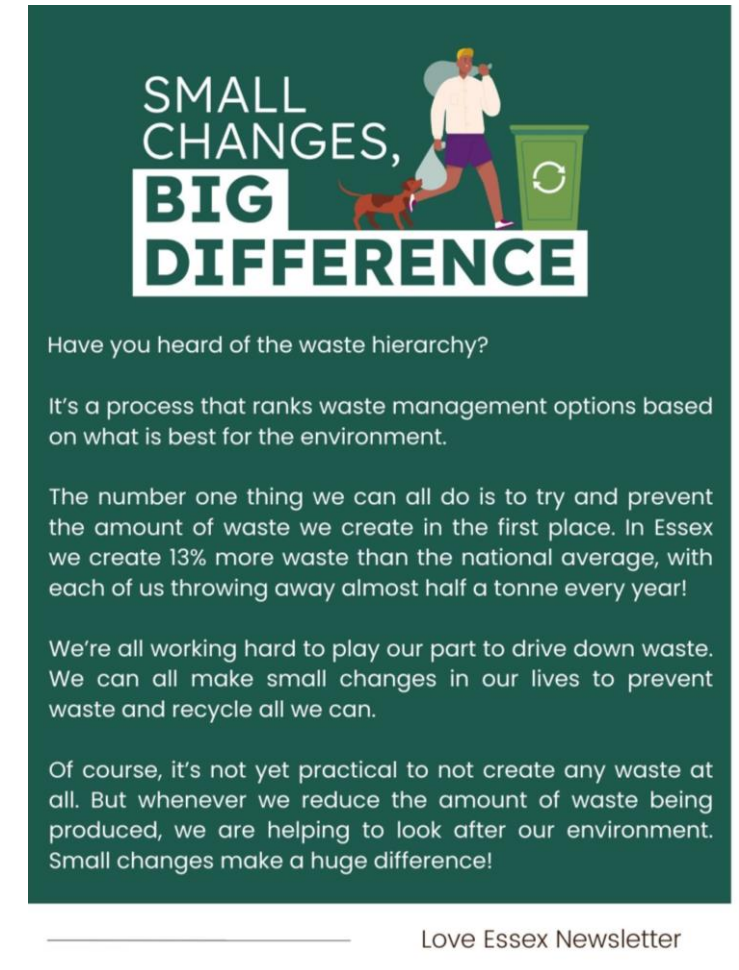
Newsletter 1: The statistic on waste production drew respondents in, but there was no clear call to action on the ‘small changes’ needed

Working well:

- ✓ The 13% figure is eye-catching and immediately draws readers in.
- ✓ The strapline *Small Changes, Big Difference* is catchy and hopeful. It feels relevant, manageable and motivating to families.

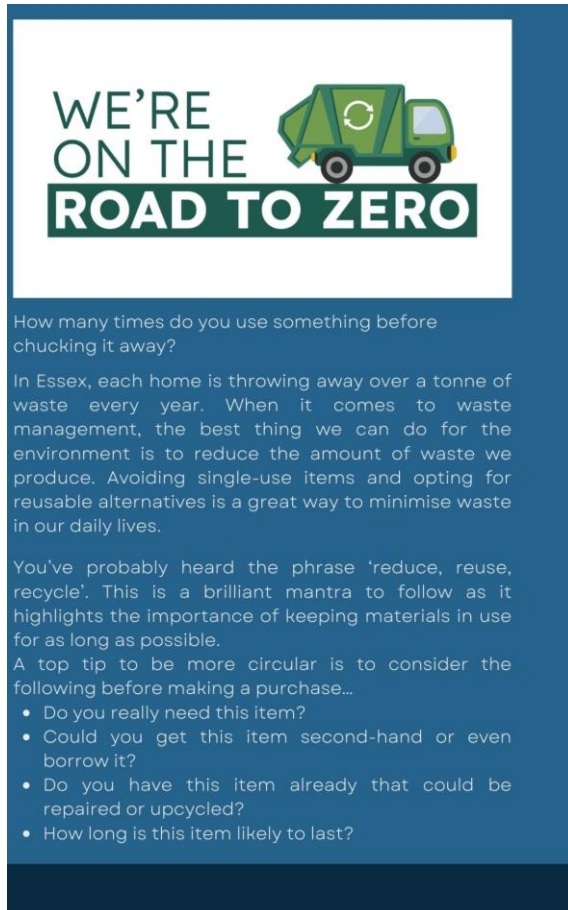
To improve:

- The 13% figure clashes with residents’ assumptions that their community is already doing a lot, so should be supported by an explanation more clearly outlining the challenge i.e., why Essex has more waste than average.
- Pinpoint exactly what ‘small changes’ residents can make by giving them examples of what they can do.
- Most feel pressure should be put on big corporations to reduce packaging, so want examples of how businesses are reducing waste to show this is being addressed and responsibility is not entirely on residents.
- Newsletter is text heavy with limited formatting, making it hard to read
 - Help strengthen call to action by reducing text, using formatting to break up text i.e. bullet point list of suggested changes.
 - Adopt a clear structure and narrative: explain the problem; what the resident can do/change; why they should make the change.



Newsletter 1

Newsletter 2: the questions worked well to make respondents evaluate their own behaviour and hold themselves accountable



Newsletter 2

Working well:

- ✓ It provides a clear challenge, reasoning for the challenge, and tips to address the challenge.
- ✓ Bullet points at the end break up the text, making the call to action clearer to read and takeout.
- ✓ The questions mimic their own thought process prior to making a purchase, making it feel relevant and engaging.
 - For some families who often practice prevention they are effective as a checklist prior to purchase.
 - For other families who do this less, they provide a helpful lens to re-examine their own behaviour and hold themselves accountable.

To improve:

- Make it clear this is relevant even to those who already engage in reuse, and can work as a reminder to maintain behaviours, or link to more 'advanced' behaviours
- For those who are less engaged, provide evidence on how reuse can benefit individual families and Essex specifically e.g., clarify the potential financial savings.
- Consider using an acronym or mnemonic to help make the checklist more memorable
- For many, repair feels out of reach and too complex. Clear signposting to extra resources would help reassure them and make it seem more achievable.

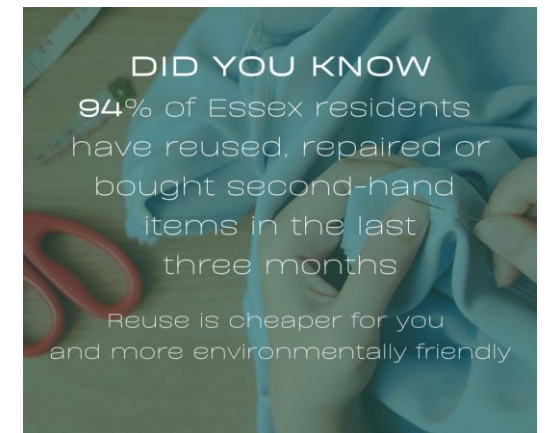
Tiles: the statistics around reuse are not motivating on their own, but would be effective supporting information for other messaging

Working well:

- ✓ The 94% statistic is encouraging and reinforces their perceptions of their own and other residents' behaviour.
- ✓ Message around saving money via reuse is the most motivating, as residents are looking for alternative ways to cut expenditure due to the cost-of-living crisis.
- ✓ Prefer tile with image across the whole background, feels visually clearer, easier to takeout the whole message and includes message around saving money.

To improve:

- There is no clear introduction or call to action telling them why this is important, or what (if anything) they could do. Consider directing residents to resources showing: how to repair items, useful websites/apps to buy second hand items.
- The tiles lack standout and aren't as eye-catching as participants would like, so using brighter colours and imaging could help to cut-through and grab readers attention.



Poster 1: respondents feel motivated to go the extra mile after being shown how their recycling is processed

Working well:

- ✓ The poster’s design communicates the recycling process in an eye-catching and engaging way using images and limited text.
- ✓ The detail behind the recycling process is new and interesting information for most, which helps counter some perceptions that everything ends up in ‘the same pile’.
- ✓ Showing pictures of recycling being “re-processed into new materials” helps confirm that the time and effort put into sorting has an impact

To improve:

- Some residents feel they are already doing enough on recycling overall, so messaging should introduce the idea event dedicated recyclers can do more by showing positive ‘micro-behaviours’ (e.g., rinsing, stripping down).
- Some would like more help visualizing the benefits of sorting and what the materials are eventually turned into/ used for e.g., replace the image of the recycling bales with imagery which more clearly show what specific materials are used to create).



Poster 1

Poster 2: The figures are positive, but too many numbers can overwhelm participants and “cartoon” style images distract from the key message



Poster 2

Working well:

- ✓ Bright colours are engaging and eye-catching, drawing readers to the messaging
- ✓ The figures tell a positive story about Essex's waste journey. They are encouraging and help galvanise residents to 'keep going' and that their efforts are worth it.

To improve:

- Keep text bold throughout and remove any 'fade' styling on text & images, which can make it hard to read.
- The image could be considered ambiguous and confused for a food/drink advert. To a minority it felt 'cartoonish' and undermined the seriousness of the message.
- Three different percentages on the poster can overwhelm some residents, some are left questioning what the key concluding message is.
- Each figure adds value, but in the current format all three feel too difficult to digest together. Consider telling the story more visually (e.g., using grids to break up the text, cutting down the text, using arrows and icons), with most focus on the 52% and 70% figures.
- Include a stronger call to action at the bottom around the changes residents need to make themselves in order to achieve the target.

Tile: most young families already feel they are doing all they can, they did not feel the need to change their behaviour after seeing this

While the tile has a positive message, it has **limited appeal for residents**. It doesn't motivate them to change their behaviour as **they already feel they recycle everything they can**.

Most felt the **design was not bold/bright enough to stand-out** on their feed, with most admitting they would probably scroll past this. **The image felt a little generic**; showing how these items would be converted into new ones would feel more relevant.

There is no direction or actionable conclusion around how to change their behaviour.

It could probably be most effective as a supporting, rather than standalone message.



Use of real-world images and clear messaging around recovery, are elements of the posts which are most likely to prompt action

Post 1

- ✓ **Real image** stirs up emotions including frustration and anger, and makes residents want to take action.

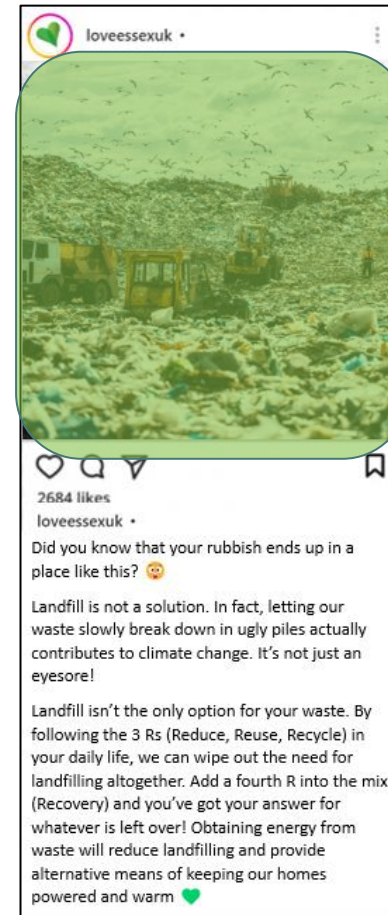
Post 2

- ✓ **Caption:** Highlighting cost to taxpayer is effective at driving urgency around landfill. Climate change might be an effective angle for the younger end of this audience.
- ✓ **Caption:** Four R's effective at getting residents to remember message, sounds like ECC have a plan....
- ✓ ...Four R's could be included in the graphic or on a swipe tile to break up the text

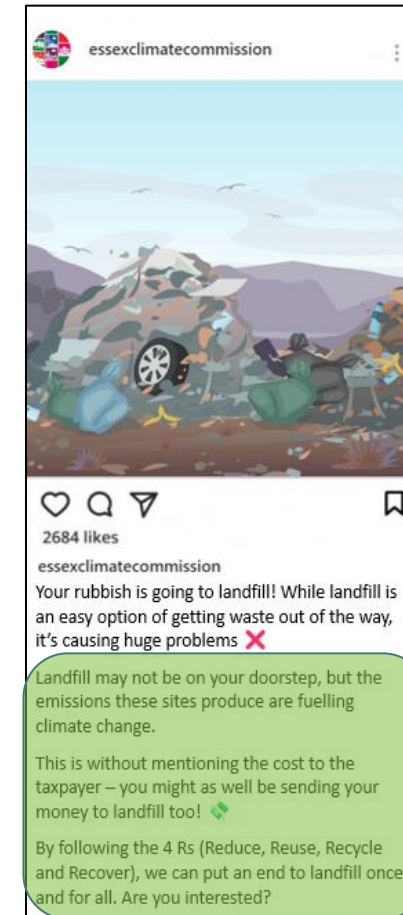
Post 3

- ✓ **Image** of child stirs up emotions including anger and sadness, and is most eye-catching for this audience
- ✓ **Introductory line** conjures a tangible image that residents want to avoid
- ✓ 'Energy from waste' description creates excitement as it is the clearest, most effective description of the benefits of "recovery"

What is working well:



Post 1



Post 2



Post 3

Residents want shorter captions, clearer information around recovery, and real-world images rather than graphic or cartoon style

Post 1

- **Caption** is text heavy, large block of text can make it difficult to read and key messages can get lost.

Post 2

- Cartoon style of the **image**, can undermine the seriousness of the messaging.

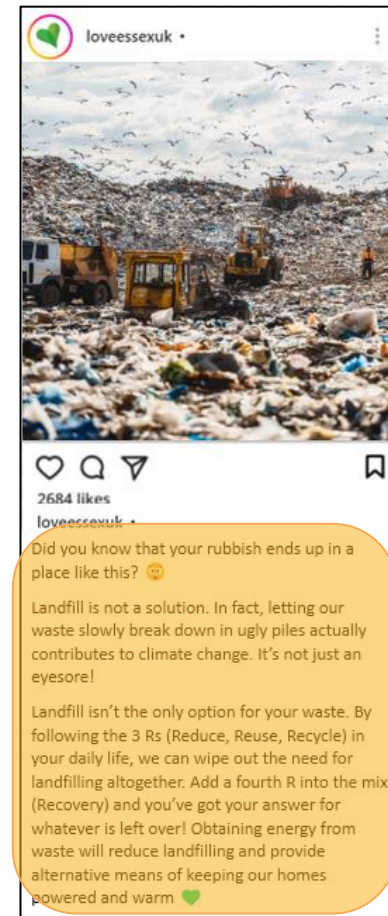
Post 3

- **Caption** content is not as engaging as it could be, with “recovery” message getting lost (which is exciting).

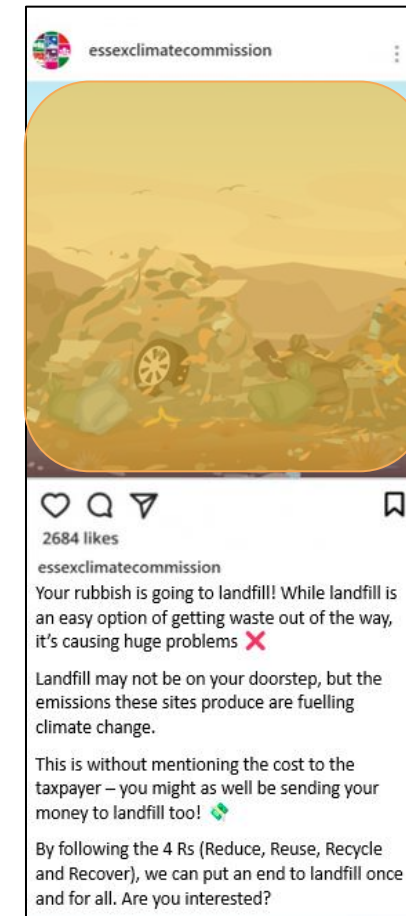
General

- Longer captions can put this audience off reading further and lead to the main message around recovery as a solution getting lost, or confused with behaviour change messaging...
- Keep these separate, and lead with recovery messages at beginning of the post.

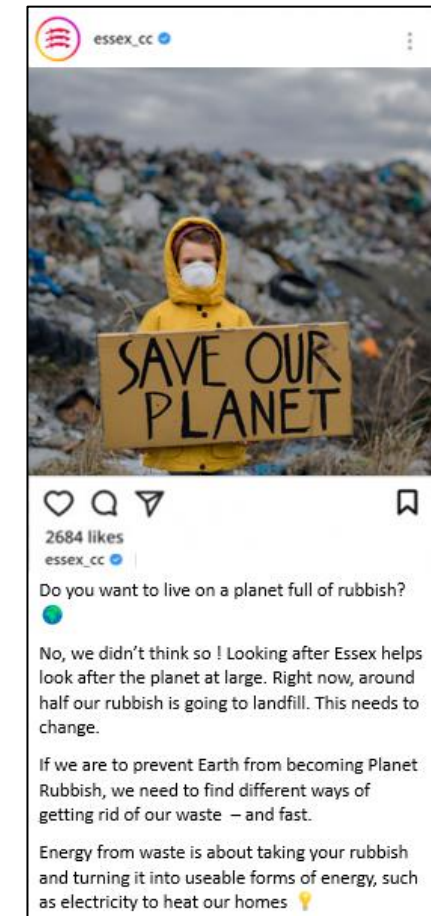
To improve:



Post 1



Post 2



Post 3

Consider combining the most appealing features of the three posts into one “best practice” post

Composing a “best practice” post

- ✓ **Image from: Post 1 or 3** – Both real world images and “hard hitting”
- ✓ **Introductory line from: Post 3** – Emotive question, draws the attention
- ✓ **Recovery messaging from: Post 3** – After the introductory line for maximum impact. The phrasing from post 3 was most engaging.
- ✓ **Caption from: Post 2** - Cost to taxpayer is most effective for this audience. Most effective message can vary per post dependent on message intended.



OR



Do you want to live on a planet full of rubbish?



Energy from waste is about taking your rubbish and turning it into useable forms of energy, such as electricity to heat our homes 💡

Landfill may not be on your doorstep, but the emissions these sites produce are fuelling climate change.

This is without mentioning the cost to the taxpayer – you might as well be sending your money to landfill too! 💎

By following the 4 Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Recover), we can put an end to landfill once and for all. Are you interested?

Long captions in one post can fatigue readers...

- Consider showing information on ‘swipe for more’ tiles instead.
- Alternative formats could also include embedded links to ‘find out more’ (e.g., through a sponsored post, on Instagram stories).

Recovery is positively received once it is explained, so current assets could be working harder to communicate its benefits

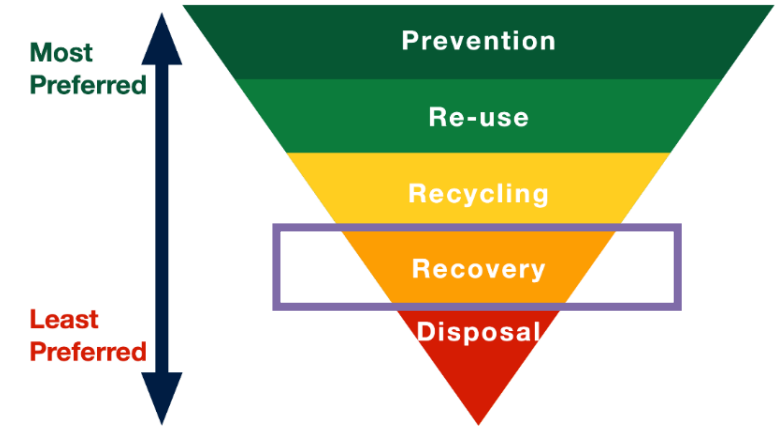
No one was aware of what ‘recovery’ means before seeing the waste hierarchy. When hearing energy can be produced from waste, participants were **positive**.

ECC communications could work harder to explain ‘recovery’, the detail behind the process and the impacts. Residents want to understand:

- More about how the process works, particularly the link between collecting energy from waste via incineration and how this reduces landfill.
- How it will benefit Essex residents and impact the environment.
- How much money it will save individuals and the council

Incineration can have negative connotations. When mentioning incineration, make sure to also communicate that environmental standards will be followed. This helps participants feel recovery from incineration could be a “win-win”. Some also expressed concerns about contradictions (i.e., encouraging people to produce waste in order to generate energy) and the potential for damage to the environment, so reassurance the long-term focus is on reduction will be key.

Anaerobic digestion is challenging to understand, even after explanation. Include in supporting detail rather than as a leading message.

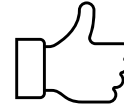


“I don't see why you wouldn't. If you have to either leave it in landfill or ship it, which is going to have huge effects on the environment only for it to sit in landfill there. If they are following guidelines and they have procedures in place, then I don't see why you wouldn't do it really.”

“It's a bit conflicting, sort of saying you have to produce less waste, but at the same time, if we have waste, we can turn this into energy for our homes and stuff.”

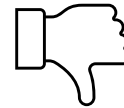
The title ‘Essex Waste Strategy’ is preferred. It is concise and easier to read quickly

Essex Waste Strategy is the preferred title as it is concise and ‘snappy’. It is the easiest to read and digest.



**Essex Waste Strategy
2024 - 2055**

Essex Resource & Waste Strategy is less appealing. Most feel that including “& resources” makes the title too text-heavy and clunky, therefore less engaging.



**Essex Resource & Waste Strategy
2024 - 2055**

Some feel both titles are a little ‘corporate’ and may be ‘uninteresting’ to the general public. Straplines will therefore be key for making the consultation more informal, engaging and ‘inviting’ for residents.

Straplines which are concise, action-focused and collaborative are the most popular

**MAKING
WASTE
WORK**

Most action-oriented, sounds like Essex is taking steps to address waste challenges

Hints at the process of recovery i.e. the waste can 'work' as energy

"This sounds like something is going to be done."

**Our Essex,
Our Waste**

Use of pronoun 'our' personalises strapline, makes it feel relevant to them

Sounds 'commanding' and bold. Mentioning Essex can also make it feel relevant to them

"This makes it sound like it's doing it together and that's important...you want to get people involved...feels personal to us."

**RETHINKING
our waste**

Use of pronoun 'our' personalises strapline, makes it feel relevant to them

'Rethinking' feels authentic. Acknowledges there is a challenge to address.

"Like we have seen in these other images, they think there is something to sort out, that's what rethinking seems to say."

Straplines including a play on words or a behaviour change message, can feel more appropriate for supporting collateral, not the whole consultation



Mixed reactions; the play on words can feel engaging, informal and personable.

...but others feel it lacks seriousness. The strategy is also 30 years long – the length can feel at odds to this strapline.

“If it’s so urgent, why is the strategy going to take 30 years?”



Landed well across both groups, makes behaviour change sound achievable...

But is felt to be more relevant as a supporting message on behaviour change messaging.

“This worked on the previous image we saw, but it’s a little too vague as if it’s the title for a whole consultation across the county.”

Words with ambiguous or political meanings like ‘Net Zero’ and ‘green’ made these straplines less popular

WE'RE
ON THE
ROAD TO ZERO



Lacked cut-through with either group, rarely mentioned as either liked or disliked.

Some ambiguity around what zero means. Also, association with the term “Net Zero” can feel too political.

“I like the image, but I’m not sure what the text means.”

OUR FUTURE

is green

Most widely disliked or regarded with apathy. Word ‘green’ overused, can cause residents to switch off.

Some feel ‘green’ has negative connotations, associating it with the ‘green agenda’.

“I think there's a lot of things associated with that as well. Not everyone is all about sustainability and stuff like that. So they might just think that oh my God, this is not something I'm interested in.”

The graphic depicting a family working together to recycle, is the most appealing as it feels the most collaborative



Most appealing graphic. Some felt an image of real people could make it feel more relevant.

Feels collaborative, shows recycling can be done as a community. Everyone can help tackle the challenge of waste.

“This feels really collaborative. Get the children to chip in, it’s their future!”

This is effective at communicating that the consultation is in Essex and all the residents are ‘in this together’

Can feel a little impersonal and distant without depicting people.

“This is a consultation about Essex, so you should show Essex...it helps us feel like we are all in this together.”

The **least appealing** of the three graphics.

The image can make recycling seem like a physical effort, which is off-putting.

“The first graphic with people looks like it will be less work than this...dragging the bin.”

Section summary: key learnings for communications assets

Use real-world imagery and a collaborative strapline to draw residents in

Seeing the problem visually stirs up emotions of anger, frustration and sadness, building motivation for making changes. Using 'our', 'we' and 'Essex' in straplines personalises the message.

Make sure the main message is the first one they read

Sometimes telling the 'whole story' can lead to the main message getting lost. Instead, lead with the main message or information which piques interest, then follow-up with supportive information and narratives.

Statistics are impactful when used sparingly

Residents responded well to the 'problem' or 'challenge' being quantified, but too many in one asset can feel confusing.

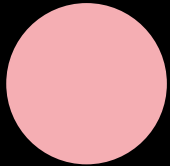
Minimise written text, or at least break it up visually

Residents have limited time and experience a lot of 'noise' on social media, so quickly switch off when confronted with blocks of text. Use devices which break up key information – bullet points, text boxes, and 'swipe for more' tiles on social media.

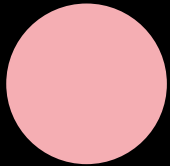
Always end on a clear call to action with specific examples of what residents need to do next

Young families are time poor, but have good intentions. They are open to being told more directly what they should do next.

Thank you



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