

NORTH LONDON WASTE AUTHORITY

REPORT TITLE: COMMUNICATIONS

REPORT OF: MANAGING DIRECTOR

FOR SUBMISSION TO: PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

DATE: 29 OCTOBER 2019

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

This report provides an overview of current communications issues, and updates Members on current and proposed activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members are recommended to comment on and note the report.

SIGNED:  Managing Director

DATE: 17 October 2019

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of the current communications issues and activity relating to the North London Heat and Power Project (NLHPP), and considers the relationship between the day to day work of the Authority and the communication of the proposals for a replacement Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) at the Edmonton EcoPark.
- 1.2. The Authority has had a programme of communications to support recycling by residents, as well as the waste prevention principles and activities. Now that the NLHPP has moved into delivery phase, officers are working to ensure that these two strands of communications activity complement each other. The corporate communications activity will be increased at key times to provide support to the NLHPP communications activity.
- 1.3. As regards our NLHPP communications, in response to the current policy environment our objectives are:
 - 1.3.1 To demonstrate that the project fits in with the Authority's wider environmental aim of delivering a circular economy
 - 1.3.2 To show that the NLHPP delivers an environmental solution which helps to achieve a UK net zero carbon emissions target
 - 1.3.3 To give confidence that the project is being delivered competently and cost effectively
 - 1.3.4 To make clear the benefits which the project will bring to residents and communities in north London
- 1.4. This report covers:
 - 1.4.1 Current key environmental and health messages;
 - 1.4.2 Channels for communication including recent activity and stakeholder engagement;
 - 1.4.3 The plans for the next few months
 - 1.4.4 The resource for plans

2. CURRENT KEY ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH MESSAGES

- 2.1. Although the NLHPP received consent in 2017 with almost no public concern or issues raised during the consultation process, in early 2019 a campaign group began to oppose the project. They made a deputation to the Authority meeting in June 2019. The action of this group coincided with increasing concern about the Climate Emergency.

In order to address any inaccurate criticisms and to get across the strong case for the project, our aim is for:

- 2.1.1 clear, factual arguments which address opponents' claims

- 2.1.2 briefing and working with communications teams across boroughs, so that there is a consistency of messaging and understanding across all partner bodies contributing to delivery of the project
 - 2.1.3 use of channels which make our communications accessible and impactful – including social media, website and video.
 - 2.1.4 Generation of a “rhythm” of announcements which ensure that the Authority is on the front foot. While media will be sympathetic to campaign groups, the Authority wants to help set the debate and not be only responsive.
 - 2.1.5 Proactive linking to positive stories about similar projects or waste developments which show how modern energy recovery plants are part of the best overall solution for waste management.
- 2.2. The key messages which have been developed in the area of the environment and health are set out in Appendix A, and cover the Climate Emergency, Air Quality, and the Circular Economy. Some of the key messages contain technical detail, and more plain speaking messages and infographics will be developed and rolled out for the general public.
- 2.3. The current messaging has been developed taking account of research from authoritative bodies, including Public Health England, the Committee for Climate Change, and the Environment Agency. If new research is carried out, or policies change, particularly those of the Government or the GLA, then the messages can be reviewed and updated.

3. CHANNELS FOR COMMUNICATION

- 3.1. The communications plan has included use of the project website to provide information, social media, and issuing of press notices. In view of the increased interest in the project, and to maximise the effectiveness of our messaging and of the research which supports the need for the project, we are now providing more proactive material. Our NLHPP activity has increased for all our communications channels and to provide a diverse range of touch points for residents to gain greater understanding about the project benefits. The key messages which are developed based on research and authoritative sources are used to form the basis of reactive responses to comments or queries.
- 3.2. The main channels to be used for communication are:
- 3.3. **Video:** there is a need to present communications in a relatable, clear and simple way to make the overall context of the project and key messages clear. A video is currently under production to achieve this which can be disseminated across all the communication channels. It will position the NLHPP within NLWA’s wider strategy to reduce waste, increase recycling and stop waste going to landfill. This is expected to be completed in December 2019. Once ready, it will be available through the website and can be used to support social media activity.
- 3.4. **Website:** in August the project website update was completed with a fresh new look, reflecting the current stage of the Programme.

(<http://www.northlondonheatandpower.london/>). There is a detailed Frequently Asked Questions and information on wider areas of the Project such as sustainability, futureproofing and health - so residents can quickly fact-check information. The website is updated regularly with news updates, press releases, supplier event details, community newsletters and provides contact details for getting in touch with the team.

- 3.5. **Social media:** a new programme of social media content now draws on specific project related themes and benefits each week to share on platforms, including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. The benefits of using social media are the ability to reach a wide audience, and the possibility of using bright infographics so that information on the specific topic is easy to access and understand. Social media channels have been used to emphasise the importance of waste prevention and recycling by collaboration between the corporate news and Wise Up To Waste, with the project, so that messages are shared. Social media can be used to provide rapid responses to issues raised, with links to the specific section of the FAQs in the website.
- 3.6. The communications activity now focuses on generating positive stories based on key project milestones rather than simply responding to issues raised. This has been successful in that several stories have been published – in the trade press - about our information event for potential contractors, and the positive opportunities the winning EcoPark South contractor can offer to local people, as well as about the work now available through the website and carried out by Ramboll to analyse the carbon savings from the new energy recovery facility compared to sending the same amount of waste to landfill. A media briefing pack has been prepared for journalists to ensure readiness for media responses and enquiries.

4. **BOROUGH LIAISON AND STAKEHOLDERS**

4.1. **Boroughs**

- 4.1.1 Communications messaging around the environmental and health impacts are included in ongoing meetings with Directors of Environment from each of the north London boroughs.
- 4.1.2 We are working to build a stronger relationship with Borough Communications Teams. This is to ensure a joint approach to NLHPP key messages and awareness of issues across all the boroughs. A regular meeting has been set up with each of these parties to discuss external communications. The first meeting took place on Thursday 5 September 2019 and a second is planned for late October 2019.

4.2. **Community Stakeholders**

- 4.2.1 The first of a series of Community Roadshows took place at Edmonton Green Library on 12 September 2019. Some 25 residents talked to project staff at this event. The next Roadshow will be held at a local supermarket on 25 October 2019 and venue options are being explored for the coming months.

4.2.2 The Community Liaison Group (CLG) established in 2018, is a forum for representatives of the local wards and community groups who meet on a quarterly basis to receive updates on the project, speak to the project team and raise matters that are important to those who live and work locally. There have been three meetings to date and the next CLG meeting is being held on 29 October 2019.

4.2.3 The latest community newsletter was delivered to 28,779 homes surrounding Edmonton EcoPark in November 2018. The purpose of this is to provide an update to local residents about the project, current work activities taking place and what to expect in the forthcoming months. Another of these is planned to go out in early 2020. As construction on-site increases a more specific construction newsletter is being produced and circulated to 19,000 homes in the local area giving information about the latest construction activities taking place on site.

5. NEXT STEPS ON COMMUNICATIONS

5.1. Building on the objectives in section 1.3 above, forthcoming activities using a range of channels include: announcing the procurement of EcoPark South works including the contribution these facilities will make to increasing recycling and providing educational opportunities; using opportunities such as commenting as the Government's Environment Bill is taken forward – we will emphasise the need to support strong action on waste while showing NLWA has a coherent, sustainable strategy; and linking to wider positive NLWA action including low plastic zones and other waste prevention initiatives.

6. RESOURCING

6.1. The increased activity and the positioning of the project has arisen from more flexible deployment of staff within the Authority and a strengthened input from the communications advisors (AECOM). The Authority has needed strategic public relations and handling advice to ensure that communications activity has the right impact with accessible language and bringing in of stakeholders. This has been procured through LB Hackney, and has assisted us in activities since the summer.

7. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.1. In considering communications, care is taken to ensure that plain English is used so that the message being conveyed can be understood widely. The Project website complies with the public sector Accessibility Regulations 2018. The channels of communication are considered carefully to include printed materials as well as electronic, to maximise the reach.

8. COMMENTS OF THE LEGAL ADVISER

8.1. The Legal Adviser has been consulted in the preparation of this report, and comments have been included.

9. COMMENTS OF THE FINANCIAL ADVISER

- 9.1. The Financial Adviser has been consulted in the preparation of this report and comments have been included.

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APPENDIX A KEY MESSAGES

Climate Emergency

Using energy recovery is part of tackling the Climate Emergency as it saves the equivalent of 215,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions each year - compared to the alternative of sending waste to landfill. That saving is like taking 110,000 cars off the road each year.

The waste industry has been able to outperform its carbon budgets and is the only sector in the UK to do so. (Committee on Climate Change) This is a result of reducing the amount of waste going to landfill where it produces methane, a greenhouse gas 28 times more damaging for the climate than carbon dioxide. (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)

Modern, efficient facilities which recover energy are part of the net zero solution in the plans of the Government's advisers, the Climate Change Committee

The waste industry represents around 4% of greenhouse gas emissions nationally and the vast majority of these are from landfill sites. Energy from Waste makes up less than 0.05% of the national greenhouse gas emissions. (Dept. of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy)

Air quality

We are investing in the best available technology to remove from the emissions nitrogen oxides (NOx), the gas associated with poor air quality. The Environment Agency standard allows for up to 200mg/m³ of nitrogen oxide. Our new plant will operate at 80mg/m³ of nitrogen oxide, 60% below the current standards. (Environment Agency)

Public Health England says: Modern, well-regulated Energy from Waste plants, like ours, are no more polluting than the levels already present in the atmosphere. That means emissions from our plant will be undetectable in the air.

Circular economy

We champion the move away from a linear economy (make – use – dispose) to a circular economy where products and the materials they contain are valued, creating a more robust economy in the process. Recovering the energy from waste which can't be recycled is a part of the waste hierarchy to make the most of the planet's resources.

Reducing waste, increasing reuse and recycling remain key priorities as it is everyone's interest to keep residual waste a minimum. Our Waste Prevention Programme works with borough councils to support residents in increasing recycling and reducing their waste. Through this our programme stops over 10,000 tonnes of materials going to waste each year.

We continue to press Government for the quickest progress on introduction of a deposit return scheme to improve recycling of plastic and glass materials, measures to increase producers' responsibility for the recycling and costs of treating their packaging and for recycling to be made compulsory for both households and businesses, with improved enforcement powers made for local councils to secure full and correct participation.