

NORTH LONDON WASTE AUTHORITY

REPORT TITLE: COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

REPORT OF: PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

FOR SUBMISSION TO: PROGRAMME COMMITTEE MEMBERS

DATE: 13 JANUARY 2022

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

This report outlines the communications and engagement activity carried out in the build up to the 16 December Authority meeting and the work planned for January to March 2022.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members of the Programme Committee are recommended to comment on and note the content of the report.

SIGNED:



Programme Director

DATE: 6th January 2022

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report provides an update on communications and engagement activity about the North London Heat and Power Project carried out in the build up to the 16 December Authority meeting.
- 1.2. The report includes in Appendix A a summary of focus groups carried out in November 2021.
- 1.3. The report also provides an update on the communications and engagement activity scheduled to take place in 2022.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. The Authority has been communicating about the North London Heat and Power project since 2014 to inform and consult residents and organisations about the project.
- 2.2. A strategic approach has been taken to ensure that communications activities are targeted to specific stakeholder groups. Since the start of construction on the project in 2019 the communications and engagement programme has been reviewed on a weekly basis.
- 2.3. Websites, social media, print, press, face-to-face events and other activities have been used to ensure accurate and up-to-date information about the project is readily available to groups and individuals.
- 2.4. A community liaison group meets regularly to receive detailed updates on the project and discuss matters that are important to people who live and work locally.
- 2.5. An important, high-profile decision to award the contract to build the Energy Recovery Facility was taken at the Authority meeting on 16 December 2021. The Authority amplified its communications activity in the build-up to this meeting to ensure accurate information reached local residents and groups.

3. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

- 3.1. The NLHPP communications team is small, so takes a strategic approach to ensure maximum impact with limited resources. Communications and engagement is built on stakeholder mapping and audience research. A stakeholder can be defined as an individual, group or organisation with an interest in or influence on the delivery or operation of any part of the project.
- 3.2. New stakeholders can be identified and added at any time during the project, so stakeholder mapping and the communications approach is reviewed regularly.
- 3.3. The key audiences for the NLHPP include:

3.3.1. External stakeholders:

- People living, working or visiting addresses directly surrounding the site.
- Neighbouring land owners that are directly impacted by the Project.
- People living or working within 1.5km of the site, including residents' associations and other community groups.
- Groups with an interest in various areas of the project including but not limited to environmental and sustainability issues.
- Residents of the seven NLWA boroughs.
- Elected politicians, including councillors from the NLWA boroughs, local MPs, Government Ministers, the Mayor of London and GLA members.
- Local authority officers from the Constituent Boroughs.
- LondonEnergy, the current and future operator of the energy recovery facility.
- Local media outlets.
- National media outlets with an interest in the delivery of the Project or waste industry.
- Trade unions interested in employment practises of workers on site.

3.3.2. Internal stakeholders:

- Councillors who sit on the Authority and make decisions about NLWA and the NLHPP.
- People employed by NLWA to deliver its statutory duties.
- NLWA staff employed to deliver the NLHPP.
- Contractors appointed to deliver the programme of works.

3.4. Communications activities follow best practice for organisations delivering large, complex, public-sector infrastructure projects. Messages are tailored for each audience and different channels are used to reach different audiences. Communications and engagement activities are continuously evaluated and reviewed to ensure they have maximum reach and impact.

- 3.5. It is important to make communications easy for people to understand, so they should be adapted for the audience. Technical terms may be used where appropriate, such as for industry stakeholders, but are explained in plain English.

4. FOCUS GROUPS

- 4.1. In November and early December 2021, an independent specialist company was used to carry out focus groups in all seven boroughs. There were two focus groups in each borough, with 94 residents in total. Participants were recruited to provide a wide spread of residents across age, gender and socio-economic groups.
- 4.2. The objectives of the focus groups were to get a qualitative understanding of views on recycling, waste management, the Edmonton EcoPark and the North London Heat and Power Project (NLHPP).
- 4.3. The research showed that most people do not know what happens to the rubbish they put in their residual waste bins. Most people do not know about the heat and power project, but when provided information about it are generally positive.
- 4.4. Most people who took part think that more information should be provided to residents about the EcoPark and suggested social media, posters and messaging through schools and resident groups is the best way to tell people about it.
- 4.5. When told about what happens to their waste, participants expressed concern about air pollution as there is a lack of understanding about the emissions from the facility. Some respondents commented that the North Circular was more polluting than the EcoPark and suggested residents would be more concerned about that and the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) much more than NLHPP.
- 4.6. Respondents were very positive about the opportunities presented by EcoPark House to enable schools and young people to have a hub for waste/environmental learning.
- 4.7. A summary of feedback from focus groups is provided in Appendix A.

5. SUMMARY OF RECENT ACTIVITIES

- 5.1. As part of our ongoing engagement with local residents, roadshows are set up in community locations with high footfall to encourage discussion the project team and members of the public. The latest round of roadshows was held from September to December 2021 and involved setting up a stall in a public building or space with two or three members of staff encouraging members of the public to find out about the project and answering their questions. Direct conversations happened with 88 residents and it is clear that more people are aware of the project now than when the first round of roadshows were held in 2019. The most common topics raised by residents at the roadshows were:

- Apprenticeship opportunities
- Emissions and the impact on air quality
- How to recycle more
- Using waste as a resource
- Project timeline

- 5.2. When coronavirus restrictions were lifted enough to allow site visits, Members and other local elected representatives were invited to visit the EcoPark to be briefed on the project and to see progress for themselves. These have been valuable in bringing home the comprehensive nature of the plans for the EcoPark and the safe and extensive progress already made. So far, 34 individuals have been able to join a site tour since July 2021.
- 5.3. The project team has attended a number of external events and meetings to talk about the project. This included a presentation to Geraint Davies MP for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Air Pollution, a round table discussion with campaigners hosted by Cllr Hakata in Haringey and a stall at the Waltham Forest Climate Action event.
- 5.4. Since the start of December 2021, over half a million north London residents were reached through a targeted social media campaign on Facebook and Instagram, which included clear, simple messages about why the project is needed and a link to visit the project website to find out more.
- 5.5. In 2021 three Community Liaison Group meetings have been held with over 21 community members and representatives to provide updates on the project, answer their questions, and hear about the issues that are important to those who work and live locally.
- 5.6. In the build up to the 16 December Authority meeting, the NLWA project team dealt with an increase in enquiries about the plans to award the Energy Recovery Facility contract. As well as responding on direct enquiries to NLWA, the team has provided detailed responses for enquiries to councillors, MPs, local authority officers and other stakeholders.
- 5.7. The messaging on the project website and social media channels has been continually revised and updated to ensure the common themes raised in enquiries, focus groups and roadshows are addressed. A new project webpage was launched in November 2021 which included a video and clear, simple messages. In December 2021 there were over 10,000 visits to this page.
- 5.8. 384,000 copies of construction and community newsletters have been sent to local residents near the Edmonton EcoPark to update them on key activity. The latest of these was delivered on 8 December.

5.9. In November and December 2021, weekly themed briefings about local residents' key areas of interest on the project were sent to all north London councillors and briefings were sent to all local Members of Parliament.

6. ONGOING NLHPP COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

6.1. Now the decision has been taken to award the contract to build the Energy Recovery Facility, the objective is to ensure accurate messages about the project are communicated proactively to stakeholders across north London and residents are genuinely engaged.

6.2. The Authority will continue to provide proactive communications through websites, social media, print, and face-to-face events and will work with borough communications teams to ensure consistent messaging and increased reach.

6.3. Key project milestones will be communicated in direct mail to local residents and local press.

6.4. Regular briefings will be sent to councillors, borough officers, MPs and GLA members so they are kept informed and up-to-date.

6.5. Providing responses to detailed enquiries is important but is also extremely resource intensive. Where possible, enquirers will be directed to information available online. If new information is required for an enquiry response, it will be published on the Authority's website [Scheme of Publication](#) so that future enquiries can be directed to it there.

6.6. The community liaison group will be promoted to give as many local groups as possible the opportunity to be represented.

6.7. Attendance at external events and public roadshows is valuable but involves a lot of staff time to engage with a relatively small number of people. The Authority will continue to review the effectiveness of these events and work with Members and other stakeholders to develop its approach to maximise direct engagement opportunities with residents.

7. RESIDUAL WASTE REDUCTION COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

7.1. The Authority's primary objective is to reduce residual waste, but there is a misconception amongst some people that the North London Heat and Power Project disincentives NLWA and boroughs from reducing waste and increasing recycling rates.

7.2. The Authority plans to work with individuals and groups to develop the next residual waste reduction plan. This engagement work is likely to take place in summer 2022, with input from Members.

8. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. In preparing communications, consideration is given to accessibility of the information provided and the appropriate format.

9. COMMENTS OF THE LEGAL ADVISER

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

10. COMMENTS OF THE FINANCIAL ADVISER

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

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Appendix A

Resident Focus Groups - Summary by topic area

Recycling across the 7 boroughs

- Respondents' knowledge of recycling and levels of recycling differ across the boroughs.
- Different boroughs that have different rules according to what can be recycled and different processes for recycling different things that cause confusion.
- Those living in flats with access to communal bins for residual waste and recycling said getting rid of waste isn't easy. Generally recycling bins are too small for the number of residents meaning that people can be left with nowhere to put their rubbish.
- Recycling of food waste isn't popular due to smells and vermin and people are deterred from recycling food waste (but some people would like better processes for recycling food waste).
- Bulky waste collections differ between the boroughs, some boroughs have long collection/booking times leaving people struggling for space to hold onto their recycling (whilst waiting for it to be collected).
- Respondents had visited recycling hubs, they said different centres have different rules about when you can go and how much you can recycle. Some respondents swap recycling with friends/colleagues in different boroughs where they are unable to recycle in their own borough.

Awareness of where waste goes

- Generally most people did not know where their waste went once it had left their house. Some people did not care and said it was not important to them, others did wonder but did not care enough to try and find out where the waste went.
- Some people thought their waste went to landfill but they did not know whereabouts, some thought it was shipped abroad to be disposed of.
- Some people thought it was incinerated and were concerned about it ending up in the ocean.
- The majority of people did not feel responsible for what happens to their waste once it had been collected, saying it was out of their control and not their responsibility.
- Many respondents felt it was best to process waste locally rather than sending it further afield and incurring additional costs that would most likely be borne by the taxpayer.

Awareness of the EcoPark

- 11 people out of 94 were aware of the EcoPark but knowledge of the activities on site differed between respondents.
- Most people felt positive after hearing about the site (and some wanted to know more details before commenting).

- Some respondents pointed out that as the facilities have been there for many years already they thought it must have been doing something right, and especially as most people in the groups did not know it existed.
- Some thought EcoPark was a strange name for a waste recycling centre.
- Respondents asked for clarity around '21 million tonnes' of waste (being diverted from landfill). Some wondered if it is a lot and asked how it compared to the whole of north London's waste.
- Some respondents were pleased the waste did not go to landfill.
- Respondents wanted to know more about why the current facility is being replaced and were concerned it is polluting the environment.

NLHPP

- Seven people knew about NLHPP – 3 had seen information on Facebook and another had read an article in the Enfield Dispatch. Others knew about it through friends, work and a child's school project.
- The majority of people felt positive with the information provided.
- Some respondents asked why the new facility was being replaced and were concerned the current facility isn't efficient.
- Respondents thought people across north London would like to know more about the facilities.

Energy from Waste

- Most respondents were initially positive about creating energy from waste saying it was a positive use of the waste. Some mentioned energy security and avoiding landfill.
- Around half wanted to know more about the process to have a positive view.
- Some wanted to know what caused the smoke and thought it was polluting the environment.
- Re. providing power to 127,000 homes, people were unable to judge if this was good and wanted a comparison with how much power the current facility produces.
- Those respondents who felt positive about the information believed EfW would help with energy security and that it was a positive use of non-recyclable waste, avoiding landfill and reducing that (landfill) for future generations.

Resource Recovery Facility

- Some respondents were very positive about having somewhere to take their waste and asked if there would be links with charities (such as British Heart Foundation) encouraging people to reuse things.

Jobs and training

- Whilst welcoming the opportunities provided respondents were sceptical about the number of permanent jobs that would be created.
- Some respondents assumed the jobs created were during the construction period only.
- Some respondents wanted to know what local meant when describing local jobs for the local area and how far that stretched.

Raising awareness of NLHPP

- Eighty-seven respondents had no prior knowledge of NLHPP before attending the focus groups. Most felt awareness should be raised and believed many people in north London would be interested to know about it.
- A few respondents felt many people may not be interested in the new facilities if they are not directly impacted by them in any significant way.
- One Camden respondent felt there should not be extensive marketing and awareness raising about the facilities as they expected some may take a “very aggressive negative attitude towards it” for the sake of it, saying, *“There’s a problem, unfortunately. If the councils aggressively market this facility, you will always get certain groups who take a very aggressive attitude towards it, almost for the sake of taking an aggressive attitude, and they’ll boycott it and cement themselves outside a facility, so I personally wouldn’t shout too loudly. If you do a lot of flag waving, you will really regret it.”*
- Suggestions about how to promote NLHPP included social media, posters, billboards, messaging through schools and resident groups, and explaining about it in council tax statements.

Alternative options to NLHPP

- Most respondents felt NLHPP was the best option (for processing waste) from the information provided and felt all other options were likely to be more harmful to the environment and/ or cost more.
- One Camden respondent said, *“it would feel criminal not to do it, like we all know now how bad things are getting, so we can’t be using solutions like sticking stuff in landfill.”*
- Some felt the information suggested there are other options that weren’t described in the information provided.

The waste agenda: the importance of environment versus cost effectiveness

- Respondents were mixed in their response to the waste agenda. Many said they would want their council to prioritise what is best for the environment and future generations and would be willing to pay more if required (in their council tax) although some feel it is already high.
- Other respondents said the most cost-effective solution should be pursued due to the increasing cost of living for people.

- Respondents said, *“It’s a hard one, because you want to be like environmentally and you want to go that way, but you’ve also got to think about the cost of living and the cost of living at the moment is so bloody expensive. Like the council tax is just through the roof”*.
- *“I think for me it’s probably cost effectiveness, like everyone, I’m sure everyone’s kind of been hit over the last kind of years, as to everything rising, everyone’s kind of living on a small budget at the moment, so say they did increase taxes and they did increase everything else, like it already has gone up, if they increase it more to try and meet this, it’s kind of pushing everyone else down. So, okay yeah, you want to save, kind of what’s to come, but at the moment if you’ve kind of got nothing to live on it kind of makes it a bit difficult to think in the long term when everyone kind of is working at the moment from week to week, as opposed to five years’ time, for example.”*
- Some respondents felt that action needs to be taken ‘regardless of cost’ but that the cost should not be borne by the taxpayer but from allocated funding and budgets.

Climate emergency and air quality

- Respondents felt there should be more information about how emissions will be captured, controlled, and monitored.
- Some respondents felt concerns about smoke and other emissions from facilities like these were a key concern for some people and they felt that if more people were made aware of what the smoke really is, then it would put them at ease, especially those with children and/ or with respiratory problems. *“I did like the bit about the misconception, because I just admit I had that. It’s like somebody said earlier, you know, there’s smoke, as you said, sometimes it’s just water vapour or steam.”* (Hackney resident).
- *“I think when we’re talking about COP26 in Glasgow and when we’re talking about sustainability and saving the planet, I think this is a very good start and I think this is actually a very positive note.”* (Haringey resident).
- Some respondents felt more context should be provided and comparisons made to the existing and other facilities to make it easier to understand.
- Across the groups, some respondents felt people in the area would be more focused and concerned about pollution from the North Circular and the changes associated with the Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) regarding air quality rather than worrying about the impact of the new facilities.

Priorities for the future

- Most respondents thought protecting the environment or educating people about waste management, including about energy from waste, were priorities for the future.
- Cost is important and respondents’ views were mixed over financial cost v protecting the environment.