

Residents Focus Groups – Summary findings, October/November 2021

Summary

14 Focus Group meetings have taken place in the seven boroughs:

- Barnet
- Camden
- Enfield
- Hackney
- Haringey
- Islington
- Waltham Forest

98 residents were recruited and **94 people attended** with a mix of **male (n=41)** and **female (n=53)** respondents between 18 years to 60 plus.

Of the people who did not turn up, one had technical difficulties, three did not dial in without providing a reason.

The facilitators reported there have been no difficult or disruptive respondents including people with negative views trying to influence others in the group.

The facilitators estimate that **15-20 respondents knew about the existing facilities** and of these estimate that **less than 12 respondents were aware of the NLHPP** and / or aware of facilities being updated on that site. Those who did know about the EcoPark did so due to a number of different reasons:

- Work close by
- Had travelled past it
- Had seen signage relating to it
- Through their own work had had some involvement with the site
- Due to family members / friends being involved in environmental awareness groups
- From social media posts
- One respondent had helped a child with homework about waste and some had seen information online.

Across all of the seven Boroughs, where respondents knew of the EcoPark they did not necessarily know what it is for and respondents generally saw the site as positive.

Three groups raised the point that “EcoPark” as a name for a waste management site did not fit with the activities on site and some questioned why “Park” was used and asked if there was a park there.

- None of the respondents in Camden knew of the current site or NLHPP
- None of the respondents in Hackney or Islington knew about NLHPP

Less than five respondents had seen negative messaging about the incinerator and one person was openly negative because of the information they had read on Facebook. That person’s view did not change during the discussion and they do not try to influence others in the group. One person also referenced seeing social media posts but admitted that they do not pay too much attention to posts like that as they doubt the accuracy of the information (a point made also when discussing information later in the group from NLWA).

A common theme that ran through all the groups was that people generally felt positive about the current and future facilities, many said the targets are good and the benefits (as set out in the discussion guide) are good but what about the negative impacts of the NLHPP, including cost. Some respondents felt that the information was only showing one side of the story and respondents used the following terms also:

- Scaremongering
- Sales pitch
- One-sided
- Guilt trippy

Some also asked what would happen to NLHPP as technologies develop further.

Regarding Energy from Waste (EfW) most respondents, circa 60% thought it was more positive than negative but would have liked more information about the process itself to be able to comment more. They also wanted to know about the negative consequences of the process (as there must be some). Some respondents asked about the potential net benefits of Energy from Waste over other options and said anything over landfill is positive.

Training and apprenticeships

- Many respondents considered the benefits as set out to be generally positive. Some were sceptical and felt it was not clear how many permanent jobs would be created.
- Many assumed the majority of the 2,500 jobs created would be during construction phase as the new facilities would be automated and questioned what the split between construction and operation would be.
- Some were unsure whether 100 apprenticeships and 225 skills training opportunities was a good target and asked if the opportunities will continue once the new facilities are operational.
- Some asked about the current workforce and how many staff are currently employed at the EcoPark. They wanted to know how this will compare with the new facilities when they are operational - will more or less people be employed and are the jobs of those working on the current facilities secure?
- A couple of respondents wanted to know how many of the local jobs created would be highly skilled rather than low-skilled construction jobs / zero-hour contract jobs.
- Many respondent questioned the definition of 'local area' and how local it is.

Energy from Waste

- Most respondents were positive about creating energy from waste.
- Some respondents questioned the energy recovery process, asking what caused the strong smells – they felt it was polluting.
- Those who felt positive about the information believed it would help with energy security and that it was a positive use of non-recyclable waste, avoiding landfill.
- Some felt 127,000 homes sounded like a lot, whilst others were unable to judge as they were unsure how many homes were in North London. Some felt that it would be more useful if a comparison was given about what the existing facilities can provide.
- A few assumed that 127,000 homes would receive energy for free or at reduced rates.
- Some questioned how the NLHPP would negate the need for gas boilers. One respondent initially assumed that a district heating system was going to be set up and felt that this should have been done.
- Some respondents commented how hard it is to visualise the context of 127,000 houses.

Recycling and technology

- Some respondents felt positive about this information and appreciated the comparison between the existing and new facilities in terms of nitrogen oxides. They felt reassured by the use of 'safest and cleanest' due to common associations of such facilities being dirty and smelly.
- Some were unsure about the information and felt it did not provide detail about the air pollutants that are still produced and what other negative aspects are associated with the facilities.
- Respondents suggested that comparisons with other facilities would be useful and one respondent asked if there are any statistics about the facility that is considered to be the best either in the UK or elsewhere.
- A few felt that the comparison with the number of cars removed from the road 215,000 tonnes of carbon translated to was helpful, but some said that they were not aware how many cars there were in London to be able to judge this and again it was hard to visualise this in context.

Alternative options to Energy from Waste

- Many said that it is best to process waste locally rather than sending further afield.
- Some felt that the NLHPP was the best option from the information provided but many felt the information suggested there are other options that weren't explored in the information provided, adding that whilst the targets and jargon sound good, they felt there was a lack of transparency (in the information provided).
- Some respondents thought the messaging provided was 'manipulative' and 'scaremongering', suggesting that if people disagree with the NLHPP, it will cost them more money (to treat waste) and damage the environment.

Importance: environment 'v' cost effectiveness

- Respondents were mixed in their opinions on this issue. Respondents 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, even though 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 generally and felt some middle ground needs to be found to avoid significant cost implications for residents in the local area.
- Some 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.

Air quality and Climate Emergency

- Some respondents felt that concerns about smoke and other emissions (from Energy from Waste facilities) and the impact on peoples' health and the environment are a key concern. They suggested that if people were made aware of what the smoke really was i.e., steam then it would put people at ease, especially those with respiratory issues and children
- Some respondents wanted to know more about the potential risks of air pollution from NLHPP and felt the information provided did not clearly explain this
- A few respondents felt there should be more information about how emissions will be captured, controlled, and monitored
- A couple of respondents said they would feel reassured if the new facilities had support from reputable environmental groups or key figures in the sector

- Some respondents pointed out that this is a current issue in the public eye and can be seen through the COP26 press and on-going changes with the London ULEZ boundary.

Priorities

- Some respondents felt that better education about reducing waste and consumerism will improve the environment, as well as lobbying businesses to reduce levels of packaging
- Some felt better education about Energy from Waste would help reassure those who have concerns about the new facilities.
- Most felt that awareness of the NLHPP should be raised and suggested that social media, billboards, bus advertising, and messaging through schools/education would be the best way to raise awareness of the facilities. One respondent suggested providing information with information about council tax.
- Many respondents felt that leaflets should not be used, it would be counter-productive and contradict the need to reduce waste.
- A few respondents felt that caution is needed with any awareness raising or promotional activities. They felt it may cause people to oppose the new facilities, saying that this often happens when information is provided about new developments.
- A few respondents questioned whether the facilities will be run and paid for by a private firm, sharing concerns about the financial aspects if this were the case.