

Informing the development of the recycling and waste service

A Report

For Leeds City Council



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Research

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1. Introduction

This report was commissioned by Leeds City Council (LCC) and was undertaken and completed by the independent research company, QA Research.

QA Research undertook the qualitative element of the overall research into the waste and recycling service in the Leeds local authority. The report documents the key findings of five qualitative focus groups undertaken in different parts of the local authority area on issues surrounding the waste and recycling service.

The overall project aim was to inform the development of the recycling and waste service in Leeds, in line with the Integrated Waste Strategy for Leeds 2005 -2035.

2. Methodology

In total five focus groups were held in the following areas across the local authority area:

- Garforth and Swillington
- Gipton and Harehills
- Temple Newsam
- Burmantofts and Richmond Hill
- Rothwell

Respondents were recruited based on the ward they live in, age, gender and ethnicity. In total across the five groups 40 residents attended. Each respondent was given a £20 incentive as a thank you for attending the group. Composition of the groups can be seen in Appendix 3.

All groups were moderated by an experienced QA researcher and three of the groups were also attended by Darryl Hill who provided technical knowledge where needed.

3. Key findings

3.1 How 'green' respondents are

In order to establish the type of respondents attending the groups, respondents were asked to say how much they recycle according to the following categories:

- **Marathon Runner**– it's the only way forward, I think about my impact in nearly everything I do and change my behaviour accordingly: I've got rid of the car, eat organic food, making my own compost and have made my house and eco-showhome.
- **Gym Guru** – I regularly recycle, try to use public transport / walk / ride my bike when I can, buy fair-trade products. I'm doing my bit.
- **Walk to Work** - I do the odd thing here and there, such as recycle my newspapers and bottles and turn the tap off when I'm brushing my teeth. I could probably do more.
- **Like the Lift** – I don't proactively do anything that might be considered green and (probably) never will.

Overall, respondents felt that they fell somewhere between 'walk to work' and 'like the lift' categories. However, all respondents do recycle to some extent and particularly when it was easy to do so, such as using the green bin.

In particular respondents from Garforth and Swillington, Rothwell and Temple Newsome said that they have a composter for kitchen and garden waste.

A minority, particularly in suburban settings, also took care to minimize water use, compost, and were generally more aware of the 'tactics' of a green life.

3.2 Perceptions of changes to collections

Respondents were asked to think about recent changes made to their waste and recycling collection over the last few years.

Key Themes:

The main changes acknowledged by respondents were the green bin they now all use and the stickers with information about what can go in the green bin which is on the side of their bins. With this further information, some respondents said this had helped them to recycle more of their waste.

Respondents were particularly concerned with the frequency of the collection of their green bin. Respondents felt that they do not have enough space in their green bin to recycle everything they can with the collection being on a four weekly cycle. They felt that a three or two weekly cycle of collections would enable them to recycle more and efficiently.

Respondents are now less likely to fill their black bin on a weekly basis; however there was strong feeling from all of the groups that this collection of refuse should remain on a weekly basis.

Conclusion: With increased frequency of the collections of the green bins, respondents felt that they could increase the amount they recycle as they would have the space in the green bin to do so. Therefore the opportunity for maximising recycling would be increased.

Nearly all respondents acknowledged change; however this was more likely to have been the introduction of the green bin over the last 3 to 4 years. However, in Rothwell respondents felt that there had been no change over the last few years. They did acknowledge that they all now have green bins but they did not feel that it was a *recent change* because it is now part of their everyday life. This signifies that by having the opportunity to recycle in the green bin has meant that respondents in Rothwell now see it as part of their daily routine.

Most respondents were aware of the new stickers they have received which have given them more information on what can go in the green bins, in particular the different types of plastic. Respondents in Garforth and Swillington were positive about this information whereas those in Burmantofts and Richmond Hill did not feel that it had particularly changed anything as they felt they were already aware of what they could and could not put in their green bin.

Respondents felt that they recycle more if it did not require much effort. For example, they all used their green bin because it was there. However if they would have to take things to the tip or recycling centre themselves they would be less likely to recycle. This point is best illustrated by the fact that most respondents felt that being able to separate more waste and recycling into the new bins had led to more recycling at home.

Another common theme that emerged across the groups was a lack of space *in* recycling bins and the frequency of collection of the green bins. All felt that the four weekly collection cycle was not frequent enough and some respondents felt that this hindered them from recycling as much as they could or would like to. Comments included:

“I do recycle, but once that green bin is full, I do get lazy and it goes in the black bin”

“It’s not enough, I think maybe two weeks or even three weeks, I mean my bin was full last week and its not being collected until Monday [the following week]”

“I would be better off on a fortnightly basis than a four weekly one”

However, respondents felt that this increased frequency of collection of the green bin should *not* be at the expense of other collections. One feeling across all groups is that they are now not filling their black bin as much due to using their green bin, one respondent commented:

“I find now, that our black bin is half empty when collected, but our green bin is struggling into the third week and I find myself either having to make the effort myself to take them, or it ends up going in the black bin.”

Respondents were aware that they should recycle more, however some were concerned about having more bins in their garden or near their home. A number of respondents across the groups were concerned about the amount of space they take up. One respondent commented:

“I don’t want five bins in my garden”

“Some people wouldn’t have room for three bins”

“Lots of bins, half a dozen bins outside my house”

However, in general respondents were positive about the possibility of having the opportunities to recycle more.

3.3 Reactions to new collection possibilities

3.3.1 Garden Waste Collections

Respondents were asked if they felt a garden waste collection would be useful. In addition, they were asked to think about the potential issues a Council would have to consider in introducing such a scheme as well as product testing some possible collection receptacles.

Key Themes:

In theory respondents in all groups were positive about having a garden waste collection service. However they felt that not all residents would need such a facility and this should be taken into account to ensure that resources are not being wasted. There were also suggestions of a communal facility rather than collections per household.

In practical terms, respondents felt that the collection service would only be needed in the spring and summer months and not in winter. There were concerns over the mess left after collections and the issue that it is 'another container'.

Overall respondents were in favour of the wheelie bin over the collapsible bag for storing the garden waste.

Conclusion: This should be an opt-in collection service, where residents who do not need the service do not have a bin or receive the service as to limit the waste of resources. However, overall respondents felt that this would increase the amount of waste they recycle.

There were differences between areas about the garden waste collection service which determined responses to the possible introduction of a garden waste collection service. However, in general most of the respondents across all groups agree with the idea in principle.

Respondents who stated that they had gardens and in particular a keen interest in their garden, were more likely to be positive about the introduction of a garden waste collection service. These respondents were more likely to already have a composter or take their garden waste to the tip or waste recycling site. In particular, respondents in the Garforth and Swillington (suburban) group were the most positive of all about the prospect. One respondent commented:

“I think that yes it is a good idea... (it would be) handy if it was there but how often would they come (to collect it)?”

The main issue that respondents felt would need to be considered would be who would need a container for garden waste and who would not. Respondents were concerned that people who did not need them due to no garden or concrete yards etc would have no need for one and therefore resources should not be wasted. Comments included:

“Need to make sure it would be sufficient for the property they are giving it to and go and assess the properties”....“Then they could give them a different sized container or put a communal one in the street”

Other considerations discussed included limiting the mess on the streets after collections and the size of the container used to collect the garden waste.

In the Garforth and Swillington, Harehills and Gipton, and Burmantofts and Richmond Hill groups, respondents suggested that instead of each individual household having a bin for garden waste, they could have a communal point for collection of garden waste. Whilst discussing this, the groups considered issues of space, smells, issues of safety of a communal collection point and where to put a communal facility. Comments included:

“Everyone doesn’t have to have one of their own, as we would not have room”

“Maybe have a community one for things like that, somewhere where there is cameras as kids might set it on fire if it’s plastic”

However, some respondents did have reservations about that idea, as one respondent commented:

“Don’t know if I could be bothered to save it up and then take it to the bin if it was at the end of the street”

The seasonality of use and when the service would be needed by residents was a concern shared by all of the groups. It was felt that residents would not use this service in the winter and it should be targeted to the spring and summer months when needed. One respondent commented:

“Winter time I can’t imagine it being used so much; it [frequency of collection] would be different with the seasons”

The need for information on what residents can put in the garden waste bin was also discussed. It was felt that any information provided should be very clear to ensure that residents can use the facility effectively from the start.

When discussing the possibility of having a wheelie bin or a collapsible bag as containers for the garden waste, the overall consensus from all groups is that they would prefer to have the wheelie bin; however they did also see some merits of the bags. The table below illustrates the good and bad points discussed for each container.

Wheeled bin		Bag	
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
Mobile, easier to put out	Yet another bin, space issues	Collapsible, stored easily	Open to elements, mess blowing over street, smell etc
Lidded, secure from pests, rain	A bit ugly in a nice garden, size	More discreet	Seen as harder to lift/move when full
Limits smells due to lid			Animals would get into it and mess

Overall respondents felt that a garden waste collection would further increase the amount of waste that they recycle.

3.3.2 Kitchen Waste Collections

As with the garden waste discussion, respondents were asked if they felt a kitchen waste collection would be useful. In addition, they were asked to think about the potential issues a Council would have to consider in introducing such a scheme as well as product testing some possible collection receptacles.

Key Themes:

Overall respondents were positive about having the kitchen bin and the collection of the kitchen waste. However the main concerns were about the frequency of collection, the cleanliness of the collections and the hygiene of the kitchen bin.

Therefore only practical issues needed to be considered on this issue as respondents felt that it is good to have a mass composting system rather than sending the waste to a landfill site.

Conclusion: Overall respondents would use the facility and said that it would encourage them to recycle more and it may encourage other people also.

Nearly all of respondents liked the concept of recycling kitchen waste and felt that it would further increase the amount of waste they are recycling. Comments included:

“I’m really up for all of this in principle, its just living with it”

“It’s no more difficult than what I do now”

After discussing the way in which the smaller inside bin and the outside bin would work, including the smell banning technology, respondents remained unconvinced that the smell and hygiene of the bins would be acceptable.

Respondents in the Gipton and Harehills group felt that the collections may leave mess in the street and also they had concerns as to who would clean the bins and cleanliness of the inside kitchen bin.

“When they empty the outside bin, are they going to send someone round to wash it out as well as they will smell”

“It would have to be emptied twice a week at least, because of rats and pets and stuff”

Despite concerns, respondents do see the merits of using the new bins. However, there was a general feeling among respondents, as summed up below, that they would not use the inside bin but would instead put the waste straight outside.

“Its helping the environment so I could, but I would prefer to use the outside one and I haven’t got the time or patience to be washing them out all the time”

As with the garden waste, respondents felt that people should be able to opt-in to this to ensure that resources were not being wasted in terms of having possibly the outside bin only, i.e. if people were not going to use both they should not have to.

There were further discussions regarding what can go in the kitchen waste bin and what would happen to it once it is collected. Respondents were keen to find out more about what could go in the bin and information about what happens to the waste once it is collected.

3.4 Energy from Waste

Respondents were asked to discuss what they thought an Energy from Waste plant was before moving on to discuss the issues they felt should be taken into consideration when planning where to put one if was to be built in the Leeds area.

3.4.1 Initial thoughts on what an Energy from Waste plant is like

Key Themes:

Initially respondents did not know what an Energy from Waste plant was or would look like. However, once we had given them information on the function of the plant and an idea of what it may look like, it was positively received.

When available from Darryl, additional information was well received and most respondents were keen to hear more about what the plant does.

Conclusion: As a minimum, residents would require the level of information we gave respondents at the groups before they would understand what an Energy from Waste plant was.

Once the information was fully digested, respondents were able to understand what the plant would do. Therefore we would suggest a wide variety of options should be available for residents to find and understand what EfW plants are and what they do. These could include: open meetings to discuss EfW plans, leaflets with information and facts on to inform residents of what the plant will do, an internet site with further detailed information including frequently asked questions.

Overall, the groups either had no idea, or made generic inference from the name of the plant. The main themes below emerged as initial thoughts.

- 'big plant'
- 'industrial'
- 'ugly'
- 'burning'
- 'incinerator'

On probing, more detailed comments included:

"Burning what could be burned, heating water or whatever, and could be piped into places like this, to supply water and things"... "I think it's a good idea"

"A large scale incinerator, and if it helps things it's got to be better"

After initial discussions, the moderator read out more detailed description of what an Energy from Waste plant is and what it would do. After this had been understood¹ and digested, there was a general consensus across all groups that an EfW plant was a good idea and respondents began to see the benefits of the plant as a resource.

Some respondents were concerned about the gases produced, however once more information had been given to respondents and some had the opportunity to talk with Darryl, most fears were allayed. Therefore we recommend that this level of information or more information would be well received by residents to help them understand the process and the real reduction to landfill to help meet the target of 50% recycling.

¹ In the groups he attended, respondents were keen to know more from Darryl. They asked questions about the technical details.

3.4.2 Expected type of image v ideal image of an Energy from Waste plant

Key Themes:

Overall, respondents responded positively to images of modern and 'architect designed' plants rather than images giving the impression of a classic 'factory with chimney' plant. The only difference occurred in the Burmantofts and Richmond Hill where they felt that the classic type of plant would be acceptable and had no strong views on the modern buildings.

Respondents stated that they liked the appearance of the modern buildings; however they also conceded that they would not want them in their back yard or near a residential area.

Conclusion: Respondents would not like Energy from Waste plant near them or near a residential area. Therefore location is key to how Energy from Waste plant would be accepted by residents, not necessarily the looks alone.

When we looked at the images with respondents; most were surprised that the images were in the UK. All of the groups concluded that they would expect the Energy from Waste plant to look like those depicting classic 'factory with chimney' plant, but they would prefer it to look like images of modern and innovative buildings. The common favourite was a simple dome shaped metallic building. First reaction comments included:

"More modern and not too out of place"

In the Gipton and Harehills group and the Temple Newsom group, there was some discussion regarding the negative effects that an Energy from Waste plant may have on the environment both in terms of gases emitted and of its potential location.

Respondents were surprised the EfW plant could be modern and innovative, which were seen as more attractive and more acceptable near people's homes, as well as being modern and well thought out.

A degree of 'Not in my back yard' existed in all groups. This was particularly strong in Gipton, where a stronger cynicism existed, which may reflect suspicions the plant will be placed in/near less affluent areas.

"I think it's a good idea, but I wouldn't want one of those on my doorstep"

In contrast to the rest of the groups, respondents in the Burmantofts and Richmond Hill group were undecided and had no firm opinions on what they would prefer the Energy from Waste plant to look like.

This group had no strong feelings that the other groups did about the aesthetics of the building; all of the other groups were concerned about what it would look

like and specifically did not want it to look like a classic 'factory with chimney' plant.

Once they understood fully, respondents in most groups felt strongly that they would support the concept of an EfW plant.

3.4.3 Criteria chosen to consider when siting an Energy from Waste facility

Key Themes:

The main criteria that respondents felt had to be considered when deciding where to site an Energy from Waste plant in Leeds is the location. All groups were in agreement that it should not be placed in a residential area or near schools for fears of safety and transport issues.

Respondents identified nearly all of the criteria that planners actually use to make such decisions. However, a few groups did identify that creating employment of the construction of such a plant could be of benefit to the local area.

Once the detailed information was read out to all groups, they all grasped the concept of the Energy from Waste plant and felt that it would be a reasonable solution to reducing the amount of waste that goes to landfill.

Positively, respondents were able to identify most of the planning criteria themselves and there were few additions to the criteria that were not already covered in some form by the official criteria used by the planners (See appendix 3).

In particular the issue of location dominated the discussions in all groups. There was a particular emphasis on the issues of smells and emissions from the plants and the need for them to be located away from residential areas or on an existing industrial site.

Comments included:

"It's got to be somewhere where you can get to it either by road or even by a river"

"Smell, dust, noise, traffic it's all safety related"

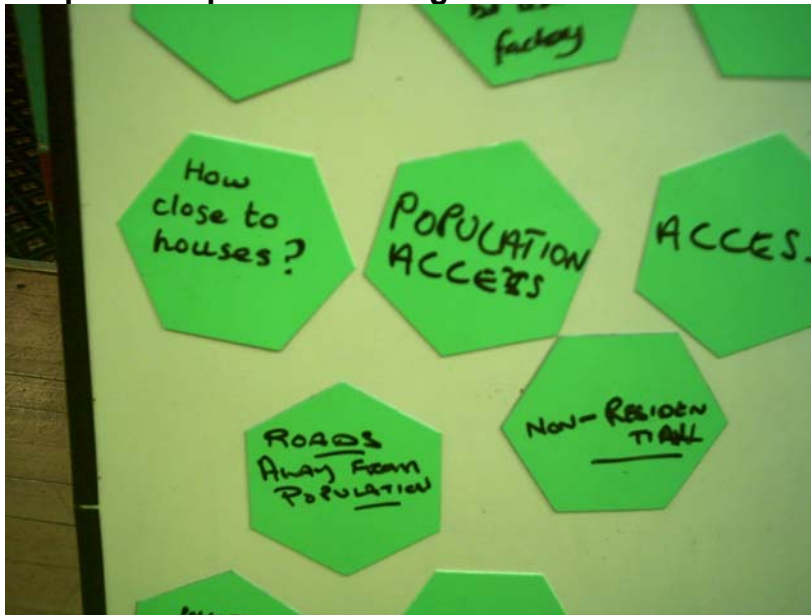
"I wouldn't want it next to a school or near a residential area"

"How busy would it be? Access in and out"

In the Rothwell group in particular respondents were concerned that if the plant was near a residential area it would have an impact on house prices.

An example of what some of the respondents wrote can be seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Example of respondents thought on the LVT boards



There were many transport issues mentioned. Of particular concern was access to the sites, overall congestion, including any additional impacts of potential additional collections within residential areas. Comments included:

“It may cause accidents with more traffic if it’s near a residential area”

“The amount of vehicles which will be going past, safety issues near schools”

Although potential emissions from the site were discussed, environmental concerns such as the local environment, nature and water resources were less prevalent throughout the groups. However, it was generally felt that these concerns were no less important, but instead were issues that would be tackled as part of the wider concern of other criteria. For example, the location concerns – that a site should not be near residential areas – included concerns about local safety, transport and air quality (see below).

One additional criteria presented by at least two groups was the need to generate employment through a new plant to maximise the benefits to the local area where possible.

3.4.4 Most important criteria to consider

Key Themes:

The top priority is the location, in particular that it is not in a residential area. The second priority was the impact of smells, emissions and the noise on residents. The third priority was that the traffic network must be able to cope with the additional traffic and not go through a residential area to get to the plant.

Conclusion: Location must be the key consideration here; in particular respondents felt very strongly that it must not be located near a residential area.

Respondents were then asked to consider, from the list of criteria the planners use to state which ones they felt were the top 5 priorities and rank then to the top 3-5 accordingly.

Overall all groups agreed that the top priority was the location of the Energy from Waste plant. It was felt that if the location was correct, a lot of the other criteria would no longer be as important as they may be if the location was wrong. Therefore, consideration for other issues such as wildlife, protection of water sources and how close it is to historic buildings would already be considered automatically.

In particular respondents felt strongly that it should not be in a residential area as seen previously.

“Location would be my top one”...”I don’t want it in my back yard”.

“If it’s not in a residential area, you don’t have to worry about the smells and everything else”

The second priority was the issues of the impact of noise, emissions and smells as one priority. All of these issues combined were seen as important however out of the three the main priority was the emissions.

“The noise and the smell would annoy me”

“The emissions may be dangerous, don’t want it near residential just in case”

The third priority was issues surrounding transport, in particular the transport network. The impact of traffic coming in and out and also access to the site was seen as important. Comments included:

To conclude the main finding from this exercise was that respondents felt that if the location was chosen correctly, other issues would take care of themselves.

With all of the criteria considered, it is apparent that residents would need as much information on the plans and what the plant will do for them to understand the benefits of having such a facility near to them or in their local area.

Where could an Energy from Waste Facility go in Leeds?

Given concerns about the location discussed above, respondents were keen to avoid residential areas in their discussions. One of the key areas mentioned was the potential 'new Leeds United FC' site. Several respondents pointed out that the transport infrastructure already existed off the M1 and that it fulfilled further criteria including that it was away from residents and that it would not be destroying the local environment as there was already industry located there.

Respondents in the Burmantofts and Richmond Hill were particularly eager to know if it was going to be near them in that area. In particular one respondent said

"It's most likely to be in the LS9, yeah its industrial"

However, some respondents felt that the area is in a poor state at the moment and this may be a good idea as there is already the infrastructure in place. One respondent commented positively saying:

"It can't smell any worse than what it does now"

"Where else can they put it in the Leeds area? The links are already there, it's already in place"

However, despite encouragement from those who supported the LS9 suggestion, other respondents within the group remained unconvinced:

"I don't want it here, as far away from here as possible"

4. Conclusions

This section acts to draw together key overarching considerations arising from the research and is to complement the conclusions to be found throughout the main text.

4.1 Development of refuse collection services

It would seem from these group discussions that residents generally accept recycling and its continuation as a given part of daily life in Leeds. There was little or no questioning of the need to recycle, reduce waste and generally act in as responsibly 'green' a manner as possible.

Everyone recycled, and a few did more; composting, reducing water usage. However no-one considered that they did anything like as much as they could or should do, suggesting that it is possible to ratchet up the expectation levels regarding what residents should be doing to help on waste issues.

It was common to hear that ease of use of recycling services and methods was paramount. Most felt that if it was made easy, they would always increase the range and volume of waste they recycled. This applied to garden and kitchen waste separation equally.

There were specific considerations for these latter types of separation and collection. The garden bin (preferred to the bag on balance) would need to be adopted only by those actually in need. The impact on planning collection timings and routes if only sporadic uptake occurs needs to be considered.

For kitchen waste there is a need to illustrate, perhaps with live demonstrations, that the new caddies and outside bins will not smell, leak, attract vermin or be hard to keep clean after emptying. If a version with a disposable lining is available, this may allay many concerns in one go, assuming the liner is itself biodegradable or similarly low-impact.

Equally there are *common* potential barriers to overcome if implementing any new collection regime:

- The limits on space and storage for 'more bins'
- Information on what to separate into each new bin

4.2 Locating a proposed Energy from Waste Facility in Leeds

Overall, if the findings from these groups reflect wider feeling, residents accept that an EfW plant is a positive way to tackle a pressing problem. While no-one wants one next door, there was some acceptance that certain types of area will become the site, either near the M1, or in existing industrial areas within the city.

The groups all grasped the concept of the plant's operation easily, and could conceivably have absorbed a lot more detailed information. Any communication sent out about EfW should at least contain the level of explanation used in the discussion scripts, and offer easy access to more detail via a website to suit the more active resident.

In terms of locating a site for EfW if it is away from residential areas then other considerations pale. However, transport and access issues and the emissions, smell and noise are still issues to address in any communication of the selection of a site.

It is worth noting that in some groups, in particular those that suspected it might be placed near their community, despite a rationale acceptance initially that the plant will be 'safe', there was a tendency to absorb and reflect any 'scare-mongering' comments from individuals in the sessions that it *will* smell, pollute and cause cancers 'whatever the experts say'. While there will always be cynicism and stirred-up opposition to any controversial developments, this reversion to stereotypical concerns despite available and understood information should be anticipated.

Appendix 1 - Images of proposed additional containers for Recycling

IMAGE 1
Garden Waste Bag



IMAGE 2
Wheeled Bin



IMAGE 3
Kitchen Waste (Inside)



IMAGE 4
Kitchen Waste (Outside)



Appendix 2 - List of criteria used by planners

SHEET 3

The impact of how it looks on you and others?

The impact of any smells on you and others?

The impact of any emissions or dust on you and others?

The impact of the noise it makes on you and others?

The impact of traffic coming in and out of it?

How easy it is for traffic to access the site (i.e. on main roads rather than smaller roads)?

How easy it would be to use more environmentally friendly transport than lorries, e.g. close to train network, canals?

How close it is to where the waste is collected i.e. minimising transportation

That it is in a commercial/industrial area?

That it is not in a residential area?

Protection Of Water Resources

Nature Conservation/ Wildlife

How close it is to Historic Sites or Buildings

Appendix 3 – Group composition

Location	Men	Women
Burmantofts	5	5
Garforth and Swillington	4	5
Gipton and Harehills	5	4
Rothwell	3	6
Temple Newsam	5	5