# Essex Climate Action Research

Summary report (July 2021)



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### Background and objectives

This research was conducted by BritainThinks – working with Essex County Council’s Research & Citizen Insight team - between March-June 2021.

The objectives were to:

* + Understand residents’ current behaviours relating to climate action and their views towards climate change and the environment
	+ Understand what residents see as the primary barriers (capability, opportunity and motivation) to engaging more with climate action behaviours
	+ Explore what might be needed to increase capability, opportunity and/or motivation for climate action to create behaviour change

The research will be used to support the Essex Climate Action Commission, Essex County Council and partner organisations in Essex in their strategy to increase engagement with climate action among Essex residents.

### Methodology

The research took a multi-stage quantitative and qualitative approach:

* 1. **Quantitative telephone survey and segmentation**: 1,800 Essex residents took part in a 20-minute survey focussed on environmental engagement and behaviours. Data were weighted to be representative of all Essex adults by age, gender, working status and district. Statistical analysis (Factor Analysis and Latent Class Analysis) was used to generate 5 quantitative typologies based on behavioural commonalities.
	2. **One-week digital ethnography and deep-dive interviews:** 25 participants (five from each segment) took part in a one-week online ethnography exploring their daily lives and behaviours. Two participants from each segment had a follow-up 60-minute telephone interview to explore barriers to climate action behaviours.
	3. **COM-B groups:** participants were split into five focus groups (one per segment) to understand each segment’s attitudes towards climate change/the environment, and what drivers might help to overcome the COM-B barriers uncovered in the depth interviews.
	4. **Communications and deliberation groups:** 10 participants (two participants from each of the five segments) were provided with a pre-read detailing some current Essex climate action initiatives, and were then split into two 90-minute focus groups to discuss their reactions to these initiatives and potential climate awareness/action messaging in detail.

### Key findings

The research found that:

1. **The vast majority of residents claim to be concerned about climate change. In practice, the issue often feels distant and less of a priority than other national and local concerns.** Protection of local green spaces is potentially one ‘bridge issue’ that can bring abstract debates about climate action closer to home.
2. **People over-estimate their current contribution and there is a disconnect between perceptions and reality of how certain behaviours impact climate change.** Most are doing lower effort behaviours like recycling (lower impact) which they see as ‘doing their bit’ and fewer are doing more challenging but more impactful behaviours (e.g. switching from cars) which they would feel is ‘above and beyond’.
3. **Whilst many are open to changing their own behaviours, many environmentally friendly options are seen as challenging to implement or viewed as presenting an unattractive lifestyle change.** It will not be easy to shift entrenched behaviours and privileges that people currently have.
4. **Across the behaviours the research explored, those where residents could appreciate there would be personal benefits are the ones where there is the greatest opportunity to effect behaviour change** – namely, increasing the number of meat-free days, reducing food waste, and making home upgrades. The areas where participants couldn’t see personal benefits, e.g. transport, will be the most challenging to effect behaviour change.

### Resident segments

Statistical analysis revealed Essex residents can be split into five segments based on their current climate action behaviours. In order of ‘least engaged’ to ‘most engaged’, these are:

1. Low-action sceptics
2. Low-income renters
3. Older home-owners
4. Younger professionals
5. Environmentally proactive

Table 1 below shows how each segment performs against the Essex population, in terms of their (positive) climate action behaviours across six areas: transport, food, shopping, waste, energy and home improvements.

Table 1: Performance of each segment against the Essex population in terms of (positive) climate actions behaviours

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SEGMENT | Transport | Food | Shopping | Waste | Energy | Home improve-ments |
| Low-action sceptics | Below average | Below average | Average | Below average | Below average | Below average |
| Low-income renters | Above average | Below average | Below average | Below average | Average | Below average |
| Older home-owners | Below average | Average | Average | Above average | Average | Above average |
| Younger professionals | Above average | Above average | Average | Average | Average | Below average |
| Environment-ally proactive | Average | Above average | Above average | Above average | Above average | Average |

The following boxes provide an overview of each of the five resident segments.

**LOW-ACTION SCEPTICS (least engaged)**

**Prevalence:** 28% of the Essex population

**Profile:** This segment tends to be male, middle-aged, and work full-time, with children at home.

**Behaviours:** They typically recycle but do few other positive behaviours.

**Barriers:** They feel time- and budget-restricted and are unlikely to go out of their way. They do not feel personally responsible for the environment.

**Opportunities:** Laddering up lower-effort behaviours like buying less plastic packaging.

**LOW-INCOME RENTERS**

**Prevalence:** 10% of the Essex population

**Profile:** Typically older residents (65+) who are less financially secure

**Behaviours:** They typically have some meat-free days, try to conserve energy and use public transport.

**Barriers:** Cost and time are their core priorities and key barriers to change. They also lack access to some services.

**Opportunities:** Laddering up lower-cost behaviours like meat-free days and reducing food waste.

**OLDER HOME-OWNERS**

**Prevalence:** 24% of the Essex population

**Profile:** Tend to be relatively affluent ‘empty-nesters’ who are moving towards retirement.

**Behaviours:** They typically recycle, have some meat-free days and have some home upgrades.

**Barriers:** They lack awareness and knowledge about eco-energy behaviours and newer kinds of home upgrades – and a sense of the benefits.

**Opportunities:** Increase awareness of energy and upgrade opportunities and persuade on their benefits.

**YOUNGER PROFESSIONALS**

**Prevalence:** 25% of the Essex population

**Profile:** Typically young couples (without children or with young children) in stable jobs.

**Behaviours:** Engaged with eco behaviours across waste, shopping, food and transport.

**Barriers:** Lack of awareness, knowledge and prioritisation in energy, transport and home upgrades – and lacking a sense of benefit.

**Opportunities:** Leverage environmental engagement to drive positive behaviours where there are gaps.

**ENVIRONMENTALLY PROACTIVE (most engaged)**

**Prevalence:** 14% of the Essex population

**Profile:** Lean towards young to middle-aged affluent females (likely with kids at home).

**Behaviours:** Highly engaged with positive behaviours across all areas except transport.

**Barriers:** Some lack of awareness with newer home upgrades; a sense they’re doing their bit so don’t need to act in other areas.

**Opportunities:** Leverage environmental engagement to drive positive behaviours in the home.

### Exploring climate action behaviours

The qualitative research explored two areas of climate action behaviour with each segment. Areas were chosen based on where there was deemed greatest opportunity for change for each segment. Within each area, there were two to three target behaviours that were explored in detail. These are shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Climate action behaviours explored by theme and resident segment**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Theme | Behaviours explored | Segments the behaviours were explored with |
| Transport | * Switching to public transport for some regular journeys
* Switching to active travel for some regular journeys
* Buying an electric vehicle
 | * Low-action sceptics
* Environmentally proactive
 |
| Food | * 2 meat-free days a week
* Reducing food waste
 | * Low-income renters
* Younger professionals
 |
| Waste and recycling | * Buying fully recyclable / refillable packaging
* Donating/selling/buying second-hand items
 | * Low-action sceptics
* Low-income renters
 |
| Energy and utilities | * Switching to a green energy supplier/tariff
* Installing and using a smart meter to actively monitor energy usage
* Installing solar panels / a heat pump
 | * Older home-owners
* Younger professionals
 |
| Home improvement | * Installing greater insulation / double or triple glazing
* Installing permeable paving / rewilding garden
 | * Older home-owners
* Environmentally proactive
 |

The COM-B framework – which proposes that capability (C), opportunity (O) and motivation (M) are required for a behaviour (B) to occur - was used to identify barriers and drivers to residents engaging with positive climate behaviours.

* + **Capability:** an individual’s psychological ability (skills or knowledge) and physical ability (skill, strength or stamina) to participate in an activity
	+ **Opportunity:** external factors which make a particular behaviour possible, both physical (such as time, resources and location) and social (such as interpersonal influences, cultural norms and social cues)
	+ **Motivation:** internal processes which influence our decision making and behaviours, whether reflective processes (such as plans, intentions or evaluations) or automatic processes (such as emotional reactions, desires, impulses or inhibitions)

### Barriers to behaviour change

Across the target behaviours, there were several common barriers to behaviour change:

* + **Capability barriers**
		- Knowing what / how to do it or supporting behaviours (e.g. cook vegetarian, find a trusted builder)
		- Awareness or knowledge of options (e.g. switching to an electric vehicle, green energy, home retrofit)
	+ **Opportunity barriers**
		- Social norms / conventions (e.g. around driving, meat eating)
		- Availability / accessibility (e.g. of public / active transport routes / infrastructure, plastic free packaging)
		- Lack of resources (time / money) (e.g. busy schedules of parents / workers meaning less space to try new things)
	+ **Motivation barriers**
		- Perceived or actual sacrifices / ‘disincentives’ (e.g. taking more time, increased cost)
		- Personal and / or household habits
		- Perceived lack of need (‘already doing my bit’ or lack of knowledge of impact)
		- Lack of benefits (personally or more broadly)

Table 3 on the following page summarises the key barriers that interventions and communications will need to address to encourage residents to engage more with climate action behaviours.

**Table 3: The key barriers interventions will need to address**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Theme | Capability barriers | Opportunity barriers | Motivation barriers |
| Transport |  | Lack of public / active transport infrastructure or options | Strong preference for car and sacrifices of switching |
| Food | Not knowing how to cook a variety of tasty meat-free meals |  | Perceptions that meat-free is less tasty/satisfying |
| Waste and recycling |  | Lower plastic packaging less available at major supermarketsHigher costs at smaller shops | Assumption they are already doing enoughNot seen as personal responsibility |
| Energy and utilities |  | Lack of moments where switching is considered | Not a priority Lack of understanding of benefits |
| Home improvement | Lack of awareness and knowledge of the optionsChallenge of finding trusted tradespeople |  | Perceived personal impacts (cost, time, disruption)Lack of understanding of benefits |

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