



# WALTHAM FOREST 'THE BIG CLIMATE CONVERSATION'

Data Report

7TH - 18TH  
NOVEMBER 2022

working with



THE **BIG**  
**CLIMATE**  
CONVERSATION

# THE BIG CLIMATE CONVERSATION



Between the 7th-18th November 2022, the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF) hosted The Big Climate Conversation summit.

Schools throughout the Borough held discussions about what actions are being taken locally to tackle climate change. Afterwards, they were given a platform to respond to the Waltham Forest Climate Action Plan, whilst considering what actions they could personally take to help the environment. The opinions of over 800 young people were recorded.

Facilitated by



Supported by



## We received responses from:

- Buxton School
- Chingford Church of England Primary School
- Connaught School for Girls
- Coppermill Primary School
- Downsell Primary School
- Emmanuel Church of England Primary School
- George Tomlinson Primary School
- Greenleaf Primary School
- Henry Maynard Primary School
- Hillyfield Primary Academy
- Jenny Hammond Primary School
- Kelmscott Secondary School
- Leyton Sixth Form College
- Mayville Primary School
- Mission Grove Primary School
- Oakhill Primary School
- Riverley Primary School
- Southgrove Primary School
- St Mary's Church of England Primary School
- St. Saviour's Church of England Primary School
- The Winns Primary Academy
- Thorpe Hall School
- Waltham Forest College

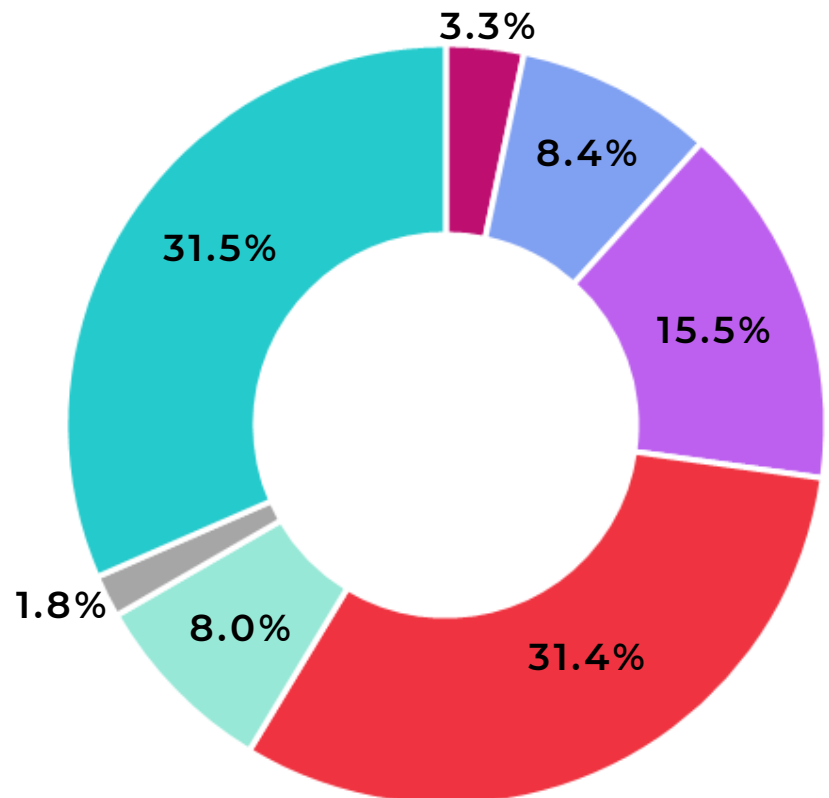
# 1 | OVERALL VOTING FIGURES



TOTAL NUMBER OF RECORDED RESPONSES:

**876 STUDENTS**

Year 3:	29 voters
Year 4:	74 voters
Year 5:	136 voters
Year 6:	275 voters
Year 11:	70 voters
Year 13:	16 voters
Mixed/Vertical Group:	276 voters



The largest percentage of students took part in the survey as part of a mixed or vertical group. This means there will have been a variety of age groups discussing the climate survey questions during the same session.

This does not mean that we received 876 responses for each question in the survey. Some students may have opted out of answering the compulsory questions and many of the questions were optional. The total number of student responses for each question has been specified throughout this report.

# 2 | AIMS OF THE SESSION



Inform young people about Waltham Forest's efforts to reduce climate change.



Build young people's confidence when discussing the climate emergency.



Ensure youth voice on the climate emergency is heard and considered when planning local climate action initiatives.



Provide young people with the knowledge and understanding necessary to make a personal 'pledge' to the environment.

A key component to this conversation was the 'pledge' that the students made to tackle climate change. This needed to be 'intentional, actionable and practical'. They have been included throughout the report to support the data where necessary.

## What percentage of your class did you feel were confident discussing climate change at the beginning of the lesson?

Less than half of the young people involved were confident discussing climate change at the beginning of the session, at 45.8%.

45.8%  
CONFIDENT

54.2%  
NOT CONFIDENT

TOTAL VOTES: 648\*

\*Disclaimer: This was included as an optional question. Adults running the session were asked to give an estimate and were not expected to record exact percentages.

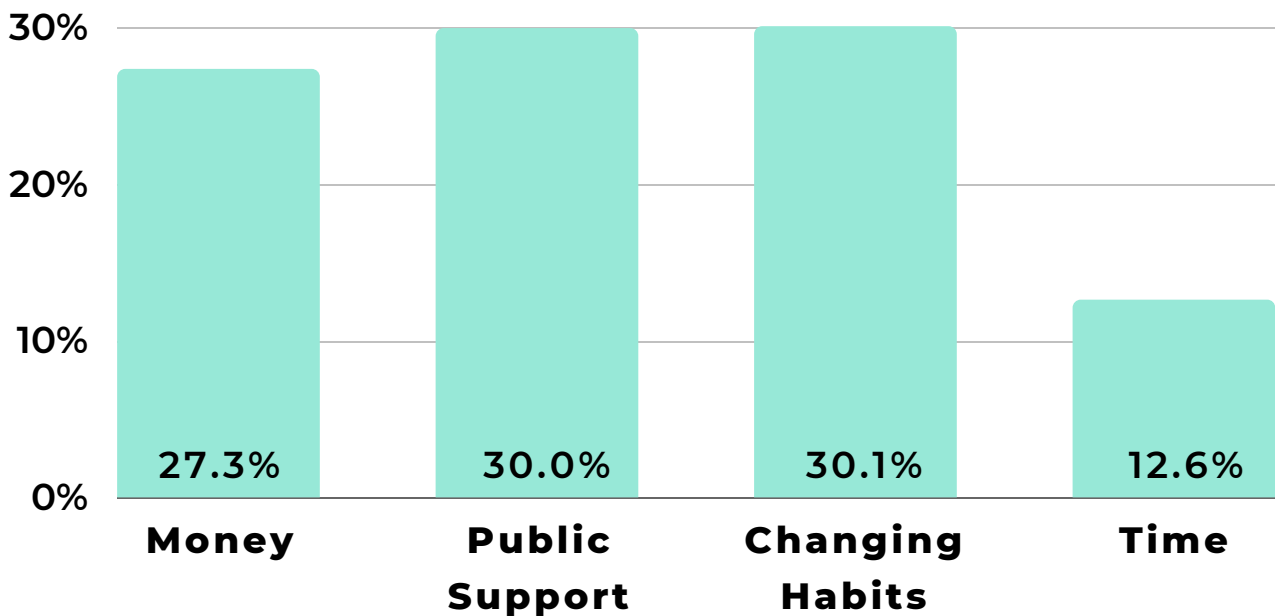
# 3 | THE ROAD TO NET ZERO



In the session, students discussed Waltham Forest's plans to reach net zero by 2030. They discussed the strategies in place for this to happen, considered whether it was an achievable goal and decided what the biggest obstacle would be.

What do you think is the biggest obstacle Waltham Forest is facing in tackling climate change?

TOTAL VOTES: 841



Interestingly, 'Time' received the fewest votes, accounting for just 12.6% of the overall result. This could suggest that those who voted believe the 2030 deadline is a realistic length of time to achieve net zero.

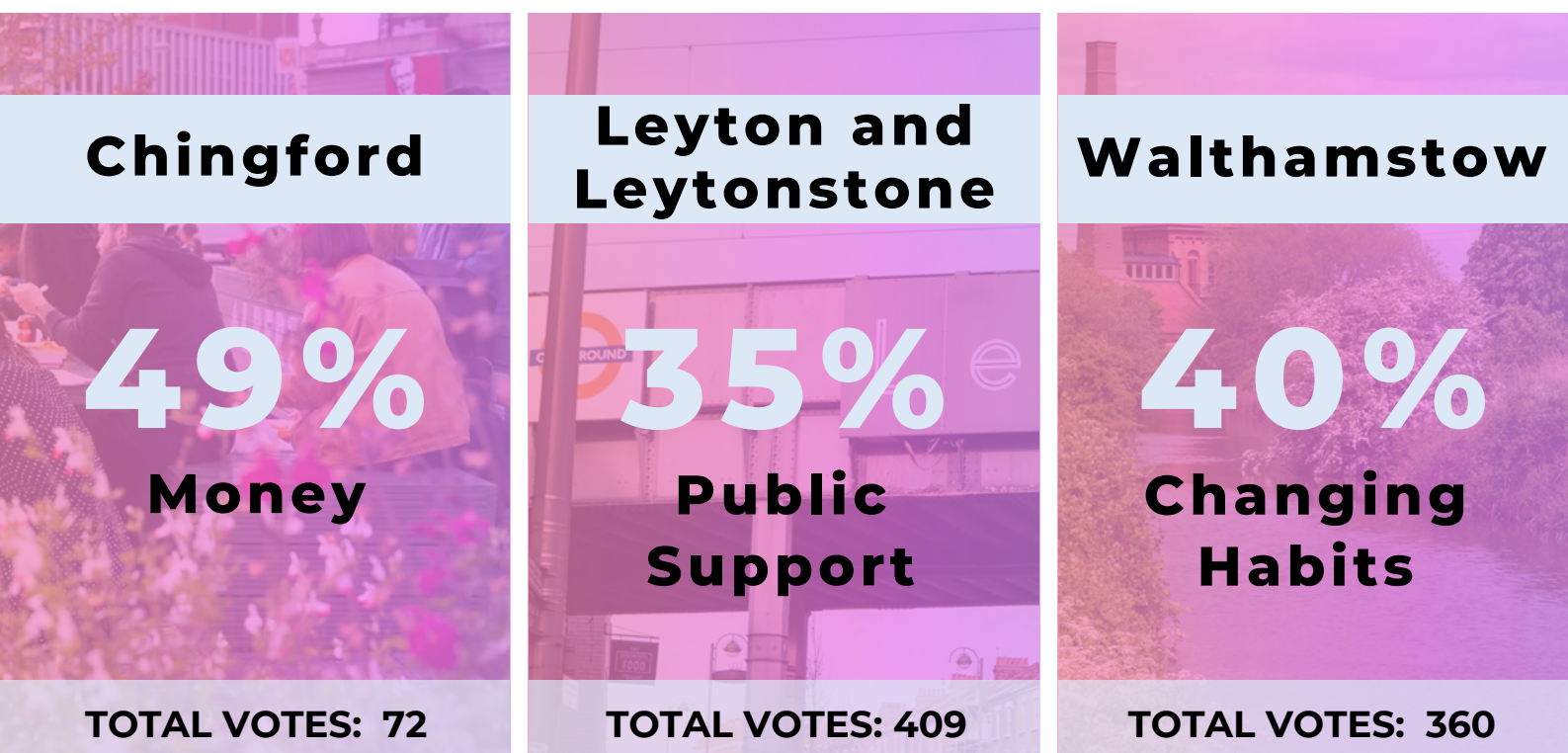
'Changing habits' and 'Public support' received almost identical totals and came out as the top obstacles Waltham Forest will face. These are also the two options that rely on the actions of the general public.

When we break the results down by area things get more interesting, as each had a different outcome.

Almost half of those (49%) in Chingford voted for 'Money' (35 votes out of a total 72), however as it had the lowest response rate of the three areas, 'Money' was not the highest voted obstacle overall.

In Leyton and Leytonstone, a third of all students (35%) voted that 'Public support' was the greatest obstacle.

40% of students in Walthamstow voted that 'Changing habits' was the greatest obstacle.



The obstacles that each area considered greatest was also reflected in the pledges made by students (see aims on page 3). Below is an example from a student in Chingford, who pledged to raise money to support environmental actions.

“

I pledge to work with my school council to raise money.

Pledge made by student from Chingford.

”

A common theme throughout the comments was the necessity for everyone to work together to tackle Waltham Forest's obstacles.

“

[Changing habits] is a big problem because the people who don't want to change might be the majority of the world.

”

“

[Public support] is a big problem if some people don't care because it needs everyone to take part to succeed.

”

With 'Public support' and 'Changing habits' coming out as the top obstacles facing Waltham Forest's aim to achieve net zero by 2030, how willing were the respondents to adjust their own behaviours and demonstrate support for environmental change?

## What percentage of your class would walk or cycle to help the environment?

Almost 70% of those in the session showed a willingness to change their habits to tackle climate change.

**69.7%**  
**WOULD**

**30.3%**  
**WOULD NOT**

**TOTAL VOTES: 693\***

\*Disclaimer: This was included as an optional question. Adults running the session were asked to give an estimate and were not expected to record exact percentages.

Students were also asked to consider how the actions of others might help Waltham Forest's efforts to reach net zero, through actions that would demonstrate 'Public support'.

## What percentage of your class thought the school should create more green spaces?

Almost 70% of those in the session believed their schools should show this support by creating more green spaces.



**TOTAL VOTES: 665\***

\*Disclaimer: This was included as an optional question. Adults running the session were asked to give an estimate and were not expected to record exact percentages.

“

Our school has a lot of greenery but we could add plants in the classrooms.

”

Comments like this one showed a real engagement with the topic, as this student was able to reflect on their school's current situation and then consider how to improve it further. In conjunction with almost 70% saying they would walk or cycle to school, it suggests the young people of Waltham Forest are committed to making habitual changes to benefit the environment.



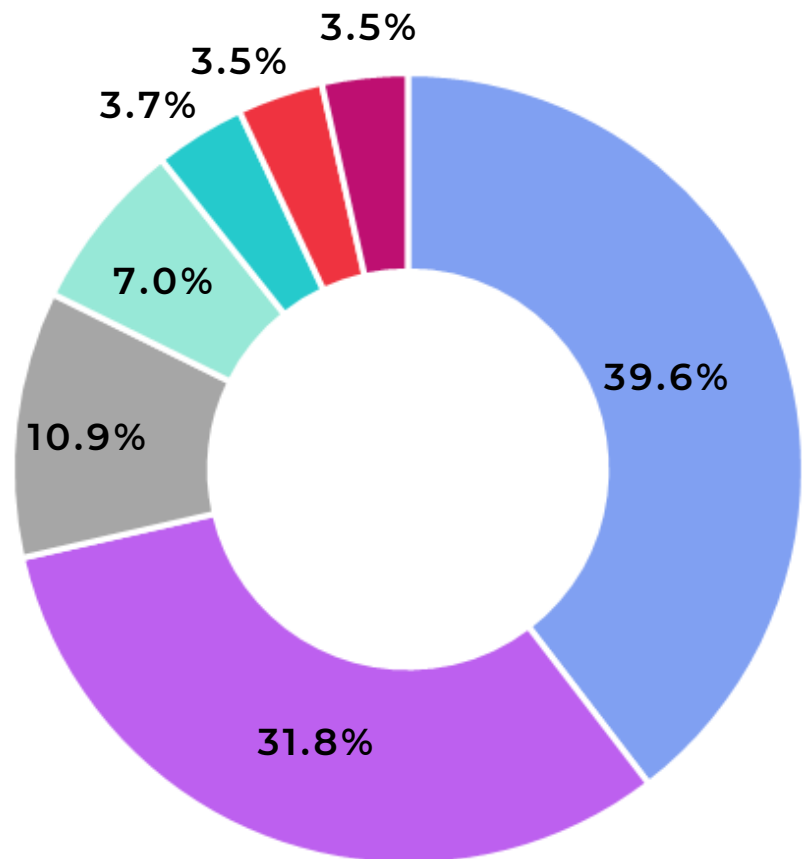
# 4 | OVERCOMING OBSTACLES



After discussing the obstacles that Waltham Forest might face, students explored how they could be overcome in order to reach net zero by 2030.

What did your pupils think is the best way to help Waltham Forest overcome their obstacles?

- #1 Teaching people about climate change
- #2 Setting up eco-councils and local groups
- #3 Other
- #4 Speaking out about climate change
- #5 Getting local shops and businesses involved
- #6 Creating easier, short-term goals
- #6 Raising money to support change



TOTAL VOTES: 713

'Public support' and 'Changing habits' were voted as the main obstacles facing Waltham Forest. As such, it makes sense that 'Teaching people about climate change' received the most votes for how to overcome them. Hopefully, by informing people of the implications of their habits and the necessity of their support, Waltham Forest can make positive steps towards their 2030 goal.

Overall, there was a positive response to the idea that we should change our habits and take small actions to support the environment. However, students were also clear that the Government need to act and instigate change too, as they have the power to do so on a much larger scale.

“

**We also need to put pressure on the Government to make changes.**

”

“

**We need to tell the Government to take bold action because if they don't places like the arctic will have less animals.**

”

One way to achieve this is to make sure people are aware of the dangers of climate change and encourage them to speak out in support of Governmental change. 'Teaching people about climate change' received the most votes for overcoming obstacles and this sentiment was reflected in many of the comments received.

“

**[We should be] making posters telling people what they can and can't recycle because people get confused.**

”

“

**We need to inform other people so they can tell more people.**

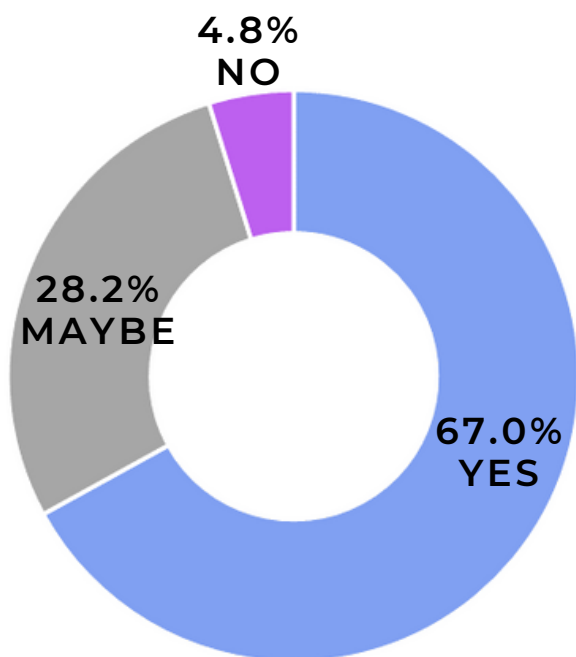
”

# 5 | PERSONAL CHANGES



Throughout the session, students were encouraged to reflect on their habits and consider how they could be improved from an environmental perspective.

Would you make changes to your life to help the environment?



Almost 70% of those who voted said 'Yes', which shows a strong desire in the young people of Waltham Forest to make a difference and support the journey to net zero.

**TOTAL VOTES: 751**

**YES**

**67.0%** voted 'Yes'.  
This amounted to **503** votes out of 751.

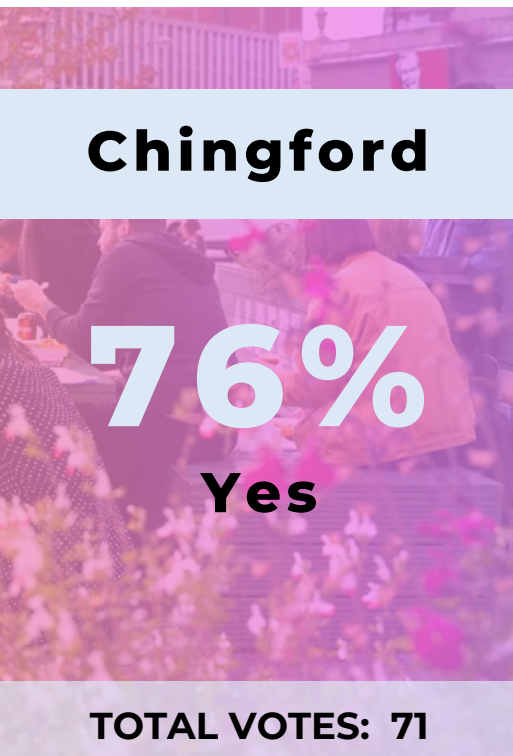
**MAYBE/  
NOT SURE**

**28.2%** voted 'Maybe/Not sure'.  
This amounted to **212** votes out of 751.

**NO**

**4.8%** voted 'No'.  
This amounted to **36** votes out of 751.

When we break this data down by location, Chingford and Walthamstow had an almost 80% 'Yes' vote. In comparison, Leyton and Leytonstone had just over 50%.



### What percentage of your class thought a lot of energy is wasted in their household?

With 'Public support' and 'Changing habits' coming out as the top obstacles facing Waltham Forest's aim to achieve net zero by 2030, we asked them how much their household's current habits are affecting the planet.

A little over half agreed that a lot of energy is wasted in their household, but 67% said they were willing to make changes to help the environment. Reducing household waste could form one of these changes.



TOTAL VOTES: 693\*

\*Disclaimer: This was included as an optional question. Adults running the session were asked to give an estimate and were not expected to record exact percentages.

After discussing the habits of their household, we asked them to consider their personal actions and how far they go towards reducing waste. These actions may include recycling, turning off light switches, avoiding the car on the school run and putting rubbish in the bin.

## What percentage of your class thought their actions help reduce waste?

Despite over half believing their collective household wastes a lot of energy, almost 60% agreed that their individual actions help reduce waste.



**TOTAL VOTES: 693\***

\*Disclaimer: This was included as an optional question. Adults running the session were asked to give an estimate and were not expected to record exact percentages.

Throughout the sessions, young people were considering ways in which they can reduce waste and tackle climate change. Some of the comments gathered considered ways to optimise spending and encourage second hand ownership. Again, this shows a strong engagement with the session and a younger generation who are committed to reducing waste.

“

**WE can save money to buy other things like plants to help the air and plants for the garden.**

”

“

**If I got a second hand phone for Christmas I could give my old one to someone without one.**

”

# 6 | I PLEDGE...

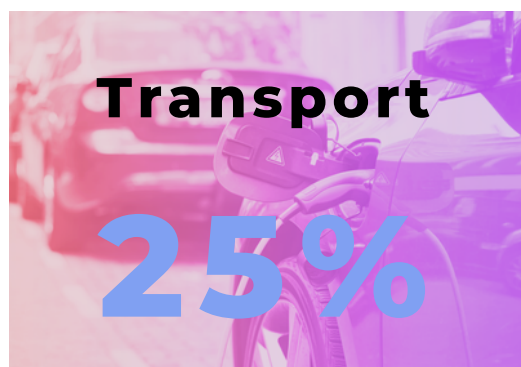
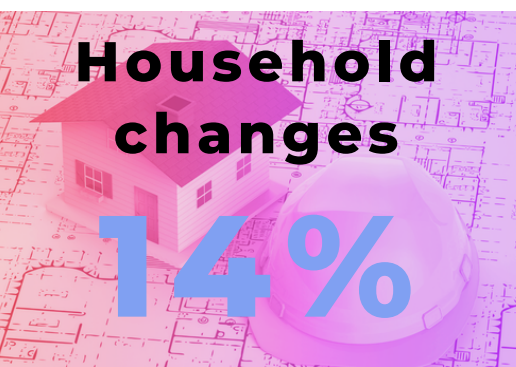


As part of the session, students were asked to consider how they might support Waltham Forest's efforts on a personal level. They created a 'pledge' which needed to be 'intentional, actionable and practical'. Within the session slides, VotesforSchools included some options to choose from, however students were also given the freedom to write their own.

## THEMES

These were the main themes that appeared in the students' pledges we received. Many more pledges were made in classrooms that were not included in the survey. Therefore, these percentages only account for the comments that were included in the survey response. Comments in the survey that did not fit these themes included educating people about climate change and donating money.

TOTAL RESPONSES: 80



## 1. HOUSEHOLD CHANGES

This theme largely consisted of turning off lights and taps when they are not being used. The main contributors to household pollution, such as using the washing machine or dryer, are less actionable for the young people involved in this survey as they are usually only used by adults in a household.

“

I'm going to turn off the tap when I brush my teeth.

”

“

[I will] stop waste electricity by switching lights off during the day.

”

## 2. TRANSPORT

With these conversations taking place in the school environment, it is perhaps understandable that the largest proportion of pledges involved the school run. Most responses for this theme involved walking or cycling, however taking public transport is also a greener alternative to driving.

“

I'm going to walk to school.

”

“

To ride a bike to school.

”

### 3. LITTER PICKING

Most responses in this theme involved pledging to pick up litter as and when they saw it. However, there were also a couple of responses that mentioned creating posters or spreading awareness to others about the importance of not dropping litter.

“

I'm going to pick up litter whenever I see it.

”

“

I pledge to make posters so people can pick up rubbish.

”

### 4. NATURAL HABITAT

After learning about the importance of plants and trees, 11% of the pledges reference planting or encouraging others to plant more in their gardens and in public spaces.

“

I'm going to plant trees in my garden.

”

“

I pledge to plant more flowers and encourage people to do it too!

”



## 5. CHANGES TO DIET

All of the dietary-based comments involved switching to a vegetarian or vegan diet a few times a week. The meat and dairy industries have big climate impacts and 14% of the responses we received were based around reducing personal intake of meat and dairy products.

“

**I pledge to be a vegetarian for two days in a week.**

”

“

**I'm going to go meat free for a day each week.**

”

## 6. REDUCE/RECYCLE

The reduce and recycle theme encompasses any comments relating to second hand belongings, recycling waste and using reusable products. It was the theme with the second-highest number of responses and, along with the comments we received, students appear particularly eager to buy and donate more second hand items.

“

**I pledge to get more second hand things to help the earth.**

”

“

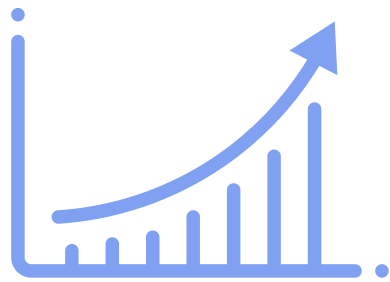
**I will try to recycle everything I can.**

”

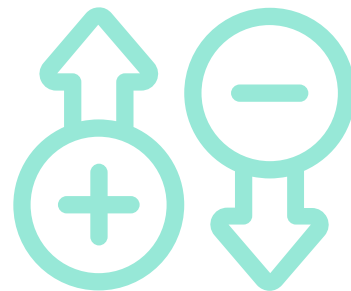
# 7 | CONCLUSIONS



At the beginning of the session, we asked teachers to estimate the percentage of the group that was confident discussing climate change. We then asked them to estimate confidence levels at the end of the session, to measure how much they had changed.



Confidence up 28.8% from the beginning of the session.



This amounted to 483 out of 648 students.

## What percentage of your class did you feel were confident discussing climate change at the end of the lesson?

Almost 75% of those who took part in the survey felt confident discussing climate change by the end of the session.

Between the beginning and end of the session, there was a significant shift in confidence levels, witnessed by the adults running the sessions.

74.6%  
YES

25.4%  
NO

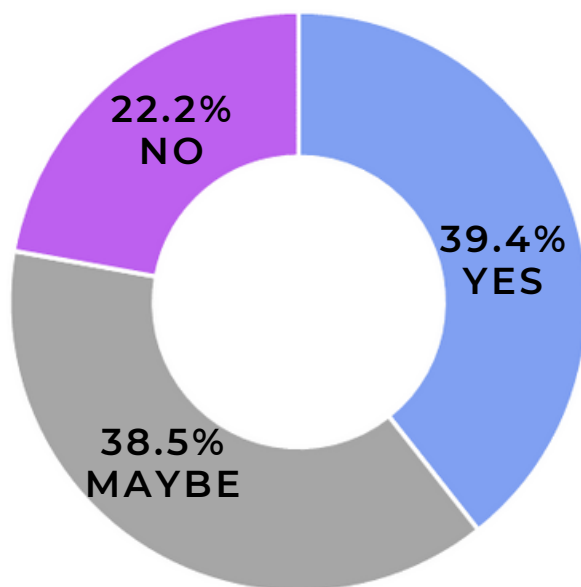
**TOTAL VOTES: 648\***

\*Disclaimer: This was included as an optional question. Adults running the session were asked to give an estimate and were not expected to record exact percentages.

Of the three main questions students answered in our survey, the final one asked them to consider Waltham Forest's main goal: can they achieve net zero by 2030?

They were given information which detailed what the problem was, how net zero would be achieved and what potential barriers they would face.

## Do you think Waltham Forest can become net zero by 2030?



'Yes' received the highest number of votes, however the 'Maybe/Not sure' vote followed closely behind. This could be because of the multitude of barriers that will affect its success.

**TOTAL VOTES: 785**

**YES**

**39.4%** voted 'Yes'.  
This amounted to **309** votes out of 785.

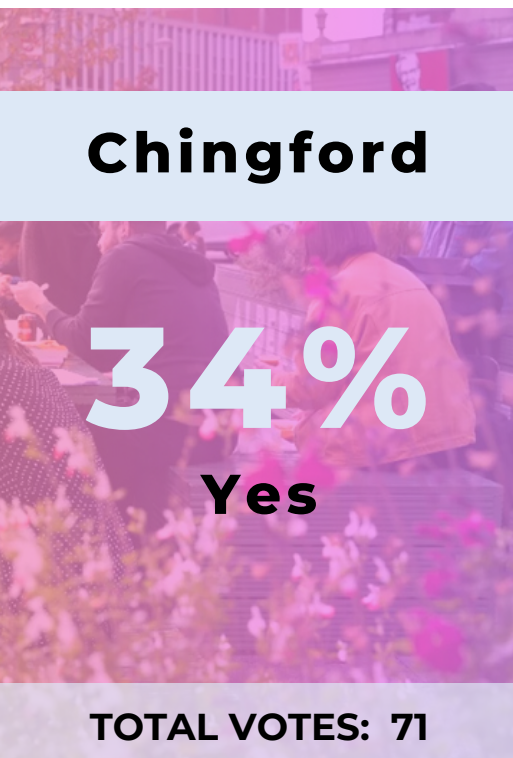
**MAYBE/  
NOT SURE**

**38.5%** voted 'Maybe/Not sure'.  
This amounted to **302** votes out of 785.

**NO**

**22.2%** voted 'No'.  
This amounted to **174** votes out of 785.

Leyton and Leytonstone were the most optimistic area, with almost 50% voting that Waltham Forest will reach net zero by 2030.



Whether they believe net zero can be reached or not, these sessions showed just how engaged young people are on the topic of climate change. The Big Climate Conversation aimed to inform young people and give them a platform to share their views. They have spoken and the results are clear: we need to take action.

Some final comments demonstrate how important this action is.

“

[...] if we don't stop climate change it will be the end of the world and then we won't be able to fix anything.

”

“

Climate change is the cause of problems like poverty.

”

# 8 | MAINTAINING THE MOMENTUM



In order to sustain this vital conversation in Waltham Forest, VotesforSchools would like to propose the following action points for consideration.

**1** | Highlight any actions or decisions prompted directly by the results of this report.

Keep young people talking through school visits, communications or online platforms.

**2** |

**3** | Continue to consult children and young people about prospective changes by holding votes, polls or further events such as youth town halls or conferences.

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with

 **VOTESFORSCHOOLS**