



Offshore Wind Farms

EAST ANGLIA ONE NORTH

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and

EAST ANGLIA TWO

PINS Ref: EN010078

**Oral Presentation to
ISH10 Health and Wellbeing
by Dr Jane McNeill
Deadline 8 – 25 March 2021**

by

SEAS (Suffolk Energy Action Solutions)

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Oral Presentation to ISH10 Health and Wellbeing by Dr Jane McNeill Deadline 8 – 25 March 2021

My name is Dr Jane McNeill – I am an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, AFBPsS, a fully accredited Psychologist with the HCPC (Health and Care Professions Council) and I specialise in Anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and other related disorders which sit under the umbrella of anxiety. I'm representing SEAS – Suffolk Energy Action Solutions. I'm here to speak about Anxiety and the potential impact of Scottish Power's East Anglia One North and East Anglia 2 Projects on the community. Mental Health is being taken seriously by HM Government. Up to one in four of us have problems with our mental health and the links between mental health and our surroundings are manifold. Numerous studies show that nature, open space, access to the outdoors and tranquillity all benefit our mental health. Planning Policy Guidance has this enshrined in their definition of a healthy place.

“A HEALTHY PLACE IS ONE WHICH SUPPORTS AND PROMOTES HEALTHY BEHAVIOURS AND ENVIRONMENTS, AND A REDUCTION IN HEALTH INEQUALITIES FOR PEOPLE OF ALL AGES. IT WILL PROVIDE THE COMMUNITY WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE THEIR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH, AND SUPPORT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND WELLBEING”.

SO WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Before I go into what Anxiety is, I think it's really important here that I say that anxiety isn't just about uncertainty – it can include feeling uncertain, but anxiety is primarily about feeling under threat (Craske and Barlow, 2008).

OK, so what is anxiety? Anxiety is a perfectly normal response to situations that make us feel under threat. Indeed, we've survived as a human race for millions of years precisely because we are hard-wired to avoid danger. You will remember fight flight and freeze from your school days – in fact there are two more which we don't need to go into depth about today but they are cling and submit.

Anxiety is a feeling that can range from unease – which is mild - to severe which we might call panic or panic disorder. When we're anxious we release adrenalin and cortisol – we



may notice changes in our breathing, we may notice we have pins and needles in our extremities, we may notice our heart is pounding, we may notice our thinking becomes feels foggy. We may feel tense, paralysed, angry, powerless, we may feel all of these.

This is entirely normal and it's our sympathetic nervous system gearing us up in order to respond to the threat either by fight, flight, freeze, cling or submit. The part of our brain which is active here is our amygdala which is right in the centre of our brain – and is where you will find the fear system. If this is severe, we may call it a panic attack.

Your anxiety response may look like a bell-curve where it peaks and then goes back down to your base-line. And then I might say – good – this shows your system is working well – however, it's the right response to the wrong situation – ie, you can respond when you're under threat, but we don't want people to be feeling under threat all the time because if they do, this is going to impact their mental health and well-being.

So, my job here is to look at what's causing the anxiety, what are the symptoms which are going to be physical as well as psychological – heart pounding, increased blood pressure, breathlessness, etc all of which are anxiety symptoms – and what going on in the brain – what are we thinking, what are we feeling, what are we experiencing physically, and what are we doing or not doing. We call this the vicious cycle – or the 3 P's: what's predisposing the individual to be anxious, what are the precipitating factors, ie what are they anxious about, and what are the perpetuating factors – what's keeping the anxiety going.

Here with the Projects, we have the proposition of a threat to individuals' lifestyle and wellbeing – environmental threat, air pollution, noise pollution, threat to livelihoods, natural habitats, loss of community and more.

When we are under threat, we feel anxious. Anxiety becomes a problem when it persists and begins to interfere with our quality of life and wellbeing. Anxiety prepares us to confront a crisis by putting us on alert.

We can treat anxiety – and my job as a psychologist is to work with individuals to start to break down the thoughts, feelings and behaviours using evidence-based psychological therapy. In the case of anxiety, the front-line treatment in the UK is Cognitive Behaviour Therapy as recommended by the NICE (National Institute for Health & Care Excellence) guidelines.

So here, we would be looking at the thoughts which are triggering the anxiety – what's the worst thing that could happen, how likely is it, how bad would it be – what can I do about it, what's helped me in the past – essentially problem-solving – we call it the “what if.... Then what... – breaking down thoughts, stepping back and thinking rationality about the



difference between possibility and probability. Is the threat internal or external? Here with the Projects the threat is external.

This community is under threat – so we can't treat the cause of the anxiety because currently it appears the threat is real. We cannot rationalise the threat away. We can't begin to break down the impact of the anxious thoughts on the physical symptoms of anxiety, the psychological symptoms and look at encouraging healthier behaviours, because with the proposed Projects, the behaviours we would be recommending are precisely the activities which are under threat:

for example: break down the negative automatic thoughts, tolerate uncertainty, spend time outdoors, do some exercise, take time to relax, join in with the community, do some volunteering, engage with nature, disengage from the worry, engage in pleasurable activities.

Untreated, anxiety can have a significant effect on individuals' wellbeing. Their mental health is affected, which and can also bring with it a host of other problems including other mental health disorders. These can and often include depression, sleep problems, relationship problems and other anxiety related disorders, alcohol and drug mis-use.

And it's not just mental health - evidence also demonstrates anxiety is implicated in a number of chronic health problems including gastro-intestinal disorders, chronic respiratory disorders and cardio-vascular disorders, (Harter et al, 2003). Medication to treat anxiety and mental health problems here can play a role, but it's not a long-term solution.

So what do we need for good mental health? What protective factors do we need in place to prevent poor mental health and what are the risk factors?

Protective factors which we know are beneficial for individuals' mental health that are relevant here (Kousoulis, 2019) are:

- Connecting with others
- Staying active both physically and mentally
- Making time for nature
- Making time to relax
- Being creative, for example painting, writing, photography and other pleasurable activities
- Being part of something bigger
- Using our senses
- Financial security
- Positive family functioning

Here, with the Projects, we have a threat to all of these protective factors. Risk factors for developing mental health problems which are particularly relevant here include

- severe or long-term stress
- social disadvantage
- social isolation
- unemployment or losing your job
- Housing problems

Friston and its surroundings demonstrates it has a strong sense of community. Research shows us these social networks have a beneficial impact on health and wellbeing, (Holt-Lunstad et al 2010). Social support has been shown to increase resilience and promote recovery from illness (Pevalin and Rose, 2003). And when there is a lack of social networks and support, when that sense of community breaks down, the effect of raised stress-hormones can lead to decreased immune function and effects on cardio-vascular health, (MacLeod, 2010).

The effect on the immediate locality is likely to have a significant impact on the natural environment. The noise pollution, increased traffic is likely to affect individuals' ability to engage with nature, to be creative, stay active and relax. The impact on jobs and tourism is likely to affect individuals' financial security and positive family functioning.

From reading the Open Floor Hearings in October and November 2020, it is clear that many individuals are already experiencing high levels of anxiety about the potential changes to their community.

I am not a planner, however, I understand that The National Planning Policy Framework sets out how planning decisions should "SUPPORT COMMUNITIES' HEALTH, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL WELL-BEING". This policy framework requires those making planning decisions to engage with local communities with their concerns over their health and wellbeing as a result of the disruption and nuisance the proposed works would cause. Paragraph 91C requires decisions to 'ENABLE AND SUPPORT HEALTHY LIFESTYLES, ESPECIALLY WHERE THIS WOULD ADDRESS IDENTIFIED LOCAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING NEEDS".

Open space, outdoor recreation and public rights of way are all considered of utmost importance in planning decisions. In particular, because these amenities provide such an imperative benefit to their users. Dozens of public rights of way will be impacted and the Planning Policy Guidance states that "PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY FORM AN IMPORTANT

COMPONENT OF SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT LINKS AND SHOULD BE PROTECTED OR ENHANCED”

The proposed Projects impact several parishes. I understand that Aldringham is preparing a Neighbourhood Plan and Leiston has successfully adopted a Neighbourhood Plan. This indicates the strength of local community involvement in the future shape of the area.

To summarise, the impact of a large construction project on a small rural population of approximately 5,000 people, and another 5,000 in the wider community is likely to have a significant effect on individuals’ mental health. This can in turn contribute to their physical ill health.

These proposals I understand will take more than 12 years of construction. This follows on from a number of years of current uncertainty, therefore in my professional opinion, there will be a significant impact on the communities’ mental health.

Again, Anxiety isn’t just about uncertainty – it can include feeling uncertain, primarily it’s about feeling under threat.

Thank you for listening.

Dr Jane D McNeill, March 2021.

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