

East Suffolk Communities Energy Partnership (ESCEP)

Deadline 4 Written Representation – HEALTH & WELLBEING

ESCEP is a partnership of over 30 East Suffolk parish and town councils lead by a Steering Group. ESCEP seeks to share knowledge and understanding to assist its members in preparing responses to NSIP applications. Individual members of ESCEP remain as IPs, where registered, but ESCEP also is an IP preparing WRs for the partnership.

Health & Wellbeing

Despite the questionable Needs Case for Sea Link, the headlong scramble to hit a completely arbitrary target date by which to decarbonise the grid seems inexplicably to have resulted in escalation of the project to National Priority status. The consequent critical urgency to rush the project through the DCO process – come what may and at any cost – means that the importance of reducing environmental and socioeconomic cumulative adverse impacts and securing the best mitigation and project design seems to have fallen by the wayside. This disregard cannot however be extended to how East Suffolk's overwhelming infrastructure burden is currently impacting the local community's Human Health and Public Safety because these impacts are protected by Planning Policy:

From revised NPS EN-1

4.1.7 Where this NPS or the relevant technology specific NPSs require an applicant to mitigate a particular impact as far as possible, but the Secretary of State considers that there would still be residual adverse effects after the implementation of such mitigation measures, the Secretary of State should weigh those residual effects against the benefits of the proposed development. For projects which qualify as CNP Infrastructure, it is likely that the need case will outweigh the residual effects not capable of being addressed by application of the mitigation hierarchy, in all but the most exceptional cases. **This presumption, however, does not apply to residual impacts which present an unacceptable risk to, or interference with, human health and public safety, defence, or irreplaceable habitats.** Further, the same exception applies to this presumption for residual impacts which present an unacceptable risk to, or unacceptable interference offshore to navigation, or onshore to flood and coastal erosion risk.

The following text has been adapted from comments delivered on behalf of ESCEP by Dr Charlotte Fox, MA (Oxon), MBBS, MRCP, FRCA, MA (KCL), during Part 4 of Day 2 of Issue Specific Hearing 2 when addressing the Human Impact of East Suffolk's infrastructure duress:

"We've talked a lot over the last couple of days about planning implications with regard to environmental and animal populations, but we're missing the elephant in the room here in relation to what is happening to the human population in East Suffolk.

Health and Wellbeing cannot be viewed exclusively through a planning lens or reduced to a simple discussion about working hours, noise and light pollution or traffic disruption. Indeed, Mental Health and Wellbeing is a highly complex issue that relates to where people sit on the Mental health continuum and it is well recognised that the overriding factor pushing people towards the "wrong" end of the Mental Health Continuum is stress. Worse than that, stress not only impacts people's mental health and wellbeing, but also impacts their physical health and ability to "thrive" as well and it is clearly evident that the stress being caused by concurrent development of so much major infrastructure in East Suffolk is already impacting both the physical and mental health of the local community.

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It is of course very difficult to quantify Health and Wellbeing, but that does not mean that it can be ignored. Since the Applicant has only carried out an extremely narrow assessment, a specialised mental health and wellbeing assessment that properly addresses what is happening to the local community in the face of such unprecedented cumulative impacts also needs to be urgently carried out.

The Applicant has consistently played down the predicted impacts of Sea Link on Health and Wellbeing and appears to be looking at all the impacts of the project in isolation rather than looking at them in the context of East Suffolk's extreme cumulative impacts. The Applicant has cited health and wellbeing document APP-058 as rebuttal of relevant representation challenges to that very same document – as if to say the Applicant is right now because it was right in the first place....

At what point does the human impact of East Suffolk's infrastructure burden progress to health issues that reduce life expectancy? Anecdotally, several local people have suffered strokes recently that might possibly be related to infrastructure strain and there have already been a couple of suicides that have been attributed in part to infrastructure imposition: how do we stop more events like this from happening?

Working hours, local disruption and noise and light pollution obviously need to be fully addressed, but the only thing that will really help reduce stress levels and protect people's mental and physical health is to address the cumulative impacts of the disproportionate and unreasonable infrastructure burden being faced by the local community at the moment. Infrastructure development should not be allowed to proceed at the expense of the health and wellbeing of the local community and if more and more major infrastructure continues to be imposed right next to the local population, we risk paying too high a human price tag.

Can the Applicant reassure us that it will address this important issue in the context of all the other NSIPs being proposed for development in this tiny area and acknowledge that more needs to be done to reduce the effects of adverse impacts on local people and that if a tolerable balance cannot be achieved, then a less harmful site for development of Sea Link will have to be identified?"

The extreme impacts of all the major infrastructure imposition on the local community's Health and Wellbeing in East Suffolk should not be – and indeed cannot afford to be – underestimated or ignored and ESCEP would like to see the situation properly and urgently addressed.