

“From Anxiety to Empowerment”

A Greenprint Forum on Eco Anxiety 24.02.25

East Suffolk House, Melton



This event was held by the Greenprint Forum to provide the space for and stimulate a conversation to explore the issues of anxiety about the multiple environmental crises facing our climate and ecological systems, its impacts, and to consider effective responses.

It was attended by 37 delegates including members of the public as well as representatives of voluntary groups, environmental organisations, businesses and statutory bodies.

The event was chaired by Jane Healey, Chair of the Greenprint Forum, who included the quote below in her opening:

“Climate is our future, but our future is looking untenable” – Year 8 student on the Youth Council of Kesgrave High School

Our expert speakers rose to this challenge, covering a range of approaches that they utilise to help others address their individual and collective concerns about the environmental crises, with a recurring theme on the importance of support systems and collective action. A summary of some key points from each follows.

Martin Wilks, Climate Psychology Alliance

A member of Climate Psychology Alliance, Martin has worked in the field of psychological health and wellbeing for 4 decades. He now works locally, in independent private practice as a chartered counselling psychologist specialising in mindfulness informed psychotherapy.

Climate anxiety is defined as a chronic fear of environmental doom. Martin highlighted how the language we use to describe climate change is evolving, with new terms needed to articulate the psychological impacts.



For example, the environmental crises facing the climate and ecosystems are an example of a hyper-object, multiple and interconnected complex crises which challenge perception and comprehension.

The emotional responses to the environmental crises can include helplessness, sadness and grief, and in the absence of appropriate support, can result in panic responses on one side of the window or tolerance, or disconnection and paralysis at the other.

Taking action and care for oneself is important as well as taking care for the environment. Self care can include taking space from or distancing oneself from the tsunami of bad news we can be exposed to.

Whilst individuals may need support to increase their resilience to “bear the unbearable”, interventions to reduce suffering need to be on a systemic level rather than an individual one. Decisive global action to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases is therefore the appropriate ‘treatment’ for climate-anxiety, rather than a pathological approach of medication or interventions to eradicate the discomfort.

Email: martin@martinwilks.com

Website: www.martinwilks.com

The slides from the presentation by Martin can be found here: [240225 Martin Wilks CPA](#)

In addition, the audio of the presentation by Martin was recorded, and the recording can be listened to here: [On Eco-anxiety - for the greenprint forum on Vimeo](#)

Robert & Sebastiana Black, Ecotherapy East CIC

Robert and Sebastiana are co-founders and directors of Ecotherapy East CIC, who steward Foxtail Meadow as a private nature reserve in Bramfield. They offer regular Community Days which focus on Wheel of the Year connection and Land-tending as well as ecotherapy workshops.

Ecotherapy is based on the principle that the human mind and body evolved through connection with nature.

They introduced us to the concept of the Internal Family Systems, intended to help us to:

- **Be aware of the internal, various emotions that come up depending on when who we are talking to or what we are thinking**
- **Understand their reactions**
- **Identify our various internal emotional parts and not try to eliminate or change these but to be there with those emotions:**
 - Fearful parts- failing to implement, not doing enough
 - Avoidant parts- want to escape from the complexity and complexity, resulting in procrastination or quick easy wins, to appease fearful part
 - Critical parts- might question if our contribution can make a difference
 - Heroic- Save the world
- **Build our innate self-compassion and resilience:**
 - Putting people in a 'good place' (notice what is happening, awareness)- curious, wise, compassionate, courageous
 - This internalised embodied state of calm, our true nature, our essence can hold and look after all parts (IFS calls this Self). We can help ourselves with our own experiences if we are in the right frame of mind.



They also informed us about the concept of ecotherapy, including the following:

-

Robert & Sebastiana also discussed:

- Healing in our home in our bodies
- Ecopsychology - a study of human relationship with the human psyche and nature.
- The Mind as an extension of the natural world.
- Nature as our teacher - when you are stressed and go for a walk in a beautiful place what does that feel like? (Calm clarity, grounded, being in your body)
- The Albert Einstein quote 'Look deeper into nature and you will understand everything better'. Nature is our guide!
- Connecting with our senses.
- Focusing on wonder, as an antidote to doom and gloom and climate distress.
- Finding places to sit in nature (deeply tune into natural experiences) and nature allies (trees and animals that can nourish and inspire us) to inspire and nurture

The also discussed the power of the community in our positive responses and actions:

- Taking advantage of the indigenous wisdom of land – holding festivals of land (e.g. at the spring equinox), meditation, workshops, creative writing, mindfulness in nature
- We don't just take from nature - but give back too: reverence, reciprocity, respect, repair
- On their land, Ecotherapy East have with their community of volunteers planted 700 trees, held scything workshops, created log piles, and planted meadow of wildflowers.
- Community building a strong and supportive place - not trying to get rid of concerns, but be aware of those concerns, be active, engage and make a difference

“Tending the earth, tending ourselves.”

Email: ecotherapyeast@gmail.com

Website: [Home - Ecotherapy East](#)

Ecotherapy East, CIC offers nature connection and mindfulness workshops and retreats in East Anglia. **They are holding their next Community days** at their nature reserve of Foxtail Meadow in Bramfield on **Saturday 22 March**, and **Saturday 3 May**. For more details, head to [Community Days - Ecotherapy East](#)



Paul Hodgkin, Hadleigh Environmental Action Team (HEAT) CIC

HEAT has a goal of helping individuals, families, farmers and business to take climate change and the destruction of habitats into account when making decisions, and shift the emphasis from mitigation to adaptation to the changes that are already occurring. Paul has been part of HEAT since it began in 2019 and for the last 18 months has been involved in their monthly climate café.

Paul brought some compost to open his talk with, to demonstrate that nature, like compost, is alive and uncontrolled and that we ultimately depend upon it, challenging the notion that the earth is out there for us to dominate. We need to be working on building relationships to form communities that are resilient enough to cope when the crises really hit hard – if left until then, it may be too late.

They started their Climate Café initiative as a place for people to raise their eco-anxieties. It's a difficult thing for people to talk about, and their learning is also that climate cafes can be a difficult thing to do in small communities where participants are likely to encounter one another on a regular basis outside of the climate café setting and there is too small a pool of potential participants for people to be likely to simply casually drop in or wander in off the street, and it can be hard to move away from relentless repetitions of the same conversations.

When it comes to what works, being active really helps, especially being active in nature, can be most productive, enjoyable, and helps to build a community, and makes people come forth and want to do things. And remember, work with what you have common, focus on similarity not differences. Identify things for the community to do that they can be proud of and be involved in the act of caring for.

Email: hadleigh.heat@hotmail.com

Website: [HEAT - Hadleigh Environmental Action Team](https://www.hadleigh.heat.org.uk/)



Talia Hardie, Students Organising for Sustainability

Talia Hardie is a Geography finalist at the University of Cambridge, passionate about sustainability and storytelling in the Anthropocene. They are a Climate Action Plan Coordinator at SOS-UK, supporting student-led climate strategies, and a Youth Shadow Panel member overseeing curriculum assessment to embed climate education in schools.

Talia challenged us all to think back to when we were most aspirational, which for many of us may have been when we were youthful, with heightened awareness but little agency.

They shared the youth perspective on climate anxiety, highlighting some key statistics including that:

- 60% of young people are worried or extremely worried about climate change
- 45% say it affects their daily lives
- 3/4 think the future is frightening (Lancet Planetary Health, 2021)

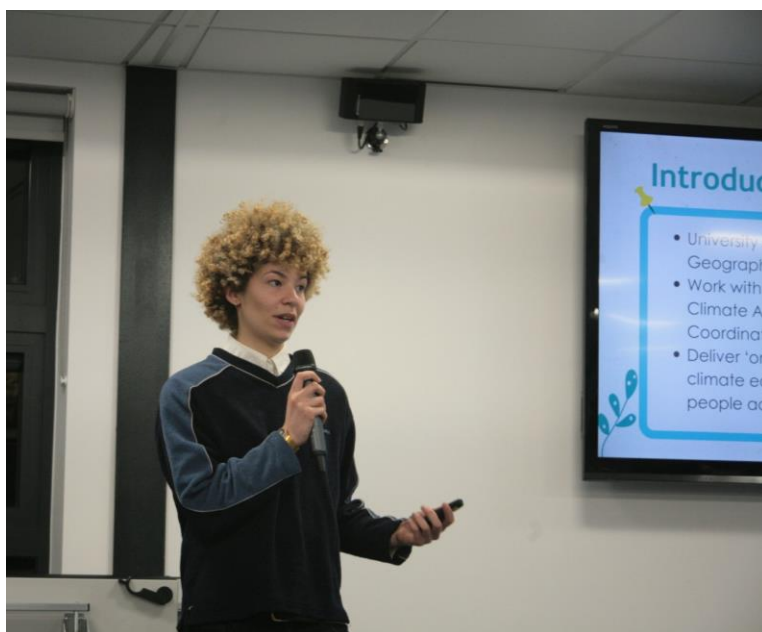
They cautioned us about learning about climate change on social media, with its risks of imbalance, exposure to intense and alarmist narratives.

They also talked about the concept of the Climate AnxieTree:

- Base: What makes young people anxious (Powerlessness)
- Leaves: What gives them hope (Workshops, having a voice)

And provided some key recommendations to help give young people a sense of validation and agency and harness the positive hope that young people do have:

- **Include climate education across subjects**
- **Involve young people in local policy and decision-making**
- **Create safe spaces for discussion and emotional processing and expression of frustration**
- **Don't protect us from the realities – include us in the conversations.**



The slides from the presentation by Talia can be found here: [240225 Talia Hardie SOSUK](#)

Email: taliamhardie@sos-uk.org

Website: [Students Organising for Sustainability UK | SOS-UK](#)

SOS-UK is a student-led education charity focusing on sustainability.

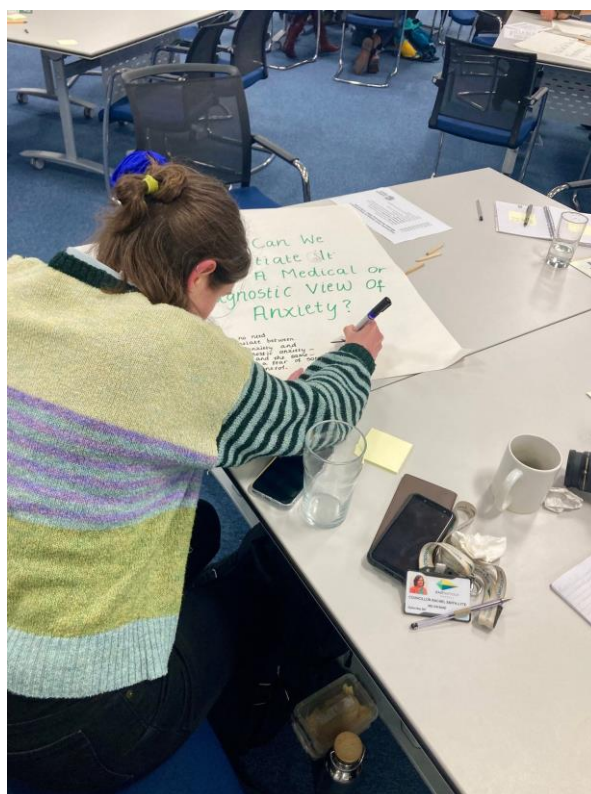


Workshops and feedback

Having had our thoughts stimulated by our speakers, the second half of the evening took the form of a workshop-type discussion bringing small groups of delegates together to generate responses to a set of questions developed in prior consultation with some of our speakers.

We invite any relevant stakeholders to refer to this anecdotal evidence to identify areas or ways in which they can enable or otherwise support action in response to the issues.

The feedback to each question is reproduced verbatim (where possible) below. A photographic record of all written notes submitted by attendees can be found at Appendix Two.



How would we define eco anxiety?

- Different lifestyles can trigger different forms of eco anxiety.
- Knowing you should take action, but not bothering thus driving you into a downward spiral
- Denial and coping mechanisms don't work (political hot air)

How would you measure and diagnose eco anxiety?

- Active hope passive to active without expectation
- Social prescribing
- Feeling a range of things both agree + disagree
- How do you feel about it? It's subjective
- Reactive? The old way of doing things?

How can we differentiate eco anxiety from a medical or diagnostic view of anxiety?

- Community, communication and debate are key to helping mitigate anxiety along with action (particularly community action – literally a problem shared is a problem halved)
- There is no need to differentiate between climate/eco anxiety and medical/diagnostic anxiety – they are all and the same – it stems from a fear of something you cannot control
- For young people in particular, I believe this stems from a lack of agency in regard to what is happening in the world
- Anxiety is the feeling of disempowerment lack of agency and feelings of threat.
- Make a change in a metre!



How can we view the phenomena from a systems point of view?

- Reset needed? But at what cost?
- Baby steps towards positive actions
- Something to focus on – something to focus on energy
- Community energy connection
- Use positive narratives
- Natural disasters
- Energy systems
- Positive action allotments, repair cafes
- Local systems networks GET LOCAL
- Understanding different perspectives engage with them
- Food systems
- Tools
- Using different triggers nature / or medical approach
- How being different sides together?

How do we recognise it in ourselves and others?

- Overwhelmed helplessness
- Inertia apathy
- Isolation

What are our own experiences of feeling anxiety in this context?

- Delay over denial censorship of information based
- Little things that changed over 10+ years e.g. flies on windscreen
- Thinking 40 years ahead, things are going to get very difficult in material terms will this result in a break down in society?
- How do we respond to a changing world/create greater resilience.
- Shortage of food supplies/clean water.
- Dictatorship resources wars
- Will mental health improve when we are aware of engaged in the crisis (Of Northern Ireland during the troubles)
- Climate anxiety triggered by other anxieties.
- Second world war – consumption + rationing -> social cohesion and NHS
- Extremes of weather flooding strong winds drought heavy rainfall sandstorms
- Is one person powerless? How do we join groups? We can cope better by connecting with other people.
- Cuban missile crisis. WWII – we are not the first generation to suffer from anxiety
- Too worried to watch the news. Worried about grandchildren, future generations
- COVID 19 food shortages feeling we weren't self sufficient enough
- If someone does not carry on the enthusiasm community togetherness shown in could what will happen?
- Too much information out there! How do we recognise misinformation? Who is correct?
- Where do I get the correct information from? Who do I reach out to?
- Social media mislead
- General despair at the actions of politicians. Climate anxiety + mental health and very complex issues.
- Why aren't all public buildings in Suffolk fitted with climate change facilities in mind?
- It is difficult to see the wider impact even though small actions can make a difference.
- Shifting baseline for what is 'Normal'

How do we see it impacting our individual and collective wellbeing and ability to take effective action in response to the environmental multiple emergencies?

- Improved welfare with any level of action
- Looking up at the universe can be comforting
- Anxiety + processing connection between the 2
- Legacy fatigue paralysis
- We are all spiritual in some way
- Role of community? Accessibility VS inspirational?
- Tipping points <50% islands of cohesion

- Nature pyramids hours overtime outside.
- Transitional /cross – over activities?
- Can we reframe this?
- Eco – anxiety can be a positive driver. Can you be a functional eco anxiety?
- Need spaces to feel grief and express it.
- Acknowledge + feel suffering, sacrifice as a practice.
- Honour + celebration of nature
- A willingness to explore new social environments Leaving one's own comfort zone 'cross pollination'
- Ritual ceremony & Celebration we all do it differently
- Voicing lamentation grief loss, in all areas in own life not just climate collapse

What are the potential interventions and how inclusive are they?

- Taking action!
- Community schemes
- Events like this
- Interaction with others that ripple out
- What are the real costs?
- Food
- Housing



Where do we get information about interventions from, and how do we discern good advice from bad?

- Media –
- Social media – Podcasts – Books – Radio – TV – Newspapers – Workplace – Relatives – Friends – Local groups –
- Charities; Green peace, Friends of the earth
- Some selected Scientists
- Who can we trust? And how do we trust
- Local action groups
- Networking
- Podcasts, Need Discernment consider motives of sources
- Newspapers + Journals
- “Inkcap Journal”

Some various links to connecting projects and further information

- **Active Hope** [Active Hope](#) offers tools that help us face the mess we're in, as well as find and play our role in the collective transition towards a society and way of being that support the flourishing of life.
- **Climate Café Network Hub** [Climate Café® – Welcome to the Climate Café® Hub](#) find out about Climate Café, connect with others, find out how they work, as well as find support and guidance to start your own
- **Climate Museum UK** [Climate Museum UK – Helping people make sense of the Earth crisis](#) a group of artists, designers and educators who help people make sense of environmental issues through creative conversations
- **Culture Declares Emergency – East of England** [CDE East of England – Culture Declares Emergency](#) welcomes cultural practitioners, artists, producers, creatives, heritage workers and activists to talk about why it's time to declare a climate and ecological emergency, grow a local network and meet like-minded individuals and organisations who actively care about the planet.
- **East Suffolk Youth Council** [East Suffolk Youth Council](#) The Youth Council works closely with the district council to ensure young peoples' voices are heard loud and clear in council decisions.
- **Furtherfield** [Furtherfield](#) organise for inclusivity and equity in art and technology and advocate for their use in imagining and building real eco-social change and positive environmental impact.
- **Greenways Countryside Project** [Greenways Countryside Project – Ipswich Wildlife Group](#) exists to protect and enhance the countryside, landscape and open space across an area of about 100 square kilometres in and around the town of Ipswich, and home to around one quarter of the population of Suffolk, for the benefit of wildlife and local people. The project relies on volunteers to complete much of its practical conservation work.
- **Ipswich Climate Café** [CHIpswich Climate café | Facebook](#) a place for people to come together within the local community who share a concern about human-induced climate change and hope for a better future for our planet.
- **Marine Conservation Society** [Marine Conservation Society | UK Ocean Protection Charity | Healthy Seas](#) Charity fighting for a cleaner, better protected, healthier ocean: one we can all enjoy. They support regular Beach Cleans along the coastline of Britain.
- **National Energy Action** [National Energy Action \(NEA\) - the UK's leading fuel poverty charity](#) a national charity offering advice and support to fuel-poor households in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as advocating for policy and regulation to protect the most vulnerable households.

- **Norfolk & Waveney Mind sUstain** [Norfolk and Waveney Mind - sUstain Project](#) a pioneering climate anxiety project, which provides support for adults and young people, in partnership with UEA, the Climate Psychology Alliance (CPA) and other partners.
- **Norfolk Green Care Network** [Norfolk Green Care Network – Connecting People with Nature](#) aims to support its members and others to connect with each other so as to add value to their activities and interests focused on enabling people to connect with the natural world and to promote the development of ‘green care’ activities in Norfolk and its surrounding areas.
- **Suffolk Association of Local Councils Climate Forum** [Climate Forum | SALC Website](#) a network of councillors and clerks with a common interest in environmental and climate matters. The purpose of the group is to provide support that offers opportunities to learn from others as well as creating an avenue to feed into county-wide plans.
- **Suffolk Mind** [What is climate anxiety and what can I do? - Suffolk Mind](#) provides support services.
- **Suffolk Wildlife Trust** [Nature Engagement & Connection | Suffolk Wildlife Trust](#) manage over 2,900 ha of land on 50 nature reserves across the county of Suffolk and inspire people and communities across Suffolk to connect with nature and to take positive actions for wildlife.
- **The Conservation Volunteers** [TCV | The Conservation Volunteers](#) Connecting people across the UK connecting to the nature on their doorsteps and providing opportunities for them to contribute to its protection.
- **Use Your Voice** [UseYourVoice – Climate awareness](#) a diverse group of people united by a commitment to take positive action for change and to use their voice to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities that climate change is bringing to the town of Lowestoft.
- **Warm Homes Suffolk** [Warm Homes Suffolk](#) This initiative has been set up by councils in Suffolk to help households **reduce** their fuel bills, **reduce** their carbon footprint and tackle cold, damp and mould in their homes that could be making them unwell.
- **Wilderness Foundation** [Wilderness Foundation | Transforming lives through nature](#) Through the Wilderness Foundation education and therapy programmes they help children, teens and adults reconnect to society and themselves through outdoor facilitation adventures, nature based therapy and mentoring.
- **Wise Ram Theatre** [Home | Wise Ram Theatre](#) Making theatre that explores the climate crisis with humour, heart and nerve.

- **Woodworks Art Café** [Facebook - Woodworks Arts Cafe](#) a local charity who use art to improve local mental health. They're a 'social prescribing art and crafts café'. Based in Lowestoft, they run specialist events for disabled and neurodivergent people, but they also run craft workshops for the wider public.
- **You Are Not Alone** [YANA: You Are Not Alone – Rural Mental Health Support](#) help for those involved in agriculture and other rural businesses affected by stress and depression



Acknowledgements

We wish to thank sincerely all of our speakers for freely giving their time and imparting their knowledge.

And of course we wish to thank all who attended for contributing their questions and answers, participating in the workshop sessions and engaging in the various conversations taking place. It was encouraging to hear of the depth and breadth of action already taking place in the various communities represented by attendees and we look forward to ongoing opportunities to engage and share learning through our wider network.

Also thanks to Jamie Bretton and Jessica Sayer, currently serving apprenticeships with East Suffolk Council, for their help writing this report.

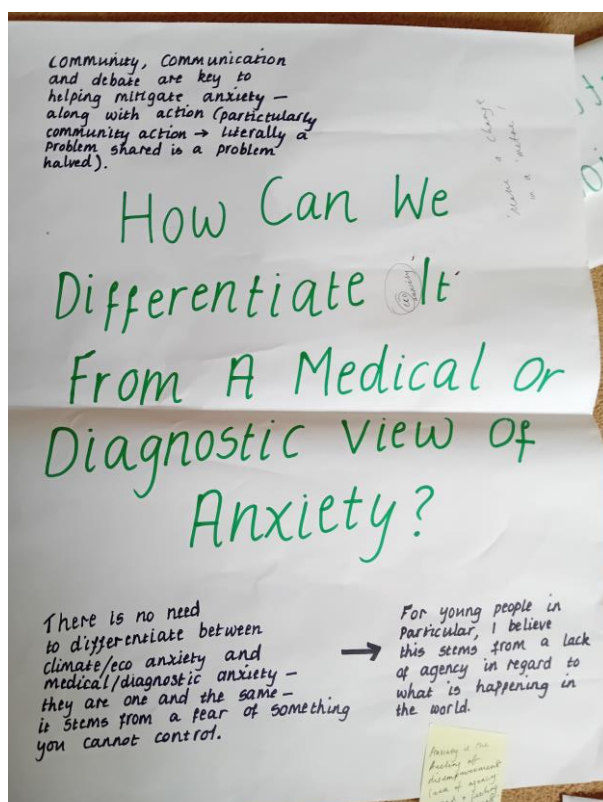
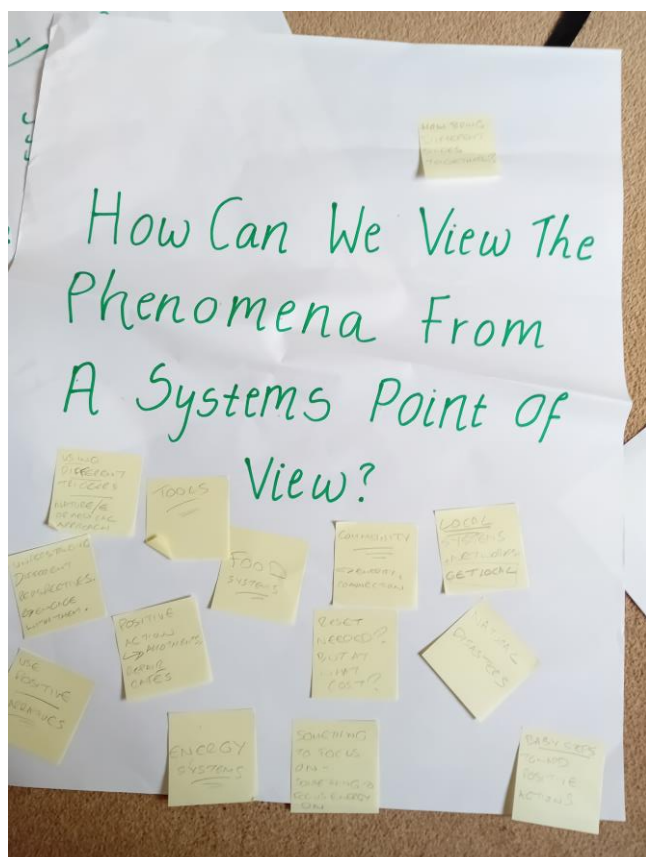
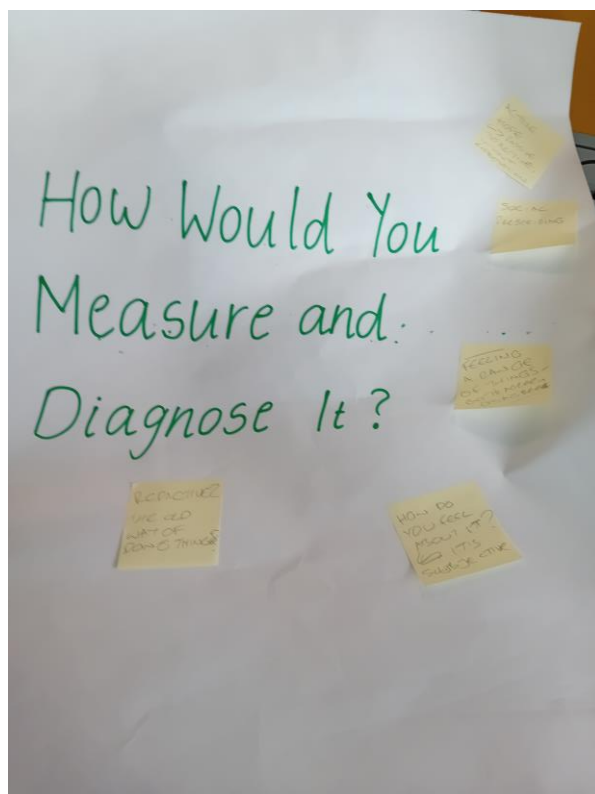
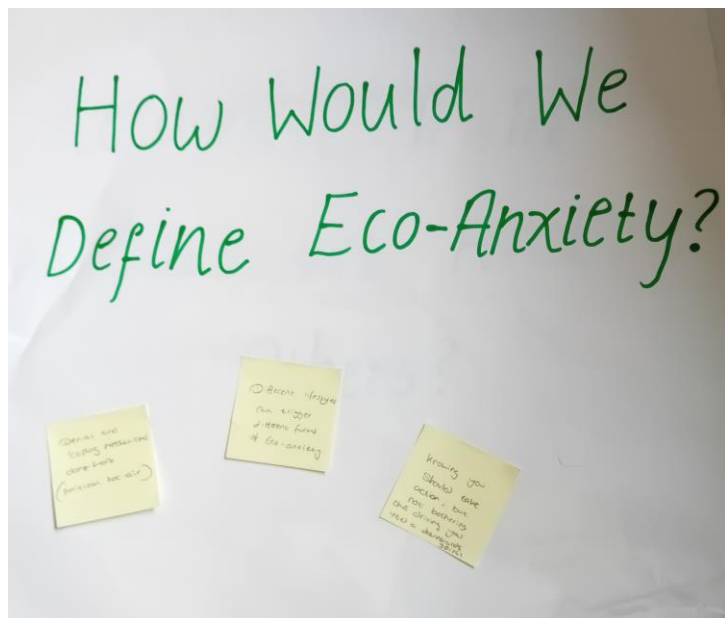
Appendix one – organisations with representatives in attendance

- Benhall & Sternfield Parish Council [Benhall & Sternfield Parish Council » The parishes of Benhall & Sternfield](#)
- Climate Psychology Alliance [Climate Psychology Alliance](#)
- Deben Climate Centre [Home | Deben Climate Centre](#)
- East Suffolk Council – elected members in attendance were **Cllr John Fisher** (Saxmundham), **Cllr Louise Gooch** (Kirkley & Pakefield), **Cllr Rachel Smith Lyte** (Melton) and **Cllr Sally Noble** [Home » East Suffolk Council](#)
- Ecotherapy East CIC [Home - Ecotherapy East](#)
- Greener Peasenhall [A Greener Peasenhall & Sibton – action for a better environment locally](#)
- Greener Waldringfield [Greener Waldringfield](#)
- Greenprint Forum Steering Group (present were **Betsy Reid**, **Daniel Wareing**, **Jane Healey**, **Laurence Moss**, **Paul Mackie** and **Rachel Smith Lyte**. Andy Jolliffe, Anne Westover, Chris Ryde, and Sam Kenward sent their apologies) [Greenprint Steering Group](#)
- Hadleigh Environmental Action Team [HEAT - Hadleigh Environmental Action Team](#)
- In Place of War – Climate Whispers Project
- Martlesham Parish Council [Martlesham Parish Council](#)
- National Energy Action [National Energy Action \(NEA\) - the UK's leading fuel poverty charity](#)
- Peasenhall Parish Council [Parish Council » Peasenhall](#)
- Saxmundham Against Needless Destruction [S.A.N.D](#)
- SEAS – Suffolk Energy Action Solutions [Suffolk Energy Action Solutions - Campaign against National Grid's Energy Hub on the Friston and Suffolk Coast](#)
- Students Organising for Sustainability [Students Organising for Sustainability UK | SOS-UK](#)
- Suffolk Climate Change Partnership [About - Green Suffolk](#)
- Transition Woodbridge [Transition Woodbridge – Part of the Transition Towns Network](#)
- Use Your Voice [UseYourVoice – Climate awareness](#)
- Waveney Ramblers [Waveney Ramblers](#)
- Wild About Campsea [Wild About Campsea » Campsea Ashe](#)



Appendix two – notes from workshops

This is a photographic record of contemporaneous notes submitted by attendees during the workshop discussions.



How Do We Recognise It In Ourselves And Others?

What Are Our Own Experiences Of Feeling Anxious In This Context?

How Do We See It Impacting Our Individual And Collective Wellbeing And Ability To Take Effective Action In Response To The Environmental Multiple Emergencies?

Where Do We Get Information About Interventions From, And How Do We Discern Good Advice From Bad?

What Are The Potential Interventions And How Inclusive Are They?