# Mental Health Report

**Contributed by Cllr Amelia Bailey (RNMH, BSc Healthcare, NKDC District Councillor)**

# Introduction

Mental health issues in the UK are rising sharply across all age groups, placing significant pressure on individuals, public services, and the NHS. In 2023 alone, 5 million mental health referrals were made, a 33% increase since 2019, with mental health-related spending set at £16.8 billion for 2023/24. Scientific evidence consistently shows that access to natural environments improves emotional, cognitive, and physiological wellbeing. However, the loss of green spaces due to industrial-scale developments like NSIP solar farms raises serious concerns about future impacts on community mental health. Studies highlight that landscape disruption, construction stress, environmental degradation, and weakened social cohesion can all contribute to increased psychological distress. It is essential that future projects protect natural environments, engage meaningfully with communities, and integrate mental health impact assessments into planning processes to safeguard public wellbeing.

# Summary Report: Mental Health Concerns

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### Mental Health in the UK – Current Landscape

- Mental health issues are a **major and growing concern** across all demographics in the UK, heavily impacting societal wellbeing, the NHS, and public services.
- **Key statistics:**
  - **20%** of children aged 8–16 and **23%** of those aged 17–19 had probable mental disorders in 2023.
  - **1.76 million** people were referred to talking therapies in 2022/23.
  - **3.58 million** people were in contact with mental health services in 2022/23.
  - In **Hull**, **10.8%** of adults were accessing mental health services.
  - **5 million** referrals were made in 2023, a **33% increase** since 2019.
  - NHS planned spending on mental health services for 2023/24: **£16.8 billion**, up from **£12.0 billion** in 2017/18.

### The Importance of Natural Environments

- Exposure to **green spaces and natural views** significantly enhances bio-psycho-social wellbeing.

- Scientific evidence strongly supports that **visual contact with nature** (real or through images) reduces stress, enhances positive emotions, and restores cognitive functioning.
- **Studies referenced:**
    - **Viewing Nature Indoors**: Leads to physiological relaxation and reduced stress (Jo, Song & Miyazaki).
    - **Biophilia Hypothesis**: Lack of nature (discords) harms health; adding natural elements helps (Grinde & Patil).
    - **Stress Recovery in Natural Settings**: Nature exposure aids emotional recovery and attention restoration (Berto).
    - **Randomised Exposure Study (Catalonia)**: Green and blue spaces significantly reduced stress and mood disturbances compared to urban environments (Triguero-Mas et al.).

## Concerns Over NSIP Solar Farms

- Large-scale solar farms pose a potential **threat to mental health** through:
    - **Loss of Greenspaces**: Reduces access to restorative natural environments.
    - **Landscape Industrialization**: Damages residents' sense of place, causing anxiety and distress.
    - **Construction Disruptions**: Noise, dust, and traffic can increase community stress.
    - **Environmental Degradation**: Violations (e.g., stormwater mismanagement) erode trust and raise anxiety.
    - **Community Tensions**: Lack of proper consultation can create social friction and collective stress.
- Although **direct studies** linking solar farms to mental health outcomes are limited, evidence from environmental psychology and community case studies **strongly suggests potential negative impacts**.

## Wider Context: Industrialization and Mental Health

- Industrialization of rural areas leads to:
    - **Disrupted social structures** and **community isolation**.
    - **Economic stressors** from shifts away from traditional agriculture.
    - **Environmental harm**, increasing stress and anxiety.
    - **Health risks** linked to pollution and changing working conditions.
- Long-term psychological impacts from industrial changes have been observed historically and continue today.

## Recommendations

- **Protect and integrate natural environments** within development projects.
- **Incorporate biophilic design** principles in infrastructure.
- **Strengthen community engagement** processes.
- **Conduct comprehensive mental health impact assessments** for large projects like solar farms.
- **Promote preventive strategies** via nature-based interventions.