

Limedown Objection

Hello, my name is Steffi Dampney, I am a chartered Sport Psychologist and I live at Farleaze.

The benefits of fresh air and appreciating your surroundings have been widely publicised since the inception of psychology. However, recently the need to help our nervous systems reset in an increasingly busy and technology driven world have become more and more important. When working with my performance psychology clients, we often focus on their environment and the impact this has on their mental well-being. The UK Sports Institute, who are responsible for the majority of our Olympic and Paralympic athletes, place well-being at the very core of high-performance. If it is important for these athletes, we can readily assume that it is vital for all performance.

We are now more contactable than ever, and the need to 'switch-off' is a vital skill to prevent burnout, anxiety, stress, and in more extreme cases depression. One of the most common exercises I use with clients is the Notice 5 Things exercise. This is a mindfulness exercise with the aim of reducing stress and anxiety by encouraging your senses to focus on the present. This practice calms your nervous system by anchoring your attention to your immediate surroundings. Whilst this exercise can be undertaken in any situation, it is best performed surrounded by nature, where there are fewer visual and audible distractions. Access to uninterrupted natural scenery facilitates the 'Attention Restoration Theory' (ART), and exposure to industrial-scale solar arrays in previously pristine areas increases cognitive load and cortisol levels, directly impairing executive function and emotional resilience.

This is known as the Neurobiology of the Countryside. The preservation of our countryside is not merely an aesthetic preference; it is a physiological and psychological necessity. For residents and visitors, rural landscapes act as a primary tool for the regulation of the Autonomic Nervous System. Industrialising 2,000 acres of open land replaces "soft fascination" environments—which allow the prefrontal cortex to rest—with the "hard fascination" of industrial infrastructure, known to exacerbate nervous system dysregulation.

This dysregulation is a state of imbalance where the body's stress-response system (sympathetic and parasympathetic) fails to return to calm, leaving it stuck in "fight-or-flight" or "shut down" modes, even without immediate danger. It is essentially chronic, long-term stress dysfunction, leading to physical pain, fatigue, intense anxiety, sleep disruption, and emotional instability.

Natural landscapes are also critical for the stabilisation of the circadian rhythm, our internal biological clock. This regulates sleep-wake cycles, hormone release, digestion and body temperature. The transition from natural greenery to a sea of glass and steel creates significant "albedo" shifts and alters the local microclimate. From a performance psychology perspective, the psychological "anchor" of rural scenery is a potent de-stressor. Losing this visual access triggers the aforementioned chronic low-level sympathetic "fight or flight" response, which is clinically proven to inhibit the production of melatonin, leading to fragmented sleep and diminished systemic well-being.

To replace 2,000 acres of therapeutic landscape with industrial utility is to remove a vital public health asset. The nervous system requires the expansive, organic geometry of the countryside to recover from the hyper-stimulation of modern life. Protecting this landscape is an essential intervention for community mental health, sleep hygiene, and the long-term psychological performance of the local population.

References

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Neurobiology of the countryside

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- Government initiative: Environmental Improvement Plan 2025
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environmental-improvement-plan-2025/environmental-improvement-plan-eip-2025>
 - Quote: "Together, we will create a future where nature flourishes, communities thrive, and our children inherit not the environmental challenges we faced, but the solutions we delivered." The Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs"
- <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2026/01/27/why-nature-close-to-home-matters-evidence-from-the-people-and-nature-survey/>
 - Quote: "EIP's commitment that everyone should live within a 15-minute walk of green or blue space. The "15-minute to nature" goal recognises that access to nature is not a luxury - it is essential public infrastructure, every bit as important as transport, housing or schools.