

EAST PYE SOLAR (EN0110014)

Written Representation and Supporting Evidence

Mental Health, Wellbeing, Green Space and Environmental Change Planning Inspectorate Examination

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WRITTEN REPRESENTATION

I wish to provide further evidence concerning the potential implications of the proposed East Pye solar development for the mental health and wellbeing of people living in the affected communities, including children and young people.

I recognise that planning decisions should be based on evidence and that it would not be appropriate to claim that a particular development will inevitably cause mental illness. My concern is more specific: there is increasing recognition within UK public health policy that the environments in which people live, their access to nature and green space, their communities and their sense of connection to familiar places can all contribute to mental health and wellbeing.

This is particularly relevant where a development would result in a substantial and long-term transformation of a rural landscape which is currently experienced as open countryside, agricultural land and a familiar natural environment by local residents.

1. Green space, nature and children's mental health

The Department of Health and Social Care's 2024 framework, Improving the mental health of babies, children and young people, identifies access to quality green and blue space and engagement with nature as factors relevant to the mental health of children and young people.

The accompanying literature review states that evidence suggests a beneficial association between exposure to green space, engagement with nature and aspects of mental health. It also identifies evidence of benefits associated with green space exposure for children's emotional and behavioural difficulties, including hyperactivity and inattention.

This is important because children do not experience the environment merely as an abstract planning designation.

Familiar fields, trees, paths, wildlife and open spaces can form part of their everyday experience, opportunities for outdoor activity, exploration and connection with nature.

The Government framework specifically identifies accessible green and blue spaces as an approach which can support mental health promotion and prevention across childhood and adolescence.

I therefore ask that the effects of the proposed development on children's opportunities to experience and engage with the existing natural environment are considered as part of the wider health and wellbeing implications of the proposal.

2. Green space as a wider determinant of health

Public Health England's Health Profile for England 2018, Chapter 6, identifies the quality of the built and natural environment as a wider determinant of health.

The report states that there is evidence that access to green spaces has a beneficial effect on physical and mental wellbeing through both physical access and use.

This is relevant to the East Pye proposal because the issue is not simply whether alternative recreational spaces might technically be available elsewhere. The quality, accessibility, character and familiarity of the environment also matter.

A large-scale development can therefore change not only land use but the environment through which people walk, exercise, observe wildlife, experience tranquillity and maintain a sense of connection with the countryside around their homes.

3. Environmental change, sense of place and psychological wellbeing

There is also a growing recognition that significant changes to a person's familiar environment can have psychological consequences.

The UK Health Security Agency's 2025 Climate change and mental health guidance discusses the concept of solastalgia — psychological or emotional distress associated with negative changes to a familiar environment or sense of place.

The UKHSA describes factors contributing to solastalgia as including changes to the physical environment, loss of familiar places, loss of routines and breakdown in community connections.

I am not suggesting that the proposed East Pye development is equivalent to climate-related disaster or that local residents will necessarily experience a clinical mental health condition as a result of the proposal.

Rather, the evidence demonstrates that the relationship between people and their familiar environment can be relevant to psychological wellbeing. It is therefore reasonable to consider whether a very large and permanent transformation of a familiar rural landscape could have consequences for people's wellbeing, particularly for residents who regularly use, view or feel connected to the affected countryside.

This is especially relevant where people feel that they have little control over significant changes to their local environment.

4. Importance of considering children and young people

The potential implications for children and young people deserve particular attention.

Children develop within their local environments and their mental health is influenced by factors operating at home, in school, within their communities and in the wider environment.

The Department of Health and Social Care's 2024 framework explicitly identifies the quality of the built environment, access to quality green and blue space, engagement with nature and community factors among the wider influences on children's mental health.

A large infrastructure project may therefore have effects which are not captured simply by considering traffic, noise, landscape character or visual impact in isolation.

The cumulative experience of environmental change, construction, altered views, changed recreational opportunities, loss of familiar places and changes to the character of the surrounding countryside should also be considered from a human health and wellbeing perspective.

5. Loss of agency and community wellbeing

There is also a wider issue concerning people's sense of agency.

Where residents feel that a major change to their environment is being imposed upon them, despite strong local opposition or concern, this can contribute to feelings of powerlessness, uncertainty and distress.

I am not suggesting that opposition to a planning application constitutes a mental health condition. However, the psychological importance of having a meaningful relationship with one's home environment and community is relevant when considering the human consequences of major environmental change.

The planning process itself can also be stressful for communities when proposals are very large, complex and long-running.

I therefore respectfully ask the Examining Authority to consider the human health and wellbeing implications of this proposal in the round, rather than treating mental health as relevant only where there is evidence of a diagnosed psychiatric condition.

Conclusion

The evidence attached to this representation does not establish that the East Pye solar development would inevitably cause mental illness. Nor do I make that claim.

It does, however, demonstrate that:

- * access to quality green and blue space and engagement with nature are recognised by Government as relevant to children's and young people's mental health;

- * access to green space is recognised as having beneficial associations with physical and mental wellbeing;

- * the natural and built environment is recognised as a wider determinant of health;

- * significant changes to familiar environments and a person's sense of place can be associated with psychological distress;

- * children and young people can be particularly important when considering environmental influences on mental health and wellbeing.

In view of the scale and permanence of the proposed East Pye development, I respectfully ask that these considerations are taken into account when assessing its overall effects on the health and wellbeing of the affected communities.

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APPENDIX 1

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH, GREEN SPACE AND ENGAGEMENT WITH NATURE

Government evidence

Department of Health and Social Care (2024)

Improving the mental health of babies, children and young people: a framework of modifiable factors

Published: 8 January 2024.

The Government's framework considers factors that can influence the mental health of babies, children and young people from birth to young adulthood.

Under the wider environment and society level, it specifically identifies:

- * access to quality green and blue space;

- * engagement with nature;

- * quality of the built environment;

- * community networks and engagement;

- * accessible green and blue spaces.

The framework states that the early part of the life course provides important opportunities for promoting and protecting mental health.

Supporting literature review

The accompanying Government literature review states that evidence suggests a beneficial association between exposure to green space, engagement with nature and aspects of mental health.

It also reports evidence suggesting that green space exposure may be associated with improvements in children's emotional and behavioural difficulties, particularly hyperactivity and inattention.

The review also identifies outdoor learning and engagement with nature as potentially beneficial for children's enjoyment, social skills, self-regulated behaviour, wellbeing and confidence.

Relevance to East Pye

The proposed development would change a large area of existing agricultural countryside.

The relevant question is therefore not simply whether children would still have access to some green space somewhere in the wider area.

The Government evidence supports consideration of the quality and accessibility of green space and children's actual engagement with nature.

The existing landscape may provide opportunities for walking, observing wildlife, experiencing seasonal change, outdoor exploration and developing a relationship with the natural environment.

The potential loss or substantial alteration of these experiences should therefore be considered when assessing the wider health and wellbeing effects of the proposal.

Official source

Department of Health and Social Care:

Improving the mental health of babies, children and young people

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-mental-health-of-babies-children-and-young-people>

Literature review:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-mental-health-of-babies-children-and-young-people/improving-the-mental-health-of-babies-children-and-young-people-methodology-literature-review-and-stakeholder-feedback-that-informed-the-framework>

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APPENDIX 2

GREEN SPACE AND THE WIDER DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Public Health England evidence

Public Health England (2018)

Health Profile for England: Chapter 6 – Wider determinants of health

Published: 11 September 2018.

Public Health England explains that health is influenced by much more than healthcare and individual behaviour.

The wider determinants of health include social, economic and environmental factors which influence people's physical and mental health.

The report specifically identifies the quality of the built and natural environment as relevant to health.

It states:

"There is evidence to suggest that access to green spaces has a beneficial effect on physical and mental wellbeing through both physical access and use."

The report also recognises natural and sustainable environments as determinants of health.

Relevance to East Pye

This evidence is relevant because the proposed development would fundamentally change the character and use of a substantial area of existing countryside.

The existing environment can provide:

- * opportunities for walking and exercise;
- * contact with nature;
- * views and open horizons;
- * opportunities to experience seasonal change;
- * opportunities for quiet and tranquillity;
- * contact with wildlife;
- * a familiar landscape around people's homes;
- * a sense of place and connection to the local community.

The health significance of such environments should not be reduced to whether there is technically another public open space available elsewhere.

Quality, accessibility, character and actual use of green space are relevant considerations.

The potential effects of a large-scale change in the natural environment should therefore be considered alongside the other environmental and social impacts of the proposed development.

Official source

Public Health England:

Health Profile for England 2018 – Chapter 6: Wider determinants of health

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-profile-for-england-2018/chapter-6-wider-determinants-of-health>

Main Health Profile for England collection:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-profile-for-england-2018>

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APPENDIX 3

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE, SENSE OF PLACE AND MENTAL HEALTH

UK Health Security Agency evidence

UK Health Security Agency (2025)

Climate change and mental health

Published: 12 November 2025.

The UK Health Security Agency has undertaken a major assessment of the evidence concerning climate change and mental health.

The report recognises that environmental change can have psychological consequences and discusses the concept of solastalgia.

UKHSA guidance describes solastalgia as distress associated with negative changes to a familiar environment or sense of place.

It identifies factors which can contribute to solastalgia, including:

- * changes to the physical environment;
- * altered landscapes or homes;
- * loss of routines or familiar places;
- * breakdown in community connections.

The guidance also recognises that rural and farming communities can be among groups at greater risk in relation to environmental disruption and loss of social cohesion.

Relevance to East Pye

It is important to distinguish this evidence from a claim that a solar development would cause the same psychological effects as flooding, wildfire or another climate-related disaster.

That is not the claim being made here.

The relevance is that Government health guidance recognises a broader principle: changes to familiar environments and a person's sense of place can have psychological and emotional significance.

The proposed East Pye development represents a very substantial and long-term alteration to an existing rural landscape.

For people who live close to the site, regularly walk through the area, see the landscape from their homes or have an established relationship with the countryside, this change may represent more than a change in land use.

It may alter:

- * familiar views;
- * walking routes and experiences;
- * the perceived openness of the countryside;
- * the character of the landscape;
- * experiences of nature and wildlife;
- * tranquillity;
- * a sense of familiarity and belonging;
- * people's relationship with their local environment.

These factors are relevant to a wider understanding of community wellbeing.

Sense of agency

The UKHSA evidence also highlights the importance of supportive and empowering approaches when considering

environmental change.

This is relevant to the concern expressed by local residents that they have little control over a major transformation of the environment around their homes.

I respectfully ask that the Examining Authority recognises this as a legitimate human health and wellbeing consideration, while avoiding any assumption that all residents will experience the same psychological response.

Official sources

UK Health Security Agency:

Climate change and mental health report

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/climate-change-and-mental-health-report>

UKHSA guidance:

Climate change awareness and mental health

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/climate-change-awareness-and-mental-health>

UKHSA guidance specifically discussing the relationship between climate change and mental health:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-climate-change-an-overview>

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EVIDENCE INDEX

Evidence Area 1 – Children, nature and green space

Evidence 1A

Department of Health and Social Care (2024)

Improving the mental health of babies, children and young people: a framework of modifiable factors

Evidence 1B

Department of Health and Social Care (2024)

Methodology, literature review and stakeholder feedback that informed the framework

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Evidence Area 2 – Green space and wider determinants of health

Evidence 2A

Public Health England (2018)

Health Profile for England: Chapter 6 – Wider determinants of health

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Evidence Area 3 – Environmental change, sense of place and mental health

Evidence 3A

UK Health Security Agency (2025)

Climate change and mental health report

Evidence 3B

UK Health Security Agency (2025)

Climate change awareness and mental health

Evidence 3C

UK Health Security Agency (2025)

Mental health and climate change: an overview

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NOTE ON THE EVIDENCE

This submission uses Government and public health sources to establish that environmental conditions, access to nature and green space, and people's relationship with their surroundings are relevant to mental health and wellbeing.

It does not claim that the proposed East Pye solar development will inevitably cause mental illness, nor that every resident or child will experience the development in the same way.

The purpose of the evidence is to demonstrate that the potential human health and wellbeing consequences of a major and permanent environmental change are legitimate matters for consideration alongside the proposal's other environmental, social and planning impacts.

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SOURCE LINKS

Department of Health and Social Care – Improving the mental health of babies, children and young people:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-mental-health-of-babies-children-and-young-people>

Department of Health and Social Care – Literature review:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-mental-health-of-babies-children-and-young-people/improving-the-mental-health-of-babies-children-and-young-people-methodology-literature-review-and-stakeholder-feedback-that-informed-the-framework>

Public Health England – Health Profile for England 2018, Chapter 6:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-profile-for-england-2018/chapter-6-wider-determinants-of-health>

UK Health Security Agency – Climate change and mental health report:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/climate-change-and-mental-health-report>

UK Health Security Agency – Climate change awareness and mental health:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/climate-change-awareness-and-mental-health>

UK Health Security Agency – Mental health and climate change: an overview:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-and-climate-change-an-overview>