

**ELECTRICITY ACT 1989**

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (SCOTLAND) ACT 1997**

**DPEA CODE OF PRACTICE FOR ELECTRICITY ACT INQUIRIES**

**TEALING TO KINTORE UPGRADE PROJECT (TKUP) TRI-120-1**

**Mental Health Implications**

**Public Inquiry Written Submission by Eileen West**

### **Introduction**

I am Eileen West and live close to Drumoak, a village and close-knit community which has lived under the sword of Damocles that is SSEN's OHL plans for the last 3 years.

I have prepared and now submit this written evidence to the Examination to draw attention to the serious and escalating harm that the TKUP 400kV Overhead Line project is causing, and will continue to cause, to the mental health, wellbeing, safety and way of life of the communities affected.

This is not a theoretical or abstract risk. It is a real thing since SSEN announced their intention in a callous and contemptuous manner to cut a swathe of monstrous pylons through Aberdeenshire.

For affected communities wellbeing, stability and way of life are not optional amenities. They form part of the sense of home, community, place attachment and identity. The sheer magnitude and linear extent of SSEN's development means that the OHL's impacts are cumulative, pervasive and effectively irreversible resulting in psychological harm, grief and loss.

A survey conducted by the Crathes, Drumoak, Durris Community Council (CDDCC) asked the question, "*Do you feel like the proposals for overhead lines are having a detrimental impact on your health and wellbeing.*" 80.9% responded YES.

That figure should be nothing short of shocking to any responsible decision-maker. It is a clear signal that something is profoundly wrong with both the project and the way it is being advanced.

These harms have been occurring and are occurring still at the pre-construction stage, many months from ground being broken, and are a direct and foreseeable result of the anticipated destruction and industrialisation of the area and landscape.

## 1. Deep and widespread mental health impacts

Residents are living under constant psychological strain as a direct result of this scheme.

People report:

- Persistent anxiety and fear about potential health risks from unprecedented, very high-voltage lines running unusually low over their land and close to their homes.
- Ongoing worry about the safety of land workers who will have to operate and work under and around this infrastructure.
- Serious concerns about years of HGV traffic, seven days a week, along small rural roads that were never designed for this volume or weight of vehicles. This raises real risks for children, dog walkers, cyclists and horse riders and people are rightly fearful.

The result is chronic stress, disturbed sleep, low mood, anger and a pervasive sense of helplessness. For many, this has already crossed the line from “concern” into significant and sustained mental distress.

The communities affected are not being “overly sensitive”, they are reacting in a very human way to a project that appears to disregard their health, their safety and their environment.

For the next five years, if this catastrophic project goes ahead, colossal construction traffic will roar past homes where children play and where people once felt comfortable walking their dogs. Narrow roads and peaceful footpaths could be transformed into haul roads with HGVs replacing birdsong as the dominant sound. That sense of sanctuary and routine, built over decades, is under threat of being shattered within a matter of months.

The words that follow are a small example and are not abstract objections or neat bullet-points on a consultation form. They are the raw, unfiltered words of people whose lives and landscapes now sit in the shadow of this proposal. Their days are already punctured by the jolt of headlights turning into their lane early in the morning or late at night, the constant dread that the next unfamiliar “unmarked” van at the end of the road belongs to yet another unauthorised survey team. For them, this is no longer a quiet rural community but a place that feels under siege.

The words below come from residents, parents, wildlife enthusiasts, farmers and dog walkers. People who know every bend in the road, the ancient hedgerows, every bit of red kite airspace and bat flight path, every foraging corridor and roosting tree and the very day year after year the swallows and house-martins return. Please read their words for what they are: a warning, a plea and a powerful record of what is really at stake when a project like this is thrust at a community.

- “I’m angry and upset because I feel I’m talked at in a language meant to minimise the impact on the environment. They [SEEN] don’t care and they twist everything.”



- “I feel constantly on high-alert. When I see anybody who parks where they shouldn’t I immediately suspect it’s something to do with SSEN or their contractors. I feel instantly irritated and feel I have to confront them.”
- “An immediate anxiety trigger for me is seeing the now all-too-familiar navy and green SSEN trucks in the area. The physical effect this has is not good for me”.
- “I feel the right to walk my dogs where I live is being taken away from me and that is very upsetting. Everything we read about improving mental health tells us to get out into nature and green space for exercise. I will no longer be able to do that because the road will be unsafe even to drive to where I can walk them so will my dogs just not get walked? That right is being taken away for not just a few weeks but up to 5 years.”
- “We have followed the advice to re-wild our garden for wildlife and now have goshawks, red kites, dragonflies, lizards, red squirrels ... everything. These will now come under pressure if SSEN bulldozes over us which breaks our hearts.”
- “Our family love watching for the bats coming out at dusk. They’re so important for the environment. SSEN say they will move the bats! We don’t want the bats moved - is that even possible? – it’s incredibly upsetting. If we were to put in for planning for a small extension a bat survey would be required but not by SSEN. It’s one rule for us and another for them. None of this is fair.”
- “Just another example of the government running roughshod over us telling us we must put up with it for the greater good. It’s not for the greater good and it’s certainly not for the good of the area or the community. It makes me so angry that we’re being hoodwinked.”
- “I’m 78 and have never been bothered by insomnia but I very often have sleepless nights now because of these pylons.”
- “They [SSEN] have no thought for, nor care, what it looks like for them to close a road (without local authority permission or notification on the local authority website) for over a month to carry out ground investigation works prior to construction when two related substations have been refused and a Public Inquiry into the OHL triggered. If that isn’t the height of arrogance I don’t know what is. Perfect example of the contempt they have for us and shows the process is all stacked in their favour from the start. Makes me despair.”
- “Because I’m a farmer they [SSEN] treat me like a selfish, ignorant peasant. Their patronising, condescending attitude makes me sad and angry.”
- “Their [SSEN’s] pylons will be 70m from my workshop and 138m from the house and their Land Manager, ~~Lauren Simpson~~ asked me on several occasions, in my own home, “Why are you behaving like this?” and “Why are you being so unco-operative

– you know we’ll just issue a 28 day notice then we can do what we like.” I’m not easily intimidated but that is no way to speak to a stakeholder. My wife was very upset.”

- “For the sake of our mental health we banned the Land Manager, ~~Lauren Simpson~~ from our property.”
- “They treated me like I was a complete nuisance and left leaving me anxious about what they would do next.”
- “~~Lauren Simpson~~ said to me, “There’s no point being unhelpful ... why don’t you give up ... because it’s going to happen.”
- “I have a health assured farm and had to deny access to SSEN to trample over my land for fear of contamination which would mean the end of my herd and the livelihood of my wife and sons built up over generations. ~~Lauren Simpson~~ said if that did happen I’d have to prove it was their fault. I’ve had many sleepless nights about this project.”
- “After weeks of constant haranguing about access to my land, three phone calls in one afternoon from ~~Lauren Simpson~~ and one from ~~Finlay Reed~~ from ~~Dalcour Maclare~~ I admit I felt suicidal and told him so.”

*(Many more were afraid to be quoted for fear of identification and retaliation from SSEN)*

## **2. Consultation characterised by dismissal and derision**

The manner in which this project has been promoted has significantly exacerbated the harm. Many residents who attended SSEN consultation events describe the tone as dismissive, condescending and, at times, openly derisory.

People repeatedly report that:

- Legitimate concerns about health and wellbeing are brushed aside or minimised.
- Detailed questions about the current necessity of the project, in light of evolving technical and scientific evidence, are not answered in a meaningful way leaving the impression that communities are being “sacrificed” for corporate gain.
- Consultation feels like a box-ticking exercise rather than a genuine attempt to listen, understand and, where possible, adapt.

This approach is corrosive. It sends a clear message that local people’s experiences, expertise and fears are of marginal importance at best. Being treated in this way is itself a source of distress and anger, and it materially worsens mental health outcomes.

The situation is compounded by SSEN's decision to scope mental health as a topic out of their formal assessment, and their insistence that it will instead be dealt with "internally". In practice, this means mental health will not be subject to independent, transparent scrutiny and is highly likely to be underplayed or ignored.

In a context where over four in five surveyed residents report mental health impacts, this stance is indefensible.

Correspondence to SSEN from residents' pleading for understanding of their anxiety are met with responses such as, "Whilst we accept there are strong emotions regarding the potential impacts of our infrastructure proposals it is not fair to claim that we do not have empathy for those who may be affected." Also, "We appreciate that our projects can also cause some uncertainty to people within the communities that are affected."

This does not demonstrate empathy.

Neither does Land Agents on behalf of SSEN banging on rural residents' doors at night demanding access to their property to set up sound monitoring equipment show empathy. It is intimidation and coercion.

SSEN consultation staff openly discussing amongst themselves in a public place how they thought the line of monster pylons should be moved even closer to a residential address because the owner complained too much does not demonstrate empathy either. It is inhumane and verges on sadism.

Telling highly distressed residents that there is no evidence that building pylons and substations close to residential property decreases property values is not empathy. It is misinformation.

When a resident asked ~~Calum Grant, Senior Project Engineer and the Community Liaison Manager, Rhiannon Merritt~~, why he had not received any replies to his emails he was told, "*We are too busy doing all these consultations, having to talk to the public stops us doing our jobs.*" Not an empathetic response. A condescending and insolent response.

These incidents which are first hand empirical evidence, and many more like them are confirmation that communities are an inconvenience and in the way of SSEN's ruthless pursuit of this project. It is not surprising that people are left with feelings of utter helplessness and despair?

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, Gillian Martin, herself has said, "*SSEN has not helped themselves.*"

### 3. Loss of cherished green spaces, ancient trees and SSSIs

The proposed route threatens to destroy or seriously degrade much-loved green spaces and woodlands that are central to local identity and daily life. These include forests and woods with deep sentimental value, places where generations have walked, played, proposed, grieved and celebrated, long-used paths (with names like “Lovers’ Walk” and “Badger Wood”), places where people walk to cope with stress, where children play, where families scatter ashes and where generations have formed memories. The anticipated loss or degradation of these spaces is a profound source of grief and anticipatory bereavement.

“Eco-grief” is a much-studied topic. It is grief in response to environmental loss or destruction of beloved places. Similarly, “solastalgia”, defined as “a form of emotional or existential distress caused by environmental change while one is still in their home environment.” is distress caused by environmental change close to home. Philosopher Glenn Albrecht described this in 2003 as “the homesickness you have when you are still at home” arising from destruction to a beloved landscape. “Ecopsychology” often discusses grief over loss of nature and places.

Research in grief and environmental psychology following the work of Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, makes clear that people grieve any significant loss including the loss of home environment and cherished places in nature. Modern evidence shows that:

- Long-term access to natural green space is strongly associated with lower stress anxiety and depression and better overall wellbeing
- Large-scale or sudden environmental degradation, especially of places people are attached to can trigger grief-like and trauma-like responses.
- These are not merely minor disappointments they can be deep, enduring and clinically significant.

For the people who live there, these are not abstract “environmental assets”. They are the places they go to cope with stress, to find peace, to maintain their mental equilibrium. The anticipated loss or industrialisation of these spaces is experienced as a genuine bereavement.

A substantial body of research backs this up. There is growing evidence that exposure to green and blue outdoor spaces has a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing through mechanisms including reduced stress, psychological restoration and increased social contact (McEachan et al., 2023; Markevych et al., 2017). Conversely, when access to such spaces is reduced or lost, mental health can deteriorate.

For example:

- A population-wide longitudinal study of green–blue space exposure found that changes in access to natural environments were significantly associated with changes in individual wellbeing and mental health over time (McEachan et al., 2023).
- An evidence summary from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) reported that, in data from more than 2 million adults, living in areas with more local green or blue space was associated with lower reported anxiety and depression in primary care records, and concluded that improving access to green and blue spaces could improve population mental health (NIHR Evidence, 2023).
- A study using detailed “NatureScore” measures in urban neighbourhoods found that people living in areas with higher levels of greenery had significantly lower rates of mental health service use than those in areas with the least green space, reinforcing the link between nature exposure and reduced demand for mental health care (Maddock et al., 2024).

Taken together, these and many other studies lead to an inescapable conclusion: destroying or degrading valued local green space harms mental health, and the harm is particularly acute in communities that have a long-standing, daily relationship with those places especially when these include areas of high ecological importance, including much cherished ancient trees and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

SSEN’s TKUP 400kV OHL, as currently proposed, would carve through landscapes that people depend on for their emotional resilience and identity. That damage cannot be undone once done.

#### **4. Damage to way of life, livelihoods and community fabric**

This project does not simply alter a view. It threatens to unpick the fabric of rural life:

- **Livelihoods:** Land-based businesses and farms face disruption and potential devaluation. Tourism and recreation, which depend on the quality and character of the landscape, are put at risk.
- **Everyday safety and mobility:** Years of HGV traffic on narrow rural roads will fundamentally change how people move around. Parents are worried about their children walking or cycling; riders fear for their horses; older residents face increased isolation if they no longer feel safe to use the roads.
- **Community identity:** The landscape is not an optional backdrop. It is central to local culture and sense of belonging. Placing a massive industrial corridor through it sends a clear signal that this identity is expendable.

For many residents, this feels like the forced dismantling of a way of life that they have built over decades and, in some cases, generations.

### **5. Perception of being sacrificed for a project that may not be needed**

There is growing concern, backed by a review of current generation forecasts and policy drivers, that the OHL proposed 3 years ago is no longer considered necessary. Revised offshore wind deployment and market priorities have materially reduced the justification for this project. TKUP 400kV OHL in its current form may no longer be necessary or proportionate and the original case for it can no longer be sustained. If that is correct, then pressing ahead regardless is not simply unfortunate, it is unjust. To continue because “... *we have spent too much money already*”, is no justification.

Residents feel that they are being asked to bear permanent harm to their health, landscape and livelihoods for a project that may be outdated or over-specified. At the same time, they are told this is being done “*for the environment*”, even as ancient trees, woodlands and sensitive habitats face destruction or degradation.

This contradiction is profoundly damaging. People feel they are watching the environment be destroyed in the name of saving it, and that is a source of deep anger, helplessness, hopelessness and despair.

### **6. Institutional failure and loss of trust**

The role of Aberdeenshire Council and the wider government cannot be ignored. Many residents are “crushingly disappointed” that their local authority and national government appear willing to endorse and facilitate a project that so clearly harms the mental health and wellbeing of their constituents and that dismisses the overwhelming concerns expressed locally.

The perception is that money and corporate interests are being put before people and before the long-term integrity of the environment. This perception may be uncomfortable for institutions to confront, but it is real, widespread and, given the evidence, understandable.

When public bodies align themselves with a process that sidelines mental health, disregards a clear majority of local opinion, and appears blind to the value of irreplaceable landscapes, they lose trust. That loss of trust itself has consequences for community cohesion, civic engagement and long-term wellbeing.

Under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989, Scottish Ministers must consider the effects of the development on amenity, the environment and communities, and must weigh all material considerations, including mental health. In determining planning permission,

Ministers must have regard to the development plan, which includes NPF4, but NPF4 is not determinative on its own.

In determining whether to grant planning permission, the Scottish Ministers are required to have regard to the development plan and to material considerations (section 25 of the 1997 Act). NPF4 forms part of that development plan, but it is expressly not site specific, neither is it the sole or an exhaustive consideration.

Current Scottish policy and guidance require explicit regard to human health and wellbeing including mental health for example:

**NPF4, (Policy 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises) and Policy 2 (Climate Mitigation and Adaptation)** make clear that decisions must support a just transition and promote resilient, healthy communities, not simply deliver infrastructure at any cost.

**Policy 3 (Biodiversity) and Policy 11 (Energy)** expect adverse environmental impacts, including on communities, to be minimised and mitigated and require a proportionate assessment of significant effects.

Public bodies in Scotland, including Scottish Ministers are also subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty and the sustainable development/wellbeing duties, all of which point to the need to consider impacts on mental health and community wellbeing.

NPF4 must be read as a whole:

- Paras 3, 9, 16 and 20 emphasise that planning should deliver a fairer, healthier, liveable Scotland and support wellbeing and equality.
- Policies 3 and 4 (paras 42–59) seek to protect and enhance natural places and biodiversity, and to avoid or minimise significant adverse impacts.
- Policies 20, 21 and 23 (paras 171–199) stress the importance of green infrastructure, outdoor recreation and health and wellbeing, including mental health.
- Policy 11 (Energy, paras 127–139) does support strategic energy infrastructure, but also requires proposals to be sited and designed to minimise significant adverse impacts on communities and the environment (para 133).

Relying on NPF4's support for grid reinforcement, while downplaying or ignoring the serious mental health consequences of this particular route, is inconsistent with NPF4 read as a whole and with the duty under planning law to take all material considerations into account. Simply quoting NPF4 and "national need" does not relieve decision-makers of the obligation to:

- Undertake a robust, independent assessment of mental health and wellbeing impacts, proportionate to the scale of the scheme
- Consider reasonable alternatives that could significantly reduce these harms

- Impose meaningful mitigation and support measures if consent is granted.

Decision-makers must:

1. Explicitly recognise that the loss and industrialisation of green space and natural landscapes along this 106 km corridor is causing, and will continue to cause, serious mental health and grief-related impacts in affected communities.
2. Require a comprehensive, independent mental health and wellbeing impact assessment before reaching any final decision.
3. Give substantial weight to these impacts in the section 37 balancing exercise and in applying NPF4, rather than treating Policy 11 as overriding and trumping everything else ... including the wellbeing of citizens.
4. Consider and, where feasible, adopt alternative solutions that significantly reduce environmental and psychological harm.

**In summary**, this proposal is not only a question of visual impact or landscape character. It is a question of public health and human wellbeing. The grief, distress and mental health deterioration already evident are foreseeable, material and serious, and must be taken into full account in any lawful and responsible decision on this application.

## **6. Mental health sidelined and minimised**

The decision by SEN to scope mental health out of formal assessment and to deal with it “internally” is wholly and insultingly unacceptable, given the scale of reported harm. It amounts to saying that the psychological wellbeing of thousands of residents is not important enough to warrant independent scrutiny.

This approach:

- Ignores the clear evidence from the CDDCC survey.
- Conflicts with modern public health practice, which recognises mental health as equally important as physical health.
- Strongly suggests that mental health impacts will be downplayed, rather than addressed honestly and mitigated.

If a project was associated with physical health symptoms in over 80% of respondents, it would be treated as a crisis. The same standard must apply to mental health.

## **7. What the inquiry must now do.**

In light of all of the above, I respectfully but firmly submit that the inquiry has a duty to act.

I ask that the inquiry:

1. Formally recognise mental health and wellbeing as a central, material consideration in assessing the TKUP 400kV OHL, not a peripheral concern.
2. Require a robust, independent mental health impact assessment, including:
  - Baseline data and community-wide surveys, building on the CDDCC findings.
  - Specific analysis of the impacts of:
    - loss and fragmentation of green space, woodlands, ancient trees and SSSIs
    - prolonged HGV traffic on small rural roads
    - perceived health risks from close-proximity to very high-voltage lines
    - the quality and conduct of consultation processes
    - identification of vulnerable groups and clear proposals for mitigation and support.
3. Re-examine the overall justification for the project in its current form, in light of up-to-date broader energy policy context and planned windfarm portfolio evidence. If it is not demonstrably necessary and proportionate, it should not proceed.
4. Direct SSEN and the relevant authorities, including Aberdeenshire Council, to conduct genuinely open and respectful engagement with transparent responses to community concerns and with mental health experts actively involved.
5. Give serious consideration to alternative solutions that avoid or greatly reduce both environmental destruction and human harm, including undergrounding and subsea.

## 8. Conclusion

SSEN's TKUP 400kV OHL, as currently proposed and handled, is already inflicting significant psychological harm on the communities in its path. The evidence from the Crathes, Drumoak, Durrus Community Council survey is stark: more than four out of five respondents feel their mental health has been adversely affected. This is not a minor side effect, but a major impact.

From any reasonable view the proposed 106km pylon and substation corridor would amount to a catastrophic alteration of the affected landscapes of Aberdeenshire and a profound interference with residents' lived experience of their homes and communities. An Angus Councillor called it, "*Corporate vandalism on a colossal scale.*"

Consistent with the body of work on grief initiated by Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and subsequent environmental and public health research the resulting grief, psychological

distress and deterioration in mental health and wellbeing are foreseeable, already emerging and of sufficient seriousness to demand explicit recognition and substantial weight in the Ministers' decision.

The wider scientific literature confirms that destroying or degrading valued green space, ancient trees and sensitive habitats has serious consequences for mental health and wellbeing (McEachan et al., 2023; NIHR Evidence, 2023; Maddock et al., 2024). Coupled with fears over safety, disruption to daily life, and a consultation process experienced as dismissive and derisory, the result is a community that feels unheard, unsafe and sacrificed.

Public authorities and developers are under a clear moral and legal duty to protect the health and wellbeing of the people they serve. Proceeding with a project that inflicts such evident and avoidable harm – while sidelining mental health and downplaying local voices – cannot be squared with that duty.

I therefore urge this inquiry to please place the mental health and wellbeing of the affected communities at the centre of its deliberations. Please ensure that any recommendations or decisions reflect not only distant technical calculations, but the lived reality of the people whose lives, landscapes and futures are at stake.

Eileen West  
for NOTKUP  
April 2026

## References:

McEachan, R., Powell, K., Lovell, R., Tobi, P., Kearns, A., Nieuwenhuijsen, M., et al. (2023) Green–blue space exposure changes and impact on individual-level well-being and mental health: a population-wide dynamic longitudinal panel study with linked survey data. NIHR Journals Library, Southampton (UK). Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK597114/> (Accessed: insert date).

NIHR Evidence (2023) Local green spaces are linked with better mental health. National Institute for Health and Care Research. Available at: <https://evidence.nihr.ac.uk/alert/local-green-spaces-are-linked-with-better-mental-health/> (Accessed: insert date).

Maddock, J.E., et al. (2024) ‘Study suggests people in urban areas with more green space use fewer mental health services’, Texas A&M University Stories, 22 February. Available at: <https://stories.tamu.edu/news/2024/02/22/study-green-space-improves-mental-health/> (Accessed: insert date).

Crathes, Drumoak, Durriss Community Council (2024) Community Survey on the TKUP 400kV Overhead Line: Mental Health and Wellbeing Findings. Unpublished community survey results.

## Further reading:

Glenn Albrecht’s essays and the book *Earth Emotions* connect very strongly to the sense of losing “home” in nature.

Joanna Macy – “Active Hope” and “Coming Back to Life”

Robert Macfarlane & others (more literary, UK-relevant) *The Wild Places* or *The Old Ways*. These do not use psychological terms but describe the ache and mourning for damaged or disappearing landscapes.