

NIMBYism in the West Midlands is becoming a growth industry

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It's official; British attitudes are hardening. NIMBYism, the Not In My Back Yard ethos of protesting against new developments in their surrounding area, is on the increase according to a new piece of research.

The annual survey on the issue by UK Saint Index, carried out to create a census on public attitude to commercial development, has discovered that, while the percentage of the population with a general aversion to development has risen to 85 per cent, those who are prepared to do something about it has reached nearly a third.

Indeed, as the economy descends deeper into the mire, the report does not make pretty reading for those trying to develop their way out of it.

Mike Saint, chairman and CEO of Saint Consulting, said its research found that the British public was far less accommodating than the residents of the United States and Canada.

"The UK is by far the most opposed to development based in our regular surveys across the US, Canada and the UK," he said.

"Curiously the British public is far less inclined to help developers in the throes of economic recession. While there are differences in culture, land values and economic cycles, the issues remain the same: a growing tide of NIMBYism is frustrating all manner of property development and thus hurting economic growth."

The survey, which questioned 1,000 people during January and February, found that attitudes in the West Midlands were becoming increasingly hardened as economic conditions deteriorated, with 89 per cent of the population now opposed to commercial development – a four per cent increase on last year.

The report argues that, with the current financial climate, "tough love" is essential in helping the development industry when it comes to rescuing recession-hit schemes, although issues such as whether the economic advantages of a project will outweigh the negative impact on local communities is one that developers have to tackle.

Traffic, protection of the environment and community character made up the bulk of residents' concerns, with proximity to their property and fears on the effect it may have on the value of their property coming a close second.

Although Eco-towns were also blasted in the survey as being the most ineffective way of tackling the housing crisis, people in the West Midlands and London were among the least opposed to these developments.

Most people believe that urban extension and infill development – the development of vacant land in existing suburban – are preferable.

The survey also found 74 per cent of respondents believe the Government's housing targets of three million homes by 2020 are unrealistic, with no difference in attitudes among urban, suburban and rural areas.

The most commonly-supported projects are private housing, social housing, supermarkets and schools, -according to the report.

The survey also identified a new green trend with considerable support for wind farms – they came out as the second most popular project with 23 per cent support, behind schools at 43 per cent but ahead of private housing (19 per cent), new roads (17 per cent) and convenience food (12 per cent).

On the other hand, support for quarries has reached an all-time low, beating casinos and power stations as the most-hated form of development by a 14 per cent margin.

The survey found retired people are the most enthusiastic opponents to new developments.

Common tactics used to oppose developments include signing a petition, attending a public or council meeting, contacting a local councillor or joining an opposition group.

The survey also found a difference between sexes with regard to methods of expressing their hostility to new developments – women favour petitions and attending meetings while men prefer to contact their councillors. Londoners utilise petitions the most.