

# PLANNING

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## Fyson on... rising tide of hardened nimbies threatens greater risk of action against planned developments



Given the difficulty of defining the phenomenon known as nimbyism, it is just as well that a survey of its prevalence should be part of a series.

Saint Consulting's annual report on public attitudes towards development has entered its third year. While the firm's contribution towards understanding exactly why people oppose development is limited, the extent to which they do so is revealed and changes in attitude are becoming apparent.

The basic 85 per cent general opposition to new construction and the meagre six per cent generally in favour are relatively constant in the public at large. But Saint has found that so-called "hardened" nimbies who are ready to take action of some kind to back their beliefs are

increasing, from 13 per cent in 2007 to 17 per cent in 2008 and 21 per cent now.

Depending on whether people feel themselves victims or beneficiaries of development, such statistics must be alarming or encouraging. When pushed, the



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public seems willing to recognise the consequences of its negativity. For example, 51 per cent reckon that government targets for house building are unachievable. This view prevails even among populations in areas with grave housing shortages that might affect the life chances of respondents' own families or communities.

Accusations from the construction industry of selfish short-sightedness are countered by activists claiming to promote local opinion and a bottom-up approach to planning. Critics are certainly too ready to caricature local opposition to a scheme as nimbyist when it may be as rational as any pro-development political or commercial interest in search of electoral or financial profit.

Nimbyism is a reality, however, and it is more marked in the UK than in the USA where the concept originated. The degree of

disapproval expressed inevitably varies not with the relative conservation needs of particular localities but with the general standing of a class of development. Schools attract least resistance followed, surprisingly in view of the furore they have generated recently, by wind farms. New private housing, roads and convenience food stores are far behind.

Only those local objectors who can sustain a case against the need for a particular category of development anywhere can escape at least a taint of nimbyism. But the central problem remains that planning and development cannot live by local opinion alone. Until there is effective and respected regional and national planning, the temptation to say "put it somewhere else" will be irresistible.

*Anthony Fyson is a freelance writer on planning issues.*