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New poll results reveal the level of public opposition to property development in Britain, the United States and Canada

Public distrust of development is rampant in Britain, the United States and Canada, where recent surveys find remarkably similar opposition to large-scale development, distrust in local politicians and fears that the planning process is unfair.

The Saint Index, conducted as three surveys by The Saint Consulting Group, an international land use politics consultancy, found that huge majorities in each country want no more development in their local area.

This phenomenon, known as NIMBYism (Not in My Back Yard), makes the planning process a political challenge for the development industry to overcome local opposition and face an increasingly hostile public in projects across the property spectrum in each country (see headline bullet points below for details).

The British public has the most hostile NIMBY views – 83 percent of Britons oppose new development in their community, compared to 75 percent in Canada and 73 percent in the US.

The US public has the greatest distrust of the planning process – 75 percent say the relationship between elected officials and developers makes the process unfair, compared to 60 percent in Canada and 58 percent in Britain.

What do these surveys mean?

“Developers in all three countries need to change the way they do business,” says Pat Fox, the Boston-based President of Saint Consulting. “They can no longer count on getting an application approved just because they think it is a good project with real community benefits. Residents are acting aggressively in their self interest to protect their real estate values and the character of their communities. They are increasingly sophisticated in their attacks, understanding that elected officials are unlikely to vote against the wishes of an angry electorate.”

Nick Keable, UK Vice President of Saint Consulting, said: “Developers need to question how to operate in this climate. It is not about how good your project is – it’s about the politics. Successful developers need to do early consultation before they announce a project. They need to build coalitions, leverage community planning gain benefits and line up support because the planning process has morphed into a classic political

campaign, where the technical details are less important than stacking up the votes. Every developer has to try to win the vote to get their project approved.”

Paul Devlin, who heads Saint Consulting's Canadian operation, said: “I continually hear developers say they have a great project with real community benefits so why would local politicians vote it down? They vote it down because it is more politically expedient to stand with the neighbours who passionately oppose a project because of traffic impact, real estate values and environmental issues which underwrite the underlying fear of change. No one wants anything new built anywhere near them. Developers need to understand that the game has shifted and proactively prepare for elected officials now winning votes by opposing new real estate projects.”

Headline bullet points

- **Global agreement – large majorities oppose new development in their community**
83% UK
75% Canada
73% US
- **Majority of Americans, Britons, and Canadians give a “fair to poor” rating to their local authorities’ handling of planning issues**
66% US
62% UK
55% Canada
- **Perception of ‘cosy relationship’ between developers and elected officials crosses borders**
75% of Americans, 60% of Canadians, and 58% of Britons believe that these relationships makes the planning approval process unfair
- **Politicians take note – Your position on development is a key factor in your chances of re-election**
*93% of Americans say a candidate’s position on growth is important (Senior citizens especially interested – 90% agree, 68% strongly agree)
87% of Canadians believe the position on growth is important
70% of Britons concur (with the senior citizens vote again being crucial; 71% agree, 51% strongly agree)*
- **Active opposition to development is much more prevalent than support**
1 in 5 Canadians and 1 in 8 Britons have taken their opposition to the streets, and in America, twice as many have opposed a project as have supported one
- **People love to shop in out-of-town big box stores, they just don’t want them near their town**
6 out of 10 in both America and Canada say they enjoy shopping in big box stores but 7 out of 10 Americans would oppose one in their community; 6 out of 10 Canadians also don’t want one in their community. 51% of Britons say the government should continue to prohibit out-of-town development, but 56% disagree with government plans to lessen restrictions on Greenfield development..

- **Property values, community character, traffic and the environment are the most common reasons in all three countries for opposing development**
- **Some types of real estate developments are universally reviled and face stiff opposition no matter where you go:**
Casinos – Opposed by 67% of Americans, 83% Canadians and 86% Britons
Quarries – Opposed by 76% of Americans, 64% Canadians and 76% Britons
Landfills – Opposed by 87% of Americans, 72% Canadians and 81% Britons
Power plants – Opposed by 75% of Americans, 57% Canadians and 79% Britons
(Note – see chart for more uses)
- **Some interesting contradictions**
Senior citizens vote is crucial in US and Great Britain, but in Canada they seem less worried about a candidate's position on growth

Supermarkets face little opposition in US and Canada (25% in each country) but are confronted with 59% opposition in Great Britain

Private housing is the least opposed use in the US and Canada at 6% and 11% respectively, but is opposed by 30% of Britons

Note to Editors

The Saint Consulting Group began operations in 1983 and today is the global leader in land use political consultancy. Saint has 12 offices around the US and international offices in London and Toronto. As experts in land use politics, Saint Consulting provides political campaign expertise to win complex or controversial planning decisions. Among the property sectors that use its services are: aggregates, food retail, shopping centres, hospitals, landfill, mixed-use developers, housing, and utilities.

The Saint Index[®] is the first and only annual primary research tool that quantifies and tracks the politics of land use, spotlighting who actively opposes and supports real estate projects and why.

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