

Negative image is unfair to Nimbys

ARE YOU a Nimby (Not In My Back Yard)? I am and I believe that we Nimbys (or should it be Nimbies?) ought not be ashamed although we are often cast in an unfavourable light. I ask you – is it fair?

We are accused of being selfish and there is no doubt that some of us are driven by personal self-interest. It may be the fear of losing a favourite view or the fields where we can take the children or walk the dog.

It may be the fear of our property losing some hugely inflated value. Or it may be the thought of being brought face to face with young offenders or the disabled.

In Surrey the local people



by **Oliver Palmer**
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recently tried to block the construction of an annexe to house the families of injured soldiers. They claimed that their homes could lose value.

The reality is that we Nimbys concern ourselves with events in our back yards because we have the local knowledge. Mainly we share a love of our environment, oppose change and favour the status quo ante and we tend to fall into two groups – the older residents

who want to keep our environment the way we have always known it and the newer arrivals who want to keep the way it was when they arrived.

Whichever group we belong to it is clear from the experience of amenity societies and institutions such as the CPRE that most of us object to developments in our back yard not because of where they are but because of what they are. Given similar circumstances we

would also object to similar developments in other back yards.

The fact is that there are decisions to be taken and the questions are who should take them and on what basis?

Should decisions be taken locally by Town Halls or centrally by Whitehall? Local administrations – often with limited resources – have been elected to act on our behalf on a case by case basis. Central government – generally with more extensive resources – tends to reflect national issues and impose one size fits all policies with a belief in targets and performance measures.

When decisions are taken should they be guided by a

sense of fair play and designed to strike a balance between conflicting interests or should they seek some 'right' decision designed to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number and decided on the merits of the arguments, not by the relative strengths of the disputants or those with the sharper elbows or by pressure groups with the loudest voices? And how far should the public interest be allowed to intrude in private matters?

Of course these are all difficult questions but they may explain why Nimbys have a negative image. After all eight of the Ten Commandments are Thou Shalt Nots and only two Thou Shalts.