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Developers suffering amid downturn and 'nimbyism'

Ian Hall reports from a conference on 'overcoming opposition' to new housing

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS NEW BUILDING ARE BECOMING increasingly hostile, according to research presented at a housing-sector conference.

Nick Keable, vice-president of UK operations at Saint Consulting, presented the research at the 'Delivering housing growth: overcoming opposition' conference on 8 July, which showed increasing 'nimbyism' ('not in my back-yard' attitudes) among Brits over the past three years.

Keable was presenting results of a survey of 1,006 UK adults in mid-February undertaken by ComRes on behalf of his firm. The South West was statistically the 'most nimby', with the North East the least.

Schools and casinos are at opposite ends of the 'approval'/'disapproval' scale, according to the research (*see top chart, below*). 'Protection of green space/environment' was the most often-cited reason for opposition to new developments (*see chart, bottom left*).

Sixty-two per cent of those polled by ComRes did not recall any consultation over the past year (*see chart, bottom right*). Just nine per cent said they 'recalled one, and it changed the result'.

Meanwhile 24 per cent of the UK population have 'actively opposed' a UK planning application in the past year, with just seven per cent having 'actively supported' one.

In a later Q&A session, Keable slammed local journalists as "lazy", claiming they often fail to give developers a "fair hearing" in their quest for "David-and-Goliath" stories and "alternative views".

In a later speaker slot, John Slaughter – director of external affairs at the Home Builders' Federation – presented a deluge of gloomy statistics on the housing market and detailed what his organisation is lobbying the government to do to "assist the market", such as the extension of English Partnerships' First-Time Buyers' Initiative.

Turning to the broader theme of PA and new developments, Slaughter said: "My impression is that our members are increasingly using consultants and advisers in this area" – a positive note for lobbyists in attendance, at least, amid an otherwise depressing barrage of negativity about the housing market.