



## CHAPTER SEVEN

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# Navigating nimbyism with community buy-in

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## Why

Development and regeneration cannot happen without community buy-in – but who is the community? Is it just the loudest complainers on Twitter, or every resident, business, and government agency in the area?



## The failing

Localism under Cameron was intended to enable development by engaging locals and ensuring they received the developments they wanted and needed. Instead it has just given more power to block development.

## Policy recommendations

- I. People's planning lottery to fight nimbyism - introduce a jury service style planning application review system that includes a set percentage of young folk and people from neighbouring areas
- II. Digital engagement: A mandate that all planning applications have to engage digitally, ensuring that a diverse representation of the local community take part and have their voices heard

## Author



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### Homes: navigating nimbyism with community buy-in

Nimbyism shouldn't be a dirty word. At its core, it is simply a catch-all phrase for local stakeholders wanting to understand the impact of developments on their homes and places. Where nimbyism starts to present problems though is when developers do not take the time or use the proper channels to engage with and educate those local stakeholders about the benefits of development.

When people feel left out is when anger arises. Sometimes that's over the impact of a development on the cherished, yet strangely empty, local pub. Sometimes it's over how it impacts biodiversity. Both concerns are equally important to address properly, to not only ensure smooth planning and development, but to make sure there is buy-in that supports the project.

So, how do you navigate nimbyism, and make it a positive for both developers and local communities?

The key is to start early and by early, I mean engagement has to begin long before you submit planning applications.

It is vital to hold meetings early, which offer a genuine examination of what the development will bring to the local area. How will it impact schools in the area? Will there be new retail locations, perhaps more ideally placed for existing residents?

You have to accentuate the positives of the new development and show how they will benefit the already existing community.

I have a simple rule about this. If you can't bullet point what your development brings to the local community at this stage, you need to go back and focus on clarifying the proposal. This isn't about trying to circumnavigate the local stakeholders, but winning their buy-in.

Sometimes this is less about tangibles and more a feeling of local pride. For example, why not celebrate what the development will do for the local community hall? That will win far more trust and buy-in than just a statement of fact. Put simply, you need to build a trust bridge.

Complicating communication today is social media. While we are all aware of the modern phenomenon of fake news, we should not treat social media as a curse. Instead we should treat it as a great way to connect with local communities far more

dynamically than the traditional town hall. Indeed, it is easier to reach more people on social media than convince the same number to head out on a wet Wednesday to the local meeting area. Crucially, if you own the social media engagement early-on, it is far less likely to be hijacked or owned by other groups.

Again, the basic rule is to engage early and often.

One way to ensure early communication becomes common practice, rather than the preserve of the smart developer, would be to enshrine the fact that developers must create a 10 page planning application (as a summary for all planning documents). This document will briefly and succinctly explain and illustrate what they intend to do, how many homes they will provide, the unit mix, the effect on the community, the cost, and the difficulties at least X months before submission.

#### Headline planning statistics: 2013-2018

#### Absolute

|   | Total  | Dismissed | Allowed | Split decision | % dismissed | % allowed |
|---|--------|-----------|---------|----------------|-------------|-----------|
| <b>Called In Planning Application</b>     | 58     | 23        | 32      | 0              | 39.7        | 55.2      |
| <b>Planning appeal</b>                    | 52,517 | 35,286    | 16,518  | 456            | 67.2        | 31.5      |
| <b>Section 106 Agreement</b>              | 95     | 51        | 41      | 2              | 53.7        | 43.2      |
| <b>Section 106BC (Affordable Housing)</b> | 44     | 15        | 25      | 0              | 34.1        | 56.8      |
| <b>All</b>                                | 52,714 | 35,375    | 16,616  | 458            | 67.1        | 31.5      |

Source: Planning inspectorate

Contributor

Philip Barnes, Barratt PLC,  
Group Land and Planning Director

Combating  
nimbyism

The scale of the OxCamb ambition dictates that an effective approach to community concerns is required. One that mediates between those who will say that no development should take place unless it enjoys clear local community support, and others who claim that an initiative of such national public importance should not be held up by local private interests.

Ensuring that the initiative is a success requires something between the two. Namely, an approach whereby those making the key spatial decisions, and also those executing the strategy, must commit to meaningful community engagement.

But what does that actually mean?

Firstly it requires people to know what is going to be built when a major new scheme is being proposed within or close to their community. Hearing grand words from master planners is not enough. They need to know who the builders will be

and have confidence that the high level commitments to design and timescales will be honoured. On housing, design quality will be particularly important and local people need to have trust in the house builders who will actually be creating the new places.

At Barratt we are ready for that challenge. Building for Life 12 (BfL12) is the government yardstick for good design, referenced in national planning policy. In 2014, Barratt made the decision that every scheme we build will comply with BfL12.

Our commitment to high quality placemaking, allied to the fact that for 10 years consecutively, over 90% of our customers would recommend us to a friend, means that we are always keen to talk to local people about what we will actually deliver. Our experience is that local people want to see the ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘when’. They need confidence on design quality and environmental credentials.

This means local authorities and landowners teaming up with house builders at the earliest stage of a project, prior to allocation or consent, to ensure that local people can have a meaningful discussion from the outset. Design quality and placemaking needs to form part of the process by which the new sites, throughout the corridor, are selected. A transparent process whereby

communities can see and compare the different alternative schemes in terms of biodiversity, infrastructure, public spaces and facilities, and new social facilities for health, education and mobility.

For local authorities, often short of resources, combating nimbyism requires an iterative consultation process. However, the democratic decision to build at a particular location only needs to be taken once. Once that decision has been made, planning officers must be trusted to do the work to ensure the scheme is executed and consented as planned. Unnecessarily running back to planning committee to discuss details or minor changes will simply cut across effective delivery.

The final point relates to environmental performance. It is clear that there will be no possibility of securing a democratic mandate for such a major long-term initiative, unless both the overall project, and the individual schemes within it, can be demonstrated to show environmental responsibility and biodiversity net gain. A clear focus on sustainable transport and carbon efficiency will be critical to avoid the court of public opinion sentencing the project to death on environmental grounds alone.

| By development types | Absolute |           |         | %         |         |
|----------------------|----------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
|                      | Total    | Dismissed | Allowed | Dismissed | Allowed |
| Major                | 4,140    | 1,763     | 2,333   | 42.6      | 56.4    |
| Change of use        | 6,868    | 4,265     | 2,518   | 62.1      | 36.7    |

| By year | Absolute |           |         | %         |         |
|---------|----------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
|         | Total    | Dismissed | Allowed | Dismissed | Allowed |
| 2013    | 7,295    | 4,781     | 2,428   | 65.5      | 33.3    |
| 2014    | 9,636    | 6,461     | 3,077   | 67.1      | 31.9    |
| 2015    | 10,867   | 7,362     | 3,404   | 67.7      | 31.3    |
| 2016    | 10,943   | 7,377     | 3,436   | 67.4      | 31.4    |
| 2017    | 11,340   | 7,654     | 3,452   | 67.5      | 30.4    |
| 2018    | 2,411    | 1,614     | 726     | 66.9      | 30.1    |

Source: Planning inspectorate

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### Contributor

**Fiona Fletcher-Smith, L&Q Group Director, Development and Sales**

## Engaging communities to navigate nimbyism

Most people are supportive of development in their local area. They understand that more quality, affordable homes are desperately needed. And that development can provide a boost to local economies and improve the environment.

The issue is that we don't hear much from them. But, as is often the case in life, we do hear from those who oppose new plans and change. People concerned of the impact of development on transport, loss of green space, pressure on schools and health facilities, and perhaps most controversial of all, the inclusion of social and affordable housing.

Personally, I do not think these concerns – call them nimbyism if you like – can truly be navigated. Navigated implies we simply move around them, and in doing so, ignore them.

I'm reminded of Dale Carnegie's book 'How to win friends and influence people': "There is only one way... to get anybody to do anything. And that is by making the other person want to do it".

If we are to succeed in creating thriving communities, we need to address the needs and concerns of existing residents impacted by our development and the people who will live and work there.

The latter includes individuals and families who might well be living in another borough or county. We need to find new ways to identify and consult with future residents before we even put pen to paper.

Our recent survey among our residents on attitudes to new development found a huge appetite to be involved early in the planning process. But also, scepticism of current efforts to do so, which many regard as a tick-box exercise.

The most telling comment was: "The last people to be consulted about a development are the people who are likely to live there once it's complete".

My firm belief is that we address rather than avoid nimbyism by demonstrating a genuine interest to meet the needs of all residents and by following through on the promise to make somewhere a truly great place to live.

Our work at South Grove is an example of such an approach where we are putting in effort and resources not only to create a thriving community but to check whether we have achieved that.

We take a long-term view in making our developments deliver the necessary roads, green spaces, amenities and community facilities and take time to listen to the issues that matter most to residents. We are both in it for the long-term, which means our interests are aligned.

Treating consultation as a tick box exercise, cutting corners and not delivering what was promised would come back to bite us.

Some opposition of course is misinformed, and good, clear communication can deal with that. In other cases, people may well have a point that we ignore at our peril.

We won't win people over by forcing them to accept our argument. We must listen and be prepared to act and change our plans if necessary.

Early engagement is vital, but engagement must continue throughout the lifetime of a development. None of us have all the answers, we can but try and learn from our efforts on how to improve.

*There is only one way... to get anybody to do anything. And that is by making the other person want to do it.*

**Fiona Fletcher-Smith**  
L&Q Group Director





### Community engagement at South Grove, Walthamstow – L&Q

South Grove is a development of 500 homes in Walthamstow.

L&Q committed £50,000 for a community development plan before residents moved in. The long-term goal is to create a sense of place, increase social mobility and community engagement and deliver positive outcomes including improved skills and education, enhanced community cohesion, improved access to arts and culture and improved public realm.

The plan was informed through an analysis of available data on the needs and views of local people. Data was sourced from consultations and other publicly-available sources and supplemented by a series of meetings with local people and community groups.

The approach focused on engagement during the pre-occupation phase to mitigate the disruption caused to local communities by construction activities.

Activity is now planned to foster new connections between neighbours and members of the surrounding community through conversation, reflection, art and food. This includes engaging students from the local college to produce designs celebrating the history and future of Walthamstow. Online networks, with group discussions and volunteering networks, alongside a resident's association have also been set up. Grants are available for community activities that achieve the desired outcomes.

Key was establishing a comprehensive impact assessment to measure success in creating a thriving community. Outcomes being tracked include the number of graduate jobs created, the number of local residents employed during the construction phase and work experience placements.

