

# Care for the Community

With the spread of 'NIMBYism', the aggregates industry continues to face the challenging task of changing the negative public perception of quarries. The Saint Consulting Group offer some advice on overcoming public opposition



Miller Argent, the developers behind the Ffos-y-fra Land Reclamation Scheme in Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales, regularly keep the community informed of progress

A recent survey carried out by The Saint Consulting Group has found that nearly nine out of 10 people in Britain are NIMBYs (people who oppose development under the banner 'Not In My Backyard'). Clearly, this does not bode well for quarry operators, as the 2008 Saint UK Index showed that almost a quarter of all UK households have objected to a planning application of one kind or another in their local area over the last 12 months.

The Saint study is said to be the only survey of its kind; the Massachusetts-based consultancy, which specializes in helping to win planning decisions for a number of clients, including those in quarrying, telephone interviewed 1,000 people across the UK in February 2008.

According to this year's Saint UK index, quarries remain one of the most disliked forms of development behind casinos, power plants and landfill sites (fig. 1). Commenting on the public

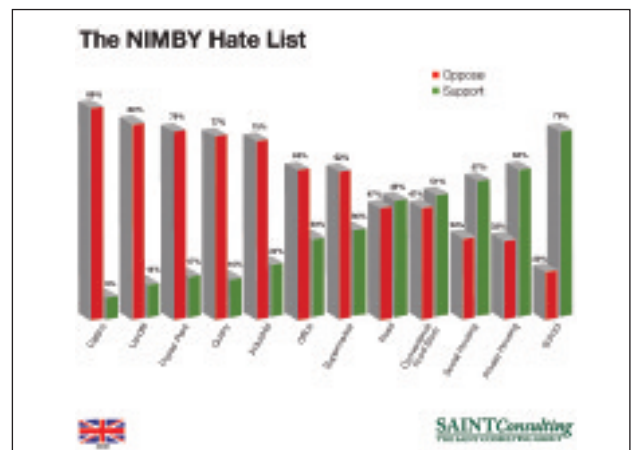
opposition to quarry developments, Nick Keable, vice-president of UK operations at The Saint Consulting Group, said: 'Protecting the environment, increased traffic flow and the impact of noise and dust pollution due to the proximity of quarries are generally the main reasons for Britons opposing this form of development.'

'With opposition increasing and support for general development draining away, NIMBYism is now commonplace in nearly every region, but this doesn't mean it's a no-win situation for quarry companies.'

Chris Hopkins, senior vice-president

for aggregates & mining at The Saint Consulting Group, agrees and believes operators must continue to work on both transparency and performance in order to build trust within local communities, if the two are to co-exist without friction. ➤

Fig. 1



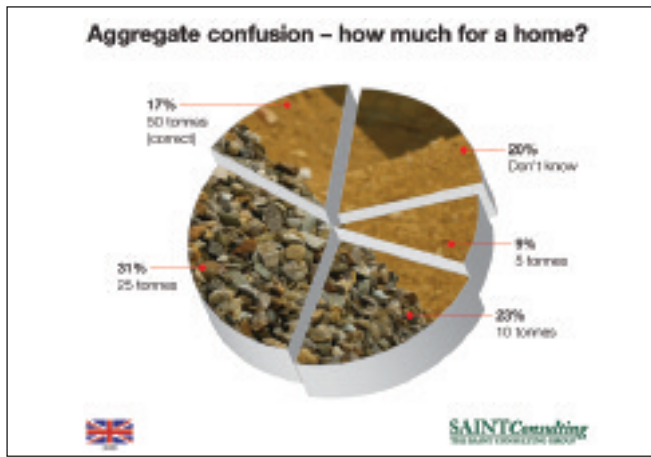


Fig. 2

'I think there is a lot of misunderstanding concerning the public's perception of quarries,' he said. 'Therefore, it is important for operators to educate local residents about what really goes on at a quarry, especially the industry's efforts to protect the environment.'

'Local communities need to be made fully aware of how companies are dealing with major issues, such as noise, dust, habitat destruction, transport and visual impact. At the end of the day, most developers are managing their quarries responsibly and are working towards more sustainable working practices.'

'For example, mitigation measures for noise and vibration include careful blast design and complete enclosure of processing equipment. Also, some operators are using alternative modes of hauling aggregates, most notably rail and water, as a way of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.'

The problem for the quarrying industry is that it has not been good at publicizing itself, and this has probably been the main barrier to changing the negative public perception of quarries. As a result, there is a real need for the sector to better communicate what it achieves to the wider public, to improve its image at a time when the UK is increasingly becoming a nation of NIMBYs.

## Counteracting negativity

Annual surveys carried out by The Saint Consulting Group in the US, Canada and the UK have found that, despite the differences in culture, land values and economic cycles, the growing NIMBYism in all these countries has actually largely been driven by self-interest.

'The much-publicized reasons why people oppose developments tend to be environmentally linked, but we have concluded that the real reason for public opposition is in order to protect the

value of land and property,' said Mr Keable.

'This has been the case since we began surveying the UK in 2006. A clear trend is that a vast majority of respondents believe their neighbourhoods are already overdeveloped and, as a reaction to the sustained growth in UK construction, unpopular forms of development, such as quarries and landfill, are becoming further disliked.'

So how can the industry overcome such opposition to quarries? The advice from The Saint Consulting Group is to engage with the local community and educate members of the public (and likely opponents) about how important the aggregates sector is, and the positive impact that a quarry can have on the community.

'Operators need to make a link with the wider community,' continued Mr Keable. 'They can deal with public concerns and develop good local relations by organizing, for example, a job fair, given that quarries generate significant income and employment for local economies.'

'A company should also undertake full and regular consultation with local residents regarding site activities. Achieving this will help build public confidence and ensure that everyone with an interest in the quarry understands the operations being carried out.'

There is good reason for raising the profile of the quarrying industry; this year's Saint UK Index showed that a majority of the public have no idea of how much aggregate is needed to build a house (fig. 2). With a major housing shortage on the way and the Government recommending that 3 million new homes should be built by 2020, quarry operators have an ideal opportunity to get the public to understand how much society is reliant on the aggregates sector.

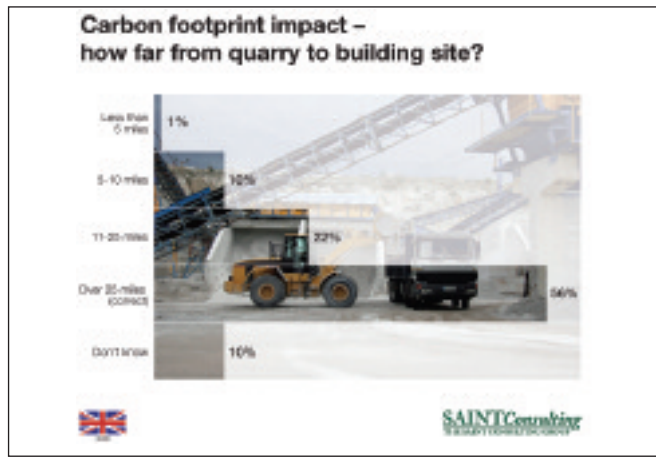


Fig. 3

Furthermore, as the construction industry increasingly focuses on meeting its waste and sustainability targets, local aggregate markets will become more important, as transporting heavy products by lorry over long distances is not considered environmentally friendly.

In the Saint survey (fig. 3), 56% of the British public correctly believe aggregates travel for more than 25 miles (from quarry to a construction site by lorry), while the remainder assume aggregate transportation is considerably less, or they have no idea how far it travels.

Developing more local quarries could help remove thousands of lorry journeys annually, which, in effect, would reduce the quarrying industry's carbon footprint. Moreover, the industry is the second biggest user of rail freight (after coal) and, during recent years, has invested heavily in rail facilities and wagons.

## Image is everything

Overcoming public opposition to quarry developments can be achieved, and the need to promote the aggregates industry more extensively has been made clear by the 2008 Saint UK Index. British NIMBYism is rife when it comes to planning and development, and the sector needs to improve its image by integrating into the wider public and demonstrating its sustainable working practices in the long term.

'The key to winning approval for a quarry is a strong show of community support to counter those who oppose the industry,' commented Mr Hopkins. 'Operators need to establish close ties with their local communities early on, as it is much easier to present the industry's message to local residents whose position has not already been influenced, than it is to change their pre-formed opinions.'

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