

## *Not In My Back Yard*

### Challenge Overview Sheet

Chair: **Julian Glover** – chief writer for *The Guardian*  
Panel members: **Dame Fiona Reynolds** – Director-General of The National Trust  
**Antony Oliver** – Editor of *New Civil Engineer*  
**Jim Steer** – Managing Director of Steer Davies Gleave

**Julian Glover** opened the debate highlighting the four main NIMBY issues facing Britain today including the energy debate, issues relating to infrastructure, planning for the future and transport issues high speed rail.

**Jim Steer** began by discussing the local versus national implications that high speed rail (HSR) has by comparing the current objections to the early railways.

Using John Ruskin's quote "*You Enterprised a Railroad through the valley - you blasted its rocks away, heaped thousands of tons of shale into its lovely stream. The valley is gone, and the Gods with it; and now, every fool in Buxton can be in Bakewell in half an hour, and every fool in Bakewell at Buxton; which you think a lucrative process of exchange – you Fools everywhere.*" Jim Steer raised the issues around High Speed Rail. Jim outlined the justifications for HSR including using the same routes but straighter and the fact that HSR uses little more energy than conventional rail travel (only 10% more energy is used at 300 kmph than is used at 200 kmph). The cost-benefit ratio is 3.5:1 giving an excellent rate of return and HSR adds capacity (freight increases as passenger trains are released). HSR will reduce carbon and 78% of people polled said YES to 'Is HSR necessary to the future of Britain?' The need for HSR has risen as the demand for rail is now growing faster than car demand; compared with in the 1980s when car travel was still growing faster than rail. HSR will take the pressure off the South East.

So why the objection to HSR? The shift followed the Channel Tunnel Rail link (referred to as High Speed 1). Greengauge21 (a public development agency group), a number of stakeholders and a National Rail strategy were involved in High Speed 1 and there were no protests when Channel Tunnel Rail link was constructed.

The future of HSR in England will be decided shortly following the release of the forthcoming White Paper.

**Fiona Reynolds** responded by saying that 383 per sq km makes the UK one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The construction of HSR benefits the country's infrastructure and since 1945 we have seen the post war government try to join things up – focusing on a more holistic approach. Market forces have replaced nationalised approach and

with the UK's ageing infrastructure comes the problem. Fiona Reynolds believed the problem was stopping people objecting.

Sustainability remains a challenge because the UK has become obsessed with making everything big (schools, hospitals). Other countries have shifted towards the local approach e.g. In Germany 6.3% of their energy is renewable and future targets are 30%. Most is achieved at the household scale, for example, through incentives and tariffs. If you generate a surplus you can sell to the grid. There is a 350million Euro grant scheme to install renewable into households, which will allow Germany to get off nuclear by 2030.

Fiona used the phrase 'mass localism' to refer to community schemes adapting to their circumstances and provide solutions. An argument for mass localism is that if there are fewer national schemes we would be more committed to getting them right. There is a need for a coherent national policy framework within which local communities can find solutions to a large number of the problems. A bottom up approach is the answer.

**Antony Oliver** continued looking at the approach to government policy by saying that getting an efficient and effective planning system is important. The term NIMBY was invented in 1980s and was originally associated with the dumping of toxic waste. It then took off in the late 1980s with Nicholas Ridley and the road construction programme. When the M1 was built it was celebrated and in demand! Since then, the issues have turned to waste, HSR, airports, roads and even wind farms.

In Cornwall no one objected to the nuclear power station at Hinkley Point as it provides jobs but they did object to the road schemes (village by-pass) and the housing that was being built in association with the power station.

In Lille, the city paid 45million Euros to ensure that the HSR went through the city; so can we turn NIMBY in YIMBY? HSR is a regeneration spur. It creates economies that did not previously exist. Travelling from London to Birmingham in 45 minutes changes the way way businesses operate.

### Panel discussion

**Q** - *Britain is different. It is small. We can already get to Birmingham in 55 minutes – why do we need things like HSR?*

**Response:** Chair: There is still an awful lot of green land out there. Fiona Reynolds – why do people object - they love their place, and they feel disempowered. How can we engage people? People want to be involved. It would lead to better planning and better decisions. Jim Steer – happens to be laid out in a north south linear route. Town and country is the ideal (from 1940s planning). If we continue with current planning Britain will become suburbanised. We have 30 million cars in Britain. Key is to make city connections work. Out of town shopping centres increase this suburbanisation.

Antony Oliver - if you say you are going to engage the local community and then don't, you will get a different NIMBY response.

**Q** - *As a nation we have become selfish. We want access but don't want the roads!*

**Response:** Fiona Reynolds – local movement 'Transition Towns'. Recession has made people rethink their priorities.

**Q** - *But is it a view only held by the wealthy? Deprived areas need to buy-in.*

**Response:** Jim Steer – there are opportunities to protest – we have good planning processes. They take time to be done well.

**Q** - *But if they work, why are political parties proposing changes?*

**Responses:** Jim Steer – it's not about the local village green! Who objected to Terminal 5?  
Antony Oliver – Heathrow doesn't really fit the NIMBY argument.  
Fiona – airport expansion is the modern day road expansion.

**Q** - *Who are the visionaries?*

**Response:** Jim Steer – there is a need for local authorities and regions to be involved.

**Q** - *Who decides on a national level project e.g. Eco-towns*

**Responses:** Fiona Reynolds – process was discredited as they were found not to be very eco. Modernising existing stock is far more economical and environmental.

Jim Steer – the big problems we face are our growing population. These decisions drive politicians.

Antony Oliver – planning was imposed without thinking about how it all comes together – roads, schools. Need a vision from local politicians but needs buy in from local businesses.

**Q** - *I agree with Fiona in that NIMBY label is unfair- majority oppose a local development rationally – is there a more appropriate location. But I disagree with changes in planning. Is the answer to start with a national consultation and narrow down the local issues? Sizewell B – of the process only 6 days was given to local consultation.*

**Response:** Fiona Reynolds – disempowerment is the problem.

**Q** - *It's the general rule that people support it (HSR) but it's the detail and the where that matters. National important issues are fractured and therefore local. Process is not to stop objections but start a process of how it should be done. We need to remember why local politicians are elected. We missed NIMTOO (Not in my term of office!).*

**Response:** Jim Steer – the problem is the time it takes. There must be a proper discourse.

**Q** - *How do you propose to protect the land with a growing population and growing energy needs?*

**Responses:** Fiona Reynolds – the suburbia of the USA happened under similar economic circumstances. The worry is that there has not been an open debate about cutting through areas that are less sensitive – need a public debate.

Antony Oliver – take Cardiff and the renewable energy source that the tidal barrage brings coupled with the environmental issues raised.

**Q** - *If the rail demand exceeds the car demand why are there 30 million cars?*

**Response:** Jim Steer – traffic conditions are going to worsen. Rail is the only solution.

**Q** - *Somebody will always complain about new infrastructure. Involving too many people will ultimately mean a decision is never made.*

**Response:** Fiona Reynolds – a debate is needed. The Channel Tunnel rail link had numerous public meetings.

**Q** - *HSR is not important to me. What is, is that we need to find a more energy efficient way.*

**Response:** Jim Steer – HSR is the most efficient solution.

**During the discussion there was an audience vote for High Speed Rail and there was overwhelming support for HSR in Britain.**