

NEWS LESSON

The Cloud Has an Address

BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Who should bear a local cost for a benefit that is shared nationally?
2. Does the language we use for technology, such as “the cloud”, change how we think about it?
3. When is a planning objection about a project, and when is it about change itself?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**hyperscale**	☐	A	spreading fear by exaggerating a danger
2	**prefabricated**	☐	B	a large site holding a group of related buildings
3	**fringe**	☐	C	describes a data centre of enormous size
4	**triumph**	☐	D	built in sections elsewhere and assembled on site
5	**scaremongering**	☐	E	officially asked and paid someone to produce something
6	**commissioned**	☐	F	the outer edge of a town or city
7	**campus**	☐	G	a great success, often one that surprises people
8	**turbines**	☐	H	machines with blades that turn to generate power

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

The argument over data centres is not technology against progress. It is about who carries the cost of buildings that everybody's services depend on.

1 The word cloud was a marketing triumph. It made a global industrial estate sound like weather. For Dale Johnston, the part of the cloud nearest his house is 23 metres of grey prefabricated panelling, standing behind an enclave of 27 homes on the western fringe of Newport. He has a trampoline and a slide out for his grandchildren and, as of this year, very little sky.

2 Johnston's case against the hyperscale data centre beside him is not a case against computing. It is a list: 36 sets of air blast coolers that will most likely hum continuously, 60 diesel generators that must be tested so the flow of data is never interrupted, a bathroom window he already keeps shut against noise from another building on the same 46-acre campus, and a wife on night shifts who cannot sleep. The politicians who welcomed the development as a job creator have, he says, declined his invitation to come and see it.

3 The national figures explain why this conversation is spreading. Britain has 315 hyperscale data centres queuing for a grid connection, and their combined requests substantially exceed the country's typical peak winter demand. That comparison deserves care: it describes what developers have applied for, not electricity anyone has used, and real consumption will depend on how each facility is designed, cooled and operated. Globally, spending on new capacity has been estimated in the trillions of dollars by 2030, which indicates how much of this is a speculative bet on an AI-led economy rather than a response to demand already in evidence.

4 What makes the politics awkward is distribution. The services these buildings support are used almost everywhere, while the panels, turbines and generators stand in particular postcodes, often poorer ones. In Cardiff, a council wants to sell a park and ride relied on by hospital staff to a data centre developer. Residents have lodged more than 1,200 objections, a retired librarian has gathered 1,300 signatures, and a filmmaker who moved onto a new estate two months before the planning application arrived now lives 300 metres from seven proposed gas turbines. The developer says the scheme cannot proceed without full regulatory compliance, and the air quality assessments it commissioned put emissions within safe limits. Residents are being asked to find that reassuring.

5 There is a serious case on the other side, and it is not only about employment, since the Cardiff facility would itself employ up to 125 people. Publicly owned computing can do obvious good: a university supercomputer in Bristol supports dementia and heart disease research. Campaigners who have actually read the planning documents tend to argue for enforceable standards and public ownership rather than outright refusal.

6 The most instructive detail is what happened to the councillor who called the objections scaremongering. Three weeks after a boxing club filled up with his own constituents, he submitted a formal objection himself.

Sources: The Guardian, The datacentre next door: on the frontline of tech's latest David v Goliath battle. Picture: .

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer treats the developer's reassurances with some scepticism. T F NG
2. The power figure for the 315 centres proves that the grid will be unable to cope. T F NG
3. The Cardiff developer is a British company. T F NG
4. The Cardiff facility would create fewer than 150 jobs. T F NG
5. The councillor submitted his objection before the public meeting. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

compliance **declined** **distribution** **enforceable** **exceed** **outright** **reassuring** **speculative**

1. Investors who back unproven technology are placing a _____ bet that may never pay off.
2. A promise to cut noise means little unless it is written into an _____ agreement with penalties for breaking it.
3. The minister _____ to comment on the proposals, saying she needed more time.
4. After weeks of hearing about fumes, the residents found the developer's promise anything but _____ .
5. Few campaigners demand an _____ ban on data centres; most want tighter rules instead.
6. Experts warn that the energy demand of the new sites could _____ what the national grid can supply.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Johnston's _____ to the building is not a rejection of computing itself. (OPPOSE)
2. Critics say the developer's claims about emissions are _____ because the company paid for the assessments. (RELY)
3. Supporters argue that the facility will bring _____ benefits, such as skilled jobs. (ECONOMY)
4. A consultation that never explains the noise levels is _____ . (ADEQUATE)
5. Developers should be made more _____ for the harm their buildings cause. (ACCOUNT)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level the preposition sits inside a fixed phrase. Learn the whole phrase: at odds with, fall short of.

for	from	in	of	on	to	with

1. The outcome of the appeal hinges _____ whether the developer can prove that emissions are safe.
2. The developer cannot be held liable _____ delays caused by the grid operator.
3. Few residents are _____ favour of a plant that will run day and night.
4. Several residents are at odds _____ the council over the sale of the car park.
5. Consultation on the plan fell short _____ what residents were promised.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. The councillor reversed his position after meeting residents. Is that weakness or representation?
2. Campaigners want standards and public ownership rather than refusal. Is that a realistic position?
3. If a country decides it needs this infrastructure, how should it choose where it goes?

9 Role-play: a data centre next door

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the resident

A company wants to build a data centre behind your street. Tell the company what worries you, such as noise, fumes or lost sunlight. Ask for changes before you will agree.

Student B · the company's representative

You want to build the data centre. Explain the benefits, such as jobs. Listen to the resident, then offer one or two changes. You cannot agree to everything.

Useful phrases

I'm really worried about the noise.
We've lived here for years.
That's not good enough for us.
I'd like to hear more about the jobs.
We're happy to listen to your concerns.
Could we find a compromise?

Afterwards, tell the class: did you reach an agreement, and was it fair to the people living nearby?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 C · 2 D · 3 F · 4 G · 5 A · 6 E · 7 B · 8 H

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 speculative · 2 enforceable · 3 declined · 4 reassuring · 5 outright · 6 exceed

6 Word forms

1 opposition · 2 unreliable · 3 economic · 4 inadequate · 5 accountable

7 Language focus

1 on · 2 for · 3 in · 4 with · 5 of

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