NEWS LESSON

The Grey Wall Behind His Garden



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What happens to a photo when you save it online?
2. Is there a large new building near your home? What do people think of it?
3. Who should decide what gets built in a neighbourhood?

2 Key words

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

1	**lawn**	☐	A	the short grass in a garden
2	**stream**	☐	B	the hours of the day that you work, for example at night
3	**chatbot**	☐	C	very bad and unpleasant
4	**generators**	☐	D	the hard grey material used to build walls and roads
5	**disgusting**	☐	E	to watch a film or listen to music over the internet
6	**backed**	☐	F	a computer program that answers your questions in writing
7	**concrete**	☐	G	machines that make electricity
8	**shifts**	☐	H	said you agreed with a plan and helped it

3 Read

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

Dale Johnston's garden in Wales now looks out at an enormous grey building. It is a data centre, and many more are being planned.

1 Dale Johnston has a garden on the edge of Newport, in south Wales. There is a trampoline and a slide on the lawn for his grandchildren, and two chairs for him and his wife. On an autumn evening he should be watching the light fade out of the sky. Instead he looks at a wall of grey panels 23 metres high.

2 The building is a data centre. Inside are thousands of computers that store information and run online services. When you save a photo, stream a film or ask a chatbot a question, machines in a building like this one may be doing the work. Artificial intelligence needs a great deal of computing power, so companies are building more of these centres and making them much bigger.

3 Local politicians have welcomed the Newport centre as a source of jobs. Johnston is thinking about what he has lost. "Before, the sun used to come around here and it was lovely," he told the Guardian. He says the way residents have been treated is "disgusting", and that the politicians who backed the project will not come to his garden to look at it.

4 He is worried about noise as well as light. The centre has 36 sets of large coolers to stop the computer chips overheating, and 60 back-up generators that have to be tested regularly. He already keeps his bathroom window shut because of a hum from another building on the same site. His wife is a nurse who works night shifts, and she struggles to sleep.

5 Newport is not the only place having this argument. In Britain, 315 big data centres are waiting for a connection to the electricity network. Together they have asked for far more power than the country normally uses on a cold winter day. That number is a request, not a measurement. Nobody yet knows how much electricity each building will really use, because that depends on how it is built and run.

6 In Cardiff, people are fighting a plan to put a data centre on a car park used by hospital staff. More than 1,200 people have objected to it.

7 Johnston can talk about little else. The internet is often called a cloud, which sounds light and far away. His garden is a reminder that it is made of concrete, and that it has to stand somewhere.

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. Johnston's garden used to get more sun than it does now. T F NG
2. The politicians who supported the project have visited his garden. T F NG
3. The 315 data centres have asked for more power than Britain normally uses on a cold winter day. T F NG
4. The Newport data centre will employ more than 100 people. T F NG
5. The number 315 shows how much electricity the centres are using. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

approved	connected	enormous	objected	regularly	request	struggles

1. The new stadium is _____ . It is bigger than any other building in the town.
2. Smoke alarms should be tested _____ , for example once a month.
3. Several neighbours _____ to the new road because of the traffic.
4. He sent a _____ to the council, asking them to cut the grass near the school.
5. My neighbour _____ to sleep because the music from the party next door is so loud.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Before the building arrived, Johnston _____ the sun in his garden every evening. (ENJOY)
2. Local politicians _____ the Newport centre as a source of jobs. (WELCOME)
3. Johnston is thinking about what he _____ . (LOSE)
4. In Britain, 315 big data centres _____ for a connection to the electricity network. (WAIT)
5. Nobody yet _____ how much electricity each building will really use. (KNOW)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many words go with one small word. Learn them together, for example worried about.

about at for in on to with

1. Johnston is worried _____ the noise from the generators.
2. The council is responsible _____ deciding where the building goes.
3. How loud the generators are depends _____ where you stand.
4. Local people have complained _____ the council about the noise.
5. Johnston does not agree _____ the politicians who backed the project.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. Would you live next to a building like this if your rent were cheaper?
2. Johnston says politicians will not visit his garden. Why might that matter?
3. Which online service would you find hardest to give up?

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 enormous · 2 regularly · 3 objected · 4 request · 5 struggles

6 Verb forms

1 enjoyed · 2 have welcomed · 3 has lost · 4 are waiting · 5 knows

7 Language focus

1 about · 2 for · 3 on · 4 to · 5 with

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