NEWS LESSON

What Is It Like to Live Next to a Data Centre?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Where do you imagine your files and photos are actually stored?
2. What should a company offer a neighbourhood before building something large there?
3. Is it possible to want new technology and object to a particular project?

2 Key words

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

1	**hyperscale**	☐	A	people's names written by hand, for example on a petition
2	**prefabricated**	☐	B	people chosen to make decisions for a town or city
3	**campus**	☐	C	machines with large blades that make power
4	**drone**	☐	D	a low, steady sound that goes on and on
5	**fumes**	☐	E	very large, built to hold huge numbers of computers
6	**councillors**	☐	F	a large area of land with a group of buildings on it
7	**signatures**	☐	G	made in a factory and put together on the building site
8	**turbines**	☐	H	strong, unpleasant smoke or gas

3 Read

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

Britain is building data centres to power artificial intelligence. In Newport and Cardiff, the people living beside them are asking who benefits.

1 Dale Johnston's garden on the western edge of Newport has a trampoline, a slide and two chairs. It also has a view of 23 metres of grey prefabricated panelling, because a hyperscale data centre now stands behind his small enclave of 27 houses. “Before, the sun used to come around here and it was lovely,” he told the Guardian.

2 Data centres hold the computers that store and process information for the services most of us use every day. Artificial intelligence has made them far hungrier for space and electricity, and the industry argues that only larger and larger facilities can meet the demand. In Britain, 315 hyperscale centres are queuing to connect to the national grid. The power they have applied for adds up to considerably more than the country's typical peak demand on a cold winter day, although an application is not the same as a measurement of what will actually be consumed.

3 Johnston's objections are specific rather than abstract. The centre has 36 sets of air blast coolers to stop its chips overheating, and 60 diesel back-up generators that will be tested regularly to protect the flow of data. He expects a constant drone and worries about fumes. He already closes his bathroom window against the hum of another building on the same 46-acre campus, and his wife, a nurse on night shifts, can barely sleep. Labour politicians presented the project as a job creator. Johnston says he has invited councillors and MPs to stand in his garden, and that none of them has come.

4 In Cardiff, a similar argument is louder. The council wants to sell a park and ride used by hospital staff to a developer planning a data facility. More than 1,200 objections have been lodged, and the Welsh government has ordered the council to pause the application. Sue Elias, a retired librarian, has leafleted the car park every Wednesday for six weeks and collected 1,300 signatures. Nick Richards, who moved onto a new estate two months before the application appeared, lives 300 metres from a proposed energy centre with seven gas turbines. “I feel trapped,” he says. The developer says the scheme cannot proceed without full compliance with environmental and public health rules, and air quality assessments it commissioned estimate that emissions will be within safe levels.

5 The councillor who defended the Cardiff plan argued that some of the claims circulating were scaremongering, and noted that the centre would employ up to 125 people once built. Three weeks after a packed public meeting in a local boxing club, he submitted a formal objection of his own.

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 Welsh government has become involved in the Cardiff application. T F NG
2. Sue Elias has been collecting signatures for less than a month. T F NG
3. Hospital staff who use the park and ride will be given a new car park. T F NG
4. The councillor who called some claims scaremongering later objected to the plan himself. T F NG
5. Nick Richards moved to the area after the application was made. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

commissioned **compliance** **consumed** **emissions** **enclave** **lodged** **proceed** **scaremongering**

1. The old village is now a small _____ surrounded by new roads and warehouses.
2. Residents have _____ a formal complaint with the council.
3. The company says that _____ from the generators will stay within safe levels.
4. The developer _____ a report from independent experts on air quality.
5. Supporters of the plan accused the campaigners of _____ , saying they were frightening people without evidence.
6. The scheme cannot _____ until the council has approved it.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Nick Richards _____ onto the estate only two months earlier when the application appeared. (MOVE)
2. The park and ride _____ by hospital staff every day. (USE)
3. If the plan goes ahead, heavy lorries _____ the narrow road every day. (USE)
4. Local people _____ outside the council offices since early morning. (PROTEST)
5. Three weeks after the packed meeting, the councillor _____ a formal objection. (SUBMIT)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Nouns, verbs and adjectives often take a fixed preposition. Learn them as chunks: objections to, rely on, interest in.

at for in of on to with

1. The developer has applied _____ planning permission.
2. Residents have strong objections _____ the plan.
3. Hospital staff rely _____ the car park every day.
4. The project cannot go ahead without full compliance _____ safety rules.
5. The council has shown little interest _____ their views.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. The power figure is an application, not a measurement. Why is that distinction important?
2. Up to 125 jobs for a facility of that size: is that a strong argument?
3. How should a council consult people who have just moved into an area?

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 enclave · 2 lodged · 3 emissions · 4 commissioned · 5 scaremongering · 6 proceed

6 Verb forms

1 had moved · 2 is used · 3 will use · 4 have been protesting · 5 submitted

7 Language focus

1 for · 2 to · 3 on · 4 with · 5 in

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