Tech firms urge UK plan on datacentre backlash

LEVEL B2


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I. WARM-UP

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word datacentre?
2. What local benefits would you want from a big new site near you?
3. How should governments balance growth and community concerns?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

opposition
actions or arguments against an idea or plan

datacentre
a large building that stores and runs many computers and servers

scrutiny
careful and critical attention from the public or media

infrastructure
basic systems and buildings a society or industry needs to work

moratorium
an official pause that stops new activity for a time

consent
agreement or permission from people affected by a decision

distrust
the feeling that someone or something is not honest or reliable

framework
an organised set of rules or guidance to follow

III. READING

A group of AI infrastructure firms says the UK has about 12 months to prevent growing opposition to new datacentre projects. The Sovereign AI Leadership (SAIL) taskforce says protests will spread unless communities see clear local benefits.

In a paper to ministers, the taskforce calls for a national "compact" to win public consent. It suggests a framework for councils and mayors that links a site's size to a visible local contribution, such as funding or facilities, and allows host areas to keep more tax revenues.

The warning follows rising scrutiny of water and energy use, and of local impacts. In the United States, organised campaigns have stopped permitted projects and led to a moratorium in some places.

The taskforce says distrust of corporate and government promises is a deeper cause than AI itself, and that similar arguments are starting to appear in Britain. Microsoft has pledged $30bn (£22bn) for UK AI infrastructure, with sites planned in Acton, London and in Newport.

The companies argue that a clear prosperity compact could show how hosting datacentres benefits local people while the country builds the computing power needed for AI.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "AI firms say UK has a year to head off...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who warns the UK it has about 12 months to act?
2. What does the taskforce propose to gain public consent?
3. What deeper cause does the taskforce link to US opposition?
4. Which two UK places are named as Microsoft sites?
5. How much has Microsoft pledged for UK AI infrastructure?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Should councils keep more tax revenues from hosting datacentres? Why?
2. What local benefits would persuade you to support a datacentre?
3. How can firms reduce distrust when proposing large projects?
4. Will protests grow in the UK, or are they going to fade? Why?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Will vs going to (prediction)

Use will + base verb for general predictions or decisions made now. Use be going to + base verb when there is present evidence or a plan already in motion.

"SAIL says protests **will spread** *unless communities see clear local benefits."*

"Look at the signs: local debate **is going to intensify**."

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each gap with will or be going to.

1. Can't find the taskforce paper? I (send) ___ you the link. _____
2. The council is booking rooms now; they (hold) ___ talks. _____
3. Look at the funding: locals (support) ___ a nearby site. _____
4. Busy? Don't worry, I (ask) ___ the council about the new site. _____
5. Crews are on site now; work (start) ___ next week. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 8–10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading, 10 minutes comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 10–12 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach datacentre, scrutiny, moratorium and consent. Use photos of server halls to anchor meaning before reading.
- Run a gist task first (Who is warning, and about what?), then scan for names, places and figures. If opinions become personal, keep focus on policies and local benefits rather than on students' own workplaces or identities.
- Differentiation: stronger students draft a two-line community benefit offer; others list three benefits and three risks in pairs before sharing.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Take a quick show of hands, then pair students from opposite views to exchange one reason each.
2. Elicit examples (funding, training, facilities). Push for specifics: amount, who benefits, and by when.
3. Board likely trust-builders (clear data, honest timelines, local jobs). Ask for one concrete step each.
4. First, predict individually on paper; then compare in groups and justify using evidence from the text.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In two teams, write and deliver 90-second pitches: for or against a proposed datacentre in your town.

Writing: In pairs, draft a 120-word “prosperity compact” summary for a host council, naming two concrete benefits and a timeline.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Will vs going to (prediction)

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Who warns the UK it has about 12 months to act?
   The Sovereign AI Leadership (SAIL) taskforce of AI infrastructure firms.
2. What does the taskforce propose to gain public consent?
   A national compact and a framework tying each site's size to local benefits, with more local tax kept.
3. What deeper cause does the taskforce link to US opposition?
   Distrust of corporate and government promises.
4. Which two UK places are named as Microsoft sites?
   Acton, London and Newport.
5. How much has Microsoft pledged for UK AI infrastructure?
   $30bn (£22bn).

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each gap with will or be going to.

1. Can't find the taskforce paper? I ___ you the link. **will send**
2. The council is booking rooms now; they ___ talks. **are going to hold**
3. Look at the funding: locals ___ a nearby site. **are going to support**
4. Busy? Don't worry, I ___ the council about the new site. **will ask**
5. Crews are on site now; work ___ next week. **is going to start**

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use will + base verb for general predictions or decisions made now. Use be going to + base verb when there is present evidence or a plan already in motion. (Example 2 constructed.)

"SAIL says protests **will spread** *unless communities see clear local benefits."*

"Look at the signs: local debate **is going to intensify**.*"*