



While most of the news stories with the keyword 'chimneys' in recent weeks have concerned the contraptions featured in Danny Boyle's somewhat elegiac Olympic Opening Ceremony, tucked away was a story that illustrates our equivocal view of the environment.

Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge is looking to construct a state-of-the-art energy innovation centre in its grounds, to take its energy production needs into the 21st century and replace the current combined heat and power plant - the NHS's first. To do so it will need to construct three large – that is, very high – chimneys and that is where the good people of Cambridge come up against a paradox. They don't want the chimneys because it will spoil the view.

Describing the proposed new building with its 200ft-tall chimneys as "hideous", a local councillor is quoted as saying: "While I appreciate the need for environmentally friendly energy, it should not be at the expense of making the skyline an eyesore." The sentiment was echoed in a tweet by the local journalist who broke the story. "Is green energy worth landscape impact?" he asked rhetorically.

Fortunately, not everyone has this view of progress in the built environment. In a reply to the tweet, another resident suggested the writer travel to nearby St Neots to view the real impact of traditional power plants. It is a sentiment expressed in this column – not St Neots but the numerous monstrosities in Yorkshire.

The weirdest thing is that the people who have been complaining about the proposed chimneys to facilitate green energy probably gasped in amazement at the aforementioned creations of Danny Boyle. Mr Boyle was born among the mill chimneys of Radcliffe in Lancashire (as, co-incidentally, was I, but a year earlier) and no expression of what England is for someone of

that lineage could happen without them. Maybe what we are seeing now is a re-emergence of the chimney as a symbol of a new, greener industrial landscape.

Oh, and by the way – it's still raining. This week I was there to witness the baling out and pumping out of basements and low-lying ground floors in the Pennine town I now call home. It's close to the source of the river that flows to the sea at Liverpool (and which, but for a surveyor's error, would carry its name) and it was gushing perilously close to the top of its allotted archway. The weather people still say it's the jetstream. Meanwhile, activists are being waterjetted as they try to prevent the Arctic being exploited and the situation further exacerbated.

Chris Stokes