Frequently Asked Questions

The Three network

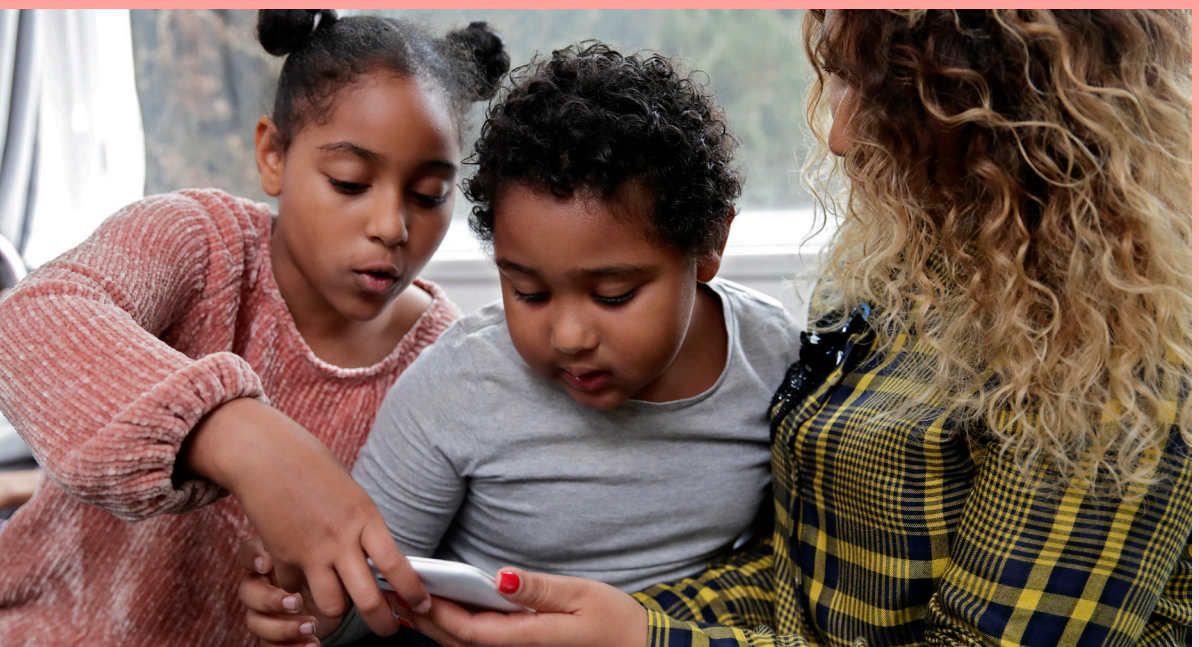
Most of us own phones and want a fast and reliable mobile signal at home and at work.

Three is investing to improve the network and deliver better connectivity, every day for every customer. This programme involves improving 4G connectivity and the rollout of 5G services along with 5G home broadband, which will rival traditional broadband connections.

As part of its Levelling Up agenda, the Government has stated that by 2030 the country will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for most of the population.

Three has over 17,000 mobile phone masts across the country delivering coverage and capacity to over 9.7 million customers. Our network carries billions of calls a year and increasing volumes of data which means the network needs to evolve to meet demand and provide high quality service.

We are investing in your area to improve connectivity and the service our customers receive.



What is a mobile phone mast?

A mast is the supporting structure for the antennas. The antennas provide the signal that enables mobile phones to connect to the network. The design can vary from a lattice tower to a slim line monopole.

Streetworks site
The antennas at the top of the mast deliver the radio signal.

The cabinets on ground level contain the computers and technology that enable calls to be connected into the wider network.

Why is a new mast needed?

Mobile phone masts provide a signal that enables our mobile phones to function, they need to be located close to where people use their phones in order to deliver signal and capacity.

Simply upgrading existing sites in the area is often not sufficient to deliver the quality of coverage and capacity required for 5G. As the 5G signal travels a shorter distance gaps can appear in the network.

New sites need to fit into the wider network and the search area for a location is often limited.

Many of our new sites are located on adopted highways land, which includes grass verges or wider areas of pavement. We want to offer the community a reliable network experience and these sites are critical to making that happen.

Why have you selected this location?

Masts need to be located close to where people use their phones.

We have identified this area as needing improved coverage or capacity which can only be delivered by installing a new site. A process has been undertaken to assess and evaluate siting options before a preferred site has been selected.

Masts need to be tall enough to transmit over nearby buildings and trees, and to ensure the signal can reach as many people as possible.

If a site is built on public highway the local highways authority will have been consulted as part of the planning process. The Government has given telecoms operators the right to site equipment on adopted highways land.

All our sites are designed and built to comply fully with all highways laws to ensure continued access for all users.

Do you need permission to build a new mast?

Yes, new sites will require approval, the type of approval will vary depending on the design of site and location. Most sites built on adopted highways land require what is known as prior approval by the local planning authority.

The local planning authority will display a site notice and may also consult with nearby residents. Members of the public can view the application and submit their comments via the local planning authority website or by writing to the local planning authority but there are time constraints.

Under the prior approval regime, a local authority has 56 days, beginning with the date on which it receives a valid application, in which to make its determination and to notify the applicant of the decision to give or refuse such approval. If no decision is made, or the planning authority fails to notify the developer of its decision to refuse the application within the 56 days, permission is deemed to have been granted.

The planning application will include drawings of the site design and location along with an ICNIRP certificate. ICNIRP is the International Commission for Non-Ionising Radiation Protection and is recognised by the World Health Organisation, the certificate is to confirm that the site complies with the ICNIRP standards.

All our sites are designed and built to be fully compliant with ICNIRP guidelines on limiting exposure to electromagnetic waves – the guidelines cover all the population including children.

A further guide to 5G

The UK Health Security Agency (previously Public Health England) advises the UK Government on the public health aspects of exposure to radio waves, including those from mobile phone base stations and other radio transmitters in the environment.

You can also find some useful information about radio waves, health and 5G technologies provided by the Government and Ofcom:

Mobile phone base stations: radio waves and health
5G technologies: radio waves and health
5G mobile technology: a guide (ofcom.org.uk)

Life needs a big network

Three is home to 9.7m customers across the UK.

We are investing in our network in your area so that customers have a fast and reliable mobile signal at home and at work.

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