

Sustainability & the Environment

Importance of connectivity to sustainability and the environment

The importance of digital connectivity cannot be undervalued, with positive impacts across many sectors, industries and demographics.

Although the Shared Rural Network does require the build and installation of new infrastructure, by providing better mobile connectivity, more services can be digitised in rural areas, reducing the overall carbon footprint of businesses and households. Connectivity can play a vital role in a greener, more resilient future, helping to reduce carbon emissions and build back better and greener.

How will the Shared Rural Network aim to reduce its environmental impact?

The Shared Rural Network aims to transform mobile coverage without duplicating infrastructure, minimising the impact on our countryside. By coming together and sharing resources, the mobile network operators (MNOs) are able to minimise the carbon footprint of installing, operating and maintaining mobile sites. According to one MNO, base stations account for 65% of the company's entire energy consumption¹. As the Shared Rural Network allows sharing of these base stations, the need for additional masts and the associated energy consumption is removed.

Part of the requirements of building a new mast is that the site has an adequate power supply. This in itself can have impacts on the environment depending on the source of power, therefore, as part of the programme we are exploring the potential for alternative power solutions.

As well as trying to reduce environmental impacts, there are long term sustainability benefits of being better connected to consider. The connections that will come from the Shared Rural Network will assist in the development of smart technologies in rural areas. Smart transportation, smart buildings, smart manufacturing and smart agriculture can all help facilitate emission reductions, whilst improving quality of life and supporting economic growth.

Connectivity powers digital solutions that help businesses and communities grow and thrive in a sustainable way, from reducing household energy consumption through smart metering, to reducing travel by powering remote working, and by improving efficiencies through the adoption of the Internet of Things (IoT) – the term used to encompass devices connected to the internet.

¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2019/08/05/will-5g-help-hinder-britains-target-net-zero-emissions-2050/>

