

BREEAM Communities 2012 – An introduction for local authorities

BREEAM Communities is a standard that helps developers, local authorities and design teams improve, measure and certify the sustainability of developments at the neighbourhood scale and beyond. It covers economic, social and environmental sustainability – assessing issues like housing provision, transport networks, community facilities, and economic impact.

BREEAM Communities can be required by local planning authorities through their local plan. The scheme provides an independent assessment of planning applications for large scale development. It can help to ensure that new developments are planned and built to provide high quality communities that are vibrant, safe and environmentally friendly.

What are the benefits for a local planning authority?

A sustainability standard at the masterplanning scale is useful for developers, local government and the professionals involved in planning new developments. Here are a few of the benefits that are specifically relevant for planning authorities:

- provides a nationally described set of sustainability outcomes that the developer and planning authority can use in pre-application discussions and subsequent negotiations
- measures what the development proposal will achieve so a case officer can quickly assess performance against key sustainability objectives
- certifies a proposal with a BREEAM rating (e.g. Very Good or Excellent) allowing planning committee members and community representatives to quickly understand the proposal's potential
- provides a measurable target for monitoring and reporting objectives in the local plan and other council strategies (e.g. on carbon reduction).

Bristol City Council's Core Strategy (adopted June 2011) requires a BREEAM Communities assessment on all 'super major' developments. 'We wanted to make use of nationally recognised standards in line with the National Planning Policy Framework,' says Celia Beeson of Bristol City Council. 'Our own checklist made it difficult for case officers to be clear on what the development was actually going to do. The national standards ensure that the development has undergone a credible and transparent process to assess sustainability.'

Sean Nicholson, Technical Director at WSP, says 'BREEAM Communities is about developers and planners working together to achieve the most sustainable outcomes for major sites. It's a solution to help move projects through the planning system and should be welcomed by everyone with an interest in securing sustainable communities.'



Image: BREEAM Communities project in Sweden, courtesy of Kanozi Architects and Diligentia.

How does this relate to viability?

BREEAM Communities addresses the long-term economic success of a development through the assessment of a number of issues, including: economic impact; demographic needs and priorities; and labour and skills.

Consideration of the economic impact of other factors (such as ecology, resources, transport and social wellbeing) is done through full assessments of site constraints and opportunities in relation to resources and services that extend beyond the development. These assessments are developed into strategies that guide decision making in the master planning process. The BREEAM Communities 2012 approach takes account of the economic effects of increasing demand on resources, services and land into the future as well as the direct and indirect costs associated with the impacts of climate change.

BREEAM Communities does not set guidelines for the development economics of a site. This is the responsibility of the local authority and the developer, as every development has unique circumstances that determine site level viability. BREEAM Communities is designed to be flexible whilst ensuring it drives real and measurable improvement in a non-prescriptive way. Flexibility is also achieved by limiting mandatory standards (as much as possible) to issues that are normally required for planning applications at this scale.

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How does this relate to sustainable building standards?

The BREEAM building standards and the Code for Sustainable Homes require detailed information from the design team that shows how the building will perform against a variety of issues, like energy, pollution and health and wellbeing. The assessment criteria in BREEAM Communities consider these issues at the very early stages of design where site-wide solutions can have a big impact. Credits achieved in the BREEAM Communities scheme can be used to support and simplify a building level assessment. There are 25 topics in BREEAM Communities that are directly related to building level issues, providing significant value in helping to achieve requirements for sustainable design and construction standards.



Image: Media City, the first certified BREEAM Communities development, courtesy of Peel Holdings.

A developer's perspective

'BREEAM has a strong reputation as an environmental standard. Using the scheme on development projects gives us confidence that we are designing and constructing sustainably, and gives our clients and tenants confidence that the green credentials claimed for our developments are accurate. People know and trust the BREEAM standard – if you get a BREEAM "Excellent", for example, there is no doubt or argument about what you have achieved.' Stuart Rimmer, Construction Manager with the Peel Group

Background

BREEAM Communities was originally launched in 2008 and has provided invaluable experience of addressing sustainability at the masterplan level. BREEAM Communities 2012 is an updated version that significantly streamlines this methodology focusing on the process of masterplanning to achieve sustainable outcomes. BRE has updated the scheme based on pilot projects in the UK and Sweden and customer feedback.

More information

For more information please contact BREEAM at breeam@bre.co.uk

Visit www.breeam.org/communities for:

Free-to-view video

There is a free-to-view introductory video describing the updated scheme.

Technical manual

The technical manual for the scheme is now live and available as a free download. This gives detail on the scope, timing and content of BREEAM Communities.

Case studies and further information

General information, flyers and a series of case studies are available on the website.

Local authority training

Local authority staff and members are welcome to attend the first day of our assessor training courses free of charge. This is a stand-alone module that gives an overview of the timing, scope and content of BREEAM Communities. BREEAM can also offer officer and member training on BREEAM Communities upon request. www.breeam.org/events

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