

Encouraging positive social impact and equity using BREEAM



Foreword



Recent global events have drawn a spotlight on the deep-rooted inequalities that still exist in all communities and societies around the world. BREEAM recognises that lower-income and marginalised communities are disproportionately impacted by negative social impacts when the built environment is unsustainable, inefficient, sometimes unsafe, often unhealthy and not resilient. We acknowledge that BREEAM plays a significant role in shaping decisions in the built environment around the world and should proactively encourage positive

social impacts that provide universal and equal access, dignity and fair treatment to people in addition to addressing and mitigating environmental impacts.

As professionals in the built environment, we also recognise that our personal and professional actions can perpetuate inequities as well as create positive impacts. Understanding this is the first step to creating the sustainable, just and resilient world that we all want to live in. Listening and learning is a cornerstone of our approach and we encourage everyone in our industry to examine their own actions and commit to a more equitable future through the work we are doing. This includes identifying what voices are not present in the room when making decisions that have an impact on people and communities and actively seeking to sincerely engage and involve them equally in the process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shamir Ghumra'.

Shamir Ghumra
BREEAM Director

The way places are planned, built, maintained and operated have direct impacts on:

- Jobs and economic growth;
- The health and wellbeing of those who interact with the built environment directly or indirectly; and
- The strength of local communities.

Introduction

Many organisations are seeking to align their activities with international initiatives, such as the United Nation's Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs), that seek to address global challenges including poverty and other societal inequalities. Similarly, businesses are increasingly using Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors to evaluate how successfully they have introduced sustainability strategies to improve performance and outcomes, manage risk and, ultimately, grow business value. As a consequence, the consideration of social impacts is now becoming an intrinsic part of decision making, rather than an optional requirement.

The expectation that the built environment should create tangible benefits to society has become widespread. Investors, owners, governments and other stakeholders increasingly recognise the need to better understand the social impacts from the built environment. This has created a need to identify how the built environment can best deliver social value throughout its life cycle, including ways to quantify, manage and improve social value outcomes. However, there is currently no consistent framework that provides agreed definitions for or methodologies to measure built environment related social impacts.

The purpose of this paper is to set out BREEAM's understanding of social impacts, value and equity from a built environment perspective and to outline how the BREEAM family of standards address social impacts both now and in the future.

BREEAM's vision for a socially equitable built environment

Our vision is for a built environment that goes beyond fit-for-purpose to one that is socially sensitive and consciously contributing to the long-term economic growth, health and wellbeing, resilience and cohesion of people and communities.

We will seek to deliver this vision by:

Encouraging social impacts and equity to be a key consideration at each life cycle stage of the built environment.

Driving the delivery of positive social impacts and value as an output from the development and operation of built environment assets.

Contributing to and encouraging industry innovation in the assessment and measurement of built environment related social impacts.

Rewarding built environment assets that generate positive social impact and value.

Incentivising the development and operation of socially equitable places.



Terms

BREEAM has adopted the following working definitions to guide our actions:

Social impacts are the effects on people and communities as a consequence of a built environment related action or activity. Communities include existing residents, businesses and other stakeholders in the local area and all those who interact with the place both now and in the future.

Social value is the cumulative benefit of all social impacts from the built environment to individuals, communities and local businesses.

Social equity is the equitable access of all people to resources and opportunities and full participation in the social and cultural life of a community regardless of their background, e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic status, sexual orientation or perceived abilities. Social equity first requires the recognition of the inequities that exist in our societies in order to develop and implement practices that address them.

These definitions are likely to be refined and updated over time as the built environment sector starts to reach a consensus on the scope and detail of these terms.

Scope

BREEAM addresses sustainability impacts that arise from and during the planning, design, construction and operation of physical building and infrastructure assets. The activities that occur within and around the physical boundaries of the asset and beyond the asset, such as the organisational occupancy and the intended use(s) of the asset, do not fall within the scope of the majority of the BREEAM standards.

The journey so far

The BREEAM family of standards, including CEEQUAL and the Home Quality Mark (HQM), have always included requirements that cover various social sustainability issues that lead to positive social impacts and outcomes. In 2019, BREEAM established a Social Impact Core Technical Team (CTT) to identify opportunities to improve the social impact and value outcomes delivered by the BREEAM standards. Our work to date has included:

Identifying which BREEAM issues contribute to a positive social impact and the extent of that contribution for each of the current versions of the BREEAM standards.

Engaging with and listening to our stakeholders in this space across multiple countries, each with their own social impact and equity issues and societal stresses, to understand how they see where BREEAM could support positive social outcomes in communities everywhere.

Acknowledging areas where the BREEAM team need to work to actively expand our own, and the wider sector's understanding of these complex issues.

Considering who is not represented in our stakeholder space and actively seeking to engage those who are underrepresented to include their views.

The role of prisons

As a global standard, we work in 87 countries at present and BREEAM is available in all countries in some form. There is a lot of variation in how human rights are defined, valued and respected and the role that prisons play in those societies. We recognise that prisons in certain contexts need to be carefully considered to determine if certification should be offered.

Prisons present a challenge to BREEAM's focus on the physical asset rather than its occupancy or intended use. We have examples where BREEAM has supported a positive social impact in a prison context where human rights and dignity are being respected. However, we recognise that not all countries in the world have this context.

As such, all prison projects seeking BREEAM certification under our International standards must go through our bespoke assessment process. This process is used for non-standard projects to develop tailored BREEAM criteria appropriate for the project context. A bespoke assessment allows us to evaluate and accept or reject projects for BREEAM certification, delivering more sustainable outcomes but also to consider the project's wider implications as necessary.

Seven aspects of social value that BREEAM can support through the application of our standards have been identified:



Below are examples of assessment issues and credits already in BREEAM standards for buildings that help to deliver direct positive social impacts for each of the seven aspects:

Health and wellbeing of asset users and local communities	Behaviour change and awareness raising	Accessibility and inclusivity	Resilience, safety and security
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visual comfort and light pollution - Indoor and local air quality - Thermal comfort - Acoustics and noise pollution - Water quality and drinking water provision - Responsible construction management - Commissioning and handover - Aftercare - Access to amenities - Sustainable and active transport - Contaminated land - Ecology and biodiversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsible construction management - Monitoring of construction site impacts - Energy monitoring - Water monitoring - Construction waste management - Operational waste management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusive and accessible design - Safe access - Travel plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental management of construction - Security of site and building - Water leak detection - Designing for durability and resilience - Adaptation to climate change - Design for disassembly and adaptability - Refrigerant leak detection - Flood and surface water management - Natural hazards

Asset user and community involvement and engagement	Local investment	Social justice and responsible leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stakeholder consultation - Aftercare and post-occupancy evaluation - Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not currently directly addressed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Responsible construction practices - Responsible sourcing of construction products

An evolving approach

We are by no means done and intend to deliver on the opportunities to improve on the issues already included.

We will put people – all people, regardless of identity or status – squarely at the centre of our vision of the sustainable and resilient world we wish to see for the built environment.

Our next steps include:

Engaging with stakeholders in multiple countries to learn from and contribute to an agreed definition and common understanding of social impact and equity that is relevant to a broad variety of development types, geographies and communities, to help to provide the market with a consistent language, consistent principles and an agreed hierarchy of delivery.

Highlighting existing aspects in the BREEAM family of standards that deliver positive social impacts.

Collaboratively mapping the BREEAM family of schemes to other initiatives, for example the UN SDGs, bringing clarity on where the aims and outcomes align, and to facilitate multi-faceted analysis and reporting.

Adapting the existing BREEAM requirements to improve their social value and equity outcomes.

Incorporating additional social sustainability aspects and issues into our standards that align with market drivers and activities.

There will be opportunities to provide input specific to each BREEAM standard through our consultation processes. We encourage you to provide feedback to us at BREEAM@bregroup.com.

The wider mission of BRE

BRE has been raising the standards of the built environment since 1921, and in the last few years has grown significantly, both through the achievements of our people and the acquisition of businesses with beliefs and goals aligned with our own.

Our multi-disciplinary teams include leading experts – working in world-class facilities – in virtually every element of the built environment. They operate internationally, with offices, representatives and partners around the globe, and at our Head Office and major facilities in the UK. Our long heritage of putting progressive thinking into practice means that our customers and partners, wherever they are in the world, trust us to deliver. BRE is part of the BRE Trust, which uses the profits we make from our services to fund new research and education programmes.

We are committed to developing knowledge on every aspect of the built environment. Using that knowledge, we set the standards for the way buildings, homes and communities are made to keep people safe, protect the environment, make buildings affordable and to create places where people want to live, work and play.

BREEAM

Over the last 30 years BREEAM has evolved and grown to reflect advances in science, technology, policy and business. BREEAM is the world's leading sustainability assessment method for buildings and communities, with more than 572,000 certificates issued and a global reach encompassing over 87 countries.

BREEAM is now used in more than 87 countries worldwide



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