Practical how-to guide:
How to use a social sustainability framework

For this ‘How To’ Masterclass, the UK-GBC has partnered with the Berkeley Group to provide you with a short guidance note on how use a social sustainability framework.

Background to the Berkeley Group & UK Green Building Council

The UK Green Building Council is a membership organisation campaigning for a sustainable built environment – one that minimises negative environmental impacts while maximising benefits for people everywhere.

Berkeley Group define social sustainability as being about people’s quality of life and the strength of a community, now and in the future. In 2012, they began working with experts in the field of social sustainability to create a framework that can be used to measure people’s quality of life and wellbeing in new housing developments. The framework is based on what is known from academic research, policy and practical experience about creating and supporting thriving communities.

So, what is social sustainability?

Social sustainability is about considering and improving people’s quality of life, now and in the future. It describes the extent to which a neighbourhood supports individual and collective well-being. Social sustainability combines design of the physical environment with a focus on how the people who live in and use a space relate to each other and function as a community. It is enhanced by development which provides the right infrastructure to support a strong social and cultural life, opportunities for people to get involved, and scope for the place and the community to evolve.

Berkeley Group in partnership with Social Life have developed a series of four documents, the first three setting out the journey of research carried out, with the fourth document culminating in a toolkit, which can be used to support the implementation of social sustainability in new developments.

In developing the toolkit, it was clear that the practical and operational aspects of social sustainability are not currently well explored, clearly defined or well integrated in the policy and practice of urban planning and housing. Social sustainability needs to be brought to the forefront of the agenda for new developments.
Creating successful places: A toolkit

Based on research (documents outlined and linked to below, please click on the document image), a toolkit was developed to offer developers a structured approach to placemaking and a method to demonstrate the success of the places they help create. The tool tries to encourage a shift in mindset away from thinking mostly about physical development to thinking more broadly and creatively about what makes a place somewhere great to live. It covers issues which are important to communities, such as links with neighbours, access to facilities and transport, feelings of safety, a positive local identity, and the ability to influence what goes on.

The framework consists of three dimensions:

- Infrastructure and social amenities;
- Voice and influence;
- Social and cultural life.

These are underpinned by 13 indicators, highlighted in the diagram above. Data from 45 questions create the results for each indicator.

Prior to being finalised the toolkit was initially piloted on several Berkeley developments, to help develop the tool further. The process of developing the framework (part 2) and its testing process (part 1) are outlined in the following documents. The diagram below outlines how the toolkit can be applied.
Creating strong communities - Part 1: How to measure the social sustainability of new housing developments

Part 1 of the report discusses what social sustainability means for housing providers, presents the findings that can be drawn from testing the measurement framework, and sets out a series of lessons learned.

The first step in developing a framework for social sustainability, is to understand how to measure social sustainability, in order to then understand how it can be improved. This report (part 1) discusses what social sustainability means for housing providers and how the proposed approach for assessing it was piloted.

The measurement framework was tested on four developments via a ‘face-to-face residents’ survey and a site survey. The four pilot assessments included two in inner city London, Empire Square in Bermondsey and Imperial Wharf in Fulham; one suburban site, The Hamptons in Worcester Park, south west London; and one in a semi-rural setting, Knowle Village near Portsmouth in Hampshire. The results of the pilots were compared with comparable developments to provide a ‘Red-Amber-Green’ assessment of each scheme against the 13 criteria. Three out of the four assessments reported more positive responses on the ‘feelings of safety’ indicator. Residents report greater feelings of safety walking alone during the day and at night and feel that crime in their neighbourhood compares favourably to other areas.

Creating strong communities - Part 2: Developing the Framework

In the process of developing the framework, prior to being tested, there were various iterations of the framework before it was finalised. This process was documented in the part 2, which explains in detail how the measurement framework was developed and tested. It reports on the evidence base used to develop the framework e.g. how indicators were selected; methods of primary data collection, data treatments for secondary analysis; strategies for testing the framework etc. and explores the practical and methodological issues that emerged during the development of the framework.

Creating strong communities - Part 3: Appendices

This document provides some additional information to support the research papers referenced above. It provides additional detail relating to the specific surveys and questionnaires completed as part of the research.

Additional Documents

Living at Kidbrooke Village

A report commissioned to understand what life is like for the first residents of Kidbrooke Village, a new community in the Royal Borough of Greenwich, south London, and currently one of the largest regeneration projects in the UK.

Living at Woodberry Down

A report undertaken part way through a long-term regeneration project to understand what has worked, and what could be done better. It was commissioned to help inform work on future phases, as well as the national policy agenda of delivering successful, sustainable places.
Understanding social sustainability


Implementing social sustainability


Statistics

- UK National Statistics, Neighbourhoods and Communities. Available at: www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/people-places/communities/neighbourhoods-and-communities

Other useful resources

- www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/
- Igloo footprint. Available at: www.igloo.uk.net/sites/default/files/documents/footprint-policy.pdf

A selection of resources on the topic of social sustainability have been collected for you under the tag #How2Social on Pinpoint, an easy to navigate, independent online platform signposting to the latest case studies, resources, toolkits and courses on sustainability http://pinpoint.ukgbc.org/.