

BREEAM®

INSIGHT

BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential Guide



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Introduction

What is BREEAM?

BREEAM is the world's leading sustainability assessment method with a certification scheme applicable to all asset types, in any country, across all lifecycle stages: master planning, infrastructure, and buildings.

Millions of buildings around the world are registered to BREEAM's holistic approach to support environmental and social governance (ESG), health and net zero goals.

Since 1990, BREEAM's third-party certified standards have helped improve asset performance at every stage, from design through construction, in use and refurbishment.

BREEAM offers certification to a wide range of building types (commercial, public, residential etc.), all over the world.

Why BREEAM?

Third-Party Certification, Science, and Robustness

With growing importance put on objective, independent and verifiable sustainability claims, BREEAM's trusted science base provides the required robustness and third-party certification which makes BREEAM the chosen standard for stakeholders, all over the world.

Holistic, Tailorable approach to Sustainability

To be truly sustainable, buildings need to make a positive impact for the environment they occupy, the people and community they serve and their purpose, both now, and for decades to come.

With increasing policy, ESG, net zero and broader sustainability agendas globally, ensuring the best outcome for a building can be complex to navigate.

BREEAM provides a solution to address sustainability as a whole, by assessing aspects of energy & carbon, resilience, healthy indoor and outdoor environments and many other topics, within the local context of the building.

What is BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential?

BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential (UKNCR) is BRE's certification scheme for new homes, in the UK.

Operating in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, UKNCR is the latest evolution in BRE's long history of residential certification. Building on over 30 years of experience developing and operating residential sustainability standards - from BREEAM Eco-Homes to the Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH) and most recently Home Quality Mark (HQM) - UKNCR represents the culmination of decades of expertise in the UK residential market.

This wealth of experience ensures UKNCR provides a trusted mark of quality that demonstrates where a home is performing beyond national standards and regulations and is adopting good and best industry practices.

Simple rating system

UKNCR provides each home with a rating to rank a home's sustainability credentials based on its design and construction.

Offering two stages of certification ('Design stage' and 'Post Construction stage'), each home receives a BREEAM rating, dependent on the score achieved across the standard:

BREEAM Rating	Stars	% score
Outstanding	5	80
Excellent	4.5	60
Very Good	4	48
Good	3.5	38
	3	30
	2.5	24
Pass	2	20
	1.5	18
Minimum requirements only	1	N/A

In addition, UKNCR also provides each home with a score (1-5) highlighting the homes performance against criteria specific to:

- **Cost** (indicating where measures have been incorporated to help reduce the overall costs of living in the home)
- **Wellbeing** (indicating where criteria have been adopted to improve occupier health and wellbeing)
- **Footprint** (indicating where steps have been taken to reduce the affect the home has on the environment both during construction, and when it's in occupation)



Working across the residential real estate market and construction industry

As a holistic, globally recognised and trusted sustainability standard with a simple rating system, UKNCR provides a common framework and language that is used across all parts of the construction industry and real estate market. The consistent methodology enables clear reporting and ESG data collection, allowing stakeholders to make informed decisions based on comparable sustainability metrics.

Specifiers: investors, lenders, insurers and planning authorities

Used by a range of specifiers, UKNCR offers a flexible framework that can support with financial or policy requirements.

Its holistic approach to sustainability is used to support ESG, resilience, national and local policy or other agendas, with the methodology providing key data for reporting both externally and internally. This consistent reporting structure helps organizations track progress, benchmark performance, and communicate sustainability achievements to stakeholders. And its third-party certification provides reassurance, and independent quality assurance that requirements have been met.



Construction industry: developers, contractors, design teams, architects, supply chains

To be most effective, it has been shown that sustainability practises must be intrinsically embedded into a home's design and construction, to positively affect its ultimate use. The approach must be communicated and understood by all stakeholders throughout the timeline of design, development and operation.

UKNCR provides a unified framework that serves multiple purposes:

- It creates a common language for all parts of the construction industry to work together effectively
- It helps developers attract green finance and meet policy or planning requirements
- It establishes consistent standards that can be understood across the entire supply chain

From architects designing sustainable spaces, to contractors implementing eco-friendly building techniques, to property owners and occupiers maintaining future efficient operations, UKNCR offers relevant guidance for every professional in the development journey. Whether you're a sustainability director reporting to shareholders, a site manager ensuring quality control, or a marketing professional highlighting green credentials, UKNCR provides the tools and metrics you need.

This shared understanding ensures that sustainability goals remain aligned throughout the development process, from initial concept through to completion and occupancy.

“BREEAM UKNCR addresses aspects of sustainability across the three key pillars: environmental, economic and social.”





Benefits of BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential

Holistic Sustainability Assessment

BREEAM and UKNCR standards address aspects of sustainability across the three key pillars: environmental (footprint), economic (cost), and social (wellbeing). This holistic approach is reflected directly in UKNCR's scoring system, which provides specific ratings for each of these areas alongside the overall certification level.

Environmental benefits

UKNCR promotes environmental responsibility throughout the design and construction process, helping protect natural resources and address climate change challenges. Enabling a sustainable future where both homes and their residents living within them can thrive. It considers the impact of the home on various levels:

- **Local environment:** Encouraging biodiversity protection and enhancement in the immediate surroundings
- **Resource efficiency:** Promoting efficient energy and water use throughout the building's lifecycle
- **Operational performance:** Supporting effective management and handover practices that ensure residents can use their home efficiently and comfortably from day one.
- **Broader impact:** Considering environmental effects beyond the immediate site through sustainable material selection, transport connections, and drainage systems

By reducing the environmental impact of new homes, UKNCR supports the transition to a sustainable future.

Economic benefits

UKNCR can deliver economic benefits for all stakeholders:

For occupiers:

- Lower running costs
- A home that holds its value
- Reduced risk from future climate impacts

For the construction industry:

- Enhanced reputation
- Ability to attract socially conscious buyers
- Opportunities for green finance
- Differentiation in a competitive market

For investors:

- Reassurance that the home has been built to higher sustainability credentials
- Futureproofing through more climate-resilient investments
- Potential for stronger financial performance and lower risk
- Protection against asset stranding due to evolving regulations

For public authorities:

- Futureproofing of housing stock
- Reduced risk of major retrofit requirements later
- Reduced strain on public infrastructure and services
- Support for broader climate adaptation goals

By demonstrating a commitment to quality and sustainability, UKNCR can contribute to the long-term success of housing projects while building resilience against future climate challenges.

Health and Wellbeing benefits

UKNCR contributes to healthier and happier communities and promotes the creation of homes that are comfortable, safe, and connected.

It rewards homes with:

- Access to local amenities and green spaces
- Good daylighting
- Reduced indoor pollutants
- Managed noise nuisance
- Enhanced occupier comfort

By focusing on the wellbeing of occupants, UKNCR supports the creation of homes that people love to live in.



Beyond regulation: UKNCR's added value

While building regulations set the minimum standards for home construction, UKNCR only rewards homes that have gone above and beyond these requirements.

A UKNCR certificate indicates that a home has been assessed and found to meet higher sustainability standards in a wide range of areas and can be used to showcase and promote higher standards of design and construction for the benefit of occupiers and the wider community.

By promoting these elevated standards, UKNCR fosters a culture of quality and sustainability throughout the housing sector. It encourages continuous improvement, innovation, and best practice, driving up standards across the industry. This cultural shift benefits not only individual projects but contributes to raising the bar for the entire sector, creating a positive cycle of improvement that extends beyond regulatory compliance

ESG principles and indicators

UKNCR supports Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles, and provides an independent, and verifiable way for developers and investors to show their commitment to these values.

It's holistic approach to sustainability means it can support a wide range of ESG indicators, from energy efficiency and biodiversity to health and wellbeing, as well as providing a rounded view of a home's sustainability and social impact.

Resilience to climate change

Sustainability is about meeting the needs of today and the future. Homes built today need to be ready to meet the changing needs of the market and climate for future decades. Physically protecting the home is crucial. Early identification of the risks to a home can help ensure these are designed out, or managed, reducing the wellbeing, cost and environmental implications of upgrades or repairs. Doing this also protects the investment in the home – ensuring it is fit-for-purpose for decades to come.

As a sustainability standard, UKNCR promotes resilience to climate change further, by encouraging the consideration of future climate risks in the design and construction of new homes. Where necessary, this includes measures to increase resilience to flooding, overheating, and other climate impacts, helping to ensure that homes are fit for the future, and providing confidence to those investing in the home.

By prioritising climate resilience at the design and construction stage, UKNCR helps minimise costly future retrofit requirements. This forward-thinking approach creates homes that can withstand changing conditions

while reducing the financial burden of adaptation measures that might otherwise be necessary as climate impacts intensify.

Quality with the occupier at its core

UKNCR has been designed with the occupier at its core.

The criteria are centred around achieving a sustainable community and home that is safe, comfortable and connected, that people want to live in. This includes not only the expected areas of performance and sustainability, but also extends to aspects of the home that are often overlooked, yet are crucial to the comfort and wellbeing of its residents:

- **Comfort:** UKNCR rewards for provision of a comfortable living environment, with considerations for temperature control, lighting, and noise levels.
- **Security:** UKNCR recognises homes that are designed with safety and security in mind, incorporating features that help to protect residents and their belongings.
- **Storage:** Adequate and well-designed storage space can achieve UKNCR credits, as it helps make the home more functional, adaptable and enjoyable to live in.
- **Resilience:** UKNCR recognises homes built to be resilient to climate risks of today and the future, including measures to increase resilience to flooding, overheating, and other climate impacts.
- **Outdoor Space:** UKNCR recognises the importance of quality outdoor spaces for occupant health and wellbeing and rewards homes that are designed to provide access to outdoor spaces that are safe, secure, and enjoyable to use.

By choosing a UKNCR-rated home, you're not only choosing a more sustainable home, but a home that goes above and beyond in delivering a high-quality living environment.

Better reputation, lower risk and happier customers & stakeholders

For developers, a UKNCR rating enhances reputation, reduces risk, and leads to happier customers and stakeholders. It demonstrates a commitment to quality and sustainability, which differentiates a developer in the market, attracting socially conscious buyers and tenants, and increasing customer satisfaction.

UKNCR mitigates several key risks for developers. By prioritising quality construction and sustainability, it reduces the risk and inconvenience of costly construction defects and future retrofitting. It also minimises the risk of non-compliance with evolving environmental regulations and standards, by considering factors important to occupiers, the environment, and wider society.

UKNCR provides independently verified, third-party certification that offers concrete evidence of genuine sustainability achievements, effectively countering greenwashing concerns. This comprehensive, externally validated approach ensures developers can substantiate their environmental and social claims with credible data, protecting their reputation and building trust with increasingly discerning customers, investors, and regulators.

Unlocking Green Finance

UKNCR-rated homes can open opportunities for green finance, as they meet the high sustainability standards increasingly required by green mortgages and loans. This creates multiple benefits across the residential ecosystem:

- **For investors:** Greater confidence in the sustainability credentials of their investments through independent, third-party verification
- **For developers:** Enhanced ability to attract investment, particularly from ESG-focused funds
- **For homebuyers:** Potential access to preferential mortgage rates when purchasing UKNCR-certified properties

Financial institutions are increasingly recognising the value of third-party green certification in their lending criteria. For instance, Lloyds Banking Group's Sustainable Financing Framework¹ stipulates that residential buildings must attain specific sustainability ratings to qualify for certain green financing products - originally referencing HQM (Home Quality Mark) ratings of 4 or higher, which has now evolved into the UKNCR standard.

"HSBC UK has been a supporter of BRE's residential certification schemes, having integrated HQM standards within our Green Loan Eligibility Guide. We're fully committed to the evolution of this scheme and will be aligning our standards with BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential moving forward. We actively support the UK housing market to build higher quality, more resilient homes." Emma Milburn, Deputy Head of Housing UK, Real Estate Finance – Housing, HSBC UK BANK PLC

Value drivers: How UKNCR unlocks Green Finance

Value Lever	Explanation
Investor Confidence	Third-party verified schemes help mitigate greenwashing risk. Investors view UKNCR-rated homes as credible sustainable assets .
Mortgage Qualification	Homebuyers may access preferential rates on green mortgages if purchasing UKNCR-certified properties.
Developer Incentives	Projects with UKNCR ratings are better positioned to attract forward funding, JV partners, and institutional buyers .
Asset Valuation Uplift	Growing evidence suggests that sustainable homes retain or increase value , and experience faster sales velocity .
Regulatory Tailwind	Commitment to the BREEAM family of schemes ensures performance above and beyond regulations and schemes are continuously updated as regulatory landscapes evolve. BRE certification aims to align with UK Taxonomy, Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulations (SFDR) and other industry standards.

¹ <https://www.lloydsbankinggroup.com/assets/pdfs/who-we-are/responsible-business/downloads/groupcodes-and-policies/2023-lbg-sustainable-financing-framework.pdf>

Leading the way to zero carbon

As with all BREEAM schemes, UKNCR supports the drive towards zero carbon. It promotes energy efficient design and construction, encouraging the use of renewable energy, reducing carbon emissions, and improving energy performance.

UKNCR takes a comprehensive approach to carbon reduction by addressing both operational and embodied carbon – together known as whole life carbon:

- **Operational carbon:** Emissions from the energy used to operate the building throughout its life
- **Embodied carbon:** Emissions associated with materials and construction processes, including extraction, manufacturing, transportation, installation, maintenance, and end-of-life disposal

By incorporating UKNCR into their projects, developers can demonstrate their commitment to sustainable building practices, achieving BREEAM certification and contributing to national and international climate goals.



Protecting and improving nature and delivering Biodiversity Net-Gain

UKNCR encourages and promotes the protection and enhancement of nature and biodiversity. At a local level, our natural surroundings play an important role in occupier wellbeing and local environment, helping to create a healthy and sustainable community.

Fundamentally however, biodiversity is critical to all life on earth. The ecosystems that support all wildlife and plants also directly support human life, ensuring food generation and absorption of carbon dioxide. Furthermore, biodiversity plays a critical role in the combat against climate change, offering huge carbon sinks to slow the effects.

All have a role to play in protecting and enhancing our natural environment, and UKNCR recognises where the development of new homes have:

- Identified the ecological risks and opportunities of developing on a site
- Reduced negative impacts of home development on local ecology
- Achieved a biodiversity net gain

Early assessment of the development site is critical to understand the biodiversity present before building works commence to evaluate the risks and opportunities. This not only supports compliance with policies and regulations but can also identify opportunities in the home design that can help both minimise impact on the local habitat and maximise the opportunities to enhance it.

Once the home has been built, UKNCR recognises the measures that have been implemented, and where these achieve a positive impact (a 'net-gain') on the local environment.

Puts policy and principles into practice

Housing remains a significant issue for both local and national policy. With the government having pledged to build 300,000 homes a year by the mid-2020s, the scale of the housing issue is immense. In England alone, an average of 159,000 extra homes are provided each year, compared with an estimated need for between 240,000 and 340,000 new homes.

Key policies such as the Clean Growth Strategy, the Environment Bill, the National Design Guide, Future Homes Standard, and NHS Healthy Towns all aim to address this demand. These policies not only focus on increasing the availability of housing but also emphasize the need for quality and sustainability.

The UKNCR plays a crucial role in this landscape. It helps to put these policies and principles into practice, aligning with key objectives on housing, sustainability, and wellbeing. UKNCR provides a practical tool for implementing sustainability principles in new home development, ensuring that the homes being built are not just numerous, but also high quality and sustainable.



“BREEAM UKNCR provides a third-party, comprehensive assessment of a new home’s performance.”



How to get BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential certification

UKNCR provides a third-party, comprehensive assessment of a new home's performance, offering certification at both the design and construction stage. A home will be assessed by an independent, licensed assessor against a wide range of detailed criteria across categories including energy, water, materials, space, transport and movement, outdoors, safety and resilience, comfort, quality assurance, construction impacts, and customer experience.

Steps to UKNCR certification

To gain certification, an assessment of the home is carried out by a licensed UKNCR assessor, who has been trained to apply the methodology and standards.

The assessor's role is to gather and review the necessary information, carry out the assessment, and provide the final UKNCR rating. The credibility and consistency of the assessment and rating is a fundamental part of UKNCR. The evidence, science-based criteria and independent assessment underpin the scheme.

The below diagram illustrates the steps involved in achieving design or post construction certification, and the role of the assessor and bre in the third-party certification process:

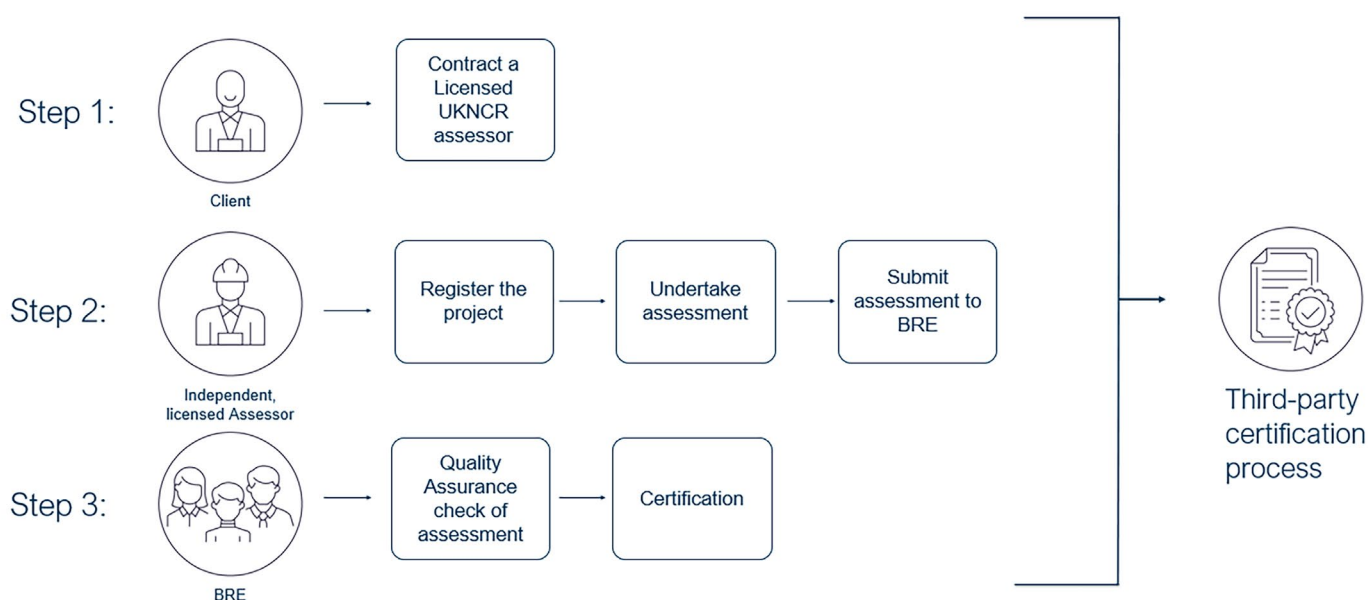
Pre-assessment (recommended)

UKNCR offers a free pre-assessment tool that can be used to give an indicative score or interact with the scoring system as an optional step before formal certification. While not required for certification, completing a pre-assessment provides valuable insights into potential performance and helps identify opportunities for improvement early in the process.

The pre-assessment tool is available by registering here:

<https://tools.breeam.com/projects/>

To obtain maximum value, we would strongly recommend that a licensed UKNCR assessor is engaged to complete pre-assessments (where required). They are specifically trained to apply the scheme criteria.





Certification stages

UKNCR is most effective when used as a two-stage process. We would strongly recommend seeking advice from a licensed assessor from the beginning of a project, to ensure the best certification and sustainability results for a home. Early engagement with a licensed assessor will help identify opportunities to integrate sustainability measures efficiently and cost-effectively throughout the design and construction process.

A home cannot claim to have achieved a BREEAM rating, until it has received certification at the post construction stage, as how a home is built will ultimately determine the homes performance and impact.

1

Stage 1: Design stage certification (highly recommended)

This is an assessment and certification of the design of the home.

Sustainability is most successfully achieved when it is integrated into the design of a home from the outset. The greatest opportunity to influence the efficiency and impact of a new home is during its design.

UKNCR provides common and shared goals across the design and construction team, helping ensure that sustainability credentials are realised, and reducing the need for costly retrofit works.

It has been found that early integration of BREEAM standards is also the most cost-effective way to deliver a high performing sustainable asset.

2

Stage 2: Post construction certification (required)

This is an assessment and certification of the construction of the home, requiring onsite verification.

There are often changes made to the intended design of a home whilst it is under construction. However, the final construction specification, build quality and effective handover of the home ultimately determine the performance and impact of that home.

Where a design stage certification has been carried out, this stage confirms that commitments made in the design stage were met and verifies that the sustainability features have been implemented as planned. A review of all claimed criteria is completed (not just those that changed during construction).

Where a design stage certification was not carried out, or changes were made during construction, this stage requires review of the as-built evidence and performance of the home against all criteria, adding to the robustness of the standard.

The post construction assessment ensures that the completed home delivers on all claimed aspects of sustainability, regardless of whether a design stage assessment was previously conducted.

Design and Post construction certification

UKNCR design and post construction certification assessments are completed by independent, licensed assessors. So, the first step to achieving certification is to get in touch with them.

For an up-to-date list of licensed UKNCR assessors, please visit [GreenBookLive.com](https://www.greenbooklive.com/).

<https://www.greenbooklive.com/index.jsp>

What BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential covers

A UKNCR assessment covers a wide range of topics to provide a rounded view of a home's sustainability performance. Within each of the following categories, are a series of detailed criteria which the home is assessed against, providing a comprehensive view of the home's quality, sustainability, and impact on occupant wellbeing.

For a full list of issues included in a UKNCR assessment, please visit our resources page to download the technical manual: <https://breeam.com/breeam-uk-new-construction-residential/resources>

Transport and movement

Early consideration of transport options, and how an occupier is likely to interact and move around their community and local area plays a critical role in reducing emissions associated with travelling, and improving occupant health, activity and connectivity. These need to account for and be appropriate for the setting of the home (i.e. urban or rural locations), and the surrounding area. UKNCR encourages early consideration of home and community design. It assesses a home's proximity to public and sustainable transport options and local amenities and recognises provision of walking and cycling routes, public transport links, and the availability of local services and facilities.

Outdoors

The outdoor surroundings of a home play a critical role for occupier wellbeing and environmental protection. UKNCR recognises quality and accessible outdoor spaces associated with the home, including private gardens, communal outdoor spaces, and local green spaces.

It also considers the home's impact on local biodiversity, encouraging the provision of nature-friendly features and biodiversity net gain.

Safety and resilience

A safe and resilient home is of critical importance to occupiers, and those investing in or insuring a home. Incorporating measures into the design of a home can reduce the risk of a disruption to the occupier, and the need for costly repairs.

UKNCR assesses the home's resilience to current and future climate risks, such as flooding, surface water, and its provisions for home security. It considers factors such as flood risk management, sustainable drainage, and security measures.

Comfort

New homes should be built to provide a comfortable environment for occupiers. A huge contributor to occupant wellbeing and satisfaction, a home designed to consider occupier comfort is often used more efficiently, thereby indirectly helping reduce the impact of a home.

UKNCR rewards homes that have been designed and built to provide high levels of natural light and ventilation and reduce noise from internal and external sources. It also promotes a healthy indoor living environment by encouraging reduction of indoor pollutants and reduced overheating risk.

Energy

The energy efficiency and systems incorporated into a new home play a critical role in addressing the operational carbon emissions associated with the home, and its ongoing running costs.

This UKNCR category assesses the home's energy performance, including its fabric performance, system efficiency and carbon emissions. It also rewards for the use of renewable energy systems, where appropriate for the home.

Materials

The materials used in the build of the home will affect the impact of the home now, and throughout its operation. Early consideration of the type and source of materials that will be used in the home plays an important role in both the local impact, and that across the supply chain.

UKNCR rewards homes that reduce embodied carbon impact, responsibly source materials, build for durability, and consider the maintenance requirements and costs throughout the life cycle of the home.

Space

The amount and configuration of space inside a home plays an important role in meeting the needs of occupants both now, and in the future.

UKNCR encourages provision of high space standards, assessing the size and layout of rooms and the provision of storage space. It considers how these factors contribute to a comfortable and functional living environment.

Water

As a finite resource across the UK, the water efficiency of a home is critical to its environmental impact and ongoing water resilience.

UKNCR encourages the home to use less mains potable water, assessing the use of water-efficient fittings and appliances and the provision of water recycling systems. It considers how these factors contribute to a reduced environmental impact and lower water bills.

Quality assurance

How well a home performs - in general but also against its sustainability credentials - is hugely affected by the quality of the construction. The 'performance gap' is well recognised as an issue in the construction industry and is attributed to challenges across the design and construction stages.

UKNCR assesses the quality of the home's design and construction, through criteria spanning all stages of the design and construction process. It encourages the integration of build quality planning and information dissemination early in the design stage, commissioning and testing throughout the build phase, and early and seasonal inspections post-completion.

Construction impacts

A significant proportion of a new home's environmental and social impact is through the construction phase.

UKNCR rewards new homes that reduce, manage and report on energy and water, and the waste and pollution created during the build. It also recognises sites that implement responsible construction practices, helping reduce the social impact of the construction site.

Customer experience

The information and handover of a new home can dramatically affect the occupiers' experience in, and use of the home. Empowering occupiers with knowledge on how to use their home most efficiently, and providing available support can help increase occupier satisfaction, limit the operational impact and support cost efficiencies of the home.

UKNCR rewards new homes that support a positive customer experience, from the initial purchase, through the handover, and into aftercare. It considers factors such as the provision of customer information, the handling of customer enquiries and complaints, and the quality of aftercare services.



Who is using BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential

UKNCR has been specifically designed to be able to assess any residential dwelling that is being built in the UK, to showcase how all the stakeholders within the development are pushing beyond minimum building regulations across all aspects of sustainability.

UKNCR has been designed for application across all residential developments in the UK. Below, we highlight a few of the key markets where BRE's Certification Schemes are being actively utilised:

Investors

BREEAM is a global standard providing certification schemes across all building asset classes worldwide. Investors recognise BREEAM's value and are increasingly driving market demand for BREEAM certification.

The convergence of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations with Green Finance has become an undeniable factor in the property development sector. Conversations with industry suggest a significant shift in investor priorities. As Nisha Kerai, Head of BTR Operations and Asset Management at Legal & General, noted in a recent webinar with BRE, "ESG reporting has evolved significantly. It's no longer good enough to have two or three ESG slides. It's very in-depth now." She continued to explain that around 30-50% of investor inquiries are now focusing specifically on ESG performance data.

Investors value BREEAM for its robust methodology, independent verification, and holistic sustainability approach with worldwide application. Those operating internationally or across different building types can specify BREEAM as their consistent sustainability standard, enabling portfolio comparability and consistent stakeholder communications.

BREEAM certification also reassures investors that homes are resilient against evolving regulations and climate change. Certificates confirm construction beyond current regulatory standards within a framework structured around holistic sustainability performance.

In the same webinar, Nisha also noted that "Adding a BRE accredited certification to what we're doing on the development and acquisition side is really helpful in saying we haven't marked our own homework here - this has been checked and approved."

As part of the BREEAM suite, UKNCR is increasingly specified by investors in UK residential developments. The uniform data and "ESG language" across portfolios, combined with UK-specific criteria, make it essential for sustainably funded, high-quality housing.

Long-term owners and operators

Homes designed and built to higher sustainability standards typically operate more efficiently (reducing costs), future-proof against maintenance and regulatory changes (reducing risk), and increase occupant satisfaction.

Stakeholders involved in both building and operating homes specify UKNCR to manage risks and demonstrate corporate commitments through robust, third-party certification.



Build to Rent (BTR) sector

UKNCR's focus on long-term value, customer satisfaction, and corporate responsibility makes it invaluable for BTR developers and investors.

With UKNCR certification, BTR developers differentiate themselves in competitive markets, attract socially conscious tenants, and demonstrate commitment to high-quality, sustainable homes. Since 2021 rapid uptake in this sector shows recognition of UKNCR as a trusted standard for assessing development performance.

BTR developers typically maintain ownership post-completion, aiming to create high-quality, sustainable communities. UKNCR ensures all aspects of sustainability and quality are not just considered but delivered to the highest standards.

"This transition of HQM to BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential is a welcome one from my perspective. I feel it will enable more immediate recognition of the BREEAM Brand for residential schemes that are aiming to demonstrate best practice when it comes to the sustainability and quality of homes." Lesley Treacy, Head of ESG, Dandara Living

Read more about the Dandara Living case study

<https://bregroup.com/case-study/sustainable-development-dandara-living-and-hqm>

Social Housing providers

UKNCRs focus on occupiers' health, reduced risk and operational costs, and independent verification of performance provide social housing providers with a trusted way to demonstrate commitments to their tenants, whilst also managing their ongoing risks and costs.

Any UKNCR certificate demonstrates performance beyond the regulatory minimum, but its flexible framework approach also allows users to apply criteria that are most applicable to their scenario, or a key focus area for the project. Whilst location or physical attributes of the home might play a role in the choice of criteria, developers can choose the way in which they achieve their scores, and in doing so, can choose to apply criteria – and demonstrate a high score – against topics that they wish to showcase.

As well as an overarching score, UKNCR also provides a score against 'Wellbeing', 'Cost' and 'Footprint'. These show where criteria specifically addressing these topics have been achieved.

A UKNCR certificate helps social housing providers demonstrate their commitment to providing a high standard of homes, and how these exceed minimum regulatory requirements to their tenants.

"Incorporating HQM into our Housing Design Guide reflects our commitment to high-quality social housing. It ensures our developments not only meet but exceed sustainability goals, providing homes that benefit both residents and the broader environment."

Michael Gwyther-Jones, Head of New Developments & Special Projects, City of London Corporation

Learn more about how the City of London Corporation is using HQM to deliver high-quality sustainable social housing in our detailed case study:

City of London pioneers use of BRE's Home Quality Mark

<https://bregroup.com/case-study/city-of-london-use-of-bre-s-home-quality-mark>

UK planning and public authorities

For years, BREEAM has been specified by local planning and public authorities across the UK.

As a well-recognised and trusted framework, addressing sustainability holistically, BREEAM offers planning and public authorities a nationally understood and comparable framework, with independently verified outcomes.

With growing policy goals and objectives nationally and regionally, UKNCR not only helps demonstrate homes are being built to a high standard, but can also help guide and support developments in achieving other, and emerging policy requirements.

Its holistic approach to sustainable development has also provided planning and public authorities with an externally referenceable, science-based standard which is updated to reflect regulatory changes, and science evolution.

UKNCRs third party certification process provides planning and public authorities with confidence in the achieved performance claims, reducing the need for them to perform checks or verifications.





Conclusion

The future of UKNCR

UKNCR is set to play an increasingly important role in the housing sector. As the demand for sustainable, high-quality homes continues to grow, it provides a robust and comprehensive assessment method that can support specifiers, guide developers, inform homebuyers and renters, and drive up standards across the industry.

UKNCR is well placed to support the transition to a zero-carbon and climate resilient future, ensuring that homes built today will meet social and environmental needs now, and in the years to come. By promoting a holistic approach to sustainability across the design and construction of a new home, and supporting the needs of the occupiers and local community, UKNCR can help ensure that new homes are ones that people want, and can thrive in.

Invitation to Join the UKNCR Journey

We invite all stakeholders in the housing sector to join us on the UKNCR journey. Whether you're an investor, a developer, a homebuyer, a renter, a policymaker, or an industry professional, we invite you to explore the benefits of UKNCR, to learn from the best practices it promotes, and to contribute to the creation of homes that are better for people and the planet.

Take the next step with UKNCR

For developers and investors looking to specify UKNCR:

Contact Dan Asquith, BREEAM's UK Lead at dan.asquith@bregroup.com or call +44 (0)333 321 8811 to discuss how UKNCR can support your sustainability goals and project requirements.

For projects seeking UKNCR assessment:

Find a licensed assessor through [GreenBookLive.com](https://greenbooklive.com) our searchable database of qualified and licensed organisations and individuals.

For professionals interested in the technical details:

Download the comprehensive UKNCR technical manual from UKNCR resources page to understand the full assessment methodology.

<https://breeam.com/breeam-uk-new-construction-residential/resources>

For those wanting to become BREEAM assessors:

Explore training courses and qualifications through the BRE Academy and take the first step toward becoming a licensed UKNCR assessor.

Start your UKNCR journey today and help shape the future of sustainable homes in the UK.

Resources for further reading

BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential technical manual:

Access the comprehensive BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential technical manual for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which details the criteria.

<https://breeam.com/breeam-uk-new-construction-residential/resources>

Getting Green Finance and Mortgages with BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential:

Discover the benefits of sustainable housing with Getting Green Finance, which provides information on green finance and mortgages.

<https://bregroup.com/news/global-green-building-alliance-launches-industry-first-guide-to-help-drive35-trillion-investment-needed-to-achieve-net-zero>

Tackling the Under-supply of Housing in England:

Explore the House of Commons Library report on the challenges and solutions for meeting the UK government's goal of building 300,000 new homes annually.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7671/>

BREEAM Tools:

Utilise BREEAM Tools to support sustainability efforts in the building environment.

<https://breeam.com/tools>

Green Home Finance Principles:

Read the Green Home Finance Principles report by the Green Finance Institute for guidelines on financing green home projects.

<https://www.greenfinanceinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GREEN-FINANCE-GREENHOMES-REPORT-NEW-a.pdf>

Green Book Live:

Search for qualified UKNCR assessors and certified developments on Green Book Live, a valuable resource for sustainability professionals.

<https://www.greenbooklive.com/index.jsp>

Santander Group Green, Social and Sustainability Funding Global Framework:

Delve into the Santander Group report for an analysis of their Green, Social and Sustainability Funding Global Framework.

<https://www.santander.com/content/dam/santander-com/es/documentos/presentaciones-de-rentafija/2023/06/prf-santander-group-green-social-and-sustainability-funding-global-framework-secondparty-opinion-2023.pdf>

ESG Services for Residential Real Estate:

Understand the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria in residential real estate with this ESG Services Guide, outlining services and certification schemes.

<https://bpf.org.uk/media/4534/bpf-residential-esg-guidance.pdf>

Town and Country Planning Association, Securing Healthy Homes at the local level:

Read about the Town and Country Planning Association's guide for local government in England on adopting the Healthy Homes Principles, and how HQM supports this.

<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Healthy-Homes-technical-guide-for-localimplementation.pdf>

Glossary of terms

Biodiversity Net-Gain: An approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before. It ensures that habitats for wildlife are improved and left in a better state than they were predevelopment.

BTR sector: Build to Rent sector. It refers to the growing market of purpose-built residential properties, design for rent instead of for sale.

BREEAM: Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method, a sustainability assessment method for masterplanning projects, infrastructure and buildings.

BREEAM UK New Construction: Residential (UKNCR): An assessment method and certification scheme for new homes, which focuses on health and wellbeing, environmental footprint, and the cost of running a home.

Environmental Product Declaration (EPD): A standardised way of quantifying the environmental impact of a product or system.

ESG: Environmental, Social and Governance. These are the three central factors in measuring the sustainability and societal impact of an investment in a company or business.

Life Cycle Assessment (LCA): A technique to assess environmental impacts associated with all the stages of the life-cycle of a commercial product, process, or service.

Life Cycle Costing (LCC): The total cost of ownership over the life of an asset, including costs of acquisition, operation, maintenance, conversion, and disposal.

Home Quality Mark (HQM): The predecessor to UKNCR, HQM was the BREEAM scheme for new build homes in the UK, from 2015 to April 2025.

Resilience to climate change: The ability of a system or home to withstand, recover from, and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS): A natural approach to managing drainage in and around properties and other developments. SuDS work by slowing and holding back the water that runs off from a site, allowing natural processes to break down pollutants.

Third-party certification: An independent assessment declaring that specified requirements pertaining to a product, person, process or management system have been met.

Zero carbon: A state where the net amount of carbon dioxide or other carbon compounds emitted into the atmosphere is zero. This can be achieved by balancing carbon emissions with carbon removal or offsetting carbon emissions to make a product, service or building carbon neutral.



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