**What is the purpose of EIA?**

‘Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is applied to development proposals that are likely to lead to significant environmental effects. The assessment ensures that potential effects on the environment are considered in decision making, including natural resources such as water, air and soil; conservation of species and habitats; and community issues such as visual effects and impacts on the population. EIA also provides a mechanism by which the interaction of environmental effects can be predicted, allowing negative effects to be avoided or reduced through the implementation of mitigation measures.’ Glasson et al, 2005

**What is BREEAM Communities?**

‘BREEAM Communities is a way to improve, measure and certify the social, environmental and economic sustainability of large-scale development by integrating sustainable design into the masterplanning process.’ BRE

**Can they complement each other?**

EIA is required by Legislation and the process is about prediction; practitioners predict the impacts based on experience and data collected through-out the assessment process. This is why the process begins at the earliest stages, when a project, including its alternatives, is being planned and designed, and should be an iterative process. BREEAM Communities is a voluntary assessment method, with a set structure that assesses issues based on a credit weighting, which is not required by Legislation in the UK and subsequently is not, or would not be a substitute for EIA, however it is a tool that can help in the decision process, guiding on sustainable principles and design selection in large scale residential, mixed-use and non-domestic developments.

The following table shows a selection of categories covered in both assessment methods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BREEAM Communities</th>
<th>Example of EIA Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and Economic Wellbeing – Local economy, social wellbeing and environmental conditions relating to health and wellbeing.</td>
<td>Socio Economic Impact – Key indicator being population increase or decrease - direct or indirect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource and Energy – To reduce carbon emissions and ensure wise use of natural resources.</td>
<td>Climate Impact – predicted emission rates and air quality assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Use and Ecology – To improve ecological biodiversity.</td>
<td>Ecology – Information on ecology on site and impacts on this through the complete development phase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Movement – To create an efficient and safe system for movement.</td>
<td>Transport – Trip prediction rates pre, during and post development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is therefore apparent that for many developments, the EIA process and BREEAM Communities assessment process would cover similar topics in their individual assessments but in a different manner. For example EIA illustrates or predicts the effects of a development (or activity) that is likely to have a significant environmental effect, it then justifies how this effect can be mitigated against, through short, medium or long term measures. BREEAM sets targets at the beginning of the design process, in terms of a score that should be achieved, and then the design of the scheme (through a masterplanning process) ensures this score is obtained.
The effects of both assessment methods are different – EIA is a defensive tool, showing how the development does not impose significant effects that cannot be mitigated against and BREEAM is a tool used for demonstrating the sustainable build quality of a development, however they appear to complement each other.

**What if the two schemes could be combined?**
There is the potential to undertake an EIA and run a BREEAM Communities assessment in parallel. If done correctly and at a critical stage of both assessments, the work required to achieve a BREEAM Certificate could be influenced by the outcomes of an EIA and act as a legitimate form of mitigation (for the EIA) with robust predicted effects – qualitative and quantitative. EIA is sometimes accused of ‘doing the minimum’ to achieve the desired planning consent. Linking the two schemes would result in a more robust outcome in terms of delivering a truly sustainable development. Mitigation measures could be monitored, through the BREEAM post construction stage assessment, something that has been predominantly missing in EIA practice, due to a number of factors, but primarily because of cost.

An example of this dual approach would be incorporating waste material in landscaping bunds rather than removal of waste off site. This would then link in to the landscape and visual impacts of the development and reduction in transport movements (reduced fuel consumption) helping address resource/energy/carbon/air quality impacts covered in an EIA. Improved air quality then links to community benefits and socio-economic issues. These benefits could feed into the BREEAM Assessment and would not need to be regurgitated for separate individual assessments (such as CEEQUAL for example).

Incorporating design into the EIA process from an early stage through the BREEAM Communities ‘Step 1: Establishing the principles of development’ means that opportunities are not lost when it comes to the built stages of the development, resulting in a sustainable and carbon efficient building which has been designed through a true ‘life cycle’ process. Further work needs to be done and trial schemes run to determine the true benefit in combining the assessment methods, but on initial review, the benefits seem very tangible, especially in terms of cost savings and delivering a sustainable development in line with the key principles of the National Planning Policy Framework.

For further information or to discuss the content of this note, please contact Juan Murray, Environmental Planner at NJL Consulting.  
Juan@NJLConsulting.co.uk