Forestry Commission



BREEAM scheme for visitor centres

In the Forestry Commission we aim to ensure that any new or refurbished buildings are designed and constructed so that environmental impacts are minimised, mitigated and meet mandatory carbon reduction targets. Our key objective is for all new buildings and major refurbishments (those costing over £500,000) to achieve a BREEAM 'Excellent' rating. BREEAM (the Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method) is the leading and most widely used environmental assessment method for buildings. It sets the standard for best practice in sustainable design and construction, and provides guidelines for mitigating the impacts of buildings on the environment. However, some of our properties contain categories of buildings that were not covered by existing BREEAM standard schemes, and that would struggle to meet the stringent assessment criteria. Visitor centres in particular have a unique function because they comprise of a range of buildings with a variety of uses, for example reception areas, toilet facilities, cafés, classrooms, retail units, changing rooms and exhibition space. The Forestry Commission worked with the BRE to devise a tailored BREEAM scheme to facilitate assessment of this building type at the design and post construction stages of assessment.



The Forestry Commission is committed to ensuring high standards in sustainable construction with a tailored BREEAM scheme specifically designed for visitor centres

The Forestry Commission was keen to seek BREEAM accreditation for its buildings, to demonstrate that they are designed and built to the highest environmental standards, even though they may have unique problems to overcome due to their remote locations. The view was that location should not prevent a building from achieving an 'Excellent' rating for sustainable construction and subsequent operation. The Forestry Commission and the BRE began working together in 2008 to develop a tailored BREEAM scheme that would allow assessments to be carried out at newly constructed and renovated visitor centres and similar buildings. The tailored version would include performance requirements and benchmarks that adequately reflect opportunities to reduce the environmental impacts of the centres, and provide credible and appropriate assessment criteria to allow the Forestry Commission to appropriately measure the environmental performance of its buildings.

The process involved drafting an initial list of assessment criteria for inclusion in the scheme, including criteria common to all BREEAM schemes, and those specific to visitor centres. A review of the proposed scheme content addressed technical issues that could prove difficult for visitor centres to meet. For example:

- The requirement for staff and visitors to have access to public transport – visitor centres are often in remote locations that are not close to bus routes or rail stations.
- The requirement for post boxes and cash dispensers – neither are necessary requirements. Post can dropped off at a box on the way home.
- Sophisticated building management systems – an unnecessary additional expense for this type of operation.
- Outside lighting - often inappropriate in remote rural locations.

As a result of discussions adjustments were made to the criteria and both sides were able to agree a final version of the scheme, which sets out in detail the types of buildings that can be assessed using the criteria developed for visitor centres. An amended Bespoke BREEAM manual was produced, together with a scoring spreadsheet containing all the calculations required to determine the performance of specific BREEAM issues. The new BREEAM Forestry Commission Visitor Centres scheme is applied at the design and post-construction stage, leading to a final BREEAM rating for the building. The assessment criteria cover: Management; Materials; Health and Wellbeing; Waste; Energy; Landuse and Ecology; Transport; Pollution; and Water.

Credits are awarded in each of the areas according to performance and the overall score is calculated. The building is then rated on a scale of: Pass, Good, Very Good, Excellent or Outstanding and a certificate awarded. An Excellent rating requires a minimum score of 70%.

Examples of BREEAM application

- Beechenhurst Visitor Centre: In 2008 an extension to the centre in the Forest of Dean achieved a 'Very Good' rating under the standard BREEAM scheme.

- Glentress Peel Visitor Centre: A new centre in Tweed Valley Forest Park, South Scotland is currently being built using sustainable principles. It is estimated that the building will achieve its targeted 'Excellent' rating.

- Hicks Lodge: A new centre in the National Forest will be the first Forestry Commission building to adopt the new BREEAM Forestry Commission Visitor Centres scheme with a target to achieve an 'Excellent' rating.

✓ Achievements

- The development and implementation of a BREEAM Forestry Commission Visitor Centres scheme.
- The scheme can also be applied to other buildings of a similar type and function in other sectors. Twelve months on the BRE are now expanding the scheme to cover all visitor centres in the UK, changing the name of the scheme from BREEAM Forestry Commission Visitor Centres to BREEAM Visitor Centres.
- Acknowledgement of the Forestry Commission in future BREEAM marketing literature as having led and funded the development of the new BREEAM Visitor Centres method.

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