



Transforming real estate for a sustainable future

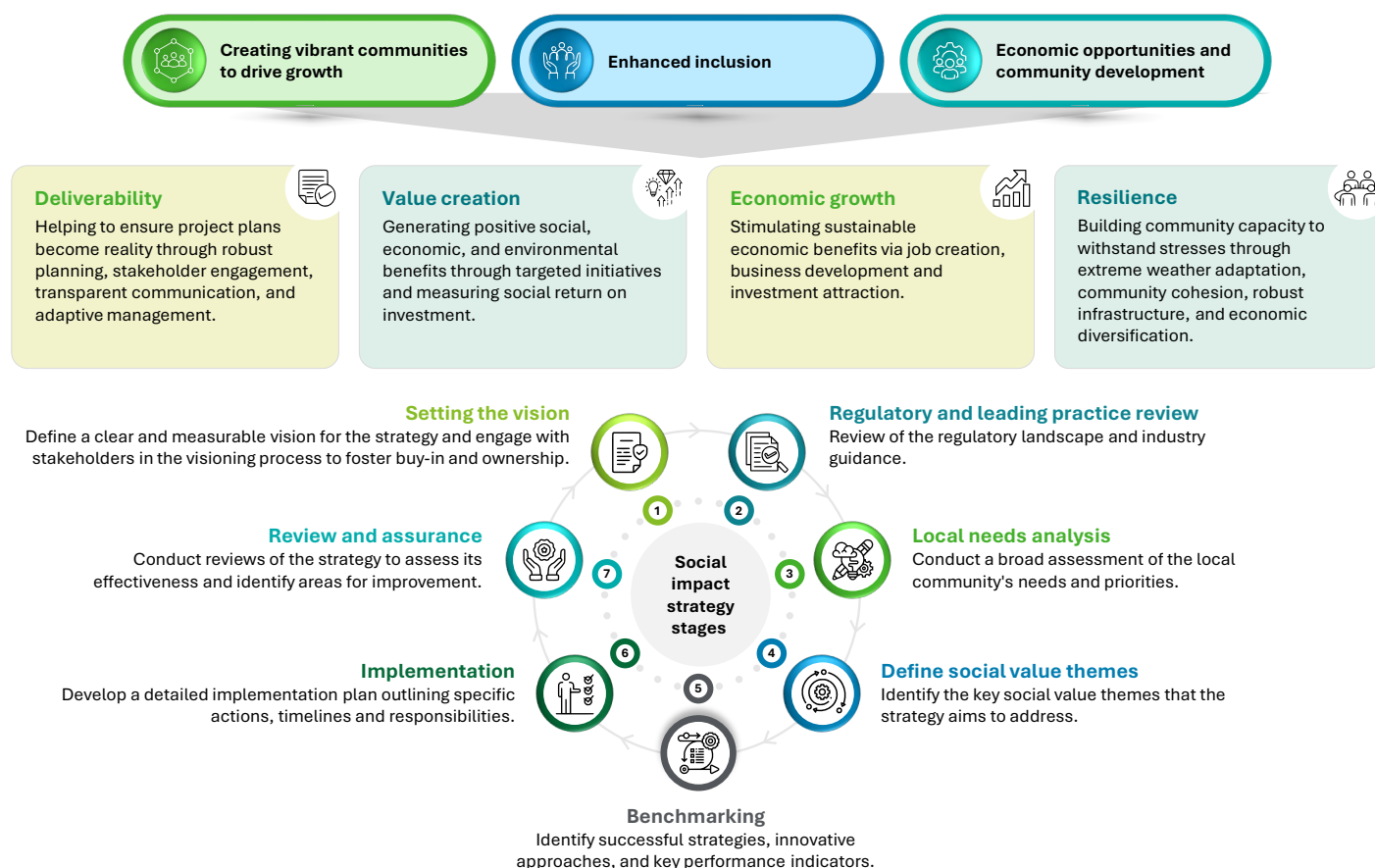
Driving social impact within sustainable urban development

With the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) projecting that 70% of the world's population will reside in urban areas by 2050 (areas currently responsible for up to 80% of global energy consumption and 75% of carbon emissions), the need for sustainable urban development continues to climb the priority list. This remains true despite the evolving and more measured approaches to certain environmental challenges on the global agenda.¹

Sustainable urban development can require a holistic approach to planning, design, and management of urban

areas, maximizing and balancing economic growth, social impact, and environmental responsibility. By integrating these factors, developers can help mitigate risk in their investment decisions and create commercially resilient and attractive environments. This approach also aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, specifically No.11, which promotes inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities². By embedding these considerations, vibrant urban spaces that benefit both communities and businesses can be created.

The strategic ambitions and their implementation:



Source: Deloitte UK

Vibrant communities to drive growth

Creating vibrant communities is important for driving growth in today's urban environments. Strategically designed urban spaces, incorporating elements such as accessible outdoor areas, proximity to essential services like healthcare and education, and efficient transport networks, play a key role in both improving quality of life and attracting investment.³ These features can foster social interaction, promote physical activity, and reduce stress, contributing to the overall well-being of residents and making these areas desirable places to live and work.

While leading practice suggests allocating 45-50% of urban land to streets and 15-20% to open public spaces⁴, the UN-Habitat World Cities Report 2024 highlights a concerning decline in global urban green spaces over the past 30 years. This trend underscores the increasing importance of prioritizing green spaces in urban development projects, which can also offer commercial benefits.

Enhanced social inclusion

Urban disparity manifests in various ways, extending beyond income disparities. This disparity creates a complex set of challenges, which may contribute to social mobility and public well-being challenges. Factors such as inadequate public transportation infrastructure, limited access to healthcare and education, and a lack of outdoor spaces can exacerbate existing gaps and contribute to a lower quality of life for certain groups.

In response, community hubs are increasingly being positioned at the heart of sustainable urban developments, serving as important resources and catalysts for positive change. Addressing these multifaceted challenges can require a broad approach that considers economic development and community development initiatives aimed at improving access to essential services and opportunities.

Economic opportunities and community development

Cities are important drivers of economic growth providing a catalyst for employment opportunities and contributing to overall economic prosperity. Local development initiatives can revitalize economies by creating access to quality jobs, investing in high-quality education, training, and skills, thus empowering residents with the capabilities needed to promote economic development.

To build more livable cities, strategic policy coordination and smart investments are needed⁵. Authorities should proactively shape urban futures, helping to ensure inclusive opportunities for all. Investing in urban infrastructure and services can help transform cities into powerful development hubs, securing long-term economic success for future generations.⁶

The path forward

In the face of pressing challenges like extreme weather, resource depletion, and social disparity, sustainable urban development can offer an important path toward resilient and thriving urban futures.⁷ Achieving this can require a holistic approach from key urban development stakeholders, integrating social considerations into

planning and development to create inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable urban environments. Livable and sustainable cities require effective, inclusive accessibility strategies. These are crucial for reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality by promoting public transport, active travel (cycling and walking), EVs, smart traffic management, mixed-use development, and accessible housing, thus enhancing mobility and social equity.

Thinking in action

Deloitte UK is acting as the lead advisor to a UK football club on its ambitious relocation project, which includes the development of a new state-of-the-art stadium and sports quarter. This move aims to create a vibrant "world-class sports quarter" for its community, generating over 8,500 jobs and delivering significant local benefits.

Deloitte UK's role in overseeing the development of the sports quarter requires the creation of the project's overarching master plan design objectives, aligning with the overall vision. As part of the master plan design brief, a sustainability and social impact strategy was created, each incorporating the key sustainable development and social impact topics discussed above.

Contacts:



Philip Parnell

Partner, Sustainability & Climate Lead
Deloitte United Kingdom
pparnell@deloitte.co.uk



Faye Hargreaves

Manager, Sustainability & Climate
Deloitte United Kingdom
fhargreaves@deloitte.co.uk

Endnotes:

1. "[Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities](#)," United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), last updated 25 March 2025
2. "[Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities - The Global Goals](#)," United Nations (UN)
3. UN Habitat. "[Healthier Cities and Communities Through Public Spaces](#)" 2025, p. 2
4. UN Habitat. "[Healthier Cities and Communities Through Public Spaces](#)" 2025, p. 4
5. Deloitte. "Inclusive smart cities". Accessed 28 August 2019
6. World Bank. "[Urban Development](#)." Accessed June 2024.
7. "[Climate change: a threat to human wellbeing and health of the planet. Taking action now can secure our future](#)" The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 28 February 2022



This publication has been written in general terms and we recommend that you obtain professional advice before acting or refraining from action on any of the contents of this publication. Deloitte LLP accepts no liability for any loss occasioned to any person acting or refraining from action as a result of any material in this publication.

Deloitte LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales with registered number OC303675 and its registered office at 1 New Street Square, London EC4A 3HQ, United Kingdom.

Deloitte LLP is the United Kingdom affiliate of Deloitte NSE LLP, a member firm of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, a UK private company limited by guarantee ("DTTL"). DTTL and each of its member firms are legally separate and independent entities. DTTL and Deloitte NSE LLP do not provide services to clients. Please [click here](#) to learn more about our global network of member firms.

© 2025 Deloitte LLP. All rights reserved.