# Data centres urged to embrace social responsibility for community engagement



The data centres industry is poised for considerable transformation as it navigates expanding expectations concerning social responsibility. In an article published by Power Engineering International, Ben Pritchard, CEO of AVK, outlines how data centre developments must contend with growing opposition from local communities and stakeholders regarding environmental impacts, such as land loss, increasing electricity costs, disruption of sights, and restricted job opportunities.

Pritchard emphasises the necessity for data centre operators and developers to adopt social performance as a core strategy to generate shared value. This pivot is predominantly influenced by heightened scrutiny from governments, business partners, investors, and the communities where these facilities are located. Increasingly, investors are adopting environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria to assess companies, with a specific focus on the social implications of their operations. It has become common for potential funders to seek assurances that the firms they support maintain a conscientious awareness of their social impact in their operating locales.

At the International Investment Summit earlier this year, the UK government recognised the data centre sector as a priority. However, the recent commitments made by the new administration regarding the nation’s sustainable development agenda highlight a clear intention to encourage green growth alongside social accountability.

Data centres are now called upon to invest in initiatives that bolster social value as a proactive measure to tackle forthcoming legislative requirements and cultivate positive relationships with regulators. Pritchard underscores the importance of cultivating goodwill with local communities, ensuring that residents feel consulted regarding the establishment of a data centre nearby and can tangibly experience its benefits.

Strategic community investments are seen as pivotal in building constructive partnerships and enhancing the local context by prioritising community needs. Effective collaborations can be fostered by offering lasting advantages in areas such as employment, education, and conservation, thereby creating mutually beneficial relationships with local communities.

One promising strategy involves district heating initiatives, which enable data centres to play a more supportive role within localities by repurposing excess heat for broader societal benefits. For instance, in Saint Denis, a local data centre has successfully redirected waste heat to meet the temperature requirements of the Paris Olympic Aquatic Centre. Additionally, a university in Dublin has begun utilising excess heat from nearby data centres, directly benefiting students. These examples signify a broader trend of integrating data centres into socially responsible urban infrastructures to cultivate sustainable ties with surrounding areas.

Moreover, data centres are taking the initiative to invest in or sponsor local green spaces, directly enhancing the communities in which they operate. Such green spaces serve as venues for recreation, elevate residents’ quality of life, and contribute to the overall well-being of local populations. Through the establishment and support of green environments in urban locations, data centres are facilitating stronger communities and enriching both the local setting and the everyday experiences of residents.

Pritchard also highlights the potential for data centres to foster economic and social development, particularly in underserved regions, where they can catalyse job creation and infrastructure development, alongside knowledge sharing. These facilities stand to have a significant impact on local economies by generating employment opportunities and enhancing infrastructure in areas of the North of England and the Midlands. Collaborating with educational institutions and community organisations could further develop local talent pipelines and stimulate interest in careers in technology.

As capacity ramps up and individual facilities grow in size and prominence, community concerns regarding land use, resource consumption—especially concerning energy and water—have escalated. To mitigate these issues, Pritchard argues for the critical importance of involving local communities from the outset in discussions about data centre operations. Such engagement is essential for cultivating trust and establishing productive relationships, which can lead to greater social acceptance of these facilities.

Reflecting on the shifting societal expectations, the greater emphasis on social value and the notion of "being a good corporate neighbour" relates to a broader understanding that data centres will indeed be a permanent fixture, particularly within densely populated urban frameworks. By actively engaging with communities and aligning their operations with local needs and expectations, data centres can contribute positively to society while securing their long-term viability and acceptance.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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