Sustainability Strategy 2023-2026

apex

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Ard na Smoll, Dungiven

Grounds at Ardavon, Derry~Londonderry

Kitchen replacement

Foreword

by Peter Caldwell Chairperson, and Sheena McCallion Chief Executive

Housing associations play an integral role in the provision of affordable and safe homes, as well as responding to wider issues of social inequality and climate change. This strategy sets out Apex's intentions to advance sustainability throughout the association; and in the communities we build and support.

It is unequivocal that climate change is happening, and that human activities leading to increased greenhouse gas emissions are the cause. International agreements are working towards mitigating the impacts of future climate change and more recently local action on sustainability has accelerated.

We acknowledge that we are at the beginning of our sustainability journey. This strategy is an important first step. It sets out our plans for the next three-year period; focusing on key actions to make a real, measurable impact within our association and communities, as well as contributing to the achievement of government sustainability targets.

Efficient implementation of this strategy will provide an informed basis for developing a more in-depth strategy from 2026 onwards, to further tackle sustainability within our organisation, setting more ambitious goals and playing a more significant role in developing safe and sustainable homes and communities. This is only the beginning.

Peter Caldwell
Chairperson

Sheena McCallion
Chief Executive

About Apex

We provide and maintain almost 7,000 high quality homes and deliver support to more than 16,000 tenants and residents across Northern Ireland.

As a not-for-profit housing association, we work to social enterprise principles and employ almost 650 staff. Over the next three years, the number of Apex homes is expected to grow to around 8,000.

We provide:

- *General needs housing for families and single people*
- *Purpose-built accommodation for older people and families with complex needs*
- *Supported housing for people with mental ill health, learning disabilities, or alcohol/drug addictions; young people in need of support; and older people*
- *Housing support for vulnerable groups under the Supporting People programme*
- *Support services for tenants and the wider community through our community investment programme*
- *Community buildings managed by local community groups*

We work with others

Apex works with Newington Housing Association, using our joint resources for mutual benefit. We provide services on behalf of Apex Housing Association (Ireland).

High quality homes

almost **7,000**
high quality homes provided and maintained by Apex

Tenants and residents

more than **16,000**
tenants and residents live in Apex accommodation

Apex Staff

almost **650**
staff are employed by Apex

Environmental, Social, Governance highlights 2020-2023

DfC regulatory rating

'1'

the highest regulatory rating '1- meets the standards'

Homes under management

6,800+

homes under management

Satisfaction with service

87%

of tenants satisfied with overall service

Satisfaction with home

85%

of tenants satisfied with heating and energy efficiency

Nearly zero-energy buildings

NZEB

pilot projects underway in Newtownabbey and Lisburn

Governance/viability

A-

retained Standard & Poors investment grade credit rating

'Decent homes'

100%

'decent homes'

Energy rating

82%

of homes are EPC-C or above

PV panels

1,500

homes with PV panels

Ballymagowan Urban Park

100

allotment users supported yearly by on-site horticulturalist

New homes investment

£100m

invested annually in developing new homes

Property age

18

years is the average age of housing stock

Upgrades & maintenance

£10m+

invested in existing homes

Tenant engagement

11,000+

people engaged through events and activities

Bike to Work scheme

33

staff purchased bikes through the Bike to Work scheme

Strategic context

The UN Sustainable Development Goals provide the overarching background to our sustainability strategy.

Sustainability is defined as meeting the needs that we have today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987).

At Apex, we understand the importance of playing our part in the creation of a sustainable world. This sustainability strategy has been developed with the guidance of international, national, and local agreements and policies.

2008: UK Climate Change Act (Amended 2019)
This set legal targets for the UK to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050

2015: Paris Climate Agreement
International treaty to limit global warming to well below 2°C and preferably to 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels

2015: UN Sustainable Development Goals

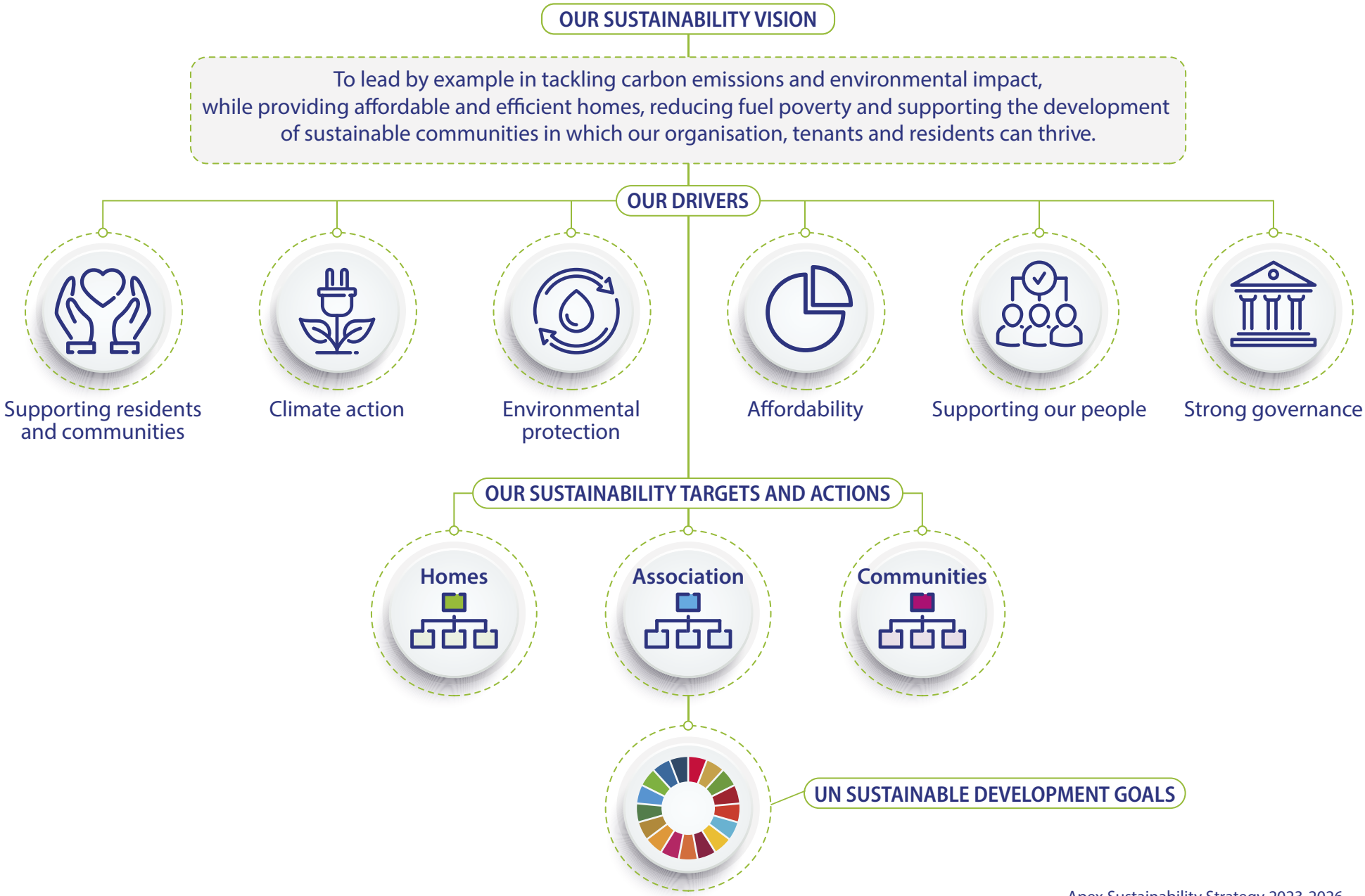
2020: Climate emergency declared in Northern Ireland
NI Assembly passes motion declaring a climate emergency

2022: NI Climate Change Act
Sets legal targets for NI to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050

2023: Apex Sustainability Strategy

We have adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals as the overarching background to our sustainability strategy. The 17 goals developed by the UN in 2015, outline a road map for peace and prosperity for people and the planet. They take into account climate action, poverty alleviation, a sustainable economy and improved equality.

Sustainability pathway



Our vision

Our vision for this sustainability strategy has been developed to help us integrate sustainability into all aspects of our work; from the homes we build, to the way we run our association and how we support our communities.

The actions we take to achieve our vision for sustainability will also support our overall corporate vision: *"For every person to enjoy great quality homes and support in vibrant and caring communities."*

OUR SUSTAINABILITY VISION

"To lead by example in tackling carbon emissions and environmental impact, while providing affordable and efficient homes, reducing fuel poverty and supporting the development of sustainable communities in which our organisation, tenants and residents can thrive."

KEY TARGET:
All new homes to have a minimum EPC rating of 'A' from 2024.

See all targets and actions on pages 10-18

OUR CORPORATE VISION

"For every person to enjoy great quality homes and support, in vibrant and caring communities."

KEY TARGET:
Increase % of tenants reporting satisfaction with heating and energy efficiency.

See all targets and actions on pages 10-18

Driving our strategy

In order to achieve our vision, we have developed six drivers of our strategy, with the overarching aim of contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

1. Supporting residents and communities

We will support the development of sustainable places, where people can live well, with minimal impact on the environment.
We will listen to residents and communities; empowering and supporting them to take action on sustainability.

Impacts UN SDGs:

1 3 7 11

2. Climate action

We will play our part in tackling the global climate crisis by reducing carbon emissions across homes and association, aiming for the national target of net-zero emissions by 2050.
We will work to minimise the future impacts of climate change on our residents and association.

Impacts UN SDGs:

7 12 13

3. Environmental protection

We will work to sustain and improve biodiversity around our developments and reduce our impact on air, land and water, while also seeking to ensure efficient and sustainable resource use in all our work.

Impacts UN SDGs:

12 13 15

4. Affordability

We will provide affordable, safe, comfortable and energy efficient housing for our residents, helping to address fuel poverty via more energy efficient homes and engagement with tenants on energy efficiency practices.

Impacts UN SDGs:

1 7 11

5. Supporting our people

We will ensure that we provide a positive work environment, where staff feel supported, appreciated and motivated.

Impacts UN SDGs:

3 8

6. Strong governance

We will lead by example, through good governance, as a transparent, ethical and accountable association.

Impacts UN SDGs:

11 16

1.0 Sustainable homes

Focusing on 'sustainable homes' will help us to ensure that both existing stock and new developments are sustainable, affordable, energy efficient and safe homes for our tenants and residents.

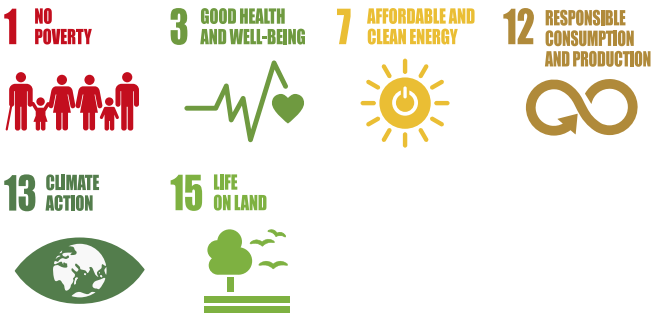
Apex is committed to providing great quality, safe and affordable housing; and to improving the sustainability of homes in the future.

In this section we outline our plans for sustainable homes. Our targets include transitioning to green energy sources, making homes more energy efficient, reducing carbon emissions and tackling fuel poverty.

Emissions from homes fall under Scope 3 of our carbon footprint, so reducing energy use in Apex homes is also essential as we start monitoring and reducing our own carbon footprint.

Steps will be taken to educate tenants on energy efficiency and resource use, while we will continue in our efforts to provide green space and improve biodiversity within our developments.

To meet these goals, existing stock will be upgraded, while new developments will see sustainability at the centre of the design process, ensuring that sustainable homes are at the core of Apex Housing Association.



Our actions under 'sustainable homes' will contribute to United Nations Development Goals: 1,3,7,12,13,15

Our 'sustainable homes' targets and actions will lead to:

- *Reduced fuel poverty*
- *Reduced carbon emissions*
- *Good quality, affordable homes*
- *Improved biodiversity*
- *Reduced resource use*

1.0 Sustainable homes *continued*

1.0	Sustainable homes - targets and actions	Associated drivers
1.1	Increase percentage of tenants reporting satisfaction with heating and energy efficiency.	1,2,4
1.2	Construct all new homes to EPC rating A, adopting a 'fabric-first' approach - starting April 2024.	2
1.3	Identify and implement alternative renewable fuel/energy sources for new build homes.	2,3,4
1.4	Consider and implement BREEAM into new build contracts where suitable, targeting a minimum 'very good' status.	2
1.5	Develop and implement a strategy to achieve a minimum EPC rating C across 90% of existing homes.	2,3,4
1.6	Encourage reduced energy use by providing tenants with appropriate advice on best practice energy management.	1,2,4
1.7	Specify 'No Peat' products on landscaping maintenance and reduced chemical use.	2,3
1.8	Continue to incorporate open green spaces into developments where possible, utilising native tree and plant species.	1,2,3
1.9	Consider opportunities for wildlife where appropriate in our developments.	3

Our targets and actions within **'sustainable homes'** are informed by our strategy drivers: - 1,2,3,4 (see page 9)
Our actions will contribute to: UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - 1,3,7,12,13,15

1.0 Sustainable homes *continued*

1.0	Sustainable homes - targets and actions	Associated drivers
1.10	Identify and incorporate increased greening at design stage: e.g. installation of green walls/roofs etc, use of SuDS.	1,2,3
1.11	Provide tenants with up-to-date advice on what action to take in the event of flooding or flash flooding.	1,2
1.12	Incorporate heat management methods into design of new build homes including shading and ventilation.	1,2
1.13	Implement a review to ensure tenants have detailed guidance on correct recycling procedures and have access to recycling facilities including for food waste.	2,3
1.14	Consider and implement the use of low flow toilets etc. in new builds and retrofitting projects to reduce water usage.	2,3
1.15	Encourage reduced water usage by providing tenants with appropriate information.	2,3

Our targets and actions within **'sustainable homes'** are informed by our strategy drivers: - 1,2,3,4 (see page 9)
Our actions will contribute to: UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - 1,3,7,12,13,15

2.0 Sustainable association

Focusing on 'sustainable association' will help us to demonstrate leadership in sustainability. We will do this by ensuring we are a transparent, ethical and accountable organisation, which supports our staff, tenants and residents, and strives to remove negative impacts on our environment.

Apex is committed to being a sustainable association. Targets in this section will ensure we achieve this, by putting sustainability at the centre of all plans and policies.

Determined to significantly reduce our association's environmental impact, we will reduce emissions across the organisation, preserve and enhance biodiversity and work to prevent pollution.

Tackling Scope 1 and 2 emissions will start with accurate monitoring and increased efficiency; and in the longer term, a transition to renewable sources of energy.

We recognise the challenge of Scope 3 emissions and commit to making progress on measuring and reduction as far as possible within this three-year strategy, ensuring that we start to tackle all areas of our work, from waste produced to our supply chain.

We will empower staff to help reach these targets through training, upskilling and flexible working arrangements, aiming to make significant steps over the next three years towards becoming a more sustainable association.

Our actions under 'sustainable association' will contribute to United Nations Development Goals: 7,8,11,12,13,16

Our 'sustainable association' targets and actions will lead to:

- *Reduced carbon emissions from association*
- *Reduced resource use*
- *Supported and motivated staff*
- *Increased transparency and accountability*

2.0 Sustainable association *continued*

2.0	Sustainable association - targets and actions	Associated drivers
2.1	Ensure that sustainable development and climate change are used as a guiding principle in all Apex plans, policies and strategies.	2,6
2.2	Establish a net-zero working group, responsible for identifying targets to achieve net zero by 2050, with intermittent goals for 2030 and 2040.	2
2.3	Develop and implement a plan to monitor Scope 1, Scope 2 and Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions.	2,6
2.4	Promote staff participation and engagement on climate change and sustainability.	2,3,5
2.5	Invest in our staff, identifying appropriate training on climate change and sustainability.	2,5
2.6	Research and consider green innovation and low carbon technologies.	2
2.7	Continue to promote a healthy work-life balance with staff.	2,5
2.8	Establish an Active Travel and Decarbonising Transport Taskforce.	2,3,5
2.9	Identify appropriate financing solutions for a decarbonisation and retrofitting programme.	2,6

Our targets and actions within **'sustainable association'** are informed by our strategy drivers: - 1,2,3,5,6 (see page 9)
Our actions will contribute to: UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - 7,8,11,12,13,16

2.0 Sustainable association *continued*

2.0	Sustainable association - targets and actions	Associated drivers
2.10	Invest in the establishment of new satellite offices, reducing staff travel times and our carbon emmissions.	2,3,5
2.11	Consider the benefits of 'Planet Mark' accreditation.	1,2,3,5,6
2.12	Develop a plan to monitor and reduce waste produced within the organisation.	2,3
2.13	Implement suitable green procurement.	1,2,3
2.14	Establish ISO 14001 accreditation across the organisation.	2,3,6
2.15	Review and identify options for providing apprenticeships.	1,5

Our targets and actions within **'sustainable association'** are informed by our strategy drivers: - 1,2,3,5,6 (see page 9)
Our actions will contribute to: UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - 7,8,11,12,13,16

3.0 Sustainable communities

Focusing on 'sustainable communities' will help us to support the development of strong and resilient communities by empowering those living in Apex homes and schemes to take action and develop safe, healthy and happy places to live.

Sustainability is not something that can be achieved by organisations working alone. We need to work together with our tenants and residents, our neighbours, other housing providers and local government to have a real, measurable impact and help develop sustainable communities.

Apex is committed to working with the wider community, providing support with education initiatives, improving people's sustainability knowledge, providing advice on energy and resource use and assisting people to avail of financial support when necessary.

We strive to create communities where people have access to green open space and local amenities close to where they live. We recognise the important role we play in our communities and hope that our influence and support will help develop sustainable communities throughout Northern Ireland.

Our actions under 'sustainable communities' will contribute to United Nations Development Goals:1,7,11,12,13,15

Our 'sustainable communities' targets and actions will lead to:

- *Community pride and ownership*
- *Increased community support*
- *Improved health and wellbeing*
- *Net biodiversity gain in local areas*
- *Reduced carbon emissions across communities*

3.0 Sustainable communities *continued*

3.0	Sustainable communities - targets and actions	Associated drivers
3.1	Recognise our role working with a range of organisations as part of the communities we work within.	1,6
3.2	Establish a cost-of-living working group.	1,4
3.3	Use our specialist expertise to support tenants that are in financial difficulty.	1,4
3.4	Identify and introduce measures that will enable and protect people throughout the energy transition.	1,2,4
3.5	Run information and community awareness campaigns, training and events on decarbonisation and sustainable resource use.	1,2,3
3.6	Promote tenant engagement in line with our Tenant & Resident Engagement Strategy 2023-2026.	1,2,3,6
3.7	Create communities that provide access to local amenities.	1,2
3.8	Develop links with other organisations to support decarbonisation of our sector.	1,2,6
3.9	Promote community gardens and more access to green spaces for residents.	1,2,3

Our targets and actions within **'sustainable communities'** are informed by our strategy drivers: - 1,2,3,4,6 (see page 9)
Our actions will contribute to: UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - 1,7,11,12,13,15

3.0 sustainable communities *continued*

3.0	Sustainable communities - targets and actions	Associated drivers
3.10	Consider opportunities to be involved in development of allotments for local food growing.	1,2,3
3.11	Consider the implementation of charging points for EVs/Scooters within sheltered housing schemes.	1,2,3

Our targets and actions within **'sustainable communities'** are informed by our strategy drivers: - 1,2,3,4,6 (see page 9)
Our actions will contribute to: UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - 1,7,11,12,13,15

Reporting

In order to meet the targets set, it is essential that we measure the action taken, and are accountable for the outcomes.

We have identified a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which will be monitored over the three year period of this strategy in order to determine how far we are progressing in key areas of sustainability action.

Each KPI includes aims for the three years of the strategy. As progress is made regarding monitoring and determining baseline data, these aims will be updated to set ourselves ambitious targets for the remaining years of this strategy and beyond. Progress on each KPI will be reported annually.

KPI	AIM	YEAR
Safety Compliance	100% safety compliance	2023-2024
	100% safety compliance	2024-2025
	100% safety compliance	2025-2026
Tenant Satisfaction	> 85% tenant satisfaction with heating and energy efficiency	2023-2024
	> 85% tenant satisfaction with heating and energy efficiency	2024-2025
	> 85% tenant satisfaction with heating and energy efficiency	2025-2026
New Homes Delivered	> 250 homes completed	2023-2024
	> 250 homes completed	2024-2025
	> 250 homes completed	2025-2026
Homes at EPC rating of 'C' or higher	Establish baseline data	2023-2024
	Establish percentage reduction target	2024-2025
	Establish percentage reduction target	2025-2026
Biodiversity Impact	Monitor and report areas of green space in assets	2023-2024
	New initiatives in place to increase area of green space	2024-2025
	Measurable increase in % area of green space	2025-2026
Carbon Emissions (Scope 1 and 2)	Develop and implement a monitoring plan	2023-2024
	Establish baseline data	2024-2025
	Establish percentage reduction target	2025-2026
Carbon Emissions (Scope 3)	Develop plan for monitoring	2023-2024
	Implement monitoring for e.g. waste, water, business travel	2024-2025
	Measures in place to begin reduction	2025-2026

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