

TOWARDS HEALTH EQUALITY

**Ardoyne Bone Community
Health & Leisure Trust
2024 STRATEGIC REVIEW**

**STRATEGIC REVIEW OF
ABC Health & Leisure Trust**

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1. Introduction



Since our previous strategy review, over 2,000 people and organisations have shared their views and ideas with us. We have heard loud and clear about their worries and the looming problems in health education and the environment. We've also heard about their goals and ambitions of living in a healthy community where everyone looks out for one another.

We are thrilled to introduce our new approach. It begins with the construction on phase 2 of the Health and Leisure facility and the rising interest of individuals who believe in the possibility of creating a great health-care institution in the district. We are building on what we have learnt since embarking on this journey in 2016, and we realise that the next phase will require more cooperation and deeper collaborations with everyone engaged in community-led health equity.

Our new strategy will help our community:

- Create a cutting-edge health, leisure, and training/education hub, and strengthen community infrastructure.
- Actively encourage healthy lifestyle activities and choices.
- Improve their employment, education, and training possibilities.
- Create collaborative learning and impact hubs to foster healthy relationships within Ardoyne and Bone, as well as amongst other communities in North Belfast.

As the Trust's tenth anniversary approaches, we are excited to implement a plan that provides each other with the opportunity to build a healthier community.

1.1 Context of Community Needs

ABC Health and Leisure Trust was established in 2016 as a result of community discussions regarding the need to address the growing social inequalities in Ardoyne electoral ward. These disparities were most evident in the domains of health, education, and the environment. Government statistics on health highlighted some of the stark realities of social issues facing local residents. ABC Health and Leisure Trust was established because of the outcome of these community discussions to address the growing social inequalities in Ardoyne electoral ward.

These equality disparities were most evident in the domains of health, education, and the environment. Government statistics on health highlighted some of the stark realities of social is-

ssues facing local residents in Ardoyne ward. The extent of these social issues has been persistent and intractable and shaped by multiple external factors such as sectarianism, trans generational trauma, deindustrialisation, dereliction, poverty, disadvantage and discrimination.

The Trust carried out desk research on the existing levels of disadvantage within Ardoyne ward. These statistics point to the fact that Ardoyne ward has consistently been measured across a variety of multiple deprivation metrics all of which demonstrate that the ward has some of the worst outcomes in health, education and environment. These realities have informed the aims and objectives of the Trust.

The aims of Ardoyne Bone Community Health & Leisure Trust

01

Challenge health, education and environmental inequalities

02

Build on existing skills and assets in the community

03

Establish collaborative learning and impact hubs

04

Strengthen & connect people-led community action within a local plan

- 2011 Census states that 30.8% of people in Ardoyne had a long-term health problem or disability that limited their day-to-day activities
- In 2015, cancer was the registered cause of 44.4% of deaths in Ardoyne in comparison to 30.5% in Belfast North Assembly Area and 28% across Northern Ireland.
- Between 2013-2017 Ardoyne Crumlin Neighbourhood Renewal Area had the highest incident of death by suicide or undetermined intent with a death rate of 25/10,000 population compared the a rate of 8/10,000 in Northern Ireland.
- According to NISRA statistics, there has been a steady increase in dispensing prescription antidepressant drugs in Belfast North Assembly area. By 2015 there had been a 40% increase from 2010 rates in dispensing antidepressant drugs. By 2017 North Belfast Assembly area had the second highest rate in Northern Ireland for dispensing antidepressants.
- In 2018, 19% (1,480 people) were on multiple disability allowance, compared to 9% NI average
- Ardoyne Crumlin Neighbourhood Renewal area has one of the highest incidents of drug related death in Northern Ireland's Neighbourhood Renewal areas, rising from 9 in 2004 to 20 in 2014. The area now has the highest incidence of drug related deaths.

1.2 Governance



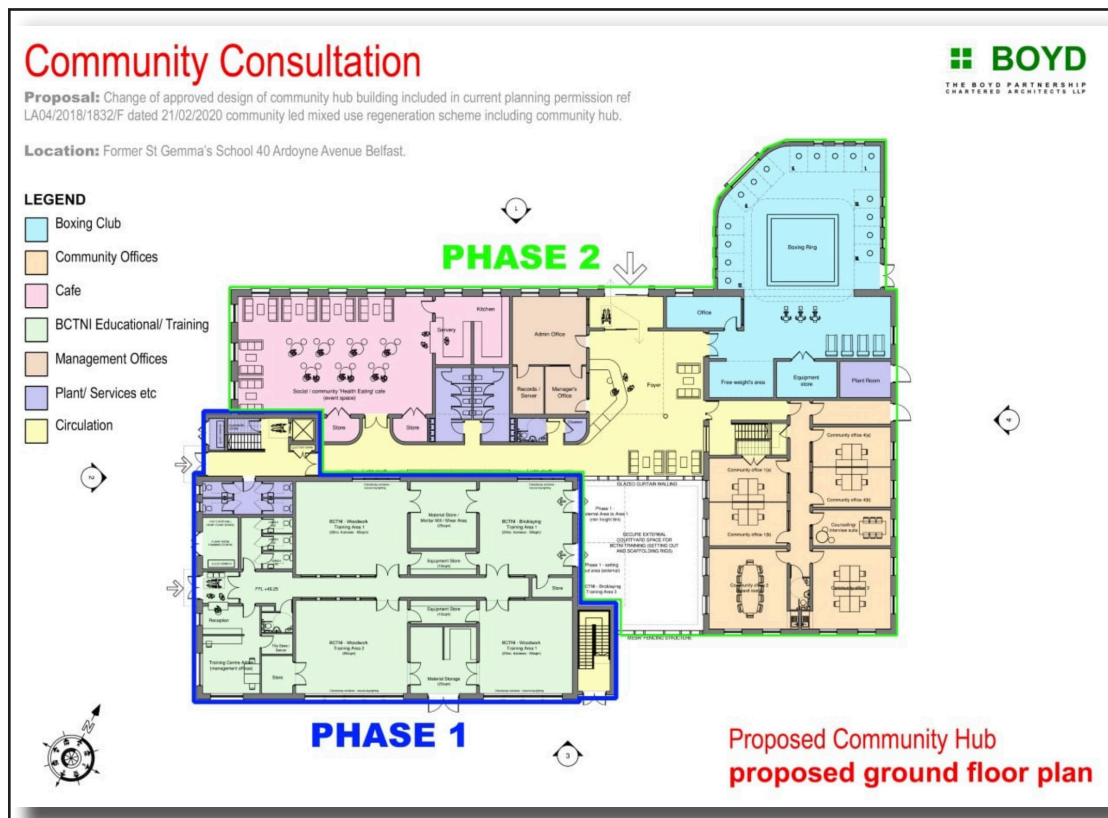
The Trust conducted a review of its governance processes aware of the wider community sector challenges of committee participation and leadership gaps. They decide to establish a company structure to manage the new facility.

The Trust wanted to enable other local people to take on leadership roles by encouraging succession planning as an integral aim of the Trust. As the building work progressed they recruited six company directors, who will ultimately manage the health and leisure facility upon its transfer in Winter 2025.

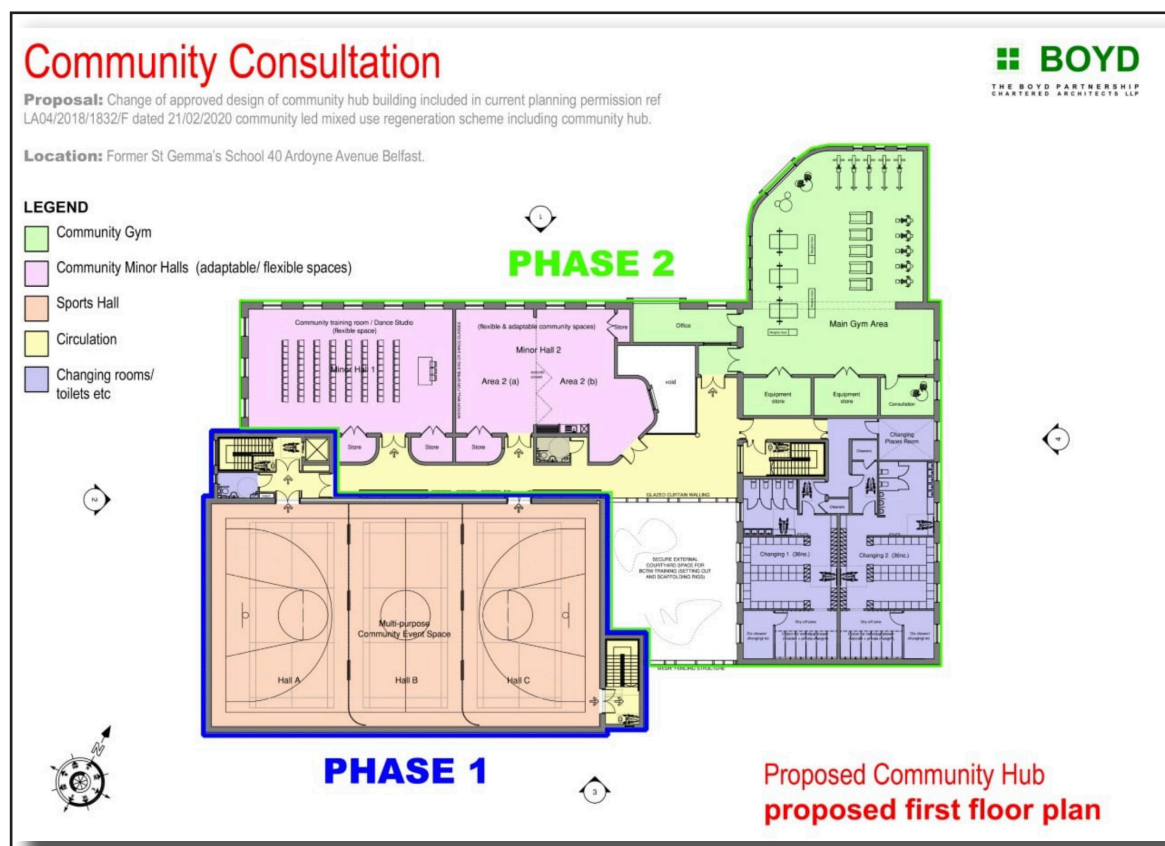
ABC Trust secured funding from the National Lottery Community Fund to provide governance training for six new directors. The Trust also secured funding from the Belfast Charitable Society for a development manager tasked with overseeing the construction process, fostering key stakeholder awareness and support for the Trust's strategic objectives, and obtaining financing to ensure the Trust's sustainability in the long term.



1.3 Community consultation



The local community indicated their preferred possibilities for the future use of the Saint Gemma's High School property, which had been vacant since 2013. The property encompassed a large expanse of land adjacent to the Flax Centre Complex, and local residents saw the need for homes in the vicinity while also indicating the need for leisure/training facilities on the site. With this in mind, the Trust was formed following negotiations with the Flax Trust to explain community needs and gain extra financing to construct a leisure/training facility.





2.0 Financing our Business Plan

The Trust formulated a business case and submitted an application to the Executive Office's Urban Villages programme, achieving success in the process.

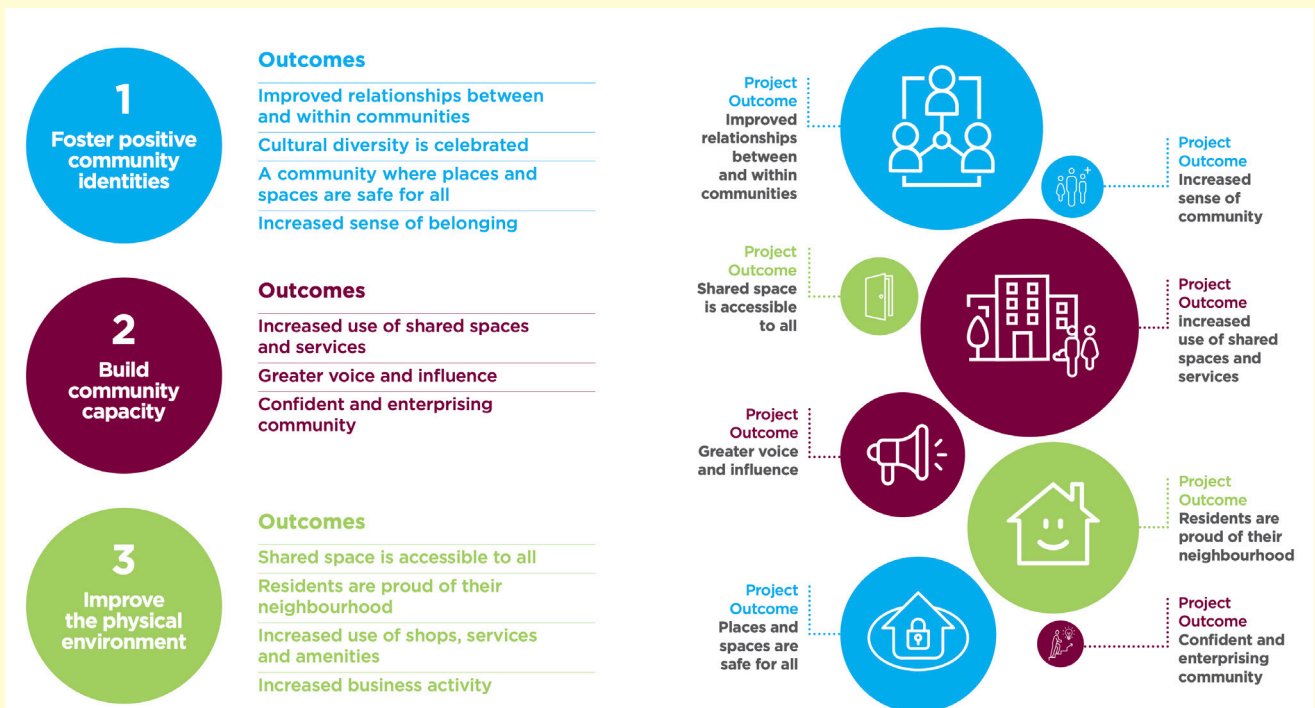
Increasing construction costs necessitated further negotiations between the ABC Trust and the Department for Communities, the Department for Infrastructure, and Belfast City Council to secure additional financial assistance.

The vacant Saint Gemma's High School building was acquired by Flax Trust and gifted to the ABC Trust to turn the vision of a state-of-the-art health and leisure facility into reality. The Trust immediately set about refurbishment works and space was leased to prospective tenants to cover maintenance and utility expenses while construction plans awaited approval.

A strategic plan was developed to guide the Trust's work throughout the process, ensuring a solid foundation for its future and aligning with their vision for community-led action. Construction workers eventually came on site in May 2022.



Alignment to Urban Villages Outcomes framework



Capital costs for the health and leisure facility currently total £7,167,000 and these costs have been met by the following funders:

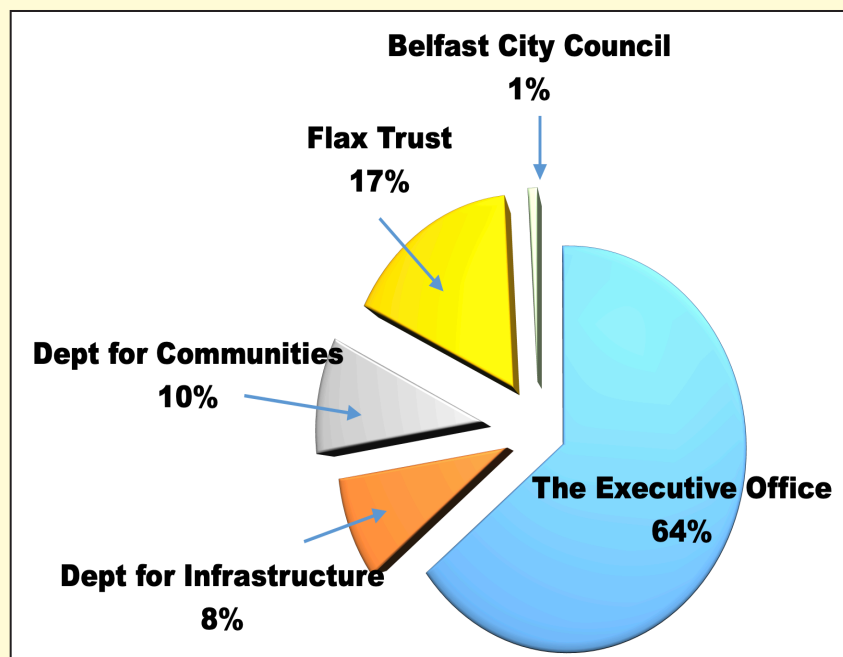
The Executive Office - Urban Villages Initiative £4,595,000

Department for Infrastructure £606,000

Department for Communities £700,000

Flax Trust £1,200,000

Belfast City Council £66,000



3. Progress on the 2018-2023 strategic plan

The 2018-2023 strategic plan has undergone continuous review, with external risk factors assessed and suitable mitigations implemented. Several tasks were excessively ambitious and remain in progress because of delays in the construction of phase 2 of the building. Phase 1 was completed and handed over in August 2023. The new building contained a training and employment facility with state-of-the-art units teaching bricklaying and joinery. The training facility tenants, BCT NI and later Bryson Energy, have successfully recruited a steady influx of young individuals motivated to acquire skills and join the workforce.



The Phase 1 construction also includes an indoor sports hall which will eventually be hired to sports clubs and other events. The main sports hall is temporarily being used by the Ardoyne Boxing Club and the Lawrenson-Toal Academy of Irish Dance until they move into their own specially constructed units in the Phase 2 building. Both tenants serve the needs of local residents with a constant flow of users.

3.1 Review of the 2018-2023 strategic outcomes

Three general outcomes were identified in the 2018-2023 strategic plan.

**1.
Improve the
Physical
Environ-
ment.**

**2.
Strategic
Plan – Health,
Education &
Training**

**3.
Good
Relations &
Partnership
Working**

OUTCOME 1: Improve the Physical Environment.

From its inception the Trust were involved with negotiating with Belfast City Council around developments on the Marrowbone Park facility on the Oldpark Road. They have been in negotiation with the Saint Mac-Nissi Educational Trust and now have the potential to unlock funding from Flax Trust to progress the development of the Holy Cross Boy's School sports pitch. This would enable the Trust to move forward with the development project, ensuring it can meet the necessary requirements to deliver the best outcome for the school and the community.

Simultaneous plans for the purchase and redevelopment of derelict Saint Gemma's High School were progressed and negotiations with the Urban Villages Programme team on preparing a business case were among the initial activities taken to improve the physical environment. Building a financial package also required facilitating community consultations and discussions with Departmental Ministerial teams regarding additional budgetary requirements.

The Trust worked with architects to develop designs and explore options for successful building design. They worked with Belfast City Council, Connolly & Fee builders, and Boyd Partner Architects to form a project board that would eventually manage the construction process. It also entailed ongoing negotiations with possible long-term renters and building relationships with several interested parties to assure the site's safety. A crucial aspect of the development was managing Flax Trust's expectations as a large contributor to the program and reporting on progress at all stages. The goal of enhancing the physical environment will not be fulfilled until phase 2 is complete, although phase 1 of building has produced a significant improvement to the public realm.

The construction of the health and leisure facility required strengthening the governance structure of the Trust as the building and operation of the facility would be only one aspect of the ABC Health & Leisure Trust's vision. In 2024 it was agreed to

establish a limited company to drive the facility project and in so doing free up the time and skills of the Trustees to develop additional plans. A general call out to the community yielded expressions of interest in this innovative leadership role and six directors were duly appointed. ABC Trust then put in place a governance training package. The Trust had employed a caretaker when they took over ownership of the school and eventually recruited a development manager in September 2024 to help design the strategic direction of the company as a sustainable business. Rental income throughout the construction process supplemented by the support of the Belfast Charitable Society enabled the recruitment of these staff. It is anticipated the company will require at least one full-time facilities manager accompanied by administration and maintenance support before the facility is fully operational. Phase 1 has already created 208 various construction posts on site and currently on Phase 2 there have been 64 construction posts.



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OUTCOME 2: Develop business clarity and embed project support

This outcome aimed to develop a plan that would look at the strategic needs of the ABC Trust and the area to see what gaps exist and how those needs can be met. Many of the activities have been partially delivered and subsequently it is clear that the outcome remains partially met. The main factor was the delayed recruitment of a development manager.

Before construction of the new facility the Trust successfully recruited tenants such as Ardoyne Boxing Club, and Lawrenson-Toal Academy of Irish Dance among other temporary tenants that enabled the Trust to get established and experience the challenges of operating a health and leisure facility – even if it was in a delapidated school building. Nevertheless, the experience demonstrated an interest from the local community and unwavering local support. With the development of their business plan the Trust has received letters of intent from Glenbrook Sure Start and Mill Café for leaseholds in phase 2. This is supplemented by intentions to hire the sports facility on a sessional basis by a variety of local sporting organisations and schools.

In 2023 the Trust began to explore the possibility of facilitating a social prescribing model based in the new gymnasium space and have been working with the Ulster University School of medicine to design a gymnasium-based treatment centre suitable for pre and post operative clients. These discussions have been complemented by further engagement with Queens University Belfast to help design impact reporting and share knowledge on similar community interventions across the UK and Europe.

Over the period the Trust has built up media links with local newspaper's such as the North Belfast News and have established a Facebook presence. The Trust has also engaged with a content creator to create a promotional video for the completion of Phase 1.

During construction design phase, the Trust facilitated the delivery of programmes on site that promote physical and emotional health & wellbeing. These were delivered through the Ardoyne Boxing Club, Flex Fitness and the Lawrenson-Toal Academy of Irish Dance. As the project progressed the Trust unlocked additional finances from the Urban Villages Social Value Funding, linked to the capital programme. This is a strategic initiative aimed at fostering sustainability and capacity building for our tenants/groups. This funding allowed the groups to invest in additional training and resources that enhance their overall skill sets, strengthen governance structures, and ensure long term sustainability.

- ABC Health & Leisure Trust Facebook page



OUTCOME 3: Improve good relations & partnership working

This outcome represents a continuous effort, considering that the Ardoyne ward is an interface area encircled by 'peace' walls. The strategy outlined opportunities for enhancing relations. Collaboration and participation serve as fundamental principles of the ABC Trust.

The Trust has been actively involved and is represented on the Urban Villages Reference Group. In the initial stages of design, they participated in the Ardoyne/Marrowbone Sports Group concerning the Council's development of the Marrowbone 3G pitch pavilion and community park in an effort to bridge relations between the two parishes of Holy Cross and Sacred Heart.

The ABC Trust has also collaborated with Flax Trust, Crumlin Ardoyne Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership, North Belfast Advice Partnership, and Clanmill Housing Association, and has formed a facility tenants group that meets on a regular basis

to iron out delivery challenges. This latter grouping comprises organisations that provide services to individuals from beyond the Ardoyne catchment area and encompasses participants from PUL communities. The Trust remains committed to presenting the site as a safe, shared and welcoming place for everyone. Discussions with other North Belfast communities regarding health, educational, and leisure needs are currently in progress and are contributing to health and training awareness events run through the Ardoyne Boxing Club on site and wider events through community development groups in the area such as the Ardoyne Association and Flax Trust.



4. OUR 2024-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN

The previous strategy established ‘the way forward’ and learning from its delivery now informs our new strategy. The construction of phase 2 of our facility began in April 2024 and is well underway for completion in Autumn 2025 and ongoing reflective practice of previous activities has presented us with a skeleton plan for the future. The key areas of the change we want to make in terms of health, education and environment may remain the same but with the pending completion of the facility our efforts to raise awareness and support for our vision will accelerate. Our strategic plan will therefore be our North Star guiding us through completion of the physical infrastructure and into the delivery stage.

Our project will **reduce instances of ill-health within Ardoyne ward, increase opportunities for employment for local residents and improve community learning** by:

- a. building a multi-purpose self-sustaining facility in the heart of Ardoyne that will facilitate health improvement and increase pathways into education and employment
- b. encouraging cultural change that promotes positive lifestyle choices

Moulding a new strategic plan

Significant progress has been made since 2016, and the potential for further advancements is evident as phase 2 construction continues at pace. Reflective practice indicates that there are key areas of interaction where the ABC Health and Leisure Trust could enhance efficiency. The Trust should systematically document their successes and disseminate these accomplishments to a broader audience. In addition to communicating a positive narrative regarding achievements, the Trust must ensure that the local community is informed about advancements with project sponsors and collect concrete evidence of change. Many local residents still appear to lack awareness regarding what will be on offer within the ABC building and the existing support services available locally, as well as the overall purpose of the ABC Health and Leisure Trust. The new strategy will systematically tackle these issues through a focused series of actions. Some of the reflections on the previous strategy have surfaced where the Trust will improve its approach to reducing instances of ill-health, increasing opportunities for employment and improving community learning

Recommendation 1: Increase awareness and assess progress.

1. Create a publicity plan and establish deeper partnerships with external media contacts.
2. Proactively increase views and support for the existing Facebook page. ABC Trust currently has 500 followers. A media strategy would boost this over the following 12 months with a target of reaching 1000 unique followers. A media strategy would concentrate on building a virtual presence by establishing a dedicated website, Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp content. Training in moderating and creating blogs etc should be accessed.
3. The development manager and directors should get media training to effectively communicate the trust’s goals and objectives. Training to become ambassadors for the Trust’s Theory of Change should be offered.
4. Create ongoing web material to raise awareness and promote cultural change. This should complement the present image gallery available on the Facebook page that celebrates the development of physical improvements to the dereliction on Ardoyne Avenue, as well as the promotional film interview that depicts the completion of the first phase of the ABC Health and Leisure facility.
5. Increase the Trust’s understanding of metrics for unique page and video views on Facebook and other platforms to strengthen their evidence base and measure future progress.

Recommendation 2: Increase ABC Health and Leisure Trust's collaborative presence.

1. Seek participation on strategic planning bodies including Neighbourhood Renewal and North Belfast Partnership Board. At present, the Trust is not represented on any larger strategic boards that are currently formulating community strategies.
2. Collaborate with GP Federation to understand how to best measure reduction of ill-health instances and the contribution of any services facilitated by ABC Health and Leisure Trust to reductions in ill-health.
3. Use participation in the Urban Renewal Reference Group to pursue collaborative opportunities.
4. Collaborate with existing social prescribing programs in Ireland and the UK.
5. Collaborate with policy and practice experts to manage inclusive health facilities.

Recommendation 3: Develop training and employment pathways

1. Put local people through physical fitness instructor training through school of medicine. Advertise the possibility of this training and work through engagement plan and media plan to promote the scheme in the local area. The target for the delivery of this target will be post Phase 2 completion date but the aim would be to celebrate the recruitment of the first cohort at a major health event.
2. Explore pathways to placements using the training provided through Mill Diner cooking school. This could be promoted through a variety of healthy lifestyle and nutrition events that are planned by existing community development groups throughout 2024 and 2025. The target for the delivery of this target will be post Phase 2 completion date but the aim would be to celebrate the recruitment of the first cohort at a major health event.
3. Explore/encourage training and skills development opportunities for service users through effective spend of Urban Villages Programme social value monies.

4.1 2024/25 Strategic Action Plan

OVERALL TASK	SUB TASK	TARGET DATE
Build a multi-purpose self-sustaining facility in the heart of Ardoyne that will facilitate health improvement and increase pathways into education and employment Build a financial sustainability plan to maintain the long-term operation of the facility	Participate and engage in various fora to develop a strategic action plan that will transform the St Gemma's Site	2024 through to Sept 2025
	Attend meetings with capital project team.	2024 through to Sept 2025
	Attend Urban Village Reference Group meeting.	2024 through to Sept 2025
	Seek additional funding for FTE front of house and maintenance staff.	Before Sept 2025
	Engage with statutory and government departments, political representatives and the private sector regarding the action plans.	See stakeholder engagement plan
	Engage and recruit training and employment agencies to support employment pathways.	See stakeholder engagement plan

OVERALL TASK	SUB TASK	TARGET DATE
<p>Encourage cultural change that promotes positive lifestyle choices</p> <p>Develop an engagement plan to assess ongoing needs in the area and within the broader North Belfast area. This plan will provide a learning platform to share ideas and gain support and promote good relations</p> <p>Develop a sophisticated media plan and training for Board members to raise awareness and persuasive arguments for our vision</p> <p>Develop an evidence base that can demonstrate impact on health, education and environment</p>	Explore social prescribing possibilities with GP Federation and schools of medicine.	On-going
	Seek sponsorship to furnish a gym for pre and post op health	By Sept 2025
	Deliver a health conference.	Event planning for Winter 2025
	Deliver a health fair as part of ArdBone festival	Event planning for Winter 2025
	Collate health-related information on users of the facility and enable tenants to collate central data for learning and sharing knowledge.	Secure funding to develop a data retrieval system by Sept 2025
	Monitor daily delivery of programmes that promote physical and emotional health & wellbeing and work with others to evaluate change	Develop relations with existing tenants to gather data in 2024
	Work with local partners to develop shared measures and evidence demonstrating the impact of independent health improvement activities. (Ardoyne Shankill Health Partnership, Cancer Lifeline, HC Boys and Girls Schools, Grace Womens, Marrowbone Community House, Youth club provision, Irish language sector)	From September 2024
	Work with others to develop satellite Health & Leisure sites across the area, Holy Cross Boy's School 3G Pitch	
	Use local media platform, Facebook & local newspapers to promote the good work of the ABC Trust.	From September 2024
	Support Tenants in the delivery of employability training programmes in line with aims and objectives	From September 2024
	Explore social value funding opportunities to complement and inspire employment pathway and seek further sponsorship for small health improvement projects	From September 2024
	Develop a measurement system to capture carbon reduction through PV roof panels and associated environmental initiatives	By September 2025
	Community Engagement to establish need or gaps in services and to work collectively	Ongoing

5. Acknowledgements

The Ardoyne Bone Community Health and Leisure Trust would like to thank all our funders:

The Flax Trust

The Executive Office and Urban Villages North Team,

The Department for Communities

The Department for Infrastructure

The Belfast City Council

Belfast Charitable Society

National Lottery Community Fund



The Flax Trust
Established 1977



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Belfast
City Council



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