



# Sustainability & Energy Strategy

## 2022 - 2025

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# FOREWORD



Since the inception of our energy team over ten years ago, Choice have delivered sector leading examples of energy efficiency, sustainable housing and cost-savings for our tenants. In this 2022-25 sustainability & energy strategy we have considered the direction we will take to build upon our past successes and address challenges such as the climate crisis and biodiversity loss.

The central theme of this strategy is achieving net-zero. Choice recognise that the climate crisis affects us all and we all have a role to play. It is critical that our plans place people in the driving seat for change. Whether it’s our employees or our tenants, this strategy aims to be inclusive of the contributions we can all make.

This strategy gives careful consideration to the delivery of our energy services, whilst mapping other Environmental, Social Governance (ESG) topics and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Choice are conscious that our energy services have widespread benefits that our tenants appreciate. In light of this we are committed to ensuring the core functions of our energy team remain at a high standard, but that we incorporate targets to prioritise additional environmental impacts.

This strategy details how Choice will address environmental impacts with a commitment to ensuring transparency and credibility whilst delivering widespread benefits to tenants. Our approach to tackling the climate crisis will use internationally recognised carbon accounting methods to benchmark direct emissions (Scope 1) and indirect emissions (Scope 2&3). We will use our benchmark exercise to develop decarbonisation plans in line with the Paris Agreement. This will include emissions reduction pathways that limit global warming well below 2 Celsius as a minimum and pursue decarbonisation that limits increases to 1.5 Celsius.

Choice hope that this strategy demonstrates our commitment to a sustainable future for all. Moreover it is our hope that this strategy encourages collaboration inside and outside of Choice that brings us all closer to delivering a just transition to net-zero for all.

**Michael McDonnell**  
Group Chief Executive

# Introduction

## Choice Housing's Sustainability & Energy Achievements 2019-2021

**-10.6%**

Reduced our  
annual Scope 1&2  
CO<sub>2</sub> emissions



Invested £2.49 Million  
in Energy Efficiency  
and Carbon Reduction



£13,500 savings for  
new Choice tenants  
through our preferred  
supplier agreement



£211,881 tenant savings  
from smart energy  
procurement



Average EPC rating  
of 76 C across our  
property portfolio



1,020,000 kWh of  
renewable electricity  
generated for tenants using  
our solar PV systems

**97%**

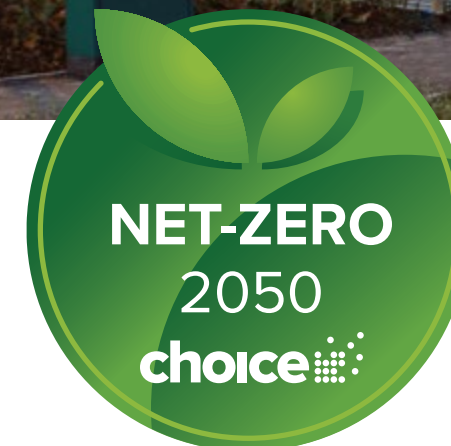
97% of all new build  
properties are Band B (82)  
or above with 12% rated  
as Band A (91) or above



Held three  
tenant energy  
engagement weeks



Installed 14 Building  
Management Systems  
with remote heat controls





# Vision

Element	Framework to 2024
Charitable Purpose	‘to benefit the community’ through ‘prevention or relief of poverty or for the relief of those in need’
Mission	‘to enrich lives through great homes, services and communities’
Vision	‘to be recognised as the leading Housing Association group in Northern Ireland’
Values	<p>We will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Caring</b> – through listening, being helpful and always acting professionally;</li><li>• <b>Committed</b> – through determination, being reliable and always acting with integrity; and</li><li>• <b>Creative</b> – through innovating, being responsive and always seeking to improve.</li></ul>
Strategic Goals	<p>We have 4 strategic priorities to 2024, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Strategic Priority #1 – ‘Great Homes’;</b></li><li>• <b>Strategic Priority #2 – ‘Great Services’;</b></li><li>• <b>Strategic Priority #3 – ‘Great Communities’;</b> and</li><li>• <b>Strategic Priority #4 – ‘Great Delivery’.</b></li></ul> <p>For each priority we have identified a number of strategic goals which will shape our business plan objectives over the 3 years of our corporate plan</p>

The key outcomes of this 2022-25 strategy:

REDUCED  
FUEL  
POVERTY  
RISK

INCREASED  
AWARENESS OF  
SUSTAINABLE  
BEHAVIOURS

Enhanced understanding within Choice of how to  
**ACHIEVE  
NET ZERO  
BY 2050**



ENHANCED  
BIODIVERSITY  
AND ASSOCIATED  
ECO-SYSTEM  
SERVICES

VISIBILITY OF THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
IMPACTS ACROSS  
OUR PROPERTY  
LIFECYCLES












DEVELOP A 1.5C  
GREENHOUSE GAS  
**REDUCTION**  
PATHWAY TO 2030















# United Nations Sustainable Development Goals










Making a positive contribution to the communities we serve is Choice’s priority. Whilst Choice are based in Northern Ireland, we appreciate that our impact can have far reaching consequences and as such we have aligned this strategy’s ambitions to the UN

Sustainable Develop Goals where relevant. Although this is primarily an environmental strategy there are numerous social and economic benefits that can be delivered with our success.

Strategic Goal	ESG Topic	Our Ambition	UN Sustainable Development Goals
Great Homes	Affordability and security & climate change	Develop efficient, climate resilient homes that ensure affordability and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.	   
	Climate Change	Demonstrate ‘pilot’ technologies and processes that reduce GHG emissions.	 
	Resource Management & supply chain	Manage environmental impacts associated with the lifecycle of our properties.	    

Great Services	Affordability and security & climate change	Refurbish our existing stock to improve affordability and reduce environmental impact.	 
	Climate Change	Reduce our Scope 1&2 GHG emissions, footprint our Scope 3 GHG emissions and develop a 1.5°C decarbonisation pathway.	  
Great Communities	Ecology	Promote positive biodiversity behaviours amongst tenants and enhance ecosystem services at our properties.	 
Great Delivery	Affordability and security	Reduce fuel poverty though tenant guidance on energy consumption and promote sustainable behaviours.	   
	Climate Change	Ensure that Choice have the capability to deliver a works programme towards net-zero with a particular focus on retrofitting existing homes to a high quality.	  

Choice’s alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Targets:







Strategic Goal	ESG Topic	Our Ambition	UN SDG	Relevant UN targets
Great Homes	Affordability and security	Develop efficient, climate resilient homes that ensure affordability and reduce GHG emissions.		1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions. (fuel poverty in this case).
				7.2 By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix. 7.3 By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.
				11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.
				13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.
	Climate Change	Demonstrate ‘pilot’ technologies and processes that reduce GHG emissions.		7.2 By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix. 7.3 By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.
				6.4 By 2020, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity.
	Resource Management & supply chain	Manage environmental impacts associated with the lifecycle of our properties.		11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management.

Strategic Goal	ESG Topic	Our Ambition	UN SDG	Relevant UN targets
Great Homes				12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources. 12.5 By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.
				14.1 By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.
				15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species.



# Choice’s alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Targets:



Strategic Goal	ESG Topic	Our Ambition	UN SDG	Relevant UN targets
Great Services	Affordability and security	Refurbish our existing stock to improve affordability and reduce environmental impact.		1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions. (Fuel Poverty).
	Climate change			7.3 By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.
	Climate Change	Reduce our Scope 1&2 GHG emissions, footprint our Scope 3 GHG emissions and develop a 1.5°C decarbonisation pathway.		7.2 By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.
				7.3 By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.  12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.
				11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for woman and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.
Great Communities	Ecology	Promote positive biodiversity behaviours amongst tenants and enhance ecosystem services at our properties.		15.2 By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally.  15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species.

Strategic Goal	ESG Topic	Our Ambition	UN SDG	Relevant UN targets
Great Delivery	Affordability and security	Reduce fuel poverty through tenant guidance on energy consumption and promote sustainable behaviours.		1.2 By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions. (Fuel Poverty)
				11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums.
				12.8 By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.
				13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaption, impact reduction and early warning.
	Climate Change	Ensure that Choice have the capability to deliver a works programme towards net-zero with a particular focus on retrofitting existing homes to a high quality.	 	7.3 By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.  12.2 By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.

# Transforming ourselves for a 'Net-Zero' future

Choice's commitment to achieve net-zero by 2050 operates upon the definition outlined by the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi): *'Achieving a state in which the activities within the value chain of a company result in no net impact on the climate from greenhouse gas emissions. This is achieved by reducing value chain greenhouse gas emissions, in line with 1.5°C pathways, and by balancing the impact of any remaining greenhouse gas emissions with an appropriate amount of carbon removals.'*

This definition aligns to **The Paris Agreement (2015)** agreed by all major polluting nations and ratified by the UK in the government's net-zero commitment. The overall ambition of The Paris Agreement is to limit increases to global average temperatures 'well-below 2° Celsius' and pursue efforts to limit global average temperatures to '1.5° Celsius' above pre-industrial levels.

Delivery of The Paris Agreement means to prevent the worst impacts of the climate crisis. As per the recommendations of the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**, a '2° Celsius' increase of average global temperatures represents the point of no return whereby the most serious impacts of the climate crisis will be irreparable.

For Choice to achieve net-zero, we need to transform our management of greenhouse gases (GHG) through dramatic reductions in emissions, whilst maximising opportunities to capture emissions where available.

This will include familiar decarbonisation efforts such as improving energy efficiency and managing energy consumption. As well as projects to understand our embodied GHG in order to plan to reduce these emissions throughout our property lifecycles.

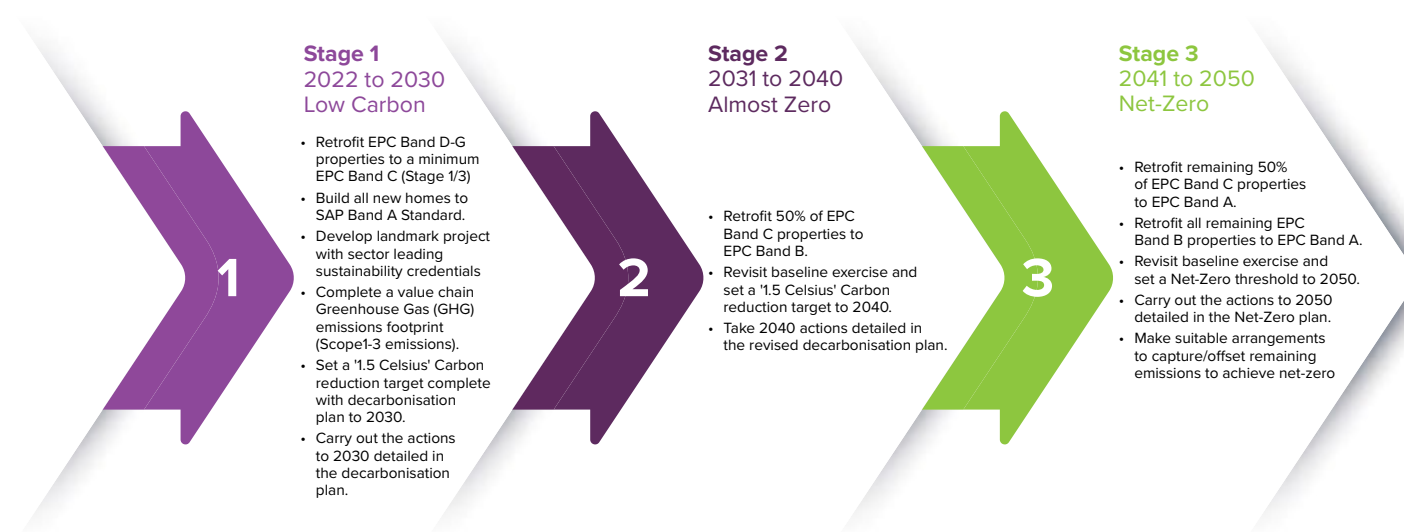
Choice's net-zero journey is outlined into three stages based upon each decade between 2022 and 2050. Stage 1 of Choice's net-zero plan will focus on delivering the 'low carbon' stage through an ambitious decarbonisation plan that commits to emissions reductions in line with a maintaining global warming increases below 1.5°C.

This will allow us to measure our most significant climate impacts, develop an emissions reduction plan and ultimately reduce emissions to 2030 that keep Choice to a net-zero trajectory. How we will achieve reductions in line with a 1.5C pathway is not yet defined. However, it is assured that we will need

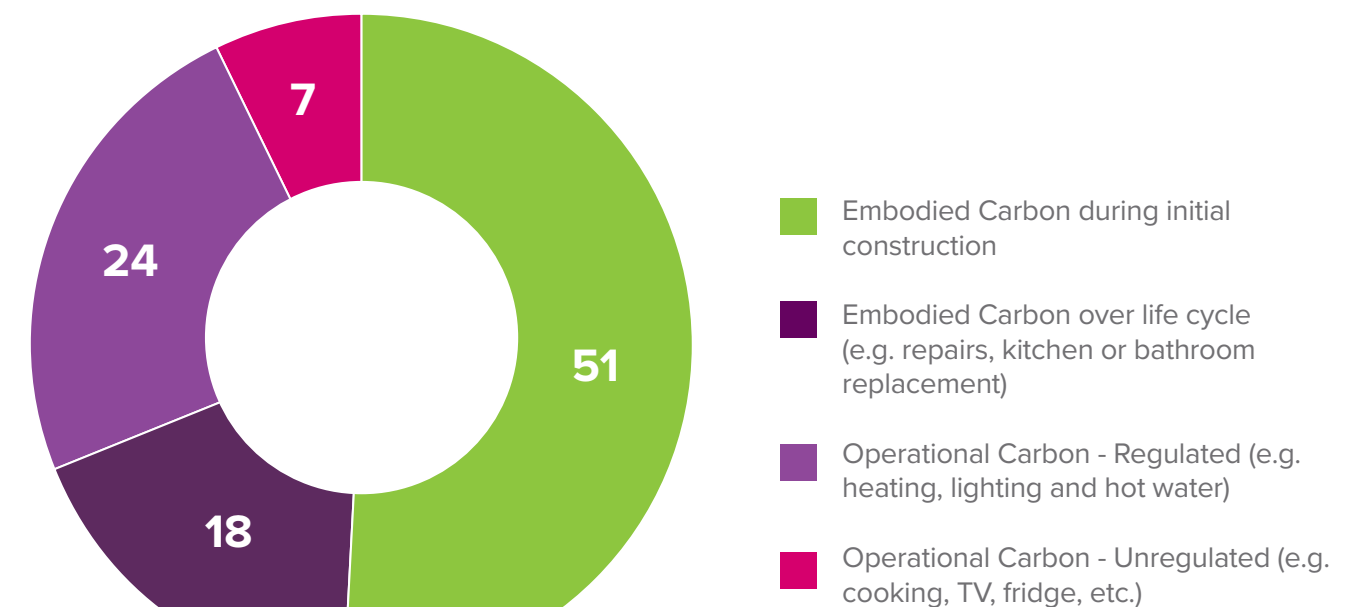
to reduce the operational emissions of our new and existing homes and so this strategy includes targets to address these emissions whilst we prepare our 2030 decarbonisation plan.

In the last ten years, our Sustainability & Energy team has made significant progress in managing energy consumption, improving energy efficiency and advocating for the development of low carbon housing. We will continue from this baseline and incorporate a lifecycle Carbon accounting approach that allows us to accurately weigh up decisions per their climate impact.

**Figure 2** - Choice's three stage net-zero outline.



**Carbon footprint % of residential blocks with basic internal fit out - RICS**



**Figure 3** - RICS (2017) Whole Life Carbon Assessment for the Built Environment

In this context Choice have a strong track record of addressing 'operational carbon' via improved energy efficiency in our property portfolio, stipulation of high building fabric standards, introduction of renewables at a large portion of our development projects, and the requirement for energy systems to be of high energy efficiency. However, these works only address emissions equivalent of 31% of a properties lifecycle per figure 3 above.

As such Choice's stage 1 'low-carbon' pathway will continue to address 'operational carbon', whilst foot-printing our 'embodied carbon' from construction to the lifecycle phase. An assessment of the remaining 69% of a property's Carbon emissions will enable us to understand our climate impacts in greater detail, evaluate where our opportunities exist and proceed to develop a decarbonisation roadmap that delivers a reduction in GHG emissions in line with a net-zero trajectory.



# A sustainable future for our tenants

Choice have a responsibility to ensure our properties meet our tenants expectations and affordability is a priority in this regard. This includes the cost of rent, but also the cost of energy which can account for a large portion of our tenant's weekly budget. To that end Choice are committed to ensuring that tenant energy bills are affordable and that the risk of fuel poverty is minimised. Therefore, Choice's ambition to achieve net-zero compliments such expectations as energy efficiency enhances the affordability of our tenants homes. However, it is the responsibility of Choice to deliver our net-zero plans in an equitable way that does not impact tenant affordability. Choice otherwise refer to this as delivering a just transition to net-zero.

There are several challenges to be considered in the delivery of a successful energy efficiency programme. This is especially true of this strategy, as achieving net-zero will require adoption of building fabric improvements and low/zero Carbon technologies that are either relatively new or may not exist yet. With a view towards 2050, our net-zero goal is 28 years from present and how solutions develop over time will present challenges that Choice need to evolve alongside. With respect to our tenants there are two key challenges Choice need to address in this strategy: (1) how we fund these works and (2) ensuring our tenants are comfortable with the energy improvements works we introduce.

How we fund these works is crucial. As an organisation Choice derive our income from the rent paid by our tenants. As we look to deliver energy improvement works Choice will need to find a way of financing these works without negatively impacting our tenants. As such we must explore alternative funding mechanisms that allow us to access environmental benefits and improve affordability simultaneously. This is central to the delivery of a just transition to net-zero.

With regards to ensuring our tenants are comfortable with the energy improvement works we introduce, Choice need to be forward thinking to the types of interventions that will allow us to improve our stock to a net-zero standard. As this becomes clear we must

consider how such works could impact our tenants in terms of user skills and affordability. As such Choice are cautious about adopting new technologies on mass until it is clear how suitable they are to our tenants. However, through this strategy we will perform pilot exercises to enhance our understanding. For example, the transition from fossil heat to alternatives such as electrified or potentially hydrogen heat sources will require a behavioural shift amongst tenants.

Choice also envisage economic opportunities for our tenants as we come to understand what delivering net-zero looks like for ourselves. It is apparent to Choice that delivering net-zero will be a monumental task that requires competent people at all skill levels in our economy and that the current skills short fall presents Choice with an opportunity to offer training and employment opportunities directly to the communities of tenants that we serve. As such, Choice will be using the three years of this strategy to analyse what skills will be required for us to achieve net-zero and develop a skills strategy that centres on delivering job opportunities to our tenants.

In addition to our efforts to reduce GHG as a means to manage our climate impact, this strategy also has ambitions with respect to improving environmental quality through enhanced biodiversity. With this in mind there are numerous positive environmental impacts this strategy aims to deliver for our tenants. For example, by addressing biodiversity loss amongst communities through enhanced green spaces, Choice can positively impact mental and physical wellbeing of our tenants.



# Energy efficiency and Carbon reduction



Choices approach to net-zero will rely on a reduction in emissions at all stages in our property's lifecycle. This of course includes operational Carbon which relates to energy efficiency. This is an area where new legislation is emerging from the Northern Ireland executive. Choice's direction will be closely linked to the regulation and support available for decarbonising heat, higher building efficiency standards and retrofitting buildings.

As the recent BuildingRegulations amendments and the new NI Energy Strategy (2022) have indicated, Choice will have to deliver significant operational Carbon reduction via energy efficiency improvements for existing homes, new homes, our offices and transport. Energy efficiency is an area where Choice have performed well over the last ten years. As we now face transformative changes to the regulatory environment, it will be necessary to evaluate how we plan to invest effectively.

In planning this investment Choice have concluded the following four challenges that this strategy needs to answer: (1) how we fund these energy efficiency works, (2) understanding what works will be required, (3) ensuring longevity and quality of these works, and (4) acquiring the skills required to deliver these works.

As discussed in the previous section Choice need to determine alternative funding mechanisms to deliver these types of work. In addition, it is important to include how the government aims to support these works. Early estimates conducted within Choice indicate that the scale of this works programme will be enormously expensive and so Choice will need to engage in all available grants in order to deliver value for money for our tenants whilst achieving net-zero.

In terms of the works required it is Choice's policy to address energy efficiency and Carbon reduction of new and existing homes through a 'fabric first' approach. We favour this approach as it provides us with confidence that the buildings that Choice operate in 30 years' time have the necessary building efficiency to operate low or zero Carbon technologies that may not yet be available or practical.

To compliment a higher standard of building fabric Choice will install efficient systems for heating and power that our tenants are comfortable to operate and help keep their energy bills low.

Choice appreciate that there will be changes to the technologies used to power and heat our tenants homes and over the course of this strategy consideration will be given to low or zero Carbon technologies on a project by project basis. It is our expectation that low or zero Carbon technologies will be common in new developments per the changes to Part F of the Building Regulations (June 22). In the case of existing buildings low or zero Carbon technologies will be considered where fabric and efficiency measures have been exhausted.

## Prioritisation of energy efficiency and Carbon reduction measures:

**Fabric First**  
(improving insulation of walls, roofs and floors to reduce heat demand)

**Efficient Energy Systems**  
(installing efficient heating and power systems)

**Low or Zero Carbon Technologies**  
(low/zero Carbon heat and onsite energy generation via renewables?)

# Energy efficiency and Carbon reduction

Average Thermal Losses Non-nZEB vs nZEB



**Fabric First** - This approach forms the basis of our efforts to mitigate Carbon emissions and ensures that our tenants’ homes have the requisite characteristics to fit into a net-zero future. We prioritise the fabric of our homes as this is a ‘low regret’ strategy that allows us to provide efficient, cost effective homes that minimise fuel poverty risk and Carbon emissions. Such buildings offer options to retrofit differing low or zero Carbon technologies as and when it is clear what is the most effective option to decarbonise to net-zero. As we look towards developing all new homes to SAP band A, Choice will lean upon our experience with projects like Killynure Green to achieve requisite ‘Target Emissions Rates’ by complimenting high building fabric standards with efficient energy systems supported by an element of low or zero Carbon technologies.

**Efficient Energy Systems** – ‘Since this years publication of new NI Energy Strategy and the amendments to Part F of the 2012 Building Regulations, Choice colleagues have been modelling how we will build homes from 2022 onwards. Over the course of this strategy Choice will assess the options for home heating on a case by case basis with a preference to utilising natural gas systems. This preference relates to user familiarity with such systems both from a tenant and a maintenance perspective. In the case where natural gas heating is used we will ensure that these systems offer a high level of efficiency with a long warranty to deliver reduced emissions and reduced tenant energy bills. This policy aims to deliver quality energy systems that are low maintenance, dependable and affordable for tenants. This approach is extended to electrical systems whereby we will ensure only necessary systems are employed and only highly efficient appliances installed.

Choice understand that natural gas heating relates to a higher level of Carbon emissions and in some cases cost compared to alternatives. The shifting energy source and cost balance in Northern Ireland is ever changing at this time with the current energy crisis. However, from previous landmark projects such as Killynure Green Phase 2, Choice found that natural gas heating systems can be utilised in an effective manner that complements nZEB house construction whilst delivering low energy bills for tenants. In the longer term it is clear that the planned abolition of heating oil in Northern Ireland will mean that heat pumps or other electrified systems will have an important role where natural gas is unavailable or unsuitable in the course of this strategy. Furthermore, beyond the next three years non fossil fuel heating types will have an increasing place within our homes and Choice will be completing further trials on these technologies to understand the benefits and impacts to our tenants over the course of this strategy.’

**Low or Zero Carbon Technologies** – Choice have been early adopters of low and zero Carbon technologies through pilot programmes. In our experience there are technologies that are a good fit for the needs of our tenants such as solar PV and others such as heat pumps can be problematic. From 2022 onwards Choice will prioritise solar PV as the low or zero Carbon technology element to achieve the uplift in the Building Regulation emissions targets. As discussed above, heat pumps will make up a portion of our heating system installations. It is therefore crucial that Choice facilitate these installations to ensure quality and provide support to tenants transitioning from conventional systems so that previous experiences and tenant misgivings can be avoided. Furthermore, we will continue to pilot emerging technologies as part of Greenhouse Gas reduction fund and careful consideration will be given to low or zero Carbon technologies for our ‘landmark’ scheme to 2025.

The delivery of pilot programmes aims to close out the remaining challenges around quality assurance and the skills required to deliver net-zero. In particular our retrofit pilot programmes and associated works programme to 2025 will greatly inform our approach to these areas. This will indicate to us the types of interventions required to deliver the required efficiency standards whilst indicating how quality can be assured in this delivery. For example, whether we complete the works to the PAS 2035 retrofitting standard. Furthermore where the works are defined we can determine a skills strategy to support the delivery of these works at scale.





# Our stock profile and energy performance certificates

Choice housing stock is maintained to high standards with significant investment in the last five years. We work to an established stock condition assessment process and plan our investment accordingly. All stock is maintained to comply with the Decent Homes Standard.

We hold detailed records on the lifecycle of the various components of our assets supported by regular physical stock condition surveys to assess the requirement and priority for component replacement or multi-element improvement. Asset services are provided to all properties.

The current Choice housing stock profile includes the following:

Local Authority Area	BEDSIT	BUNGALOW	FLAT	HOUSE	MAISONETTE	SUPPORTED / ROOM	Grand Total
Antrim and Newtownabbey		18	227	195		53	493
Ards and North Down		231	351	255	3	121	961
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon		53	252	124		120	549
Belfast City Council	41	445	2568	1783	22	328	5187
Causeway Coast and Glens	22	23	97	41		25	208
Derry and Strabane		83	510	154	2	46	795
Fermanagh and Omagh		75	71	71		69	286
Lisburn and Castlereagh		101	320	602		97	1120
Mid and East Antrim		105	416	164	5	60	750
Mid Ulster		25	62	23		22	132
Newry, Mourne and Down		49	325	319	2	88	783
Grand Total	63	1208	5199	3731	34	1029	11,264

The above excludes properties managed by Oaklee Housing in Rol and the SHB1 PPP Comhar Properties.

Distribution of EPC ratings of existing homes.	A	0.8%
	B	27.9%
	C	31.8%
	D	11.4%
	E or lower	1.9%
	EPC Status To be confirmed	26.2%





# Protecting our natural environment

In addition to the challenge of reducing our climate impact and improving tenant affordability, there are other environmental impacts across the lifecycle of our housing to consider. In many ways such impacts contribute to the climate crisis and an appreciation of these will complement our net-zero ambitions.

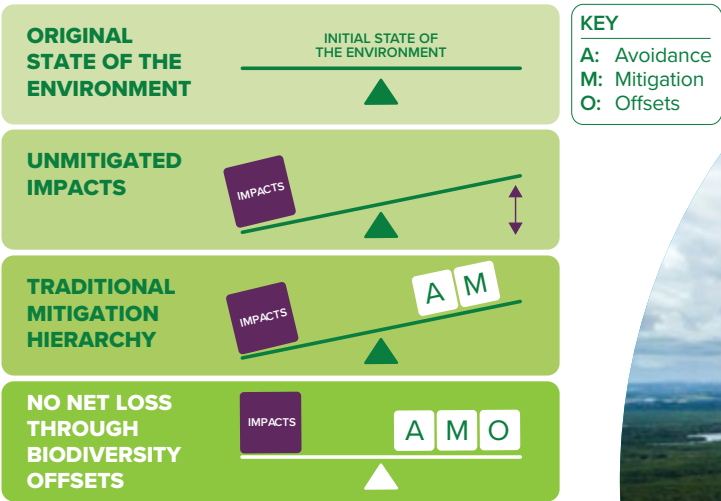
As with the matter of measuring, targeting and reducing the GHG emissions embodied within our housing lifecycle, Choice are committed to understanding where other environmental impacts exist. Where appropriate we will put practices in place to minimise such impacts and where available take action to have a net-positive impact on the environment.

**Biodiversity loss** – Land use change is a considerable issue within housing where material extraction and development of greenfield sites are concerned. In particular where habitats are removed or destroyed to support these activities. Choice want to understand our impact, keep our negative footprint to a minimum and where possible enhance the eco-system services provided from the spaces we own. Choice aim to promote native species and support habitats that help stabilise declining populations. For example, Choice want to create lifelong structures for wildlife such as Swift bricks where we can demonstrate the benefits and enrichment that supporting biodiversity can offer.

**Supply chain** – The origin of the materials we use can have a significant impact on the climate and biodiversity. For example, extraction of building materials from a distant region where natural habitats are destroyed to produce raw materials, could have a much greater Carbon and ecological footprint compared to locally or responsibly sourced materials. In many cases such damaging material decisions can be substituted for alternatives. In tandem to accounting for the embodied emissions from materials, Choice aim to eliminate environmentally damaging products from our supply chain where credible alternatives are available.

**Resource management** – In addition to reducing operational emissions, encouraging sustainable waste management and water consumption amongst our tenants will have a positive impact on the environment. Choice are committed to designing out waste from our properties and will appraise all applicable solutions for their merit in protecting the environment and suitability social housing.

Furthermore, we will engage with our developers to ensure that the waste hierarchy is adhered to on site and that suitable plans are in place to protect the local environment from pollution.





# Strategic Priority #1 Great Homes

Net-Zero Impact:  
Reduce Scope 3  
emissions

1 NO POVERTY

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

13 CLIMATE ACTION

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

14 LIFE BELOW WATER

15 LIFE ON LAND

- Ambition 1: Develop efficient, climate resilient homes that ensure affordability and reduce GHG emissions.
- Target 1a: Build all new homes to SAP A standard.
- Target 1b: Develop one ‘Landmark’ development with sector leading sustainability credentials.

## New Builds

Choice take great pride in the calibre of the homes we provide to our tenants and we are committed to building 400 new homes every year. Building homes to a high energy efficiency standard reduces the energy tenants need to maintain a comfortable living environment. This improves affordability for tenants and ensures that less energy is required over the lifetime of the property. The energy tenants use in their home relates to operational carbon emissions that fall under Scope 3 of Choice’s footprint and high energy efficiency results in reduced Carbon emissions. Furthermore, a home that is affordable to heat ensures a living space that reduces the potential health risks associated with fuel poverty.

We aim to build upon previous landmark developments such as Killynure Green, and use the

expertise gained through such projects to develop all new homes to a SAP A standard. This target relates to achieving the amended NI Building Regulations in 2022. However, our ambition is not to simply comply with these changes, but to take a holistic approach that ensures climate resilience that is fit for purpose. This means that these energy efficient homes will suit the needs of tenants to ensure convenience and affordability that delivers a just transition to net-zero.

It is also our ambition to move beyond the 2022 benchmark standard and deliver a further ‘Landmark’ development to showcase fabric improvements, low or zero Carbon technologies and a net positive environmental impact. This project will compliment previous Choice projects that piloted Passivhaus, Code for Sustainable Homes and Nearly Zero Energy Buildings (Oaklee) to inform the next generation of Choice homes beyond 2025.



Killynure Green Phase 2, Carryduff

Net-Zero Impact:  
Reduce Scope 1,  
2 & 3 emissions

1 NO POVERTY

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

13 CLIMATE ACTION

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

14 LIFE BELOW WATER

15 LIFE ON LAND

- Ambition 2: Demonstrate ‘pilot’ technologies and processes that reduce GHG emissions.
- Target 2: Invest £250k in innovative technologies and processes that will contribute to a reduction in Greenhouse gases (GHG) through ‘pilot’ projects with a purpose.

## Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund

In addition to spend from Choice’s Planned Maintenance Programme (PMP) to improve the energy efficiency and building fabric of existing properties, Choice has also committed £250,000 of investment in the next three years to be spent specifically on pilot projects with the purpose of demonstrating technologies and processes that reduce GHG.

Such investment will allow Choice to trial differing types of technologies that would otherwise not be selected within a typical PMP. For example, Choice’s PMP already includes energy efficiency interventions such as LED lighting, energy efficient heating upgrades and fabric improvements to improve Energy Performance Certificates (EPC).

This £250,000 of funding is specific to innovation in tackling GHG within social housing. Choice have a strong history as being early adopters of technologies such as air source heat pumps, combined heat and power plants and solar PV. Choice will continue to trial new and existing low or zero Carbon technologies, remote energy management systems and Electric Vehicle (EV) infrastructure.

Choice are interested in exploring new technology options for monitoring and managing performance that would enable us to better understand our GHG impact, analyse our effectiveness and allow Choice to shape our strategies going forward. This type of data management process will allow Choice to address Scope 1, 2 & 3 emissions. In all cases, this investment is specific to items that would otherwise not be included in typical spend and will allow Choice to minimise our lifecycle GHG footprint.



Net-Zero Impact:  
 Reduce Scope 3  
 emissions & enhance  
 Carbon capture  
 opportunities

Ambition 3: Manage environmental impacts associated with the lifecycle of our properties.

Target 3: Complete a lifecycle analysis of the environmental impacts of our developments and take action to reduce these impacts.

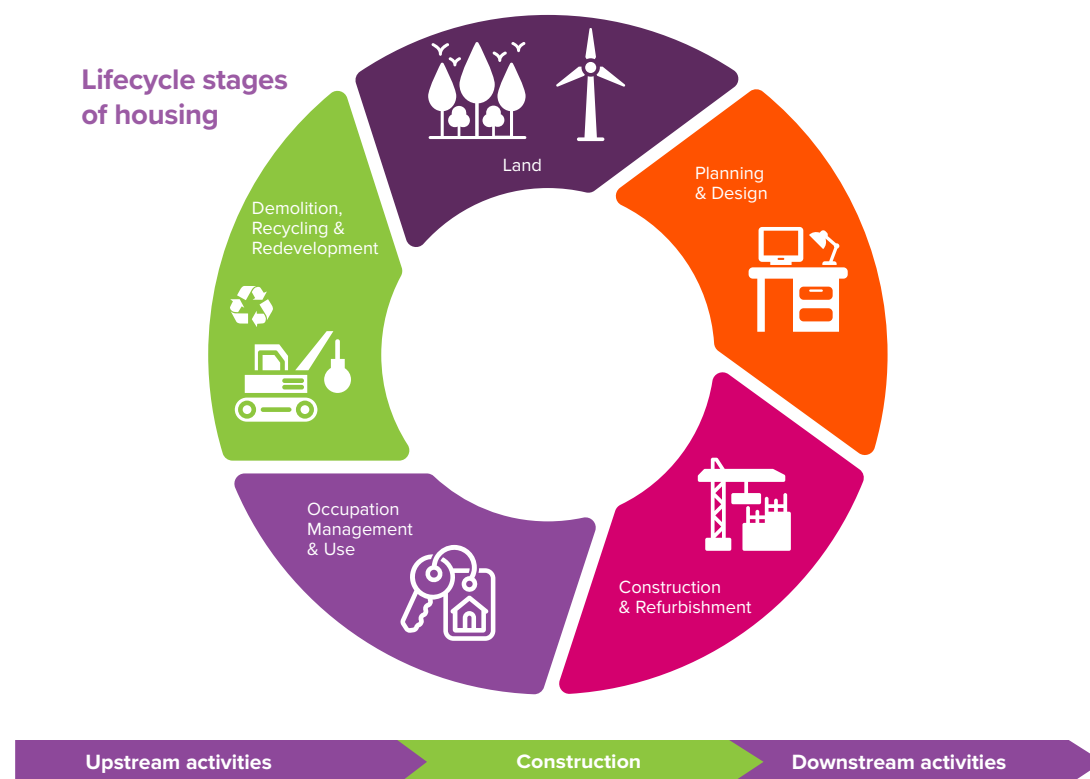
### Environmental lifecycle assessment

In Choice’s commitment to analyse our development lifecycle, Choice are aiming to scrutinise processes and materials upstream and downstream of our construction activities. As an organisation Choice are increasingly aware that the materials and processes adopted in the extraction, manufacturing and transport of the building materials Choice use, can a detrimental impact on the environment.

Foremost in these impacts is biodiversity loss, however, we also recognise the climate crisis to be another significant impact that needs to be addressed. The sourcing of building materials has a significant impact on global GHG emissions that fall under Choice’s Scope 3 footprint. These emissions will ultimately be the hardest to measure and address. In performing this task, it is Choice’s aim to baseline our impact and start to consider where emissions

reduction opportunities exist. Further, it will highlight what steps Choice can make in procurement of materials to reduce land use change for material extraction which impacts the sequestration of Carbon and results in ecosystem devastation simultaneously.

Likewise, there is a potential for environmental impacts during the construction phase of our properties that we need to consider carefully. Naturally an assessment of these will be included in a lifecycle assessment. The final portion of this assessment will seek to look at the environmental impacts downstream from Choice developments when our properties become tenant’s homes. At this stage Choice have made good progress with energy efficiency, water consumption and waste management and we are keen to improve upon our success to date.



## Strategic Priority #2 Great Services

Net-Zero Impact:  
 Reduce Scope  
 1, 2 & 3 emissions

Ambition 4: Refurbish our existing stock to improve affordability and reduce environmental impact.

Target 4a: Achieve a minimum EPC band C across 65% known Band E, F & G properties.

Target 4b: Achieve 100% coverage in Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs).

### Retrofit programme

One of the most recognisable challenges for a housing association to achieve net-zero is improving the energy performance of our existing buildings. In this strategy we are aiming to improve properties within EPC bands E, F & G to a minimum EPC C, starting with our worst performing properties. Choice recognise that an EPC C is not likely to be a high enough efficiency rating to bring these to a net-zero ready status, however, this programme will act as our first transitional programme so we can understand how to develop a comprehensive net-zero retrofit programme.

Choice will use the three years of this strategy to retrofit 65% of our known E, F & G properties. This project has been included as an exercise to establish the process to perform retrofit projects. This will provide Choice with the opportunity to face known challenges with regards to funding these works, quality assurance and skill shortages so we can better understand what we need to do as an

association to develop a larger programme beyond 2025. Likewise with the new homes projects, this programme will follow the same prioritisation of fabric improvements, with efficient energy systems and low or zero Carbon technologies where appropriate.

Beyond 2025 Choice recognise that we will need to expand this programme. In preparation for an expanded retrofit programme Choice will close out data gaps and so we have included a target to increase our EPC coverage so we have the necessary information to determine a comprehensive retrofit programme.

In addition to existing properties within our current portfolio, Choice are currently refurbishing circa 300 properties that were acquired from Victoria Housing Estates. As part of these refurbishment works Choice are ensuring that all these properties achieve a minimum EPC C so they can be incorporated into our future retrofit works programmes that will focus on upgrading EPC C properties to net-zero standards.



Former Victoria Housing Estate properties that Choice have refurbished to EPC Band C



Net-Zero Impact:  
Reduce Scope  
1, 2 & 3 emissions



Ambition 5: Reduce our Scope 1&2 GHG emissions, footprint our Scope 3 GHG emissions and develop a 1.5°C decarbonisation pathway.

Target 5a: Reduce Scope 1&2 emissions by 3% per annum from 2020/21 baseline.

Target 5b: Reduce energy usage by 3%.

## Energy consumption and GHG Emissions

Choice are acutely aware of our responsibility to manage our energy consumption effectively. All the landlord energy procured and managed by Choice is charged onto tenants. To ensure value for money for our tenants we take all available opportunities to reduce consumption and cost. Through effective energy management Choice can further reduce our climate impact.

Our Sustainability & Energy Team will continue to work with colleagues to reduce our energy use by 3%. Through a programme of mechanical and electrical planned maintenance over the course of the strategy, investment in pilot projects and engagement with our tenants Choice will strive towards these reduction targets. Achieving this will result in greater affordability for our tenants and a reduction in fuel poverty risk.

A critical element of reducing energy consumption is understanding where it is used. In line with the mantra that 'you can't reduce what you can't measure', Choice will increasingly rely on data to drive energy efficiency. At present approximately 75% of our scope 1&2 emissions are derived from heating with the remaining 25% a result of electricity usage. Building upon the information we have gathered thus far and innovating the way we communicate this to staff and tenants, Choice will improve the way energy consumption is understood.



ENERGY TEAM (L-R):  
David McNeil  
Building Services  
Engineer,  
Daniel Egerton  
Energy & Sustainability  
Manager

Net-Zero Impact:  
Reduce Scope  
1, 2 & 3 emissions



Ambition 5: Reduce our Scope 1&2 GHG emissions, footprint our Scope 3 GHG emissions and develop a decarbonisation pathway.

Target 5c: Develop a complete lifecycle emissions footprint inclusive of scope 3 Carbon emissions upstream and downstream of Choice's activities.

Target 5d: Set 1.5°C carbon reduction target complete with decarbonisation plan.

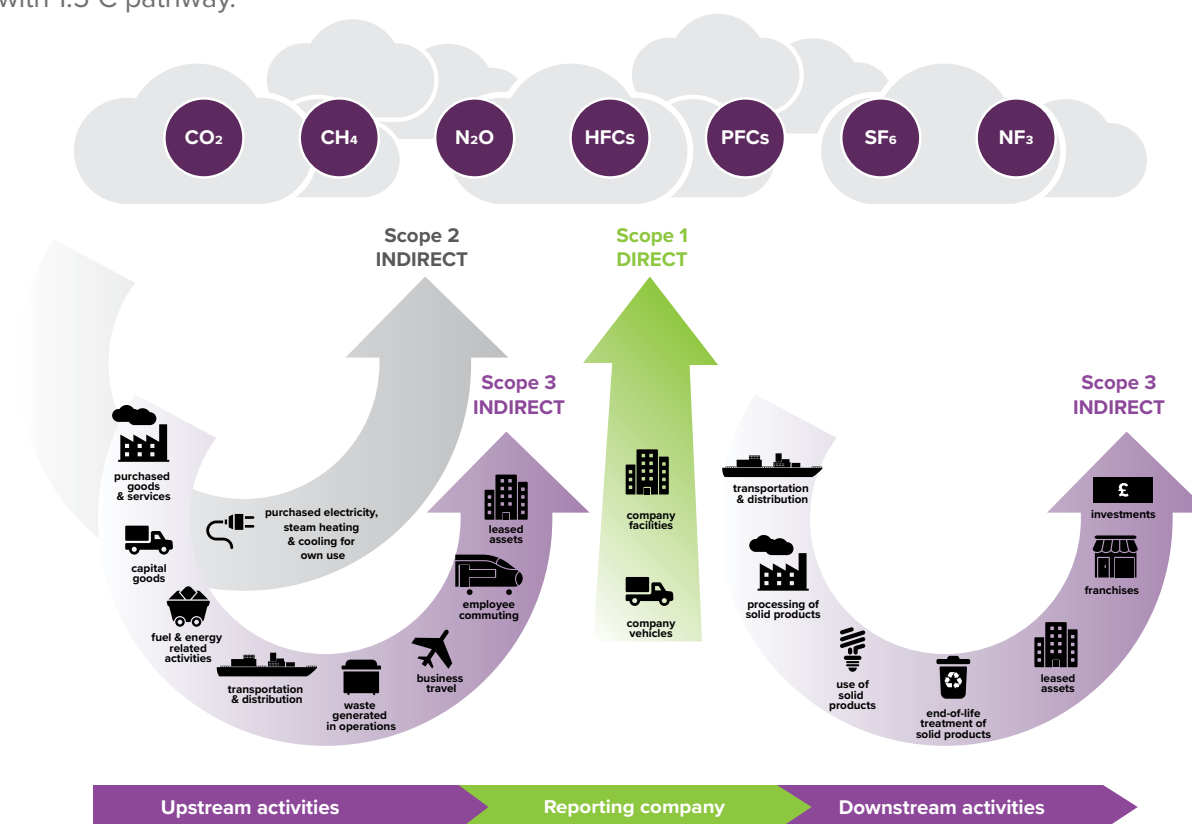
## Decarbonisation plan

As part of the environmental lifecycle assessment a collection of necessary scope 3 foot-printing data will be included. In a typical residential block development, 51% of the emissions are found in the embodied upstream activities and construction process. Critical to understanding our reduction opportunities is an evaluation of the emissions baseline.

Similarly, downstream activities from the construction process account for a large portion of the lifecycle emissions of a property development. Energy consumption accounts for 31% of a residential buildings lifecycle emissions. Choice have a good knowledge base and history in reducing energy consumption within our homes and such efforts will compliment all aspirations to achieve a GHG reduction in line with 1.5°C pathway.

Having gathered this data and performed a scope 3 baseline, Choice will evaluate the reduction opportunities that relates to all scopes (1-3). These opportunities will inform a decarbonisation plan that targets CO<sub>2</sub> reductions in line with a 1.5°C pathway. In doing so Choice will be able to plan reduction interventions that ensure our impact does not contribute to global warming in excess of 1.5 Celsius. At 2°C the IPCC anticipate irreparable damage to earth's climate. As such it is important to Choice that we adopt a 1.5°C pathway on route to becoming a net-zero housing association by 2050.

Figure 1 -  
Greenhouse  
Gas Protocol  
- Corporate  
Value Chain  
Accounting  
and Reporting  
Standard





# Strategic Priority

## #3 Great Communities

Net-Zero Impact:  
Enhance Carbon  
capture opportunities



- Ambition 6: Promote positive biodiversity behaviours amongst tenants and enhance ecosystem services at our properties.
- Target 6a: Deliver employee and tenant engagement on biodiversity at work and at home.
- Target 6b: Deliver a biodiversity zone at Carolan Road and encourage uptake of biodiversity supporting activities at tenanted properties.

As a significant land owner, Choice are the custodians for a large swath of green space that could be optimised towards encouraging healthy ecosystems in Northern Ireland. Using Choice's office premises as a case study for ecological diversity, Choice aspire to encourage our tenants to engage in this mission to develop less homogenous landscapes throughout Choice's property portfolio. In doing so Choice aim to enhance habitats throughout Northern Ireland to encourage ecological diversity.

Using Choice's proposed new office as an example of good practice, we will promote these interventions throughout our staff and tenant base. As per images below, many of these are simple changes to the way we either manage the landscapes Choice own or small projects that need little upkeep, but can have lasting positive impacts on biodiversity.



- Ambition 6: Promote positive biodiversity behaviours amongst tenants and enhance ecosystem services at our properties.
- Target 6c: Set aside land for nature conservation/restoration project at a major development.

To compliment small interventions at Choice's current property portfolio and our new office, we are committing to the development of a significant ecological habitat at the centre of one of our developments. The purpose of this project is to improve awareness of the social and environmental benefits of enjoying diverse outdoor spaces. Placing such a facility at the centre of a large development will allow Choice to understand what the implications of such projects have on our development programme.

As an aspiration, Choice would encourage the involvement of local schools in the physical landscaping of this space to again foster an increased awareness of ecology and the biodiversity loss crisis that all of us are currently facing. Furthermore, we aspire to use the lessons learned from this project to inform our development specifications such as species selection and inclusion of further ecological measures within our homes.

As we anticipate an increased focus on this matter in years to come, early adoption of such practices will ensure Choice have the expertise to execute this type of environmental project where appropriate and will enrich the lives of the community of tenants who have the pleasure of living adjacent to it.





# Strategic Priority #4 Great Delivery

Net-Zero Impact:  
Reduce Scope  
1, 2 & 3 emissions  
and enhance Carbon  
capture opportunities






- Ambition 7: Reduce fuel poverty though tenant guidance on energy consumption and promote sustainable behaviours.

Target 7a: Take action to reduce fuel poverty and increase sustainable behaviours amongst our tenants.

Tackling fuel poverty is a priority for Choice. We offer advice on how to save energy via our website, our tenant energy booklet and our advice service. Using these tools tenants can gain valuable tips on how to manage their energy costs. Choice collaborate with organisations such as the Energy Saving Trust to promote an annual energy week to raise awareness of the services we offer amongst our tenants.

An important part of Choice’s service is ensuring our tenants get value for money from their energy suppliers. To achieve this Choice provide advice on how to switch suppliers to reduce costs and we have a ‘preferred supplier arrangement’ in place where we have negotiated competitive energy rates for our new and remodelled homes. This allows tenants who move to these properties to avail of lower energy costs. Choice encourage our tenants to check that they are receiving their full entitlement to benefits which may include financial support to manage their energy costs.

A crucial element to achieving carbon reductions in line with a 1.5°C pathway is communication of the opportunities available to Choice and our tenants. Tenants are at the heart of this task as they have the ability to positively impacts our footprint across all three Scopes. Promoting awareness and encouraging sustainable behaviours amongst tenants is again something that is not new to Choice. Having participated in an annual energy week for several years and published sustainable guidance for tenants to do with water consumption and waste management, this strategy will build upon these successes.



- Ambition 8: Ensure that Choice have the capability to deliver a works programme towards net-zero with a particular focus on retrofitting existing homes to a high quality.

Target 8: Assess the technologies and skill sets required to deliver net-zero for Choice and ensure Choice have the right expertise to manage and deliver a just transition to net-zero.

Choice have a rich history of piloting low Carbon homes, energy efficiency techniques and low / zero Carbon technologies. Over the last decade Choice have demonstrated an appetite to understand how such climate interventions impact Choice and our tenants.

This ambition centres around planning for the implementation of such techniques and technologies at a significant scale. From our experience it is clear that there are skills and expertise gaps that need to be addressed inside and outside of Choice in order to facilitate a quality retrofit programme. Through an assessment of what Choice’s risks are we aim to determine a plan towards the future that ensures capacity in our journey to net-zero.

A further element that is to be incorporated here is understanding additional management risks associated with different techniques and technologies with regards to their lifecycle costs and quality of their installation. Naturally quality equipment and installs are critical to ensuring value for money when incorporating these techniques and technologies.





# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, TARGETS & INITIATIVES

Strategic Priority	Target	Initiatives
<b>GREAT HOMES</b> <b>Ambition 1 -</b> Develop efficient, climate resilient homes that ensure affordability and reduce GHG emissions	<b>1a.</b> Build all new homes to SAP A standard.	Agree a holistic, fit for purpose house building standard which specifies a fabric first approach that is supported by efficient energy systems and low or zero Carbon technologies. All new properties to include Solar PV as a minimum and a hydrogen ready gas boiler. Electrified heat to be specified at properties off the gas network.
	<b>1b.</b> Develop one 'landmark' development with sector leading sustainability credentials.	Plan and agree a development project that goes above the uplift requirements to the Building Regulations part F. For example, use the opportunity to 'pilot' low or zero carbon energy solution that utilises solar PV with a battery energy storage solution and a low carbon heat source such as a heat pump. Trial the programme to meet anticipated standards as part of 2025 changes to the building regulations to nearly zero-energy building standards. Incorporate further sustainability measures that improve affordability, comfort and lifecycle of tenants in this scheme, such as outside spaces, etc.
	<b>Ambition 2 -</b> Demonstrate pilot technologies and processes that will contribute to a reduction in GHGs through 'pilot projects' with a purpose.	Develop transport strategy and pilot EV charging options at different property types e.g. communal/ individual properties.  Conduct research project on battery storage in domestic properties, including 100% electrified property (power & heat) to measure annual cost to tenant.  Trial remote monitoring technologies to manage renewable portfolio and ensure maximum generation where possible.
<b>Ambition 3 -</b> Manage environmental impacts associated with the lifecycle of our properties.	<b>3.</b> Complete a lifecycle analysis of the environmental impacts of our developments and take action to reduce these impacts.	Conduct a lifecycle analysis of a construction project to measure volume of different building materials used, identify supply chain risks and measure a scope 3 footprint for materials and processes used.  Develop plan to reduce environmental impacts identified from our lifecycle assessment.  Maintain environmental standards.
<b>GREAT SERVICES</b> <b>Ambition 4 -</b> Refurbish our existing stock to improve affordability and environmental impact.	<b>4a.</b> Achieve a minimum EPC Band C energy efficiency rating across 65% E, F & G properties..	Determine a programme of works at these properties based on EPC assessments and action programme as part of PMP.
	<b>4b.</b> Achieve 100% coverage in Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs).	Expand current programme of EPC assessments when properties are void to target properties missing EPC attributes on ActiveH (occupied).

Strategic Priority	Target	Initiatives
<b>GREAT SERVICES</b> <b>Ambition 5 -</b> Reduce our Scope 1&2 GHG emissions, footprint our Scope 3 GHG emissions and develop a 1.5°C decarbonisation pathway.	<b>5a.</b> Reduce Scope 1&2 emissions by 3% per annum from 2020/21 baseline.	Baseline scope 2 emissions from landlord electricity using supplier fuel disclosures. Stipulate minimum fuel disclosure limits in procurement of landlord electricity for 2023 onwards.  Stipulate a preference to individual boilers from 2022 with decision process to limit refit of communal boiler systems.  Trial remote monitoring technologies to manage renewable portfolio and ensure maximum generation where possible.
	<b>5b.</b> Reduce energy usage by 3%.	Deliver landlord energy database and management process that allows for regular communication with Choice personnel capable of making change at landlord properties.
	<b>5c.</b> Develop complete lifecycle emissions footprint inclusive of scope 3 carbon emissions upstream and downstream of Choice's activities.	Develop complete scope 3 footprint of Choice's entire value chain and commit to reductions in line with a net-zero 1.5°C future.
	<b>5d.</b> Set 1.5°C carbon reduction target complete with decarbonisation plan.	Develop decarbonisation roadmap complete with scope 3 emissions reduction plan focussed on a lifecycle approach to housing sustainability, i.e. material selection/ construction process/ lifecycle maintenance.
<b>GREAT COMMUNITIES</b> <b>Ambition 6 -</b> Promote positive biodiversity behaviours amongst tenants and enhance ecosystem services at our properties.	<b>6a.</b> Deliver employee and tenant engagement on biodiversity at work and at home.	Develop materials and delivery plan for biodiversity week and promote throughout Choice at sites and at our offices.  Hold an annual biodiversity competition amongst green fingered schemes. Provide 'seed' funding for tenants to take action and in particular deliver edible gardens with fruit and vegetable growing facilities, trees and bushes.
	<b>6b.</b> Deliver a biodiversity zone at Carolan road and encourage uptake of biodiversity supporting activities at tenanted properties.	Incorporate biodiversity stations into the grounds of Carolan road such as bug hotels, bird boxes, wildflowers/ vertical planting/ log piles/ hedgehog houses/ compost bins, etc.  Consult with an ecologist to develop a biodiversity plan that can be replicated throughout Choice properties, i.e. scheme, general needs homes, etc.  Develop guidance from consultation and provide support to tenants to adopt similar practices at their schemes.
	<b>6c.</b> Set aside land for nature conservation/ restoration project at a major development.	Design wild space in a development as part of a shared community ecology space.  Develop at least one biodiversity restoration / conservation project at an existing Choice development(s).

Strategic Priority	Target	Initiatives
<b>GREAT DELIVERY Ambition 7 -</b> Take action to reduce fuel poverty through tenant guidance on energy consumption and promote sustainable behaviours.	<b>7.</b> Take action to address fuel poverty and promote sustainable behaviours amongst tenants with relatable guidance and online content.	<p>Provide appropriate advice and support to alleviate fuel poverty through effective management of energy systems, in particular emerging low-carbon and renewable systems.</p> <p>Increase/ enhance the mediums used to communicate fuel/ energy management with tenants such as hints/ tips videos. E.g. Heat pumps/ weather compensation/ heat controls/ waste disposal.</p> <p>Hold annual energy ( NI energy saving trust), waste (local councils) and water (NI Water) engagement weeks.</p>
<b>Ambition 8 -</b> Ensure that Choice have the capability to deliver a works programme towards Net-Zero with a particular focus on retrofitting existing homes to a high quality.	<b>8.</b> Assess the technologies and skill sets required to deliver net-zero for Choice and ensure Choice have the right expertise to manage and deliver a just transition to net-zero.	<p>Perform a risk assessment of low Carbon building techniques, energy efficiency and low or zero Carbon technologies to determine actions Choice can take to manage our transition to these as we strive to achieve net-zero.</p> <p>Determine necessary skills and expertise to deliver net-zero and develop a resourcing plan to ensure Choice are ready to deliver a long lasting and quality retrofit programme.</p>

Broughshane Street,  
Ballymena





# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Biodiversity** - All the variety of life that can be found on Earth (plants, animals, fungi and micro-organisms) as well as to the communities that they form and the habitats in which they live.

**Carbon Sequestration** - The long-term removal, capture, or sequestration of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to slow or reverse atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> pollution and to mitigate or reverse climate change.

**Eco-System Services** - The varied benefits to humans provided by the natural environment and from healthy ecosystems such as clean air, pollination of crops, regulation of floods or recreational benefits from natural areas.

**Low or Zero Carbon Technologies** - the term given to technologies that emit low levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, or no net CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Examples include: solar hot water, air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps, combined heat and power, biomass heating, solar photovoltaics and wind turbines.

**Nearly Zero-Energy Building Standards (nZEB)** - A building that has a very high energy performance. The nearly zero or very low amount of energy required should be covered to a very significant extent by energy from renewable sources, including that produced on-site or nearby.

**Regulated energy** - Energy resulting from the specification of controlled, fixed building services and fittings, including space heating and cooling, hot water, ventilation, fans, pumps and lighting. Such energy uses are inherent in the design of a building.

**Scope 1 Emissions** - Direct greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that occur from sources that are controlled or owned by an organisation (e.g. emissions associated with fuel combustion in boilers or vehicles).

**Scope 2 Emissions** - Indirect GHG emissions associated with the purchase of electricity, steam, heat, or cooling.

**Scope 3 Emissions** - All other indirect emissions that occur in a organisations value chain such as emissions embodied in the purchase of goods or services or the lifecycle emissions from the use of an organisations product.

**Unregulated energy** - energy consumption from systems in the building on which the Building Regulations do not impose a requirement. For example, this may include energy consumption from systems such as, IT equipment, lifts, escalators, refrigerators, external lighting, laptops, cooking, audio-visual equipment and other appliances.

**Value Chain** - The full lifecycle of a product or process, including material sourcing, production, consumption and disposal/recycling processes.

**1.5° Celsius Pathway** - An emissions reduction pathway that holds off some of the worst climate impacts and avoids irreversible damage to our societies, economies and the natural world. We must hold the temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels to avoid these impacts. This requires halving GHG emissions by 2030 and hitting net-zero emissions by 2050.





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