

# BELFAST HOLYLAND AREA COMMUNITY ASSETS AUDIT

May 2024



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## **BELFAST HOLYLAND AREA COMMUNITY ASSETS AUDIT REPORT**

### **Commissioned by Forward South Partnership 2024**

**The Belfast Holyland Area** (the Holyland) situated a mile from Belfast city centre is one of the most diverse communities in Northern Ireland (NI). It is known as the Holyland area because of its biblical street names and has been the subject of many reports and much research over the past 30 years.

Forward South Partnership have commissioned this community assets audit.

**Forward South Partnership (FSP)**, previously known as South Belfast Partnership Board describes itself as a vehicle which drives regeneration through soft power – attracting, persuading, influencing. It is 1 of 4 area partnerships in Belfast one of the main government planks to target social need and address many of the legacy issues required to build resilience and move forward into a more peaceful and prosperous society. FSP has driven capacity building in South Belfast Holyland through the employment of a part time worker funded by a capacity building grant from Belfast City Council and this audit has been commissioned to inform future community development work in the area.

Denise Wright was commissioned to undertake the audit.

She qualified as a Registered General Nurse in 1986 and has a degree in Community Development from Ulster University (2006), OCN Level 5 in Peacebuilding Through Intercultural Dialogue (2013) and a Diploma in Restorative Justice (2021)

Having worked as a community nurse across Belfast she was then employed by City Church in Belfast's Holyland area from 1998 – 2006 as Assistant Pastor and Community Development Worker where she was a founder member of Belfast Holyland Regeneration Association. In 2006 she became the Race Relations Coordinator for South Belfast Roundtable under South Belfast Partnership, remaining in this post as the organisation became independent in 2012 finally retiring in 2022. In that post she was involved in setting up and coordinating the NI Refugee and Asylum Forum and several projects with the Romanian Roma Community in the Holyland area. She sat for many years on The Wider University PACT group retaining her commitment to community development within the Holyland. She now works as a freelance consultant and trainer.

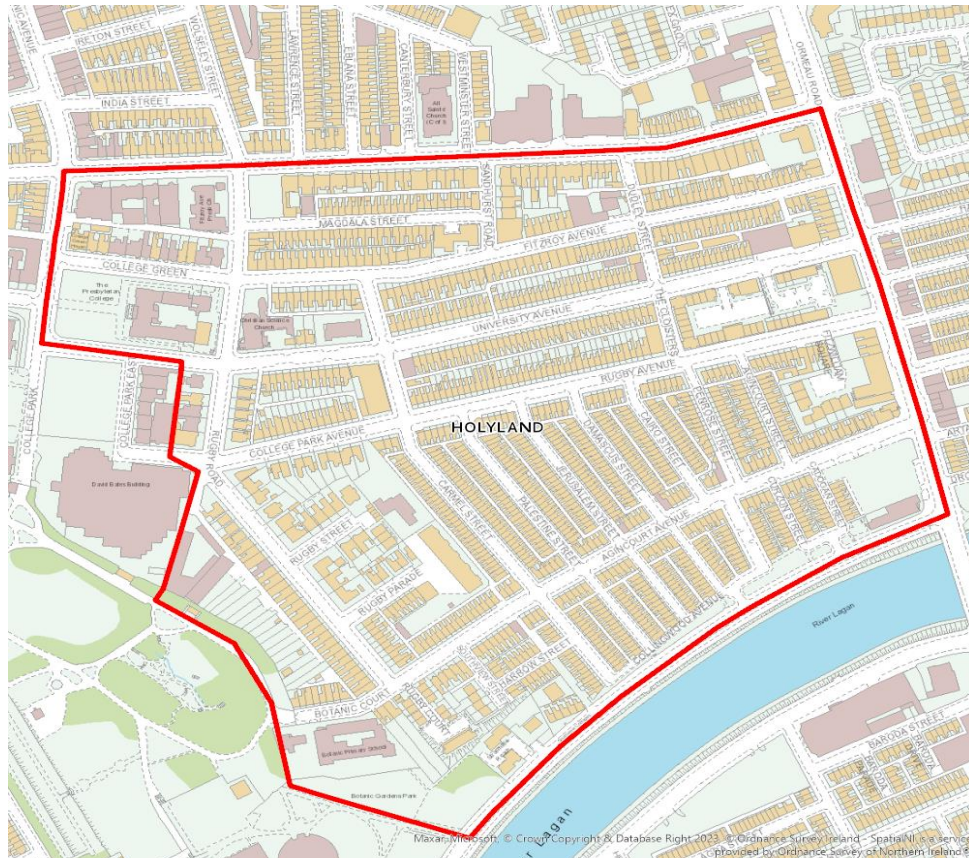
The audit was supported by bi-lingual facilitators who gathered surveys from the Romanian, Arabic and Somali speaking communities in the Holyland: Maria Teglas, Hasna Elsiyofi and Fatuma Maallin.

This document is intended as resource for FSP staff, residents of the Holyland and wider stakeholders.

## PARAMETERS

While there is no official geographical definition of the Holyland area it commonly refers to the streets enclosed to the west by Queen’s University, to the south by the River Lagan, to the east by Ormeau Road and to the north by University Street and it is this area which has been audited.

<https://factcheckni.org/articles/are-95-or-98-of-all-households-in-the-holylands-area-of-belfast-hmos/>



“Communities have never been built upon their deficiencies. Building communities has always depended on mobilising the capacity and assets of people and place.”  
Kretzman & McKnight (1993)

## **BELFAST HOLYLAND - CONTEXT**

### **ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT**

The area has a distinct history which is key to understanding the current opportunities as well as challenges that present in this small area.

The Holyland was part of the Cromac Woods Estate until in the late 1890s when R J McConnell an estate agent and James Rea a developer purchased the site which became known as the Holyland area on the banks of the River Lagan.

The river had been developed as a main thoroughfare, a working canal all the way to Lough Neagh, to link the port of Belfast to the County Tyrone coal fields and to the Shannon system so creating an all-Ireland waterway connection. This was a working canal from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century until it ceased this function in 1955.

McConnell and Rea, two friends visited the Holyland in 1894 and came back to build on this land, finishing the development at the end of 1899 and this trip clearly influenced their choice of street names.

It was built to house members of the skilled working classes of Belfast, those working in the shipyards, in engineering and in the linen industry. There were a mix of houses in an area with access to the river, Botanic Gardens and Queens University Belfast. Some were large family houses such as those in the wide Agincourt Avenue for the most skilled and other smaller family homes on streets like Carmel and Damascus for the less skilled workers.

A number of still significant institutions were already in existence at this time.

**The Botanic Gardens** had first opened in 1828 as the private Royal Belfast Botanical Gardens and continued as a private park for many years, only opening to members of the public on Sundays prior to 1895.

**Queen's University Belfast** had been founded by Royal Charter in 1845 and **Union Theological College** which was founded in 1853 to educate Presbyterian ministers went on to become the seat of the new Parliament of Northern Ireland in 1921 until it moved to the newly built Stormont in 1932.

**Botanic Primary School** was built in 1939 and at that time children attended from the age of 6 or 7 up until the age of 14. It was an innovative building intentionally designed, as were a number of others in Belfast, to be close to the water and parkland to allow access to both. It now serves a much wider area with pupils coming from Donegall Pass and Lower Ormeau as well as from the streets in the Holyland. As a result, it is a school with pupils from a very wide range of faith, political and ethnic backgrounds. This is not something new for Botanic which due to its setting close to QUB and the City Hospital, has seen children whose first language isn't English attending long before we saw a significant increase in inward migration into NI in the 2000's. Indeed, for many years the Belfast Education and Library Board ran its English as an Additional Language service from the school premises.

**Belfast City Hospital** which is half a mile away has its origins in the workhouse which opened in 1841 at a time when many people were moving to Belfast City. It was designed to house 1000 inmates and as the effects of the famine and resulting destitution and fever outbreaks took hold, its infirmary served the sick poor of Belfast.

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS REPORTS

Across many years studies have regularly assessed people's needs as well as their vision and aspirations for the area. The most recent have been,

**Belfast: A Learning City, Holyland and Wider University Area Strategic Study March 2012**  
**Louise** Browne Associates was commissioned in October 2010 by Belfast City Council on behalf of its partners on the Inter Agency Group. The purpose was to identify long term solutions to the issues facing the Holyland and wider university area, within a city-wide context.

<https://forwardsouth.org/documents-links/>

**2020 Holyland Transition Study** undertaken by Paddy Gray and Ursula McAnulty was a study examining the effects of new build purpose built managed student accommodation on the area.

[https://zgv604.n3cdn1.secureserver.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Transition-Study\\_compressed.pdf](https://zgv604.n3cdn1.secureserver.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Transition-Study_compressed.pdf)

### Changes in housing use and its consequences

Previous reports show that in the past 50 years, NI has seen an increase in those entering higher education and, with inadequate provision of purpose-built student accommodation, it was inevitable that housing in the vicinity of Queens University would become sought after for students to live in during their studies. Many properties were purchased for this purpose by both parents and landlords who recognised the business potential. This affected not only the Holyland but the Wider University area.

As "the Troubles" ended, Belfast was considered a safe place to live fuelling demand for accommodation. Landlords developed properties as Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO's) with a resultant increase in the numbers of students in a relatively small area. A House of Multiple Occupation is a property which is the main residence of three or more people who are from more than two households. For more detailed information it is worth reading the Holyland Transition Study 2020 FSP.

It is now commonly agreed that until the early 1990s the Holyland was considered a mixed but relatively balanced community, but the following years saw many more properties being bought and then renovated using grants provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). These grants were intended to upgrade existing HMOs to ensure adequate standards of accommodation and safety.

Prior to 2004 however there was no requirement to obtain planning permission to convert existing houses into HMOs and therefore no means of limiting the numbers of such properties in any area. As a result, there was a significant increase in the population of the area and mainly in the student population. Historically students from a range of further education institutions in Belfast have chosen to live in the Holyland so student residents attend Queens University, Ulster University, Stranmillis College, St Mary's College and Belfast Metropolitan College.

In more recent years there have been increasing numbers of newcomer people to NI becoming residents in the area, particularly Romanian Roma people and people seeking asylum.

Such a high concentration of HMOs and changing demographics in the Holyland have caused many issues. Firstly the streets, residential properties and amenities were not designed for such a large concentration of people, Secondly, differing lifestyles and cultures have led to tensions. There are also tensions between landlords and many residents who have differing visions of what the future of the Holyland should look like.

The Transition Study reported that many respondents felt there was no shared vision of what it will look like for the future and that there was general agreement that any solution must be a partnership approach meaning all the partners - the long-term residents, newcomer residents, statutory agencies, higher education institutions, landlords, students union etc.

There is however no formal definition of a “long term resident” or how long a resident needs to be living in the area until they are no longer considered a “newcomer”.

It also highlighted that there was no safe play area for children and no pedestrian crossings, and one interviewee stated that *‘it is only a matter of time before a child is killed or seriously injured, then this will be taken more seriously but then it will be too late.’*

It also raises the issue of the engagement of students, explaining that student volunteers have participated in local regeneration, however these are usually not students who live in the Holyland area, and it mentions a wider plan for newcomer and established migrant communities.

It recognised that the area is home to both short and long-term residents, families, individuals, members of a range of ethnic minority groups including Roma, Eritrean, Somalian, Sudanese, along with other nationalities and students from Queen’s University Belfast, Ulster University, Stranmillis College, St Mary’s College and Belfast Metropolitan College.

**The Wider University and Lower Ormeau Action Plan** has been developed by Belfast City Council (BCC) over the past year following a report in March 2023. It falls under 3 areas with associated actions to:

1. Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in the area.
2. Improve community cohesion.
3. Increase wellbeing of residents

## RATIONALE FOR A COMMUNITY ASSETS AUDIT

Across many years studies such as those previously mentioned have regularly assessed people's needs as well as their vision and aspirations for the area. While they are extremely useful activities and help inform action, they only provide a partial insight into the dynamics of the Holyland.

This assets audit aims to take a community development approach. Describing an area solely in terms of issues and people's *wants and needs*, provides a deficit-based insight into a community. When focusing on the negatives we can regard the communities themselves as a problem. This can be damaging to people's general wellbeing and self-esteem and can limit their aspirations.

In addition, problem-solving solutions treat people as consumers, helpless recipients of a service, rather than conduits of change. This perception can be very disempowering and demotivating.

Many of the solutions to the "problems" identified in previous studies lie only within the gift of statutory bodies and government. This study seeks to conduct a community audit to catalogue everything that is of value in the Holyland area and rebalance power.

Taking a community development approach, it aims to enable people to work collectively to bring about positive social change.

Every community has assets: physical facilities such as schools, churches, mosques, community centres, businesses, parks and outdoor spaces are obvious. However, possibly the most important are the people and their strengths.

Where a community can harness these through working together toward common goals all, who wish to, can contribute to making their local area a better place to live and work.

Community development enables people to work collectively to bring about positive social change. This long-term process starts from people's own experience and enables communities to work together to:

- Identify their own needs and actions
- Take collective action using their strengths and resources
- Develop their confidence, skills and knowledge
- Challenge unequal power relationships
- Promote social justice, equality and inclusion

in order to improve the quality of their own lives, the communities in which they live and societies of which they are a part.

CLD Standards Council

<https://cldstandardscouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/CDNOStandards2015.pdf>

Forward South Partnership will act as the lead partner in the Holyland on a number of the actions in the Wider University and Lower Ormeau Action Plan and to do this effectively it is necessary to ensure that they know and understand community dynamics, who lives in the Holyland, the personal skills and strengths which they might contribute and if they are willing to be involved in projects and in what capacity.



Being aware of residents' frustration around the length of time it takes to see change, it is also hoped that undertaking this work prior to the action plan being formally launched, will allow the Holyland Capacity Worker to "hit the ground running" once resourcing is made available.

## **AIMS**

To take a "snapshot" of the Holyland area to map the resident communities as they are in early 2024 in order for FSP to:

- reach out to the local communities and ensure that no one is left behind.
- establish adequate means of communication and engagement.
- provide an up-to-date insight into the profile of the local populations.

Mapping the local organisations will allow FSP to:

- improve use of local services
- identify gaps in service provision.
- coordinate communication and understanding of what is available.

The findings of the strengths audit will allow FSP to:

- Assess the level of community cohesion which exists currently.
- Create a picture of the community which shows its capacity and potential.
- Bring people together to talk about community matters and value what already exists.
- Support people to become advocates for transformation of the spaces in which they live.
- Work together to use existing resources and goodwill to address issues in the local area.

## **CHALLENGES**

With a population of over 4000 in properties which contain multiple units it is impossible, both due to time constraints and practical issues around access, to survey the entire population. The audit is therefore "a snapshot" of the area, at a particular time, rather than a comprehensive report on the demographics and aspirations of the whole population.

Data protection prevents information on individual residents' contact details or addresses being available, which makes engagement challenging. The time of year when the audit was undertaken meant that few people were out and about due to weather and the consultant relied on personal knowledge and contacts to let residents know the audit was taking place and invite them to participate.

There is not a comprehensive means of communicating across the wider community in existence. There are a number of small WhatsApp groups, but none appear larger than a couple of dozen members and although these means were used, there was no uptake through them. Most responses were gained from being visible on the streets, approaching passers-by and by knocking on doors.

It was taken into consideration that for groups unfamiliar with the concept of community research there might be a significant issue around distrust of people or agencies they did not know, and this might make it difficult to engage with them. For both Roma people, who are recognised as being historically discriminated against in their country of origin and across Europe, and for people seeking asylum, the concept of being asked personal information can be very intimidating.

## **METHODOLOGY**

**AIM** - to compile a Holyland community profile that maps out the populations and organisations in the area and audits their strengths.

The methodology took a strengths-based approach aiming to move away from what is commonly seen as a negative, problems-based narrative and provide a balanced understanding of the area.

Engagement involved consulting individuals, households, organisations, and certain members of communities who are considered to hold accurate knowledge about the makeup within the area. This was undertaken using a written survey, not only to gain specific information, but to also provide the consultant with an opportunity to hear people talk about their perceptions and hopes for the area.

To address the issue of access to groups which might prove particularly difficult to engage with, the consultant worked with a small number of trusted co-facilitators who undertook peer research in Romani, Arabic and Somali. This allowed for greater access within some of the newer community groups and harnessed capacity which already exists within the area.

The overwhelming number of surveys were completed face-to-face. This approach resulted in more qualitative data being obtained around how residents feel about both the ongoing issues in the area and what they feel has changed in recent years.

Group “Community Conversations”, engaging residents, were originally planned.

A stand was set up at an event at the launch of the Holyland Community Garden which allowed for conversations with residents and other stakeholders and the following visit to Wildflower Alley was also used to completed surveys.

In total 140 surveys were completed: 108 completed by individual residents (some of these surveys had input from up to 5 people living in the property) and 32 by businesses or agencies.

## **CONSULTATION WITH RESIDENTS**

Confidential surveys were designed, and information collated on,

- the level of knowledge of respondents about the streets they live on
- their household makeup
- their current and previous involvement in local community activities
- the community led activities they think would improve the area.
- the personal skills and strengths which they might contribute to this objective and if they were willing to be involved in projects and if so in what capacity.

## CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED DURING CONSULTATION WITH RESIDENTS

This audit was not looking at negative issues faced as they have already been well documented, but rather the strengths and the possibilities. There does however appear to be an automatic default to focus on negative aspects of living in the area, which is understandable, as they act as significant barriers to engaging in everyday life. Taking this on board allowed for greater understanding of the issues faced in relation to taking a community development approach to building cohesive community within a diverse population which feels it has been let down by agencies for many years.

Many of those approached cited significant “consultation fatigue” having been asked to partake in many research projects over the years. Many, although obviously in houses which appeared to be occupied by long-term residents, didn’t open doors and others who did, politely declined to take part. A number cited poor mental health and said they simply didn’t want to talk about the area, in case it made them feel worse. Some said they’d take the form and have a look. A number asked for a phone number and did message to arrange for the survey to be collected.

*“I don’t want to be involved – some people are always moaning, it always ends up really toxic and it’s not good for my health – -or anyone else’s.”*

On one WhatsApp group a couple of members responded by saying the survey “should be boycotted” and referred to previous research which they felt was ineffective in delivering change. A number of residents stated that when consultations take place it’s always with a very small number of the same people and they are not necessarily representative of the wider population.

*“we are fed up with money being put into more reports and not into the area.”*

Some residents commented that when agencies claim to have widely consulted, this is mainly with other agencies, and it is believed that only very few residents take part. It is felt that this is disingenuous, and reports should say exactly how many residents were consulted and if it is a group who is speaking on behalf of residents, how many residents they represent and from which areas.

While this may initially appear negative, people are critically reflecting upon effective representation which may point to the time being right to work on this.

*“maybe if the recommendations in the reports already done were implemented, people would be happier about answering more questions.”*

Group “Community Conversations” engaging residents were originally planned but it soon became clear that there was little will to attend such events due to consultation fatigue. As a result, time was instead invested in one-to-one community conversations with individual residents or with sets of neighbours, as weather allowed. Having been listened to about the issues they face, as conversations progressed, some acknowledged that there has been positive change (which is reported on later) and then were happy to complete surveys.

*“these things happen every year and nothing changes, I’m not interested in more talking shops”*

Surveys were designed and data collated on,

- brief organisational overview aims, main services, opening hours, contact details.
- their current and previous involvement in local community activities and what community led activities they thought would improve the area.
- the professional skills and resources they might be willing contribute to this and if they were willing to be involved in projects and if so in what capacity.

52 organisations based in or with a particular remit for the area including statutory bodies, community voluntary organisations, formal and informal cultural groups, private businesses, and landlords were approached. See Appendix 1.

Attempts were made to contact all businesses face-to-face and most engaged this way were very willing to take part. Others were contacted by email or phone. 32 surveys were returned, and others preferred a semi-informal interview rather than completion of a survey.

While none of the landlords based in the Holyland filled in the surveys, they did talk with the consultant.

There were semi-informal meetings and conversations held with statutory agencies, community voluntary and faith groups with a specific remit for the Holyland area.

Appendix 2 lists the services which businesses, statutory bodies and community voluntary groups provide.

## **FINDINGS - POPULATION STATISTICS OF THE AREA**

There have been many attempts to map the population of the Holyland in recent years and it appears that none of these have proven able to ascertain accurate figures. This task should, in theory, have been aided by the 2021 Census undertaken on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2021, however in the Holyland area it appears that it fails to provide accurate statistics relating to transient communities.

This is due to several factors including the COVID 19 pandemic, Brexit, a significant increase in people seeking asylum arriving to Northern Ireland, along with many students not living in their rented properties at the time of the census.

In addition, many of the Romanian Roma population of the Holyland area temporarily returned to Romania during COVID 19. The NI census shows a total of 68 Roma living in the area at that time, while this audit shows 21 Roma families, with a total of 141 individuals, living in the Holyland at present who have lived in their properties for more than 3 years.

The comments below evidence that, in relation to Northern Ireland, Government recognises the limitations of the Census on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021

*“NISRA had to respond to various unexpected challenges to successfully, and safely, deliver live Census collection operations at this unprecedented time. To manage and mitigate risks to Census data, NISRA adapted its systems and provided additional support to respondents to best capture accurate data. For example, it adapted the development of its address register, using online tools and utilising administrative data, to enhance the accuracy and coverage of data on the status of addresses to best inform field operations. NISRA also took steps to support data collection for respondents. For example, for students in Northern Ireland, NISRA modified the Census electronic questionnaires and, in conjunction with the two main universities in Northern Ireland, provided additional support on how those individuals should complete their Census returns.*

*Undertaking Census during COVID-19, however, meant that data on topics such as employment, economic activity, travel, and household status may well be unusual or changed. Census data will reflect the population of Northern Ireland at this rather unique point in time and data users’ needs, such as those of local service planners, may no longer be met from the data collected in 2021.”*

<https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/assessment-of-compliance-with-the-code-of-practice-for-statistics-2021-census-in-northern-ireland/pages/2/>

Many of the migrant populations who consider the Holyland area home would not have been able to access the online tools mentioned, due to data poverty or lack of confidence in their ability to complete complex forms. Considering Brexit and related uncertainties around accessing the EU Settlement Scheme, some will have had concerns about why they needed to give sensitive personal information at this time. This will most likely have affected the level of information given.

Many students who had tenancies in the area will have chosen to return to live with their families to reduce isolation and save on living expenses. Lectures were held online and so accessing classes would not have been an issue.

Such limited knowledge on the population profile continues to raise significant challenges in relation to service provision and in evidencing need when it comes to accessing resources for engagement and community development.

## 2021 CENSUS DATA

Data zone	No of Properties	People	%Age 0-14	No Age 0-14	%Age 15-39	No Age 15-39	%Age 40-64	No age 40-60	%Age 65 +	No age 65+
Botanic										
N2	207	532	8	43	75	399	14	74	3	16
N3	203	538	7	38	87	468	5	27	1	5
N4	206	598	8	48	82	490	8	48	2	12
N5	239	580	10	58	65	377	19	110	6	35
J1	225	478	2	10	83	397	10	48	5	23
J2	199	427	7	31	77	330	13	57	2	9
J3	154	411	3	13	83	341	11	45	3	12
J4	202	593	2	12	92	546	5	30	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1635</b>	<b>4157</b>	-	<b>253</b>	-	<b>3348</b>	-	<b>439</b>	-	<b>117</b>

<https://explore.nisra.gov.uk/area-explorer-2021/N10000303/>

## CENSUS ANALYSIS

The census data is presented at <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/2021-census/results> and is in a range of formats.

Data for the Botanic Ward is presented in data zones and the geography of the Holyland does not clearly fall under these zones however for the purposes of this audit most of the Holyland falls under the 8 zones in the table above which shows,

- 4157 total population in 1635 properties
- 253 children under 14 years of age
- 3348 people between the ages of 15 and 39
- 439 people between the ages of 40 and 65
- 117 people over the age of 65

While the age bands make it difficult to assess numbers of children under 18 it would be reasonable to assume that there were around 350 at the time of the Census when we know that many of the Holyland Roma families were still in Romania. It is likely that in 2024 there are more than 500 under the age of 18 living in the Holyland area, whose needs should be taken into consideration at all levels of planning.

**Data collated by Street Check also shows** most people in these zones identifying as White, with a very significant 12% of people of minority ethnic backgrounds. It is however worth noting that many Roma families were not resident in Belfast at the time of the Census and asylum accommodation in the area has increased since 2021 so this percentage is likely to be considerably higher in 2024.

- 7 as Irish Travellers
- 68 as Roma
- 67 as of mixed race
- 98 as Indian
- 6 as Pakistani
- 76 as Chinese
- 38 as other Asian
- 151 as Black African
- 7 as other Black
- 28 as Arab
- 9 as other

<https://www.streetcheck.co.uk/>

## SUMMARY OF RESIDENTS IN THE HOLYLAND AREA

There are currently a range of temporary, short term, medium and long-term residents living in the Holyland. They are in a mix of privately owned, privately rented properties, fold and social housing, provided by mainly by Clanmil and Choice Housing.

For many years, there have been vulnerable adults accommodated in hostels and supported accommodation and it has proven very difficult to get data in respect of this part of the population but anecdotally, numbers appear to have increased since COVID. Previous research has shown that both residents and landlords have concerns about some of those being offered hostel accommodation in the area being a risk to children and young people and there is a strong perception that the area is being used to house those who have been intimidated out of other areas due to anti-social or criminal behaviour. In an area which has a significant number of families, teenage students and a Belfast Health and Social Care Trust facility this is seen by both residents and landlords to be unacceptable.

As already described, the high proportion of private rental properties in the area has resulted in it being the term time home to large numbers of students who most often hold a one-year private rental tenancy and over the past 20 years there have always been a small number of asylum seekers temporarily housed in the area. It is important to note that a number of students choose to become long-term residents once they have graduated and that several of the longest-term residents were themselves students in Belfast.

The number of HMO registrations per street in April 2024 are shown in the table below [https://nihmo.belfastcity.gov.uk/registers/index.html?fa=licence\\_register&section=licence\\_register](https://nihmo.belfastcity.gov.uk/registers/index.html?fa=licence_register&section=licence_register)

STREET NAME	No of HMOs
Agincourt Ave	86
Agincourt Street	17
Botanic Court	3
Cadogan Street	11
Cairo Street	20
Carmel Street	71
College Green & Mews	0
College Park Ave	25
Cotlingwood Ave	12
Curzon Street	7
Damascus Street	40
Dudley Street	3
Fitzroy Ave	153
Fitzwilliam Square - gated	7
Harrow Street	5
Jerusalem Street	43
Magdala Street	35
Palestine Street	58
Penrose Street	17
Rugby Ave	85
Rugby Parade - gated	5
Rugby Street	0
Rugby Road	10
Sandhurst Street	0
Southview Cottages	0
Southview Street	2
University Avenue	84
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>800</b>

During COVID, as the numbers of students decreased due to lockdown, the perception is that there was a resultant increase in the number of privately rented houses being procured by MEARS who hold the Home Office contract to provide accommodation for People Seeking Asylum in NI, this has been commented upon by several respondents.

MEARS are currently using 3 hotels on the edge of the Holyland to temporarily accommodate newly arrived people seeking asylum, alongside several HMOs and other properties.

In addition, following the publication of the “Belfast: A Learning City” report by Louise Browne Associates in March 2012, Queen’s University took the decision to expand its existing Purpose-Built Managed Student Accommodation (PBMSA). Since then, Ulster University has very significantly expanded its campus in the City Centre and developers have provided a few PBMSA in the vicinity of the campus in York Street Belfast.

The Irish News March 2024 states that some 5,040 student accommodation units have been built in Belfast across 12 schemes since 2016, with another 1,237 beds due to be completed in 2024, and a further 3,773 units in planning.

<https://www.irishnews.com/news/business/pbsa-5000-student-units-built-in-belfast-since-2016-with-another-3773-in-planning-DBRT3XC65VFTDD5W4RRNTLAWO4/#:~:text=Business,PBSA%3A%205%2C000%20student%20units%20built%20in%20Belfast%20since,with%20another%203%2C773%20in%20planning&text=A%20new%20PBSA%20scheme%20under,bring%20another%201%2C267%20beds%20online>

This may mean there is less of a student population living in the area than before, and indeed landlords reported that almost all their rental properties for the next academic year were rented out by the end of March, due to high demand. It is also a factor that students are now more likely to be second year students rather than those new to Belfast. The overall picture is that, at any given time, there is a smaller settled group of residents alongside a larger, more transient group of student residents who have tended to take out yearlong tenancies. Several respondents said that current student tenants plan to stay on next year and hope to extend their contracts early, due to high demand. This might lead to students being more vested in the area.

The area is now a mixed community in all aspects – age, ethnicity, household makeup or economic status.

This provides great opportunity for positive progress alongside the risk of conflict, with so many diverse groups living near one another.



## FINDINGS FROM SURVEYS

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This report aimed to give a snapshot of the very complex community make-up of the Holyland at a particular point in time. It sought to gain,

- **Accurate information on the number of people living in the area**
- **A database of contacts to provide a means of communication in the Holyland**
- **Information on the nationalities and languages of the population**
- **A list of initiatives respondents felt the community could do to improve the area**
- **An understanding of the skills within the community which could contribute to improving it**

**Accurate numbers of the population** in the area have not been available from any previous research and this has often been a criticism. This has made it difficult to evidence need and thus make an argument for resourcing. One aim of this audit was to ascertain more accurate numbers of all who live in the area; however, a number of factors have meant that this was not possible. These include

- A significant number of residents declined to take part in the survey.
- Many of those who did complete surveys were unwilling to give personal details of household make up due to suspicion of what it might be used for.
- Organisations which do hold numerical information are unable to disaggregate it into data sets which fit the Holyland geographical area or are unable to release it for reasons of data protection, while others simply do not know.
- Most residents are unaware of who else lives in their streets other than those in very close proximity.

The figures obtained therefore cannot be used to estimate broad demographic numbers for the area but many of the findings point to changes in the area and potential trends.

### Learning

It would take considerable time and resources to contact over 1600 properties and even then, all the information required might not be forthcoming. This was attempted in the late 1990's early 2000's by the Holyland Need to Know (N2K) project undertaken by EXTERN which had 2 dedicated staff members and was rolled out over approximately 2 years. The data collated was not made available. If such a process was to be attempted again, in such a transient population the data would undoubtedly be outdated by the time the research was completed.

It is therefore necessary to recognise that the exact complexities of the population may never be known and that effective means of operating in such an environment should be developed.

### **A database of contacts to provide a means of communication in the Holyland.**

Of 108 residents who completed surveys 33 gave permission to be contacted directly, to be kept informed of events and issues in the Holyland. Many others said they would prefer a community noticeboard situated centrally close to the Spar or City Church to access information.

Agencies were more willing to sign up to an email or WhatsApp. Support for a social media group would be on the basis that it is one way for information sharing only.

*"A community noticeboard would be a great idea"*

## Learning

To ensure adequate and accessible communication to ensure inclusion of all residents will require a mix of mediums to be developed.

## Nationalities and languages spoken

Those respondents living in asylum accommodation did not always know the nationality of all their house mates. There were a number of languages other than English named by respondents – Romanian, Somali, Arabic, Tigrayan and Irish, however it was explained that if information is sent in English in Word format via phone, it can be put into a translation app (pdf will not work). If there were to be posters on a notice board a QR code would be a possibility. A number said they would like to be kept informed via the Roma Women's Group or MEARS (who provide asylum accommodation).

## Learning

It may not be necessary to provide translation for every communication, which is costly when translators need to be engaged. As relationships are built, it might be possible to use some of the skills offered by respondents to translate simple messages.

## Initiatives respondents felt the community could do to improve the Holyland. (Pg23)

Many ideas were forthcoming, and many were common across residents from different backgrounds such as clean ups, integration, parking and traffic projects.

*"I'm not prepared to put my name out there but I would be willing to volunteer if a suitable opportunity was made available"*

## Learning

Working on common initiatives could support integration as residents work together on common goals and interests.

**Skills of respondents** which could contribute to improving their community were varied. Only a small number of people were willing to be contacted about using them in the Holyland, 21 out of 108 respondents and only 8 of these would be willing to lead an initiative. Many others did say that if something was happening which interested them, they might offer to volunteer on a one-off basis.

*"The same people are asked to get involved in everything; it can be too much"*

## Learning

There appears to be only a small pool of people who are willing to lead initiatives or to support their delivery. Many others say they feel that their priority is to see statutory bodies fulfil their responsibilities and improve the living environment, before they would be willing to get involved in community activities.

It may be that there is an awareness that there is a very small pool of people willing to get involved and a feeling that if they put their name forward, they may be put under pressure to engage. For many in the migrant and minority ethnic communities, the concept of volunteering is new, and work would need to be undertaken prior to projects beginning, which would seek to recruit them. Many are temporarily housed in the area in asylum accommodation and would most likely not be long term volunteers as they can be moved at very short notice.

No students expressed interest in volunteering, so designing projects with such student engagement from the Holyland may not prove feasible.

## OVERVIEW

While not all the information anticipated was gained, additional information was gathered which is equally important in terms of a reality check.

There is now a much more detailed list of what residents would like to see take place and that, alongside knowing what they don't want to do, will prevent projects being designed which would most likely prove unsuccessful. Often such projects result in the perception of organisational failures as they rely on the willingness of residents to engage. For many residents, the priority is to live in a safe, peaceful environment rather than to engage in community projects.

*“Get the important things sorted first like parking and noise!”*

In relation to work within the Wider University and Lower Ormeau context it will be essential to acknowledge that one size will not fit all areas. While there are certainly many similarities around some of the challenges faced, the Lower Ormeau for example has a significant level of community cohesion which has been resourced and developed over many years. This is alongside several community buildings, already existing groups and staffing which could be available to support delivery the WULO Action Plan.

The Holyland is in an entirely different position, as evidenced in this audit, which identifies a mainly disheartened, disconnected, more transient community with no specific community owned facilities and only a part-time worker.

Sufficient resources will need to be allocated to ensure successful delivery of actions. Considering the lack of community cohesion this will also require a differentiated approach, initially involving single-identity work to build capacity and ensure equality when it comes to being able to speak up and engage in a broader community setting. It should take a very grassroots soft approach, looking for small wins for all interest groups initially and then build upon those.

The wins that certain groups have already achieved through their advocacy and community action are positive examples of what can be achieved when residents pull together, but they can however be cited as examples of inequality. This necessitates capacity building in the geographical areas where there is less cohesion and a recognition that there are different demographics even within the very small area of the Holyland.

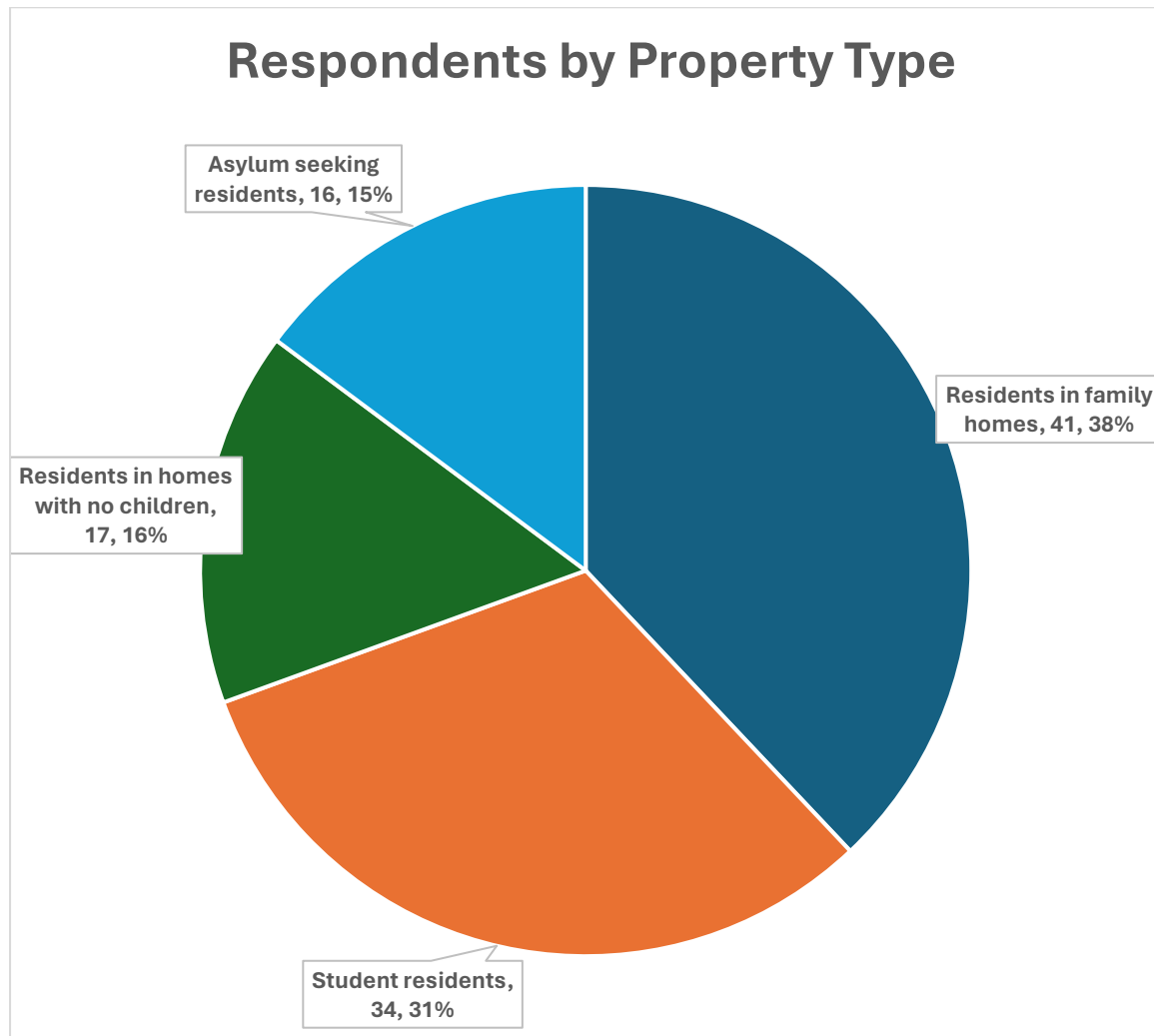
*“Only people in the “Upper Holyland” ever get things done for them – it’s about who you know and how much money you have”.*

A level of autonomy will be required for FSP to test out what will and will not work, with a focus on outcome rather than outputs as numbers of those willing to engage appears very low.

## Makeup of the population and geographical spread

Most of the long-term residential population was traditionally believed to be contained within the College Park Avenue, Rugby Road environs (referred to in previous reports as the residential core area) however changing demographics now appear to show that there is a much broader mix of long-term residents throughout the area. It is a diverse multicultural community with a broad socioeconomic mix of residents.

Household makeup of the 108 residents surveyed in this report include 41 families with children which will only be a proportion of families living in the area. The majority appear to be in houses in the lower end of the streets which are adjacent to the river.



The Transition Study – published by FSP in 2020 reported,

*“There has been consideration by Holyland residents as to what would happen to the area if there was a major exodus of students. They have expressed a strong desire for this to lead to a more shared community with vibrant families and young children included. They believe there will be a gradual rebalancing of the community due to changes brought about by new PBSA.”*

This may describe current dynamics in the area, not perhaps simply as a result of the development of PBSAs but due to a combination of factors in the intervening years.

A growing number of smaller houses which were built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to house families, in an area which was seen as a favourable place to build a community, appear to be returning to family use. Previous reports have stated that many landlords say housing is not suitable for families, however it no different from that in many other areas of Belfast where family homes are small, with no outside space. The streets are generally considered unsafe for both children and older or infirm people, due to on pavement parking and other traffic issues.

There appear to be pockets of housing occupied by significant numbers of long-term residents and families, alongside a larger area which is predominantly made up of mainly short-term student residents.

It is estimated that there are at least 500 children living in the area.

While respondents in general were very positive about the increasing cultural diversity in the area and particularly welcomed new families, there were concerns raised about this increasing diversity not being managed.

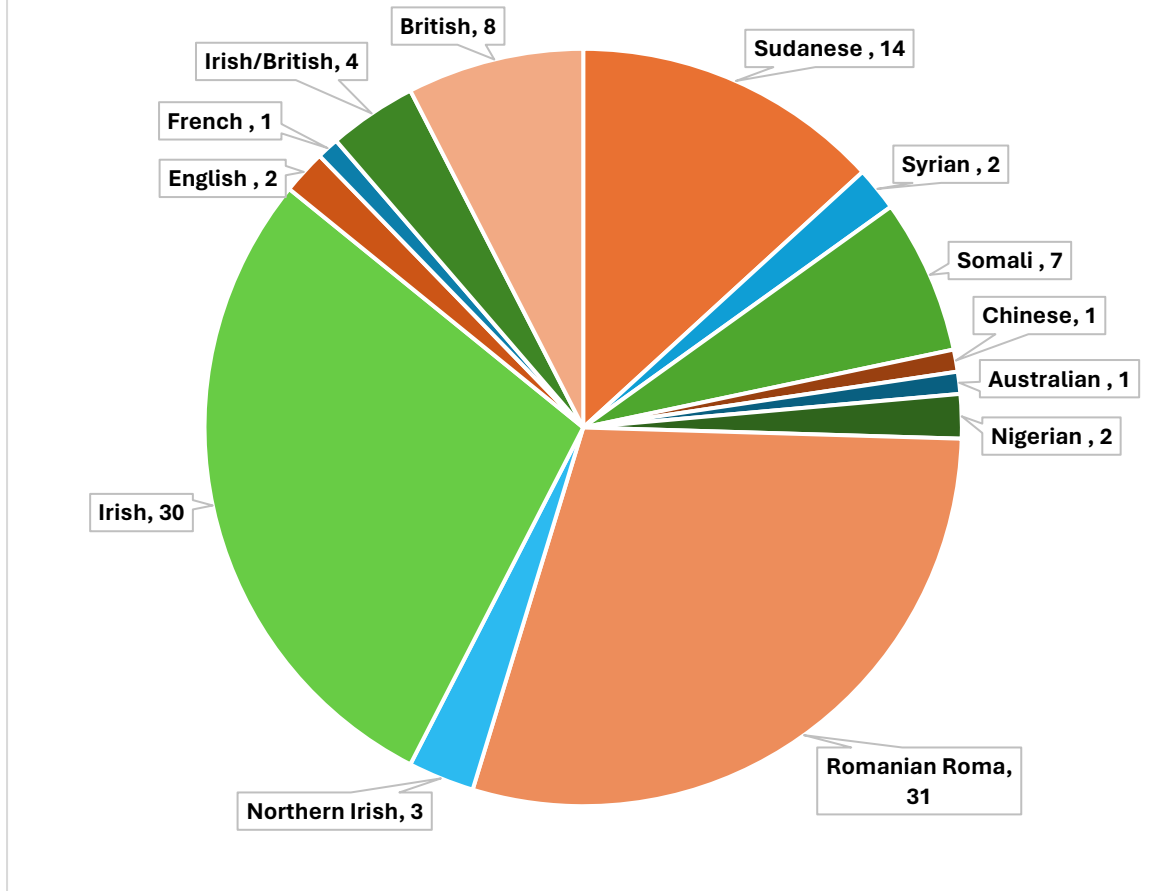
There are also concerns about the type of housing which might replace student accommodation. There is no integration plan for the area and there may be unintended negative consequences to a reduction in student numbers, if this is left unaddressed.

A balanced population is widely felt to be the key to a positive future for the Holyland.

Isolated communities can be vulnerable to exploitation and there are fears that the rise of drugs, prostitution and human trafficking might thrive in an area where such housing change occurs.

It was widely acknowledged that a level of cohesion will need to be built for the “community” to be able to speak out and prevent this from occurring. It was also acknowledged that it is imperative for constructive communication to take place to prevent this happening and that this is in the interest of all stakeholders, even if they have other competing interests. If it doesn't, other local communities will make sure that their areas are protected while the Holyland is potentially left at the mercy of such trends.

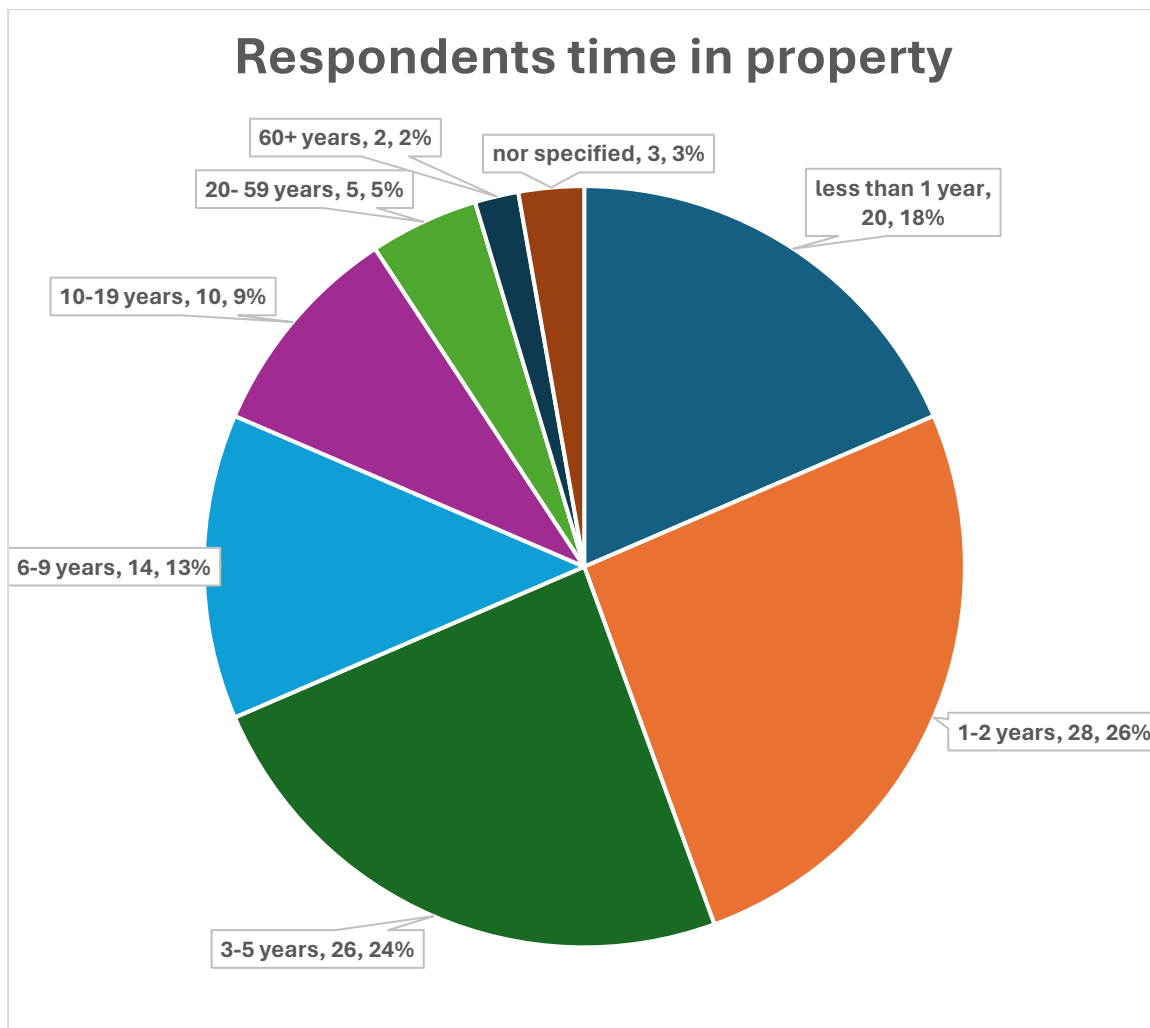
## Respondents by nationality



As has been reported over many years the area has a high level of diversity with increasing number of residents who are seeking asylum and who live in accommodation provided by MEARS who hold the Home Office contract for asylum accommodation in NI.

Many respondents of all backgrounds cited the need for integration projects to bring together all sections of the population. It was seen as very desirable that projects be designed and delivered to ensure that newcomer residents are equipped with the language, knowledge and skills to become fully integrated into their new community and to be able to thrive in their new home.

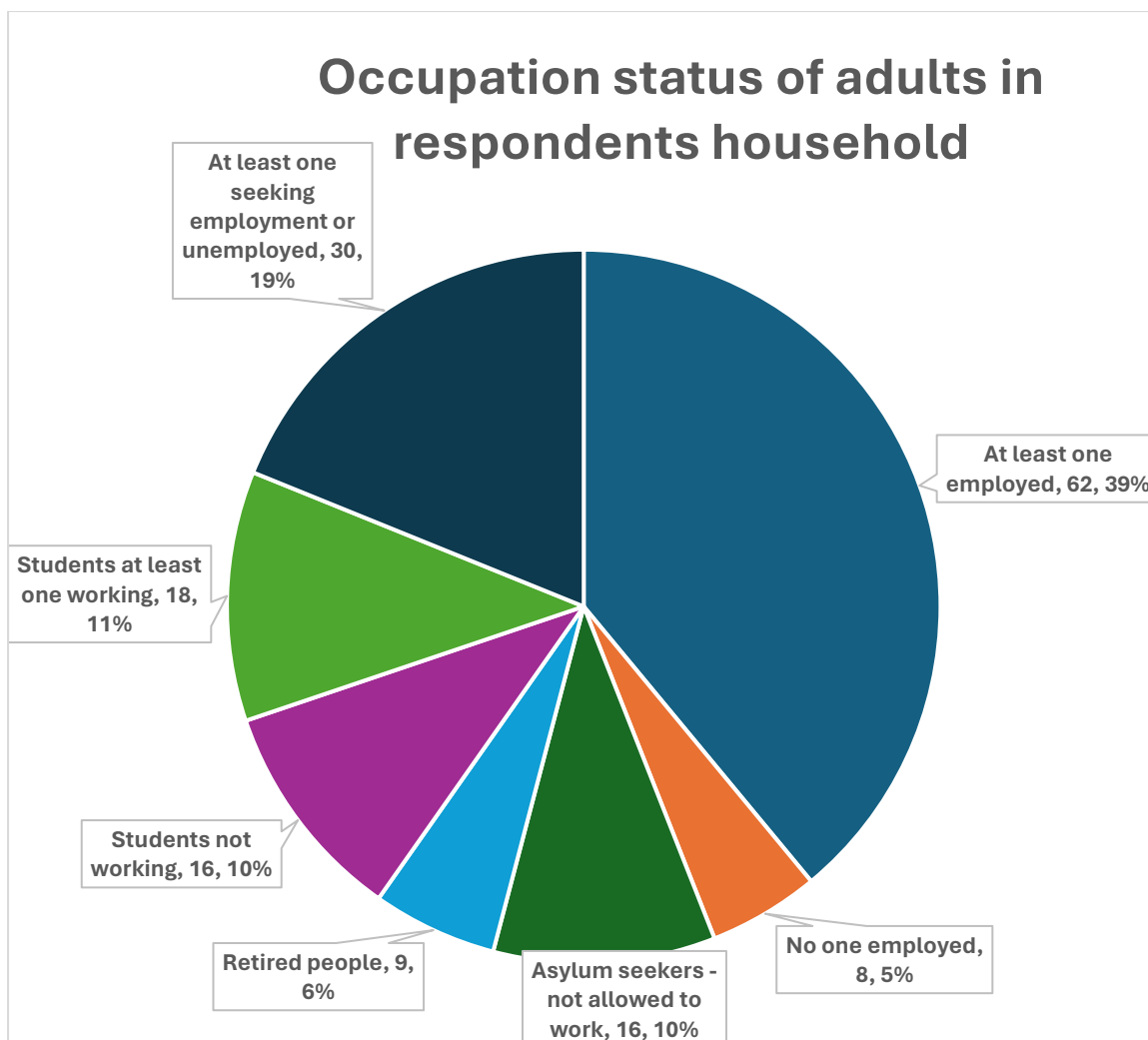
It was stressed by many, that a local approach with longer term residents volunteering to teach English and support orientation for newcomers would be the ideal scenario. This would be alongside "softer" projects which would bring together people to share food and cultural understanding.



A significant number of respondents have lived in their properties for many years – most of the very short-term residents are students or people seeking asylum in housing which is temporary.

Findings from Community Conversations 2021 FSP, undertaken with residents who were seeking asylum, suggests that many of those seeking asylum would choose to live in the area if they were able to, after they receive their refugee status.

Additionally, several students said they are considering longer rental periods which could potentially lead to an increased sense of belonging to a wider community.



39% of households had a least one person employed but many also had people who were seeking employment living in the homes as well.

5% of respondents lived in households where no one was employed, the NI unemployment figure for March 2024 was 3.8%

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/news/labour-market-statistics-65#:~:text=In%20March%202024%2C%20the%20seasonally,pandemic%20count%20in%20March%202020>

People seeking asylum are not allowed to work and can only volunteer for charities.

Around half the student houses which responded have no residents who work, and the other half have some students who work (mainly part-time) alongside their studies or who would like to.

6% of households which responded, have residents who are retired.



**COMMENTS ON IMPROVEMENTS TO THE AREA** remarked upon by respondents during this audit included,

*“There has been a significant reduction in the number of To Let signs on properties.”*

*“There are fewer complaints about anti-social behaviour (ASB) than in previous years.”*

*“An increase in second year students has led to somewhat better behaviour.”*

*“The main streets are greener – trees seem to be left to grow.”*

*“Roma families all seem to be working now – they are driving cars, and it feels like this is this is their community too. I have conversations with my Roma neighbours, now they speak English.”*

*“We’ll be getting hanging baskets from the Council soon which makes the place look better.”*

*“The seating at the front of City Church is great, so long as it doesn’t become a drinking spot.”*

*“It’s nice to see people from so many backgrounds here – it’s not just residents and students – at least not in the way it used to be.”*

#### **WHAT APPEARS TO BE WORKING**

Murals – to reduce graffiti.

Greening the area – tree planting, climbers and hanging baskets

Community festivals and food related events

Personal relationships developing over time between residents

Development of communal spaces

#### **WHAT ISN’T WORKING SO WELL**

Assuming people want to engage. Community engagement and consultation have poor turn out.

Change doesn’t happen quickly enough for residents leading to a lack of buy in for consultation.

Perceived inequalities in terms of change - e.g. residents parking for one area only

Communication around what is available in the area.

Engagement with children and young people is very poor with the risk of exploitation and ASB.

Engagement of newcomer male residents, it appears easier for women to integrate.

Local orientation for newcomer people

Despite the improvements mentioned most people said they still feel as they did when consulted for the Holyland Transition Study which reported that,

*“Many respondents felt that there hasn’t been a shared vision of what it will look like for the future. Landlords have a vision, so do residents, so does BCC, Queen’s University and Ulster University, but we need to bring these together to get a shared vision.*

*There was general agreement that any solution must be a partnership approach. This means all the partners - the long-term residents, newcomers, statutory agencies, HEI’s, landlords, students union etc.”*

This will require a whole community approach to ensure that the area becomes a safe community for all living there and to support successful transition into a “Shared Community”. The engagement of a very wide range of residents and stakeholders with often competing aspirations for the area will remain a challenge.

Language will play an important role - during this audit makeup of the population was commonly described as residents, newcomers and students. This has the potential to separate rather than

promote community cohesion and consideration should be given going forward about how descriptors are used. For example, when do “newcomers” become simply “residents”. Many have been living in the area for over a decade and feel this is their home now.

## **WHAT RESPONDENTS FELT THE COMMUNITY COULD DO TO IMPROVE THE HOLYLAND AREA**

Key priorities in the Holyland area are reducing hate crime and anti-social behaviour, improving health and wellbeing, community regeneration, improving good relations and community cohesion.

The suggestions below fall broadly under these priorities and evidence that there are aspirations and a willingness to move forward.

### **GOOD RELATIONS AND COMMUNITY COHESION**

**INTEGRATION PROJECTS** – more than just meeting briefly. Carefully designed and facilitated opportunities get to know each other and build relationship and trust.

**ORIENTATION SESSIONS** for newcomer people, were suggested by both long-term residents and people seeking asylum. Suggestions included local volunteers being trained to deliver these with an emphasis on the Holyland and immediate area. This would not only improve English acquisition but would develop relationships.

**PSNI WORKSHOPS** for newcomer people to meet the local neighbourhood officers and learn about the law in NI and how to contact PSNI should they need help or wish to report.

**ENGLISH LESSONS and CHAT GROUPS** would also be welcomed by many for whom English isn't a first language and it is thought that if neighbours volunteered for this it would again build relationship and increase community cohesion.

**BEFRIENDING PROJECT** this was suggested to go hand in hand with orientation sessions.

**INTERCULTURAL WOMENS' GROUP** was suggested by a few respondents. It is known that here is a Roma Women's Group in existence, but several people thought that it is time for a broader group to include both new and longer-term residents.

**SUPPORT WORKER FOR THE REFUGEE/ASYLUM SEEKING COMMUNITIES** similar to what is in place for the Roma community. Help to enhance skills to get into employment.

**CULTURAL AWARENESS SESSIONS** for both newcomer people about NI and for people from NI about other cultures

**MEETING THE NEIGHBOURS AND SHARING CULTURES** – these could follow on from the above and be made fun, utilising the lived experience of residents of all backgrounds.

**REGULAR TOURS OF AREA** – going into organisations' buildings – having coffee and seeing the range of activities already in the Holyland area and meeting new people.

**COFFEE MORNNGS, COMMUNITY MEALS, FOOD FESTIVALS** were all suggested as a means of creating safe space to celebrate food and culture both local and from around the world. Belfast Friendship Club which is freely accessible to all and meets in Common Grounds every week was

mentioned by a number of respondents who attend it but others said that while it was a great initiative for many people, it was “not everyone’s cup of tea” In the same way Common Grounds café and Press 29 were considered great assets but it was noted that “they’re not affordable for a lot of people who live in the area”.

**POP UP MARKET** at front of City Church on Wed afternoons when students are not in lectures – anyone could bring things to sell.

### **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

#### **AFTER SCHOOL CLUB and YOUTH CLUB/ACTIVITIES**

This was mentioned by both families and other residents. Some agencies have tried to deliver these in the past without success. Perhaps a co design process with families and children might support the development of an accessible project. The suggestion was that student volunteers could be involved, and clubs could be made fun with some sporting and games activities too.

**PLAY OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN** – a significant number of respondents suggested this, as parents don’t believe that Botanic Gardens is a safe place to let their children go to play. Streets are considered very dangerous due to traffic and most houses with families do not have any outdoor space.

### **ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

**A MEN`S GROUP/WORKSHOPS/MEN`S SHED**, this was suggested as a targeted means of engaging the men who are seeking asylum and living temporarily in the area. While in the asylum process (with very limited exceptions) they are unable to work and are seen to be hanging out on the streets due to a lack of things to do. It should be open to all as others would also benefit.

**SPORTS OPPORTUNITIES** were suggested by agencies and by young people. It is felt that there are areas such as at the green space by the river where work could be done to ensure there was a safe shared space where football or other games could be played. This could be developed to include a separate playground. Football, swimming and karate were all specifically mentioned.

**SEWING OR CRAFT GROUPS** could be a means of bringing people together and several people said they would potentially be interested in this and could contribute skills.

**MUSIC CLASSES and SESSIONS** were considered a means of harnessing and expressing some of the cultural diversity within the area. It was commented upon that there is a small group already who meet and play at Common Grounds some Sundays and that it brings a sense of community to the area.

**RECYCLING GROUP** – Holyland specific workshops and projects which could be creative and feed into other projects could potentially bring people together.

### **COMMUNICATION**

**MEANS OF COMMUNICATION - COMMUNITY NOTICE BOARD – WHATSAPP GROUP.** There is no cohesive means of conveying information within the area. Comments such as “stuff is happening & not everyone knows” was common.

## **COMMUNITY SAFETY**

**TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP** – to make the area safer for all, especially children. There was a common concern among both families and longer-term residents about road safety. The absence of a playground or pedestrian crossings was mentioned often. Parking on pavements is a serious concern with several respondents saying that it is only a matter of time before a child is seriously injured or killed.

When speaking about traffic management it was suggested that this be seen as a wider project which could see some of the narrower streets adjacent to the river, where there are significant numbers of families, being developed into greener safer spaces. The potential for one way only streets, parking only on one side of the road or even some pedestrian zones were mentioned. It was felt that working on a visionary project with the safety of the most vulnerable at its core could potentially bring people together who would not normally mix.

## **COMMUNITY SPACE AND ACTIVITY**

### **IDENTIFY AND USE SHARED COMMUNITY SPACE.**

Lack of “community owned space” was cited as a barrier to running activities but areas which it was suggested could be used more included,

In front of City Church–popup market–noticeboard–storytelling corner

Dept of Infrastructure land on river – could be developed both as a play area and a dedicated space for ball games which could also be used for BBQs and as a common resource. One person cited the type of places you see in big American cities where young people play basketball.

The unused shop on Rugby Ave was mentioned by a few people as a possible community meeting hub. More use of the Horsey Hill area for community events was also suggested.

**COMMUNITY CENTRE** – A hub for all the needs of the community particularly children and young people would be ideal. It would recognise that the Holyland is partially a family area and should be treated as such.

**MORE ACTIVITIES TO CONNECT WITH RIVER LAGAN** should be looked at in terms of future planning across Belfast and it would be helpful if there could be a community vision of what this could look like for the Holyland prior to agencies beginning to lead on this.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS WHICH COULD ALSO INCREASE COHESION**

**COMMUNITY CLEAN UPS** – to improve the look of the area and meet the neighbours. This was a common suggestion from students and to a lesser degree other residents. Some residents however felt the onus for cleaning up should be on the council, not a community activity.

**GRAFFITI REMOVAL GROUP/MURAL DEVELOPMENT** – this was an attempt by many to look for a positive way to address the issue of graffiti. It is recognised that where there are murals there is much less likelihood of graffiti. Lack of strategy means that some graffiti must be removed within a stated time frame, such as that on HMOs, while other graffiti has remained in place for months.

One HMO landlord explained that as soon as they repaint their wall it is an instant blank canvas which simply attracts taggers. Even effective removal can have a negative impact with a range of different paint colours making the area look unkempt. A group could look at all removals using the same paint and how murals could be designed and resourced ensuing a high standard of art and with design and procurement which involves property owners from the start. A group could also ensure that work wasn't "patchwork", and that the area had a cohesive feel.

**MORE GARDENING, NATURE, AND GREENING PROJECTS** – many recognised that the Holyland Community Garden and Wildflower Alley are excellent initiatives but there is a call for this type of work to be spread right across the area. Some respondents were however unaware of their existence. There is an appreciation of the tree planting which has already taken place, supported by landlords, but it is felt that the more the better. The benefits for wellbeing would be felt by all. Further development of the area at the bottom of Carmel Street would be welcomed as would development of the land adjacent to Stranmillis Embankment.

## **SERVICES**

**ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME FOR OLDER PEOPLE** to support older or infirm residents in times of need, particularly during winter when it might be difficult to get out and about.

**A COMMUNITY RUN AFFORDABLE LAUNDRETTE** to provide an affordable way to dry clothes in homes with no outdoor space - "but don't reinvent the wheel. What about seeing if we work with the one already here, say one night a week and use it as a social space?"

## **REDUCING ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

- **DRUG OUTREACH WORK**
- **CCTV** covering the area would make people feel safer and discourage criminal activity.
- **ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR WORK**

## **COMMUNITY REGENERATION**

- **GROUP TO REGULARLY CATALOGUE ISSUES IN THE AREA AND FOLLOW UP ON THEM**
- **IMPLEMENTATION OF EXISTING ACTION PLANS**
- **AFFORDABLE HOUSING GROUP**
- **A HOUSING AUDIT to benchmark the quality of housing stock**

## **PERSONAL COMMITMENT FROM RESPONDENTS WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE SKILLS AND RESOURCES THEY COULD BRING TO COMMUNITY INITIATIVES**

Only a small number of residents said they were willing to be involved in initiating projects, a larger number said they would support delivery of projects dependent upon what the projects were, and many said they would attend or take part on the same basis.

It was clear that broadly speaking, student residents do not feel that they want to engage in initiating or supporting projects. However, many did say that if the timing was right, they would attend larger community events such as the festivals or food related events and maybe take part in cleanups. Most, when asked about engagement in the local community, said they felt that they were living in the area for only 9 months or so and only during the week. Many say they go “home” at the weekend, they often have weekend jobs, and feel their long term social life is where their family is from. Perhaps this reflects the fact that most international students live in PBSAs and those who take tenancies in local communities are more likely to be from NI.

When volunteering was mentioned, it involved volunteering from all elements of the community. The Wider University and Lower Ormeau Action Plan has suggested volunteering projects for people seeking asylum and students however this audit, in the more defined area of the Holyland, suggests that students living here are not particularly interested in volunteering in the community and residents generally think that it should apply to the whole community as it would support long term integration.

## **SKILLS AND POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO COMMUNITY INITIATIVES FROM RESPONDENTS**

When asked what skills they might use to support community activities or what they could contribute residents mentioned,

- Time
- Project management abilities
- Admin experience
- Experience of previous community work
- Arranging venues
- Providing or serving refreshments
- Getting others on board
- Charity leadership and engagement skills
- Social media skills
- Teaching women sewing
- Just being friendly
- Arranging parties
- Teaching English to people seeking asylum
- Doing grant applications and seeking funding
- Organising clean ups
- Language skills/interpreting/translating
- Experience of being on boards
- Gardening and clean up experience.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Forward South Partnership will use the findings from this audit to develop initiatives that will build on existing skills, resources and good will and facilitate active citizenship, collaboration, and cohesion.

### **Forward South Partnership should explore work,**

- to ensure a summary of the findings of this report are made available and distributed in as timely a manner as possible and in an accessible format for all residents and stakeholders.
- which recognises that there are a number of communities of interest within this small area and attempts to find a way to support all of these to deliver on at least some of their aspirations.
- which recognises that there are different geographical areas within the Holyland, and these may require different strategies. This should aim to change the current narrative around the “haves” and “don’t haves.” It could potentially use the wins around residents parking and Wildflower Alley for a small percentage of the population in one area as an example of the potential for other small areas to create positive change e.g. safer roads in the Holyland streets on the river where there are more families with children, should people come together to exert influence.
- to bring together residents and stakeholders in a facilitated event to allow for prioritisation of the ideas put forward in this audit. This would inform future work. It is important that all be seen to have an equal say and so it should ensure that the quieter voices are engaged and heard and that those for whom English isn’t a first language are enabled to contribute.
- to then bring together those who are willing to contribute, to instigate a small number of community activities to evidence the effectiveness of the consultation process.
- to instigate effective forms of communication for all stakeholders in the area
- to explore the feasibility of instigating a mediative process to address what are perceived as opposing opinions, personality clashes and lack of equality in terms of positive change.
- to assess whether the Transformative Leadership Programme previously delivered by FSP might be appropriate for a group of diverse emerging leaders from the area.
- to develop mechanisms for effective community involvement and then support agencies to ensure increased, broadened and more transparent representation when undertaking consultation.
- to work with other agencies to deliver on recommendations from previous reports.
- to recognise that that the exact complexities of the population may never be known and develop effective means of operating in such an environment.
- To address concerns about the increasing diversity not being managed by approaching TEO Racial Equality Unit to discuss a collaborative piece of work which would join up the work of its Roma and Traveller Subgroup and Refugee Integration Strategy in relation to ensuring integration in the unique setting of the Holyland population.

## **APPENDIX 1 ORGANISATIONS APPROACHED**

1. College Park Avenue Residents Association
2. Rugby Residents Association
3. Botanic Holyland Regeneration Association
4. Holyland Our Voice
5. Wildflower Alley
6. Holyland Community Garden
7. Common Grounds Café
8. Press29
9. Thai Bo Tree Kitchen
10. City Church 12- 24 University Avenue
11. Fitzroy Presbyterian Church
12. Inglesia NI Cristo Church of Christ
13. Ihsan Youth and Family Mosque
14. NI Muslim Family Association (NIMFA)
15. PSNI Neighbourhood Team
16. BCC Wider University and Lower Ormeau Intervention Programme
17. Belfast Health and Social Care Trust - Roma Health Project
18. Queen's University Belfast
19. University of Ulster
20. Choice Housing
21. Clanmil Housing Association
22. MEARS Housing
23. Boyle Properties
24. M&M Properties
25. Lairds Properties
26. Queens Quarter Housing
27. Lagan Backpackers
28. Belfast Trust Residential Facility
29. Botanic Primary School
30. South Belfast Foodbank
31. Chinese Welfare Association
32. Forward South Partnership
33. Mediation NI
34. CRUSE Bereavement Support
35. Belfast Intercultural Romanian Community CIC
36. Counselling All Nations Services
37. Sure Start Roma Project
38. HOMEPLUS
39. Belfast Friendship Club – NI Together CIC
40. Global Village
41. Spar
42. Wineflair
43. Castormart Ltd
44. M-R Motors
45. Autonomie
46. International House
47. McKee and Birnie Ltd
48. Wash and Tumble
49. Pharmaceutical Society
50. Infinite Sales Solutions
51. Cogent Management Consulting
52. Jehovah Witness Hall



## APPENDIX 2 ORGANISATIONAL AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY ASSETS in the Holyland Area

### RESIDENTS ASSOCIATIONS

**College Park Avenue Residents Association (CPARA)** This group includes residents of College Park Avenue and University Avenue. Their aim is to protect the residential core. Key projects include Wildflower Alley, Spring Gathering, environmental improvements such as street trees and hanging baskets, and the residents parking scheme.

**Rugby Road Residents Association** This group campaigns for retention of local historical features and environmental improvements. Together with CPARA they were involved in a long and successful campaign to develop the residents parking scheme.

**Botanic Holyland Regeneration Association (BHRA)** is a group of residents and stakeholders concerned with physical regeneration and environmental improvements of the area.

**Holyland Our Voice (HOV)** is a group set up to represent the breadth of long and short-term residents in the area.

### COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

**Wildflower Alley** is a community garden developed by residents themselves in what was originally a neglected alleyway behind houses in University Avenue, Rugby Road, and College Park Avenue. The alleyway is now gated and a vibrant award-winning community space which is used and maintained by residents of the houses it serves.

**Holyland Community Garden** is a small community garden behind City Church. Users meet every Thursday morning and local people are welcome to simply turn up or contact Stephen at [smccrory2020@outlook.com](mailto:smccrory2020@outlook.com) <mailto:smccrory2020@outlook.com>

**A Welcome Corner** with seats and planting at the front of City Church for use as a community space.

**Horsey Hill** – an alley which is being developed as a small greenway for community use

**Carmel Street Chatty bench** – a community space at the river end of Carmel Street

### CAFES AND RESTAURANTS

**Common Grounds Café** - 12-24 University Avenue.

A community café, a family run business open from 8-5pm every day.

**Press29** – 63 Agincourt Avenue.

Coffee shop open Mon – Thurs 10-6pm 10-4 Fri and Sat

**Thai Bo Tree Kitchen** – 65 – 67 University Avenue.

Thai restaurant, unlicensed – customers can bring their own bottle. Mon – Sat 12 – 9pm Sat 12 – 8.30pm

### FAITH GROUPS

**City Church 12- 24 University Avenue**

Office opens Tuesdays to Fridays 9.30am to 1.30pm. [neto@citychurchbelfst.org](mailto:neto@citychurchbelfst.org)

Sunday services at 11am.

Office opens Tuesdays to Fridays 9.30am to 1.30pm.

Kids Club at 6.30pm on Wednesdays. English Classes at 7pm on Thursdays.

Playgrounds at 10.30am on Thursdays. Community Garden at 10.30 am on Thursdays.

Christmas Meals on Christmas Day from 12pm to 2pm

**Fitzroy Presbyterian Church – 77 University Street**

Office hours Tues – Fri 10-3.30pm. [roberta@fitzroy.org.uk](mailto:roberta@fitzroy.org.uk)

Sunday services 11am.

Memory Lane Service 1<sup>st</sup> Friday of each month, open to all but particularly for those with dementia and their carers

Friday night Youth Club 6.30 – 9pm

Baby and Tots Wed 10.30 12md

Once a month community cook for people living in Asylum hotels.

**Inglesia NI Cristo Church of Christ - 2-4 University Ave**

Sunday service – 10am [rpolancos@gmail.com](mailto:rpolancos@gmail.com)

**Ihsan Youth and Family Mosque - 143A Ishan Masjid and School.**

School and Mosque – provides services to the Muslim youth and their families across Northern Ireland

**Jehovah Witness Hall – 2A Magdala Street**

Place of worship. Meetings see notice board outside

**NI Muslim Family Association (NIMFA) – 7 Rugby Road**

Community centre providing services and activities for the Muslim community. Dedicated to maintaining Islamic culture and values whilst integrating into the wider community. Provide services including Arabic and Islamic school, 4yr to GCSE along with social activities. Open to the Muslim community and general public for a wide variety of services and support.

**STATUTORY BODIES – with specific Holyland input**

**PSNI Neighbourhood Team**

There are 4 named neighbourhood officers for the Holyland Area who provide a dedicated policing presence in the community in order to build long term relationships, address complex anti-social behaviour problems, investigate local crime and help communities resolve conflicts. For up to date contact details see <https://www.psni.police.uk/about-us/local-policing/belfast-city/lisburn-road-local-neighbourhood-policing-team-lnpt>

**Belfast City Council (BCC)**

**BCC Antisocial Behaviour Officers**

Anti-social behaviour in the area can be reported to [communitysafety@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:communitysafety@belfastcity.gov.uk) or given by phone to Keith Addy, South Belfast Anti-social Behaviour Officer on - 028 9032 0202 (ext. 3298) or 078 7668 6660

**BCC HMO Office** - Non-compliance with legislation or non-licensing of a suspected HMO can be reported at [nihmo@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:nihmo@belfastcity.gov.uk) as can antisocial behaviour inside or within the garden or yard of an HMO property.

**BCC Night time Noise Team** – operates from 8pm – 4am and can be contacted at 02890373006 or at [envhealth@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:envhealth@belfastcity.gov.uk)

## **BCC Wider University and Lower Ormeau Intervention Programme**

A Policing and Community Safety Partnership project which works across 3 Strategic Themes to

1. Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
2. Improve community cohesion
3. Increase wellbeing of residents.

Alongside continued operational planning for peak periods in the year [rafters@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:rafters@belfastcity.gov.uk)

## **Belfast Health and Social Care Trust - Roma Health Project**

Supports access to services for Roma families with a focus on Early Years

### **FURTHER EDUCATION ESTABLISHMENTS**

**Queen's University Belfast (QUB)** has a large campus and many departments some of which are based in or border the Holyland area.

QUB offers academic degrees at various levels and across a wide range of subjects.

**QUB Neighbourhood Engagement Team** investigates where there are complaints about student behaviour, gives advice to students on community living and reports issues of concern to the respective college. They do this not only for QUB but also on behalf of the teaching colleges of **Stranmillis and St Mary's** as well as **Belfast Metropolitan College**.

[community@qub.ac.uk](mailto:community@qub.ac.uk)

## **Ulster of University (UU)**

Higher Education Institution providing a wide variety of courses.

**Community Relations at UU** works in partnership with and supports statutory agencies working in the area as well as with residents' groups. This is alongside delivering services to support students' health and wellbeing.

[up.calvert@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:up.calvert@ulster.ac.uk)

### **ACCOMODATION PROVIDERS**

**Choice Housing** – Headquarters - Leslie Morrell House, 37-41 May Street, Belfast.

Housing Association which manages a number of properties in the Holyland area including FOLD accommodation.

**Clanmil Housing Association** - Headquarters - 3 Waring Street, Belfast.

Housing Association which manages a number of properties in the Holyland area.

**MEARS Housing** – NI Headquarters - 14 Britannic Terrace, Belfast BT12 5NX.

UK housing Solution Provider which holds the Home Office contract to provide asylum accommodation and support in NI – manages a number of properties in the Holyland area.

### **Private Landlords.**

There are many individual private landlords operating in the Holyland area and the majority have no public facing contact details. The main larger landlord businesses which have physical offices in or adjacent to the Holyland area include.

**Boyle Properties** – 1 Rugby Ave - <http://www.boyleproperties.co.uk/>

**M&M Properties** - 26 University Ave - <https://www.mandmpropertyservices.com/>

**Lairds Properties** – 5 University Street - <https://www.rslaird.co.uk/>

**Queens Quarter Housing** – 153 University Street.  
Hostel Accommodation

**Lagan Backpackers** – 121 Fitzroy Avenue.  
Backpacker accommodation

**Belfast Trust** – 57 College Park Avenue.  
Residential facility

**Sort term rental accommodation** – there are a number of properties for rent in the area on a range of websites including Airbnb.

## **SCHOOLS**

**Botanic Primary School** – 6 Botanic Court  
Provides nursery and primary education for up to 210 children from a diverse range of ethnic, faith and socioeconomic backgrounds who live in the wider catchment area. Open term time September to June.

## **COMMUNITY VOLUNTARY GROUPS**

**South Belfast Foodbank – 119 University Avenue**  
Aims to alleviate food poverty, providing emergency food supplies and signposting for emergency fuel and gas. Opening hours Mon – Fri 10am – 5pm  
[info@southbelfast.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:info@southbelfast.foodbank.org.uk)

**Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) – 1 Stranmillis Embankment**  
Open 9am – 4pm weekdays to support the Chinese community around integration, capacity building, dealing with hate crime and to build links between NI and China. Also support other minority ethnic groups to build their capacity hosting several initiatives in their building  
[office@cwa-ni.org](mailto:office@cwa-ni.org)

### **Forward South Partnership's Roma Support Hub (RSH)**

Provides weekly immigration and welfare clinics and has a helpline for making referrals to other services such as food banks, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Education Authority and offers a drop-in service to support people with form filling or contacting their doctor. It also facilitates a weekly women's group.

### **FSP Holyland Community Capacity Worker**

The key focus is on developing the use of existing community assets, both physical and social, to build capacity and increase delivery of programmes and events.

### **FSP Social Supermarket**

### **Mediation NI – 83 University Street**

Provides services, expertise, and support to manage, resolve and transform conflict.

### **CRUSE Bereavement Support -10 College Green**

Provides bereavement support for adults and children, training, information, and awareness raising. Open Mon – Fri 9-5 and Tues – Thurs 5-8pm

### **Belfast Intercultural Romanian Community CIC – 1 Stranmillis Embankment.**

Office hours 10-5pm Mon – Sat. Offers a range of events including a morning Saturday School.

Provides education, cultural awareness, support, and translation services. Delivers a range of multicultural events. [belfastintercultural@gmail.com](mailto:belfastintercultural@gmail.com)

**Counselling All Nations Services (CANS) – 1 Stranmillis Embankment**

Provides culturally sensitive professional counselling and a range of talking therapies (in English or a common minority ethnic language) to adults experiencing excessive stress and/or mental ill health and whose first language is not English.

**Sure Start Roma Project – 1 Stranmillis Embankment Mon – Fri 8.30 – 5pm**

Supports Roma families with children under 6 to enter education. Provides ante natal, parent and toddler sessions and child development programmes.

**HOMEPLUS – 113 University Street**

Primarily serves asylum seekers and refugees providing a drop-in centre with food every weekday, shower facilities, and sandwiches to homeless people 365 nights a year. A women's centre provides trips for families and social activities.

**Belfast Friendship Club – NI Together CIC**

Belfast Friendship Club is held 7-9pm every Thursday in Common Grounds Café – everyone welcome and tea and coffee are provided free of cost. Delivers a range of workshops and training most of which are free to community groups. [s.mitchell@together-cic.org](mailto:s.mitchell@together-cic.org)

**Cooltura Polish Community Centre – 1 Stranmillis Embankment**

Seeks to establish a positive alternative environment for Polish minority ethnic people together with those from Belfast that generates social development and good community relations among participants. [info@coolturani.co.uk](mailto:info@coolturani.co.uk)

**BUSINESSES**

**Global Village – 87 University Street.**

Hostel accommodation.

**Spar – 27 University Avenue.**

Store selling groceries, hot food, and drinks. Open 7am – 11pm Mon –Turs 7- 10pm Fri, 8am – 10pm Saturday, 9am – 11pm Sun.

**Wineflair – 39 Agincourt Avenue.**

Off license and grocery express. Open Mon – Sat 10am – 9.50pm Sun 11am – 9.50pm

**Castormart Ltd – 102 University Avenue**

Industrial castors and wheels sales. Opens Mon – Thurs 9- 5pm, Fri 9-1pm

**M-R Motors - 2A Dudley Street**

Car servicing and repairs

**Autonomie - 4 Sandhurst Road.**

Supports the inclusion of young disabled people into the community by offering support and advice in education, social, and leisure activities and the promotion of independence and transition into adult working life.

**International House – 109-111 University Street.**

Provides Teaching of English as an additional Language and Teacher Training Courses – open 9-5pm Mon – Fri

**McKee and Birnie Ltd – 91 Rugby Ave.**

Paint and decorating sundries distributor – opens Mon – Fr 9.30 – 5.30pm Contact Noel McKee  
02890233609

**Prana Yoga & Fitness - 91 University St**

**Hospitality Ulster – 91 University Avenue**

The trade body for Hospitality in Northern Ireland

**Wash and Tumble – 120 Agincourt Avenue.**

Launderette - Service Washes, Self Service, Dry-Cleaning. Commercial Laundry Contracts.

**Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland - 73 University Street.**

The regulatory and professional body for pharmacists in Northern Ireland.

**Ibis Hotel – 75 University Street**

Currently closed to the public.

**Dukes Hotel – 65 – 67 University Street**

Currently closed to the public.

**Infinite Sales Solutions – 169 University Street**

Sales and marketing agency.

**Cogent Management Consulting – 169 University Street**

Management consultancy

**Redbox Recording Studios – 173 University Street**

Recording Studio

## **APPENDIX 3 SOME RELEVANT PHYSICAL and COMMUNITY ASSETS**

accessible for, but not in the Holyland.

### **Healthcare**

- Belfast City Hospital
- Bradbury Health Centre
- A range of GP practices

### **Primary Schools within 1.5 miles**

- Scoil an Droichead
- St Malachy's PS
- Holy Rosary PS
- St Michael's PS
- St Brides PS
- Fane St PS
- Nettlefield PS

### **Secondary Schools within 1.5 miles**

- St Joseph's College
- Methodist College Belfast
- Royal Belfast Academical Institution
- Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School
- Wellington College
- Breda Academy School (2.8miles)

### **Jobs and Benefits Office**

Shaftesbury Square Jobs and Benefits Office

### **Funded and Staffed Community Voluntary Groups with services available to the area**

- Forward South Partnership Roma Hub
- Ballynafeigh Community Development Association
- Shaftesbury Community and Recreation Centre
- Mornington Community Project

### **Recreational facilities**

- Shaftesbury Recreation Centre
- PE Centre QUB
- Botanic Gardens
- Ulster Museum

### **Shops, Cafes, and businesses in**

- Botanic Avenue
- Ormeau Road
- Dublin Road

### **NI Somali Association – 185A Ormeau Road**

## **APPENDIX 4 -SOME RELEVANT POLICIES**

### **Programme for Government**

The Northern Ireland Executive is committed to developing a long-term, strategic Programme for Government. This is based on a shared and strategic vision for the future which aims to improve wellbeing for all. It is anticipated that the new Programme for Government will bring a new focus to deliver lasting, real and positive change in people's lives.

It will build on the Outcomes-based approach that has defined strategic planning across the public sector since 2016, and reflect the messages contained in New Decade New Approach.

### **Programme for Government Framework Outcomes**

1. Our children and young people have the best start in life
2. We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment
3. We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect
4. We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives
5. Everyone can reach their potential
6. Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon neutral
7. Everyone feels safe – we all respect the law and each other
8. We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives
9. People want to live, work and visit here.

### **The Executive Office: Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025**

This presents a number of recommendations which should be taken into consideration when looking to the future in the Holyland area.

The Executive Office has overall responsibility for issues relating to minority ethnic groups in NI. The draft Refugee Integration Strategy is underpinned by the Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025. It sets out how Government will take action to support refugees and asylum seekers to ensure they are treated fairly, do not suffer injustice and have every opportunity to realise their full potential and live as valued members of the community.

### **The Draft Refugee Integration Strategy 2022-27**

*“Our vision is for a cohesive and shared society where refugees and asylum seekers are valued and feel safe, are integrated into communities and are supported to reach their full potential.”*

It has identified the following desired outcomes:

- 1: Refugees and asylum seekers are valued and respected If refugees and asylum seekers are to integrate successfully it is critical that they feel valued and respected in their communities.
- 2: Refugees and asylum seekers are safe and feel secure If refugees and asylum seekers are to integrate successfully it is critical that they feel safe in their communities and do not live in fear of persecution or discrimination.
- 3 – Refugees and asylum seekers exercise their rights and responsibilities We must ensure that Refugees and asylum seekers are aware of and able to exercise, their fundamental human rights and responsibilities alongside the rest of society.
- 4 – Refugees and asylum seekers are supported to achieve their full potential It is recognised that Refugees and asylum seekers need support to know how to access services and what support/services is available to them to enable them to if they are to achieve their full potential. Emphasis is placed upon partnership working and utilising the structures and relationships developed via the community planning process. Integration of refugees into local communities and society is a common goal that all government departments, public authorities, district councils and community and voluntary sector partners must work towards to build a united and cohesive community.



**Roma Thematic Group**

As part of the Racial Equality Strategy, a separate Roma Thematic Group has been established to address the unique issues faced by the Roma communities.

## APPENDIX 5 – Holyland Community Assets Audit Survey – residents

### YOUR AREA

Which street do you live on?

Roughly how many properties or people do you think live in your street?

What number of are

- family units with children
- family units no children
- students
- asylum seekers

What proportion are

- long term residents
- short term residents

### YOUR HOUSEHOLD

How many people live in your home? Total number -

- 0-11
- 12-17
- 18-30
- 31-60
- 60+

How long have you lived there?

Are the adults (can tick more than one)

- Employed
- Unemployed – seeking work
- Not working
- Retired
- Students
- Volunteering
- Seeking Asylum

### Is your Home

- Owned by you.
- Privately rented
- Provided by MEARS
- Provided by a housing association or NIHE.

What is your nationality?

What are the nationalities of others in your house?

## THE COMMUNITY

Are you currently involved in any community activities?

- Yes/No
- If so which and in what capacity?

What type of community led work do you feel would improve the Holyland area

Would you like to be involved?

- Yes/No

Do you have any professional or personal skills which you might use to contribute to community activities in the Holyland? If so, what are they? e.g. time, skills, admin, seeking funding, arranging venues, providing refreshments, project management, getting others on board.

- Yes/No

If the answer is yes, do you give permission for FSP to contact you?

- Yes/No

Are there any initiatives they would like support to initiate and lead – short or longer term? If so, what are they?

If the answer is yes, do you give permission for FSP to contact you about being involved in initiating any activities?

- Yes/No

## BEING KEPT IN TOUCH

Would you like to be kept informed of events and issues in your community by Forward South Partnership?

- No/Yes

If yes what is your preferred means of contact?

- Phone no
- Email address

If you require information in a language other than English, please write below

**Any contact details provided will be retained by Forward South Partnership in line with data protection regulations.**

I give permission for Forward South Partnership to retain my contact details for the purposes of sharing information with me about events and issues in the Holyland area of Belfast.

Name

Contact

Date

Signed

## APPENDIX 6 – Holyland Community Assets Audit Survey Organisations

### YOUR INFORMATION

#### Name and address

Organisations - please describe briefly your organisational overviews: aim, main services, opening hours, contact details.

Business's – please describe briefly your business' main services, opening hours, contact details.

Do you give FSP permission to make the above information available to the general public – any written information having first been cleared with you to ensure accuracy.

Yes/No

How long has your business operated in the Holyland area?

### THE COMMUNITY

Is your organisation or business involved in any community activity currently or offering free services to residents of the Holyland area?

Yes/No

If yes, please describe

What type of work, involving organisations, do you feel would improve the Holyland area?

What organisational resources, professional or personal skills do you have: e.g. people, expertise, services, facilities, funding etc. which you might offer free of charge to support any community initiatives.

Would you like to be involved or lead on an initiative – short or longer term? If so, what?

If the answer is yes to the above, do you give permission for FSP to contact you?

Yes/No

Are there any initiatives your organisation/business would like support to initiate and lead – short or longer term?

Yes/No

If so, what are they?

If the answer is yes, do you give permission for FSP to contact you about being involved in initiating any activities?

Yes/No

**BEING KEPT IN TOUCH**

Would you like to be kept informed of events and issues in the Holyland area by Forward South Partnership?

No/Yes

If yes what is your preferred means of contact?

Phone no

Email address

**Any contact details provided will be retained by Forward South Partnership in line with data protection regulations.**

I give permission for Forward South Partnership to retain my contact details for the purposes of sharing information with me about events and issues in the Holyland area of Belfast.

Name

Role

Date

Signed