

Ballinacurra Weston Residents' Alliance

"The right to participate in decisions which affect one's life is both an element of human dignity and the key to empowerment – the basis on which change can be achieved."

– Amnesty International
Our Rights Our Future

"Participation and active involvement in the determination of one's own destiny is the essence of human dignity"

– Mary Robinson

Dear Minister,

The above quotes serve to highlight much of what is wrong with the Limerick Regeneration Project.

For the past four years, the Limerick Regeneration Agencies have pretended to engage with the communities under their remit; there was no real consultation, no real participation and no real role in decision making for residents, only the illusion of it. In that time, 900 families have been displaced, 700 homes have been demolished and there are now more boarded-up houses than ever before. Anti-social behaviour, illegal dumping and rat infestations have thrived, making living conditions severely worse and encouraging people to leave.

None of our TD's or Councillors actually lives in a regeneration area and the legislation establishing the Agencies has, for the most part, relegated them to the sidelines.

Our Council officials and elected representatives have become little more than auctioneers, as homeowners are bought out for a pittance and turned into tenants; with 'compensation' of €35,000, you can rent a house from the Council in exchange for the deeds to your home. Alternatively, you can wait for your new regeneration home to be built, or you can be bought out for the 'market rate', which would in effect leave you homeless.

Regeneration was supposed to restore confidence and stability in the communities with the establishment of a dedicated Garda service for regeneration areas, but this never happened and most residents don't feel safe in their homes. We did get a CCTV system, but it's not monitored.

Depopulation is the order of the day; as soon as a house is boarded up it becomes a target for anti-social and criminal elements. More often than not, the residents next door are elderly, vulnerable and afraid for their lives. In Ballinacurra Weston, such houses are systematically looted, vandalised and eventually burnt-out. Penetrating damp, leaking water mains, illegal dumping, junkies and rats have become the new neighbours. Indeed, the impact that a boarded-up house has on the residents living next door to it can only be described as intimidation by proxy.

Our human rights and dignity are being denied and our best interests are not being represented. This needs to change and the Ballinacurra Weston Residents' Alliance (BWRA) is hopeful that the change in government will also mean a change in approach towards regeneration with the involvement of residents in a real and meaningful way.

For our part, the BWRA is working with other communities to develop a human rights based approach to regeneration and we recently launched '*Residents First – towards real community participation in regeneration areas*' at the University of Limerick summer school '*Renewing Local Democracy Through Civic Engagement*'.

We ask that you take the time to read our proposal and we hope that you will lend your support to real community participation in regeneration areas.

Matt Collins,
Chairperson,
Ballinacurra Weston Residents' Alliance,
4th July 2011