

# REGENERATION – A MODEST PROPOSAL

On 6<sup>th</sup> December 2007, the Weston Gardens Residents' Association formally presented Mr. Brendan Kenny and Mr. Brendan Hayden of the Southside Regeneration Agency with a comprehensive proposal for the regeneration of Weston Gardens, Rosbrien.

Entitled, '*Renewal Integration Regeneration*', our proposal was based on everything that Mr. Kenny said was possible for our area at an earlier meeting with our Association in November 2007.

We asked the Southside Regeneration Agency to acknowledge receipt of our proposal for regeneration in their vision document, *Our Community, Our Vision, Our Future*. This was not facilitated and now it is claimed that the Agency is waiting for us to make up our minds and would welcome any proposals or suggestions we have. What follows below is an abridged version of our proposal.

## RENEWAL, INTEGRATION, REGENERATION

(n) **regeneration:** *renewal of lost parts; rebuilding or revitalising of an area, eg the centre of a city.*

It is important that we clarify from the outset the definition of the word '*regeneration*', as we understand it and to clearly state how we expect it to be applied to our area.

We see the regeneration of Weston Gardens, Rosbrien as involving:

- the *rebuilding* of No.'s 1 & 2 Weston Gardens,
- the *renewal* and refurbishment of No.3 Weston Gardens, and
- the *revitalising* of our homes, gardens and general area.

## REBUILDING & REFURBISHMENT

We require:

- The demolition and immediate rebuilding of No's 1 & 2 Weston Gardens, to be disposed of as the Southside Regeneration Agency see fit.
- The refurbishment of No. 3 Weston Gardens, which upon completion would be disposed of as our Community see fit.
- A turning point to facilitate a refuse collection.
- Access to the backs of our homes.

## REMEDIAL & INTEGRATING WORKS

These works would be fundamental to the integration of old and new. We require:

- Insulation and re-slating of our roofs.
- New matching walls, pillars and gates.
- New matching driveways..
- Removal of most hedges and landscaping of our gardens.

## THE BOUNDARY WALL

Limerick City Council officially extinguished the right of way that exists between Weston Gardens, Rosbrien and Clarina Avenue, Ballinacurra Weston in May 2005. We still support the erection of a boundary wall as we require a turning point for a refuse collection and we would like our area to retain some distinction.

We understand that Clarina Park, Clarina Avenue, Crecora Avenue and Beechgrove Avenue in Ballinacurra Weston are to be demolished. With the exception of Clarina Park, it is our opinion that these areas could be saved. However, we accept that ultimately this a matter for the residents of those areas to decide.

Our attitude towards a right of way between Weston Gardens and the newly regenerated area will depend on the facilities (if any) that will be built there. If it is the case that little or no facilities are to be built, then we see no point in having any access between the two areas.

We have no desire to live openly next to a more densely populated ghetto than the one that already exists. Family-orientated and state-of-the-art facilities that will attract non-residents into the area are required. We would like to see:

- **A Garda Sub Station or Base.** We are aware that drug abuse, crime and anti-social behaviour are re-emerging as problems in parts of the newly regenerated area of Ballymun, Dublin. A permanent Garda presence would help prevent the re-occurrence of existing problems.

In the interim, there is an urgent need for the full implementation of the first recommendation of the *Fitzgerald Report (3.1)* to have a highly visible Garda presence at all times in our troubled estates, in order to restore confidence and stability in the communities. This is especially needed in Southill, where people are vacating their homes at an alarming rate.

- **A Sports and Leisure Facility.** We recognise particularly the role of sporting facilities and the support of sporting clubs in addressing the alienation of young people in our society. Such a facility should include a 25-metre swimming pool, which would attract business from outside the area.

- **A Community Centre** with supervised indoor and outdoor playground. (eg: *Tons of Fun* or *Gymboree* meets the *Peoples Park* playground). This would also attract business from outside the area. However, residents should be able to avail of most services free of charge. This facility could provide pre-school services and staff to help marginal or 'at risk' Families develop better parenting skills.

- **Education Facilities** - improve existing primary school facilities and introduce better Adult Education facilities. These could be located next to the new Community Centre. Establish dedicated teams to address Social and Family problems, including issues of educational disadvantage as recommended in the *Fitzgerald Report (3.3)*.

- **A good mix of private, affordable and social housing.** Our definition of 'a good mix' means that social & affordable housing should be peppered throughout the area, as opposed to the internal segregation of such housing, which would undermine the objective of developing an integrated community and perpetuate the stigma attached to social housing.

- **A Drugs Treatment Centre** should be considered for the greater Southside area to help tackle the serious problem of drug addiction, especially heroin, as outlined in the *Fitzgerald Report (3.8)*. This should involve an outreach programme. We are opposed to a 'drop in centre' for addicts, as we believe that such centres achieve little in tackling the problem.

- **An Equestrian Centre.** It has been estimated that there are some 600 unlicensed horses in Ireland and that 250 of these can be found in Limerick. There is a genuine horse culture in Limerick. The problem of unlicensed and 'wandering' horses is one that needs to be dealt with in the interest of the wider community and for the benefit of those who have a genuine love of horses. We would like to see the establishment of an equestrian centre that follows the example of the *Festina Lente Foundation*, Old Connaught Avenue, Bray, Co.Wicklow.

As we understand it, the new regenerated area will have no gardens or green areas; this is regrettable. However, this centre could also provide allotments to those interested in gardening and horticulture. It is essential that such a centre be given serious consideration when developing regeneration plans for the greater Southside area.

Talk is cheap. We have spent the past seven years talking about our troubles and we have had many promises made. The time for talk is over. What we require now is a firm commitment in writing so there can be no doubt in our minds about the Agency's intentions towards our area.

We understand that the Agency's remit is vast and that our area is small. We have always viewed what happened to our estate as a microcosm for what has happened in Southill and our other troubled estates and as a warning for what could happen elsewhere if the situation isn't taken into hand.

Thankfully, Limerick has been given the opportunity to resolve these problems through the faithful implementation of the *Fitzgerald Report*. This is an opportunity that should not be squandered, or diluted for the benefit of developers. Indeed, there is a unique opportunity for the Gardaí to revolutionise Community policing (*Fitzgerald Report 3.1*). This is crucial to restoring confidence and stability in our troubled Communities and for ensuring that problems are not merely displaced.

The task ahead of both the Northside and Southside Regeneration Agencies is monumental and we wish them every success in their endeavours.

Our Association worked hard on our proposal and has attempted to engage with the Southside Regeneration Agency through a series of scheduled meetings, which Mr. Kenny consistently ended without reaching an agreement. He then announced publicly that we were outside his Agency's remit, and more recently announced that we are part of it. Clearly, it is not our residents who cannot make up their minds.

**SIGNED, The Committee of the Weston Gardens Residents Association:**

**Cathal McCarthy, David Hammill, Jerry Carey, Seamus Breathnach, Heather Cunningham, Darren Maher**