

The **Real** Guide

to Regeneration

for Communities



*Making The Right Decision  
About Urban Regeneration*

This document is produced by Tenants First for tenants and community groups. It is based on experiences in local areas already “up for regeneration”. Our aim is to ensure that local authority tenants are empowered to make a clear and rational decision about the future of their own areas. That means to begin with making a decision about whether to say yes or no to the regeneration-degeneration agenda.

Tenants First can provide further advice if you need it - just get in touch or come along to one of our public meetings.

## About Tenants First

**Tenants First** is an independent forum of tenants and community workers who have come together to share information and experiences and to support each other on issues of common concern.

The central aim of **Tenants First** is to provide a strong collective voice for local tenants on issues related to their living and dwelling conditions. **Tenants First** provides support, advice and a space for tenants and community voluntary organisations to come together and share mutual experiences and concerns and to develop collective responses/ actions.

Membership is open to tenants, community voluntary organisations and activists. **Tenants First** is a non-party political, non-sectarian, equality based forum.

**Tenants First** operates in an independent and voluntary capacity. The work is directed through a central Steering Group, which is guided and informed by grassroots public meetings with tenants and community voluntary organisations.





## Making the right decision about regeneration

### *Urban Regeneration on the Agenda*

Dublin City Council has recently adopted a new approach to “regenerating” its flats complexes. The word “regeneration” has a positive ring to it – who could possibly be against it? Why would anyone be critical of the policy? Regeneration seems to offer so much – new housing, a better environment – but does it deliver?

In fact, “regeneration” means CHANGE, but the pluses and minuses of the agenda for change need to be carefully thought out before any community signs up for the medicine. It can mean some positive changes for communities, but it can also mean a lot of conflict, stress, disruption and fear, and there will be winners as well as losers, gains and losses. Indeed, so much is lost in the whole process (depopulation, demolition, redevelopment) that it might be smarter and more accurate to think of it in terms of degeneration and regeneration – taking local places apart (over many years) and putting them back together again in a radically different way.

### Do you want this to happen?

That’s a big question, and there are no easy answers. This document aims to provide some help. It pinpoints some critical issues to think about and inform yourself about before you can make a good decision about the future of your estate, your community. This is important - there are serious moves afoot to advance the regeneration agenda rapidly across the city, and many more estates are likely to be targeted soon.

Urban “regeneration”:

What does it mean?

What has happened elsewhere?

When “regeneration” comes on the agenda, experience in other estates tells us that some dramatic physical and social changes are being planned. It’s not exactly the same in each estate, but in general what the city council is trying to do looks like this:

- The existing flats complex will be demolished or partly demolished
- The site will be redeveloped, but at a much higher density. This will mean much more housing on the site and a big population increase
- The redeveloped site will no longer be solely local authority
- The regenerated complex will have a mix of private, “affordable”, and public housing
- Remaining tenants will be rehoused by the local authority either on site or in other places; however, the experience in Fatima Mansions and St. Michael’s Estate is that substantial sections of the population have left before the whole process is finished

Increasingly, all of this won’t be carried out directly by the local authority in the traditional way; instead the local authority will enter into a deal with a private developer, who will become the key driver of the project (this is called a public-private partnership, an approach encouraged by government since 2001 (DoE Circular HS 13/01))

The public housing and community facilities will be funded mainly through the sale of private apartments. Some new facilities may be developed, but what you get will depend on the deal that is struck between the local authority and the private developer.

**There have been fierce struggles over all of these issues and over what regeneration should be about. Communities have fought hard for social as well as physical regeneration – a community agenda. Another kind of regeneration – centred on social and community needs – is possible. But that will depend on how well you as a community can organise and act to influence the future of your estate.**



## What do you need to do? For starters:

**You have a big decision to make about the future of your estate**

### Making the decision locally

This is probably one of the most important decisions you will ever make as a community. Regeneration can easily be sold as an incredible break for communities – the promise of new housing seems especially rosy. Very often, older estates have been let run down, and people welcome the promise of change (any change!) without thinking things through carefully and without full information or meaningful dialogue. Some communities have agreed to demolition because they were vulnerable and at a very low point after years of bad maintenance, the drugs crisis, population decline, etc. But large, solid, stable communities are also being pressured to accept a demolition and redevelopment. Is this the right choice?

### Stop and take stock!

The central issue for communities is how the decision gets made to demolish or not. This is crucial. Don't allow agencies to impose decisions - you have to take the lead on this. People need full information, then you need to debate the positives and negatives, and then you need to evaluate your current situation and needs before you can decide the best way forward for you as a community:

### 1. Information and understanding:

- Develop a better understanding of what is happening behind the scenes: what plans do the city council have for your area and why?
- Develop your own questions
- Ask as many questions as you need to. Keep asking questions until you get straight and clear answers
- Get advice from local development organisations, other communities, Tenants First, etc.
- Find out what is going on in other estates: Dominick Street, Charlemont Street, Chamber Court, Dolphin House, Teresa's Gardens, Fatima Mansions, St. Michael's Estate, O'Devaney Gardens, and other flats complexes across the city
- Demand greater transparency and accountability from the local authority
- Your area will have at least one Dublin City Council official assigned to it. Find out who he/she is. If necessary go to the Assistant City Manger or City Manager to find out who is responsible. Demand clear answers from these city council officials, such as –
  - What are their future plans for your area?*
  - When will independent consultation take place with residents and community organisations?*
  - Why are they targeting your area for regeneration?*
  - Is demolition and redevelopment the right thing for your area?*
  - Why won't they invest in and improve the existing estate?*
- Ask your local councillor to be accountable, demand some clear answers –
- Why is this happening to your area?
- What are they doing about it?
- Why aren't they talking to local people about this?
- How much do they really know?
- What are they doing to safeguard tenants' rights?
- What are they doing to ensure that tenants are consulted in a meaningful way about the future of their estate?
- **Keep asking questions**

**Stop and take stock!**

**Keep asking questions**

You need to have dialogue and debate locally

2. Debate

Consider both sides of the argument about the demolition route. There are many crucial points that can easily be lost in the early battles or that can be glossed over when the officials arrive with flashy presentations and open days in hotels. But, is this kind of regeneration (involving depopulation, demolition and rebuilding) really the right choice for your community? Or should you look for a different approach?

You need to have dialogue and debate locally to answer these questions:

- Do you want your estate knocked down?
- What should the regeneration of your estate be about? Don't forget, this is about the conditions of your lives. That means the future of your homes, open spaces, facilities, etc., and the future opportunities and quality of life available to you and your children
- What will be the benefits of this approach?
- What are you going to lose if the estate is demolished and redeveloped (with much more housing units, many of them private)?
- What do different people in the locality stand to lose or gain if you take this option?
- Don't be coerced, don't have your rights taken away. Focus on all the issues. Keep asking questions. Make up your own mind about the future of your area.

3. Evaluate:

What are the strengths of the existing area? What do you want to hold on to? What do you want to protect? What would you hate to lose?

*Alternatives to demolition and regeneration: recognise the value of what you have and improve on it*

Home	Culture
Light	People
Open space	Landscape
Working class traditions of community solidarity	History
	Neighbours

**How do you find out what residents really want? How do you find out what the community's needs are? You need an independent survey to answer these questions.**

4. Make a democratic decision

Depopulation – Demolition – Redevelopment

OR

Keep the estate and community together – retain the existing space – look for refurbishment and precinct improvement



## Which way do you want to go?

Remember especially, you have the option and the right to decide what is best for your community. You have the right to look for a community agenda based on recognising the value of the existing estate and the living community and improving on these strengths.

## Yes or no to demolition and rebuild?

Should you say yes or no to a plan based on demolition and redevelopment by PPP? A case can be made for and against. A lot will depend on the local situation and on local histories. If the estate is at a very low point due to social problems, population loss, bad maintenance, etc., it might look like the only choice. However, other options like refurbishment might be a smarter option for many communities in a stronger position.

### The case for “yes”

For some communities, depending on conditions on the estate, there will be a strong case to agree to a programme of demolition and redevelopment. The case for saying “yes” is based on the promise of physical change, new amenities and social investment.

- You will get new dwellings and new facilities at the end of the process
- There will be some welcome physical change and improvement and the chance of a new start
- You will have a chance to negotiate for support for a programme of social regeneration (this can be a hard fight and there are no guarantees)

### The case for “no”

The promise of physical change and new accommodation will sound good to a lot of people. Why might you want to say no? Why might you want to look for an alternative policy? Here are some reasons why in some places the best decision might be to **JUST SAY NO** to demolition and regeneration.

The critical issue has to do with what you will really gain - what will regeneration actually deliver, and in whose benefit? - and what you will lose. There are many risks and there is much uncertainty. Consider the following:

- Regeneration is unlikely to deliver houses in the inner city. Planners are targeting new apartments and higher densities in the main, though there might be some duplexes
- Higher densities mean a bigger population and either taller buildings or less open space
- There will be a significant development of private housing to pay for the new public housing and facilities
- There will be a big loss of public land
- The whole process will take many years – many years of difficult negotiations, disruption and living in the middle of a building site
- You might have to undertake short term moves to flats elsewhere during the transition, or else remain living in a rundown estate and a terrible environment, especially for kids
- Existing community residents and families may be displaced through the whole process; many families will leave because of the poor conditions during the long period (years) of negotiations, demolition and transition
- Is there an alternative? **A community agenda for regeneration without demolition...?**



## If the community decides to say NO to demolition/regeneration, what should you do next?

You will need to campaign for a different vision of regeneration based on investment in the existing estate. We recommend the following areas for immediate action. This is bigger than any one person or any local organisation – you need the involvement over a long period of local people, tenants and residents, community activists, development workers and anyone else committed to the future of the estate and its people.

### Capacity and support

- Who's around you and who can help? Who's on your side?
- Identify and mobilise existing resources (local activists, CDPs, Drugs Task Force, community workers, etc.)
- Develop strong local structures
- Discuss all the issues, consult locally
- Consult with other communities dealing with these issues
- Get technical advice and help if you need it

### Setting a community agenda

- Develop clear arguments, agree your positions clearly
- Put together a Community Agenda for Regeneration. This needs to be a positive vision for change and improvement – new life without demolition. It could be based on:
  - Recognising the value of what you have and improving on it
  - Keeping the estate and community together
  - Retaining the existing space
  - Improving the precinct, refurbishing your homes
  - Investing in the existing estate and the living community (don't let them tell you this is not possible - government funding is available for this under the Remedial Works Scheme and the Area Regeneration Programme)
- Make sure community representatives have a clear mandate
- Put pressure on the statutory bodies to do their jobs properly
- Look for publicity, campaign for your rights
- Keep a clear head, stay united and organised, don't get divided or split
- Lobby politicians

## If the community decides to say YES to demolition/regeneration, what should you do next?

If you agree to a plan to pull down your flats and redevelop, there are many things you need to know and to do.

### 1. Get your own independent space

- Be aware that the regeneration process and the PPP arrangements can move very quickly
- Get your community organisations to advocate for you
- Keep your own space. Develop and build independent community structures/groups; the stronger your structures and organisations, the better chance of achieving a positive outcome for the community. All local stakeholders (residents, blocks' committees, CDPs and other community development groups) need to be involved. Don't let your community structures get divided or sidelined in the regeneration process. This structure will work as an independent local regeneration team throughout the whole process
- This needs to act as a locally based, independent group of people who will work on the regeneration from a community perspective. This can function as a separate space to discuss the issues and agree positions before dealing with any external stakeholders (city council, architects, private developers, consultants, etc.). This needs to be community-oriented, community-based and community-led
- Tenants and support groups need to come together within this and only deal with DCC through this local structure.
- Stick together during the process, don't get divided or split, stay united
- At key moments, organise a strategic advisory team including independent advisors with relevant expertise. Look for financial support to facilitate this, but make sure it remains independent and community controlled.

## Local Regeneration Team: A Possible Community Structure



## 2. Know what you want

- Consider a complete redevelopment – what should it look like?
- The physical provision of new housing is central, but you also need to look at social development, amenities, community development, open space, childcare, financial community gain, etc.
- Draw up a vision statement – an answer to these questions, setting out bottom lines.
- Take a look at some other examples of vision documents for ideas (e.g. Eleven Acres, Ten Steps (FGU), Past, Present, Future (St. Michael's Estate))
- Get ahead of the game, draw up your vision first – don't wait for DCC to turn up with its own plans, models and a ready-made "Community Charter"!
- At all times: keep your own independent space; keep asking questions

## 3. Democracy in Regeneration: Real Participation.

There are a number of supports you should look for in order to participate as the central stakeholders in a meaningful manner:

- Consultation should not take place after the decision has been made: independent community consultation should take place from day one.
- The community must be adequately resourced and have decision-making powers
- Tenants and residents must be paid for childcare costs to attend meetings
- Tenants and residents need access to their own independent experts – e.g. architects, planners, legal advisers, etc.
- Put together a plan to get funding
- A capacity building programme needs to commence before any engagement with the regeneration process. This means local activists and development groups working together, but it also means demanding external support to gear up for the challenges of participating in a major planning and development project.
- Open and honest discussion is vital between the residents and City Council officials
- The community must have proper input into any proposals, plans or ideas for their estates at every stage in the process
- Agendas and minutes for meetings should be agreed in advance
- Communities need resources for local newsletters to keep residents informed of all developments
- Formal best-practice guidelines from other areas should be adopted and honoured. This includes consultation, communication and independent financial resources.
- Keep your own independent space; keep asking questions

## St. Michael's Estate Vision Statement

Our overall aim for the regeneration of St. Michael's Estate shall be one whereby the residents of the estate are treated with dignity and integrity and are guaranteed quality of life, quality housing, quality services, quality community facilities and amenities within the newly regenerated estate. **Past, Present, Future**

## The Real Guide to Participation

**Information** - necessary for empowerment but seldom enough on its own

**Consultation** - gives people a restricted choice and allows comment

**Deciding together** - join the decision-making process without fully sharing the responsibility for carrying the decision through

**Acting together** - Not only do different interests decide together what is best, but they also form a partnership to carry it out. Acting together in partnership involves both deciding together and

then acting together. This means having a common language, a shared vision of what you want, and the means to carry it out. It will only happen if each partner feels they have an appropriate stake in the partnership, a fair say in what happens and a chance of achieving what they want

**Supporting Independent Community Initiatives** - help others do what they want – perhaps within a framework of grants, advice and support provided by the resource holder

### 4. Ways of doing the work

Regeneration involves many different groups and parties. They have to find a way of working together. This usually requires a partnership between Dublin City Council, residents, community workers, local representatives, state agencies and other relevant stakeholders. One approach that is being used in three flats complexes at the moment is a **Regeneration Board**. Ideally, this Board should follow these broad guidelines:

- The Regeneration Board should be inclusive of the community
- The Regeneration Board (agreed with the community) is established before any tender documents are released
- The Regeneration Board should have an independent chair and legal status
- Communities should seek to involve local Councillors directly in the participatory process to allow for more transparency and support
- Communities should also seek to involve an independent observer at all meetings of negotiation. The independent observer should produce annual or interim reports on the process.
- Participation must mean people have a say over the future of the estate – it is not a basic information-giving exercise (see the Box above, The Real Guide to Participation)

### Moving forward.

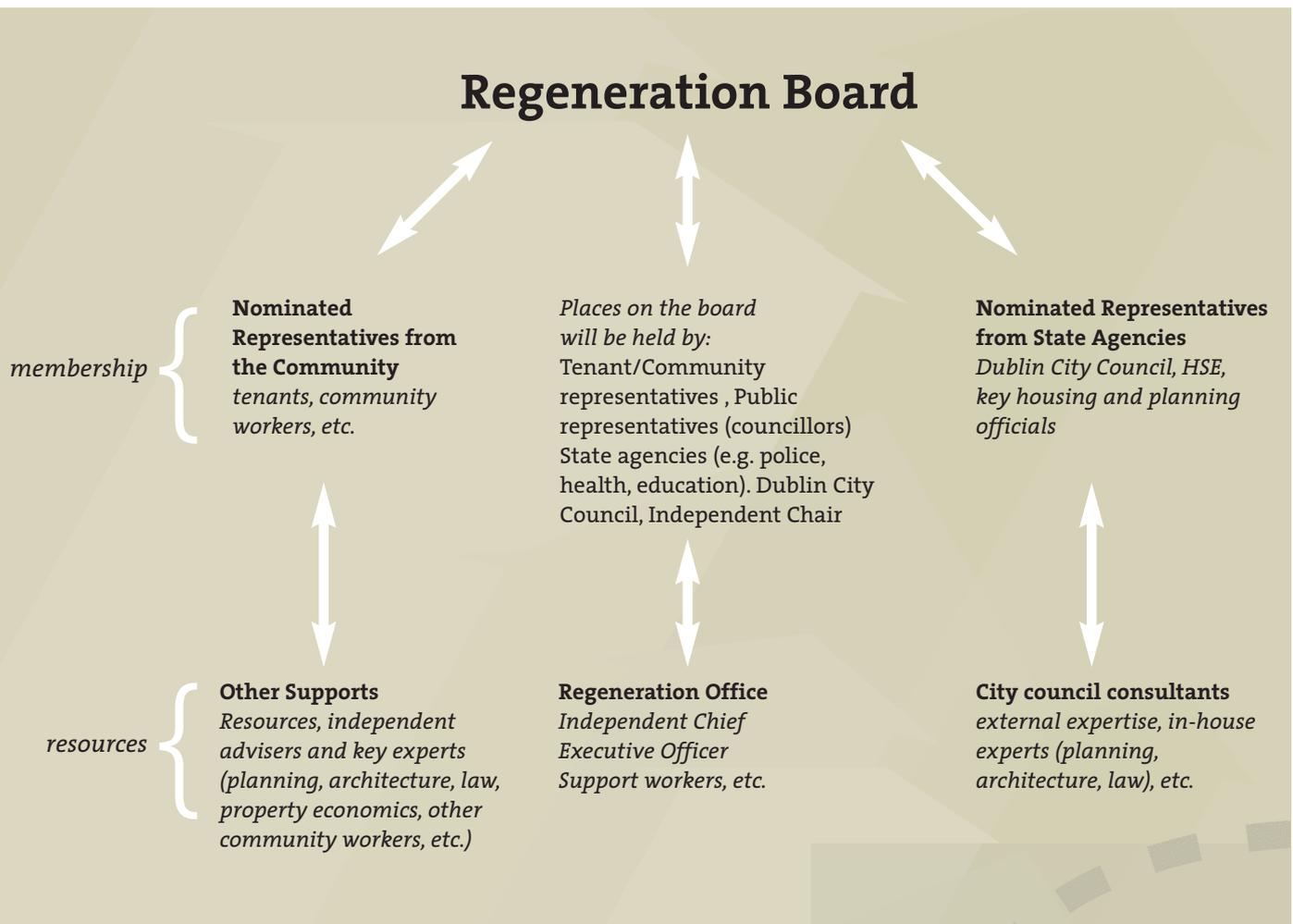
Once the Regeneration/PPP process is up and running you will have a steep learning curve ahead of you. You will need resources, support and independent advice from other communities and relevant experts.

Among other things you will need information and support to deal with:

- Tendering
  - Request for qualifications
  - Shortlisting of private developers
  - Request for proposals
  - Assessment of proposals (plans for demolition and rebuild)
  - Selection of a winning bid (i.e. the private developer who will do the construction)
  - Contract: Signing public-private partnership/joint venture agreement
- Planning
- Architecture and design
- Negotiating a master plan
- Transition
- Estate management in a mixed estate (with public, private and affordable housing)



## Possible structure for a Regeneration Board



*12 steps to making  
the right decision  
about regeneration*

**1** What is regeneration?

**2** Find out

**3** Understand it

**4** Think about it, Talk about it

**5** Value what you have

**6** Make a decision - YES or NO?

**7** Know what you want

**8** Set your own agenda

**9** Fight for what you want

**10** Organise locally

**11** Get resources

**12** Get what you want

*tenants  
first*

*This document was produced by the Steering Group of Tenants First in response to needs and concerns expressed by tenants and community workers at city-wide public meetings on regeneration. The following organisations currently have representatives on the Steering Group:*

Cork Street and Maryland Residents Association  
Davitt House Residents Association  
Dolphin Residents Association and Voluntary Groups  
Dublin Inner City Partnership  
Fatima Groups United  
Inner City Organisations Network  
Markets Area Community Resource Organisation  
O'Devaney Gardens Community Forum  
St. Michael's Estate Block's Committee and Regeneration Team.  
Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, Trinity College, Dublin

*A large number of other complexes have also affiliated to Tenants First.*

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