

Weston
Gardens
RESIDENTS'
ASSOCIATION



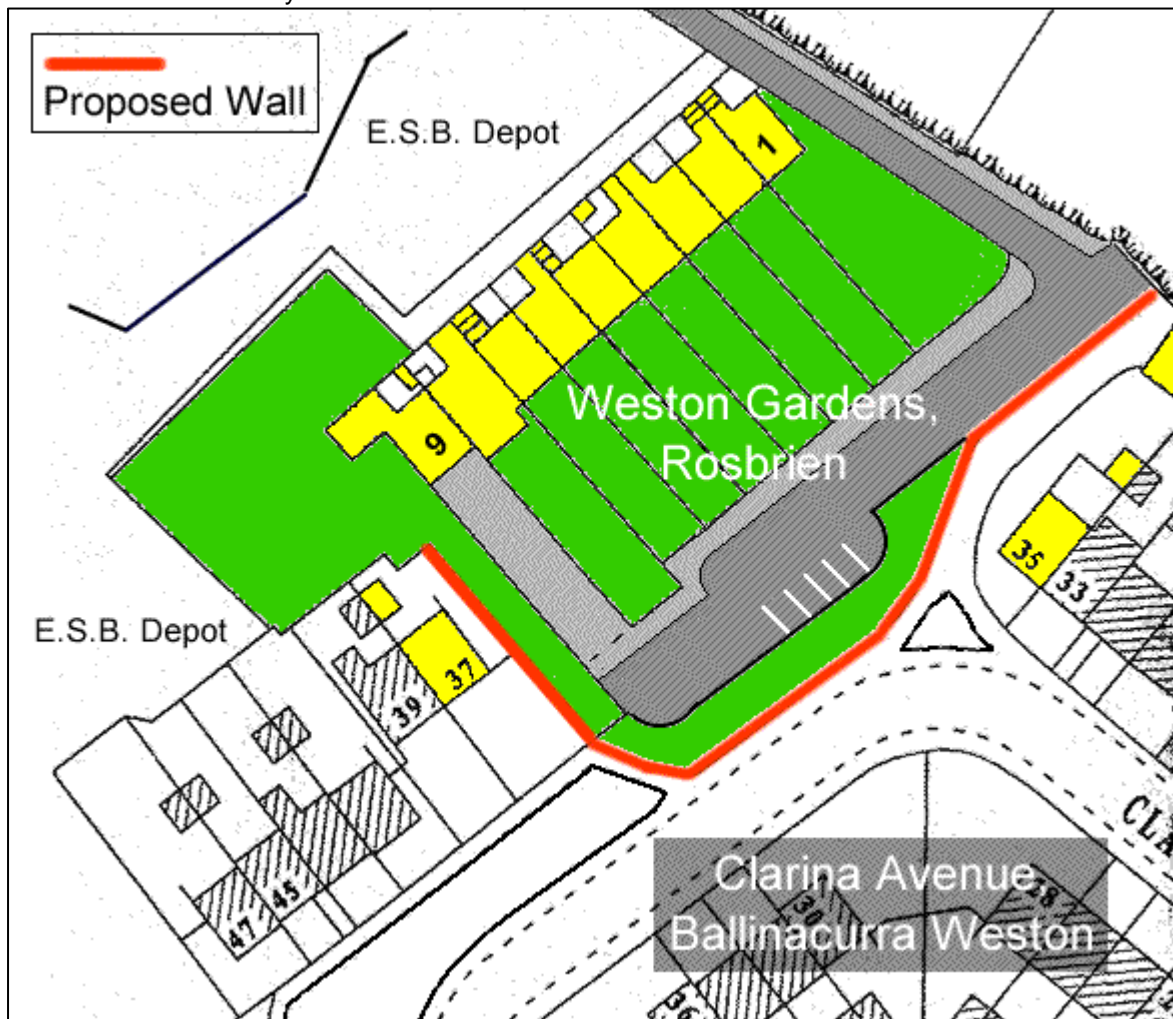
RENEWAL, INTEGRATION, REGENERATION

PROPOSAL TO THE
SOUTHSIDE REGENERATION AGENCY
FOR THE REGENERATION OF
WESTON GARDENS, ROSBRIEN



Above: Weston Gardens, Rosbrien. Since 2000, our area has endured an on-going campaign of criminal and anti-social behaviour aimed at forcing our residents out. Only through our constant vigilance, co-operation with the Gardaí and persistent complaints to Limerick City Council's Tenants Enforcement Office we have managed to turn the situation around.

Below: Reproduction of Limerick City Council plans to build a 3-metre high boundary wall between Weston Gardens, Rosbrien and Clarina Avenue, Ballinacurra Weston, which would have implemented the council's motion (May 2005) to extinguish the right of way between Weston Gardens and Clarina Avenue between house Nos. 35 and 37 Clarina Avenue as outlined on drawing no. ERW/1/05 (LCC Planning Department). The 'green' area that is currently in Ballinacurra Weston was to become part of Weston Gardens, eliminating it as a nuisance area and giving us a turning point to facilitate a refuse collection, which we still don't have. Our relatives collect our rubbish every week.



INTRODUCTION

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

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.

It is also important to clearly state what we mean by ‘*representation*’.

The Weston Gardens Residents’ Association is representative of every individual resident in our area and as such, only those who we nominate are mandated to speak for our area. As presently constituted, the Southside Regeneration Committee is not representative of our area and is therefore not mandated to discuss or make proposals concerning the future of our homes.

It is worrying to note that some members of the Southside Regeneration Committee have been parachuted in from failed entities that might be collectively described as the ‘disadvantaged areas industry’ and other members that we contacted since its establishment have admitted that they have never actually read the *Fitzgerald Report*.

We applaud the recommendations of the *Fitzgerald Report* and fully support its faithful implementation.

However, as a result of our exclusion from the local Residents Committee and the manner in which it was cherry-picked, the good faith and trust that we had initially in the Southside Regeneration Agency no longer exists. And though we are wary of scheduled meetings, it is our hope that trust can be rebuilt.

Our acceptance of inclusion in the remit of the Southside Regeneration Agency will be dependent on the response of the Agency to our proposal, which will require an agreement in writing by 10th January 2008. Before we present our proposal, it is vital that the Southside Regeneration Agency gains an understanding of our perspective and what we’ve had to endure for the past seven years.

WESTON GARDENS – A RECENT HISTORY

Built over 100 years ago, Weston Gardens is a private estate consisting of nine terraced houses, three of which were burnt out over a nine-month period in 2001–2002 by criminal elements living in the neighbouring estate of Ballinacurra Weston. In the past seven years 11 of our residents have left because of intimidation and 4 have died of natural causes. Our remaining 11 residents are a tight-knit Community, committed to saving our historic homes.

Donal Flaherty, the elderly man who lived alone in No. 1 Weston Gardens had endured months of harassment and intimidation; windows broken, horses placed in his garden, etc. Finally early in 2001, when he was mugged in his own garden he moved out. Criminals who wanted to rent his house approached him, he refused and told them that he was selling it. The “For Sale” sign wasn’t up a day when his house was burnt out. Limerick City Council (LCC) refused to board it up, as it was a privately owned house. The house was not insured and Donal did not have the means to secure his now derelict property.

Paddy Hegarty, the elderly man who lived alone in No. 2 Weston Gardens now became the focus of attention for criminal and anti-social elements from Ballinacurra Weston. He had horses placed in his garden, stones thrown at his property, etc. His sister wrote to LCC in October 2001 warning of the threat posed to her brother’s home by use of the now derelict No.1 by drug users and of fires lit in the property. Eventually, in May 2002, No. 1 was set ablaze again and the fire damaged the roof of No. 2. Finally, LCC boarded up No. 1. While Paddy moved out to allow repairs to take place, his home was broken in to and burnt out. It was boarded up by LCC at the request of the Fire Brigade and Gardaí.

Joan Higgins and her Family, who lived in No. 3 Weston Gardens, became the next target for youths from the neighbouring estate. They returned from holidays to find their home had been boarded up by LCC at the request of the Fire Brigade and Gardaí after a failed arson attack. Subsequent to this attack, their home was ransacked and vandalised.

Heather Cunningham, the owner of No. 4 Weston Gardens purchased her home in November 2000, she moved out in 2002. She was being harassed and intimidated in her own home on a daily basis. Both adults and children from Ballinacurra Weston verbally abused her, she was threatened with being burnt out and physically threatened at knifepoint on the breen. She had also endured several attacks on her property, including the deliberate demolition of her front gate and wall by a stolen car.

Heather shared her home with two workmates, who were also intimidated out; one of them was attacked and beaten on his way to work. The house is now occupied by a friend, Darren Maher, whose sole purpose for living there is to protect the property. Darren also has endured harassment and intimidation, including an attempted mugging. He maintains the garden and regularly cleans the avenue. He spent the past two summers as a volunteer in Ballycotton, working with children from Ballinacurra Weston and Southill. He has been an invaluable asset to our Community. Were it not for his presence and commitment No. 4 would definitely have suffered the same fate as No.'s 1, 2 & 3.

Cathal McCarthy and Cindy Fogarty bought No. 5 and moved in with their baby in 2001, six weeks before No. 1 was burnt out. They now have two children and at times it has been difficult, to say the least. In June 2004, at 4am, six men kicked open their front door in an act of intimidation. In 2006 all their windows were smashed while they were on holiday.

Breda Anslow was born in Weston Gardens in 1919. She lived in No. 6 with her brother Maurice, born 1917. Their autumn years were filled with fear and intimidation. Maurice died in 2003, Breda took ill in 2004 and was placed in a nursing home. She asked Cathal McCarthy to buy her home by private treaty because she was afraid to put it on the open market, in case she was made an offer by the same criminals that burnt No. 1. She died in 2006. Rob Garside now resides in No. 6.

Pauline Hammill was born in Weston Gardens. When her parents died she moved back to No. 7 with her husband Tony and raised six children there. She was a tireless campaigner for the area and her Family endured much torment. In 2004, Pauline was declared overall winner of the Fáilte Ireland Welcomes Awards. She died suddenly in 2006. Tony and their son David still live in No. 7.

Jean Leahy and Jerry Carey moved into No.8 in 2001, eight weeks before No. 1 was burnt-out. Ironically, Jean had sold her home in Garyowen because she felt that it was getting rough and Weston Gardens seemed like a quiet place to live. Instead, it was 'out of the frying pan and into the fire'.

Colm and Ann Lowe bought No. 9 Weston Gardens 48 years ago and raised seven children there. Because they were elderly and lived end-of-terrace they became the most harassed of the remaining residents. Colm died in 2005 and Ann moved out in 2006. Although the area had become quieter and plans had been shown to us, the harassment over the years had taken its toll and she was unable to sleep at night. She sold the house privately in 2007 to our newest resident, James Walsh.

The residents of Weston Gardens had been campaigning informally since 2000, writing to LCC and meeting with the Gardaí and councillors. We had all suffered individually from acts of intimidation and harassment and it was obvious that our homes were being targeted one by one. Our informal approach was getting us nowhere. Acting on the advise of the Gardaí, the Weston Gardens Residents' Association was formed in February 2003.

We produced a video, "Weston Gardens: A Week In The Life" and sent it to Limerick City Council. We also produced newsletters and briefing documents. After a number of false starts, LCC then held a series of scheduled meetings with the WGRA and the Gardaí, which eventually resulted in the erection of palisade fencing between Weston Gardens and Ballinacurra Weston. Street lighting was also installed. We were informed by LCC that nothing further would be done for us unless we supported the extinguishment of the right-of-way, which was eventually achieved in 2005. It was never properly implemented.

Meanwhile, people from Ballinacurra Weston continued to dump domestic rubbish and horse manure in the gardens of No's 1, 2 & 3. Annual reports from Health Inspectors were ignored by LCC. Criminal elements also used the gardens to stash weapons and drugs. In 2004 the Gardaí recovered €80,000 worth of cocaine, 2 handguns, 1 sawn-off shotgun, ammunition and a quantity of commercial explosives on "waste ground" in the area. Even residents have found live rounds of ammunition on the street. Residents have had stones, bottles and fireworks thrown directly at their person as well as their property. Horse and motorbike racing on the boreen were regular events. Visitors to Weston Gardens often had their cars broken into. One of the worst incidents occurred in June 2003, our postman was stabbed in an unprovoked attack by a gang of 15 youths from Ballinacurra Weston. They invaded our area and attacked David Hamill of No. 7 Weston Gardens and three of his friends from Clarina Avenue, one of whom happens to be our postman.

We intensified our campaign, producing more videos etc; with the help of the Gardaí and persistent complaints to LCC's Tenants Enforcement Officer we have managed to turn the situation around. Finally in 2006, LCC produced plans and money was secured for the refurbishment of our area. The plans were advertised (twice) in February 2007, but never lodged. We eventually found out that everything was suspended pending publication of the *Fitzgerald Report*, which LCC later insisted we were part of because it mentions Ballinacurra Weston. We live in Rosbrien!

PROPOSAL FOR REGENERATION

As we have stated earlier, plans already exist and money was secured for the regeneration of Weston Gardens, Rosbrien. Our acceptance of inclusion in the remit of the Southside Regeneration Agency is dependent on an agreement in writing by 10th January 2008 with the Southside Regeneration Agency to facilitate our residents in accordance with our wishes and to carry out the following works, which we deem necessary to the successful integration of our homes with the newly regenerated area:

REBUILDING & REFURBISHMENT:

Limerick City Council has architects plans for the rebuilding of No.'s 1 & 2 Weston Gardens and the refurbishment of No. 3 Weston Gardens. It was agreed at a meeting with Gardaí, city officials and all ward councillors in November 2006 that no demolition would take place unless it involved the immediate rebuilding of No. 1 & 2 Weston Gardens. This was because of the potential safety and security risk to our residents should the backs be left exposed for a prolonged period of time, as well as the potential for increased illegal dumping. We require:

- The demolition and immediate rebuilding of No's 1& 2 Weston Gardens. These can be disposed of as the Southside Regeneration Agency see fit, on condition that we would have a say as to who would live there if there are to be social housing, or if they are sold privately that they will only be sold to people who intend to reside there.
- The refurbishment of No. 3 Weston Gardens, which upon completion would be given to Darren Maher who has resided at No. 4 Weston Gardens since 2002 (*see Weston Gardens – A Recent History*). Darren has been an integral member of our community since he arrived; living on the frontline, were it not for his presence and contribution over the years, No. 4 Weston Gardens would undoubtedly have joined No.'s 1, 2, & 3.
- A turning point to facilitate a refuse collection. Since privatisation we have been without a refuse collection, as we have no turning point to facilitate one. Our relatives collect our rubbish once a week. Plans for this are with Limerick City Council.
- Access to the backs of our homes. While we have it in writing that currently the Southside Regeneration Agency has no intentions towards land behind our homes owned by the ESB, it has been stated 'face to face' that the Southside Regeneration intends to acquire this land. Should this be the case then we would require access to our backs. However, this issue and others relating to the use of that land can be discussed at a later date, if it is acquired by the Agency.

REMEDIAL & INTEGRATING WORKS:

For many years we have been discussing works that we might do in tandem whenever Limerick City Council should begin implementation of their plans for our area. These works would be fundamental to the integration of old and new. We require:

- Insulation and re-slating of our roofs. This will be necessary to help blend our area in with the new houses and the wider regenerated area.
- New matching walls, pillars and gates. It is possible that the existing garden walls could be improved upon with minimal demolition and should be finished with a stone effect tile, which would enhance the historical flavour of our homes.
- New matching driveways. Preferably in cobblestone. This work would be essential to the renewal and integration of our area.
- Removal of most hedges and landscaping of our gardens. Again, this work would be essential to the renewal and integration of our area.

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 the boundary wall proposed by Limerick Council, 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. Only a small minority of people in the aforementioned areas are responsible for the trouble; they could be dealt with through *intensive policing arrangements* and the installation of promised and long overdue CCTV cameras. 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 home 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. Private houses should only be sold to people who intend to live in the area. These new homes should be good quality houses, finished to a high standard and not simply built to last the lifetime of a mortgage.
- **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. However, criminal elements have corrupted this to a great extent, with some individuals keeping numerous horses merely as status symbols, without the proper care or respect for the animal. We have had problems in the past with such elements trying to keep their horses in our gardens.

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, (T: 01 2720704). As they explain themselves:

"Festina Lente Foundation provides a range of integrated training, occupational, learning and employment opportunities to people whose needs have not been met by mainstream services. These services are provided through equestrianism, horticulture and community-based activities with an emphasis on choice, personal development and progression." Visit www.festinalente.ie for more information.

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.

CONCLUSION

If we are ever to establish a trust with the Southside Regeneration Agency then it is essential that we achieve an agreement in writing by 10th January 2008.

If the Southside Regeneration Agency's word is good then it should be no problem to commit it to paper. We also consider this vital to demonstrating the transparency espoused by the Agency.

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.

Once an agreement has been reached, we see no reason why work could not begin by June 2008, if not sooner. 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.

It is clear to us that the troubles experienced by our Community and other beleaguered estates could have been avoided if our Local Authorities and the Gardaí were better equipped, organised and committed to deal with the situation.

There is an obvious link between the organised criminal gangs and the rise of anti-social behaviour. Youths involved in anti-social behaviour are ready recruits for such gangs. Criminal gangs are in the process of establishing strongholds in estates up and down the country. People are being forced out of their homes if they object. Property is being deliberately devalued so that it can be easily acquired.

Decades of neglect have taken its toll, increasing numbers of people are turning to drugs as a means to escape reality and Communities are breaking down.

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.



Below: Photograph on the left: Gone but not forgotten; pictured from left to right are Pauline Hamill (deceased), Breda Anslow (deceased) and Ann Lowe (moved out in 2006) at the inaugural meeting of the WGRA on 5 February 2003.

Photograph on the right: In December 2004 we were delighted with the news that Pauline Hamill was declared overall winner of the Fáilte Ireland Welcomes Awards. She is pictured with Jennifer Wallace and Daniel Turek (Los Angeles), who nominated her for the award and then Minister for Arts, sports and Tourism, John O'Donoghue TD. The news gave a much-needed boost to our residents. 2004 was a particularly bad year, with incidents of criminal and anti-social behaviour occurring daily. Unfortunately, because of this, Pauline felt unable to receive her new American friends as guests in her home.





Above: The two sides of the 'green'. We do our best to keep Weston Gardens tidy. The illegal dumping is being done by a handful of residents in Ballinacurra Weston. The resultant rat infestation and health risks posed to residents are major concerns.



Above: Our Avenue littered with broken bottles thrown by youths from Clarina Avenue. This used to be a regular occurrence, especially at weekends. Such incidents are less frequent now, the last one being March 2007.



Above: 30 April 2007, Bonfire Night – Burning rubbish in Clarina Ave. For a while it seemed that Bonfire Night was a weekly event. As well as the health risk, such fires have damaged phone lines.



Above: 30 April 2007 Residents clean up. The WGRA registered with An Taisce's National Spring Clean to clean up the gardens of No.'s 1, 2 & 3. We needed permission from LCC's Housing Dept., which wasn't given. We went ahead regardless, removing 8½ tons.



Above: October 2007, the Fire Brigade extinguishes a burning stolen car. This incident left Weston Gardens inaccessible for several hours. This problem is ongoing. Often, driveways have been blocked and property damaged.



Above: May 2005, children and teenagers, under adult supervision, throw stones at our homes from Clarina Avenue. Our residents have witnessed adults actually directing children; instructing them which house to target.