

BWRA NEWS

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALLINACURRA WESTON RESIDENTS' ALLIANCE



HUMAN RIGHTS REGENERATION WRONGS

Very few residents were invited to attend the launch of the Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan, although all of the speakers stressed how much community participation, involvement and "collaboration" there was with residents in developing it.

The Minister of State for Housing and Planning, Jan O'Sullivan TD, launched the new plan to invited guests in Thomond Park on Friday 27th of September 2013. The 506 page document outlines the Councils intentions for "regeneration" areas over the next 10-years.

The event was compered by Garda Chief Superintendent Dave Sheehan, who claimed that the "regeneration" areas had been "stabilised" over the past 7-years. There was no mention of the depopulation policy that had devaststated communities with boarded-up houses. There was no

explanation from the Chief Superintendent as to how so many of those houses were looted and burnt out (often in broad daylight) while the Gardaí were supposed to be policing the estates. However, it was admitted that anti-social behaviour was still a major concern for residents.

The fact that many resident's basic human rights to adequate housing and security were seriously undermined by these deliberate policies was described throughout the launch by a variety of speakers as "mistakes".

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services..."

**– The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Article 25**

Mayor Kathleen Leddin urged everyone to put the past behind them and move forward together with the plan. The fact that mandated and representative resident' groups had initially been excluded from the event and had to obtain last minute invitations to the launch by contacting the office of the Minister of State for Housing & Planning directly does not bode well for any stated intentions of a unified approach to regeneration that is inclusive of the community.

The BWRA and our affiliates in *Limerick Regeneration Watch*; the Weston Gardens Residents' Association (WGRA) and the Moyross Residents' Alliance (MRA), are recognised by government Ministers and Departments, EU Institutions and organisations, we are even recognised and receive funding from the Councils Environment section, yet the Office of Regeneration refuses to engage with us.

We were also excluded from a "Buffet Breakfast Briefing" organised by the Office of Regeneration before the launch for selected "community people". Pat Begley, Chair of the Kincora Carew Concerned Residents Action Group, did receive an invitation to this event, but it was withdrawn the day before; he was told that it had been sent "*by mistake*".

The olive branch was extended on the day by Tom Daly, Chairperson of the MRA in an interview with Limerick's Live 95fm, but it remains to be seen if the Office of Regeneration will adopt inclusive policies.

Cathal McCarthy, Chair of the WGRA and PRO with the BWRA, was less enthusiastic and raised the need for community elections so that residents could directly elect representatives, he also highlighted the lack of policing and the issue of unmonitored CCTV cameras on the Southside, telling Limerick's Live 95fm that the plans needed to be studied closely.

Unable to attend the launch at such short notice, Chairperson of the BWRA, Matt Collins, said he was shocked to learn that a lot of occupied homes were now being targeted for demolition and described the consultations that took place in March as farcical:

"Those consultations were farcical, they weren't able to answer half our questions and there were no independent experts to help residents understand what we were shown. We made a formal submission and they never replied.

We had to go to our TD's. We have a letter from the Office of Regeneration to Willie O'Dea that addressed some of our issues and now these plans are telling us different; they want to knock more homes including ones that they said they would refurbish, they want all my neighbours across the road gone and this is the first that anyone heard of it.

"I'm really shocked, but I suppose I shouldn't be; I was on the residents' forum for 3-years and they never listened. Now they're telling everyone that they're listening, but they haven't even the decency to knock on peoples doors and let them know that they want their homes. People are afraid that they will take their homes; they really should have talked to residents first and come to an agreement.



ABOVE: Pictured at the launch from left to right, Chair of the *Community Consultative Forum*, Mr. Ger Crowley; Minister of State, Jan O'Sullivan TD and Mr. Oliver O'Loughlin, Director of Home & Community.

BELOW: June 2013, this kitchen in Crecora Avenue was refurbished 2-years ago. Penetrating damp is a common issue for residents living next to boarded-up houses. The tenants here are paying €89 per week for the privilege of living in these miserable damp conditions. Mr. O'Loughlin and Minister O'Sullivan were first informed of this family's plight in September and October 2012, nothing was done. The family have been advised by their doctor and the Public Health Inspector that the house is not fit for human habitation.



"Look, we protested for 4-weeks this time last year just to get them to knock the more dangerous houses, we had to get government Ministers and the national media involved before they would listen. They can pretend all they like that they worked on these plans with the community but we know better.

"Myself and some of our committee members have just completed our Human Rights Action Training with CAN (Community Action Network) in Dublin. What went on here over the past 7-years with the boarding up of houses was an abuse of our human rights, it caused all sorts of problems for residents and forced many to leave; they had no choice in the matter.

"We learnt a lot from CAN about our human rights. We have the right to adequate housing, to security and safety. We also have a human right to participate in the decisions that affect our lives and that certainly isn't happening now, the BWRA will be doing all we can to assert those rights going forward." said Mr. Collins.

"... adequate housing must provide the inhabitants with adequate space and protect them from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind or other threats to health, structural hazards and disease vectors...and provide...safe drinking water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation and washing facilities, means of food storage, refuse disposal, site drainage and emergency services."

– General Comment 4 of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

At the launch the Cathaoirleach of Limerick County Council, Cllr. John Sheehan, welcomed the plans and the Councils *Director of Home & Community*, Mr. Oliver O'Loughlin claimed in his presentation that residents had been properly consulted, but later acknowledged the need for greater community participation, empowerment and civic engagement.

This was followed by a *few words of endorsement* by the Chief Superintendent before inviting the Chairperson of the *Community Consultative Forum*, Mr. Ger Crowley, to speak. Most residents are unaware of the existence of this forum or who their selected representatives are, as there is currently no communication with residents.

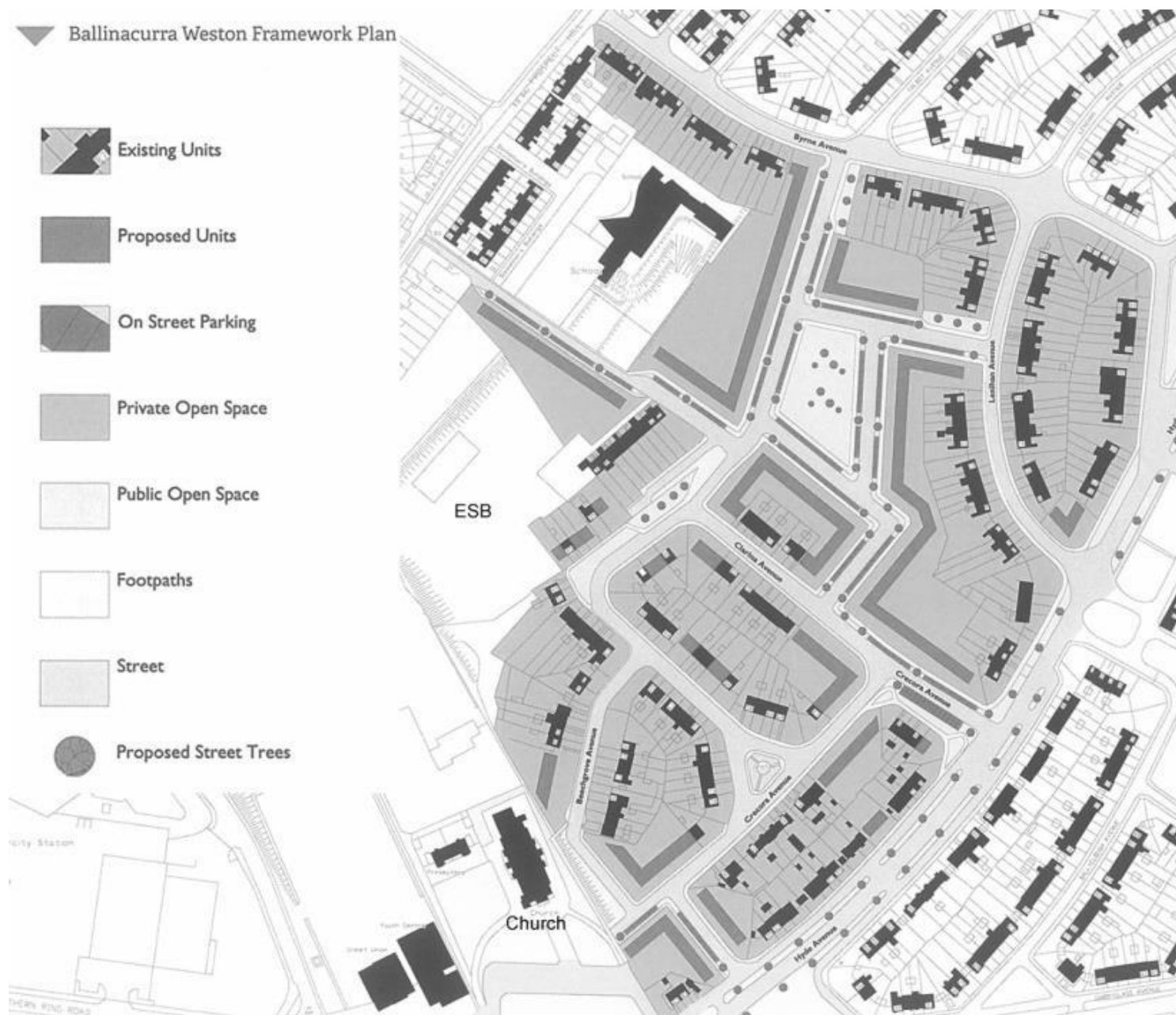
It was then the turn of Minister O'Sullivan to officially launch the plan. In the foreword Minister O'Sullivan tells us that she is "*pleased with the level of engagement and co-operation between the Office of Regeneration and the communities in framing this plan.*" Unfortunately, many residents are less than pleased with the engagement, particularly those residents that were unaware that their

homes are being targeted for demolition until the publication of the plans.

Up next was Limerick's City & County Manager, Mr. Conn Murray, who acknowledged that the target communities had been failed by previous administrations, echoing the words of the former Limerick Regeneration Agencies CEO, Mr. Brendan Kenny, 7-years ago when "regeneration" first arrived, but it is of little comfort to residents that have to endure it, many of whom are still living in fear.


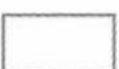
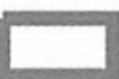

The proceedings were brought a close by the Chief Superintendent. There was no opportunity to ask questions from the floor; this carefully choreographed event stuck rigidly to the itinerary.

Only time will tell whether or not this is more than the public relations exercise that it appears to be. The powers that be may yet prove willing to learn from those past "mistakes", but the injustices perpetrated in the name of "regeneration" also need to be atoned for, perhaps then we can all move forward together.

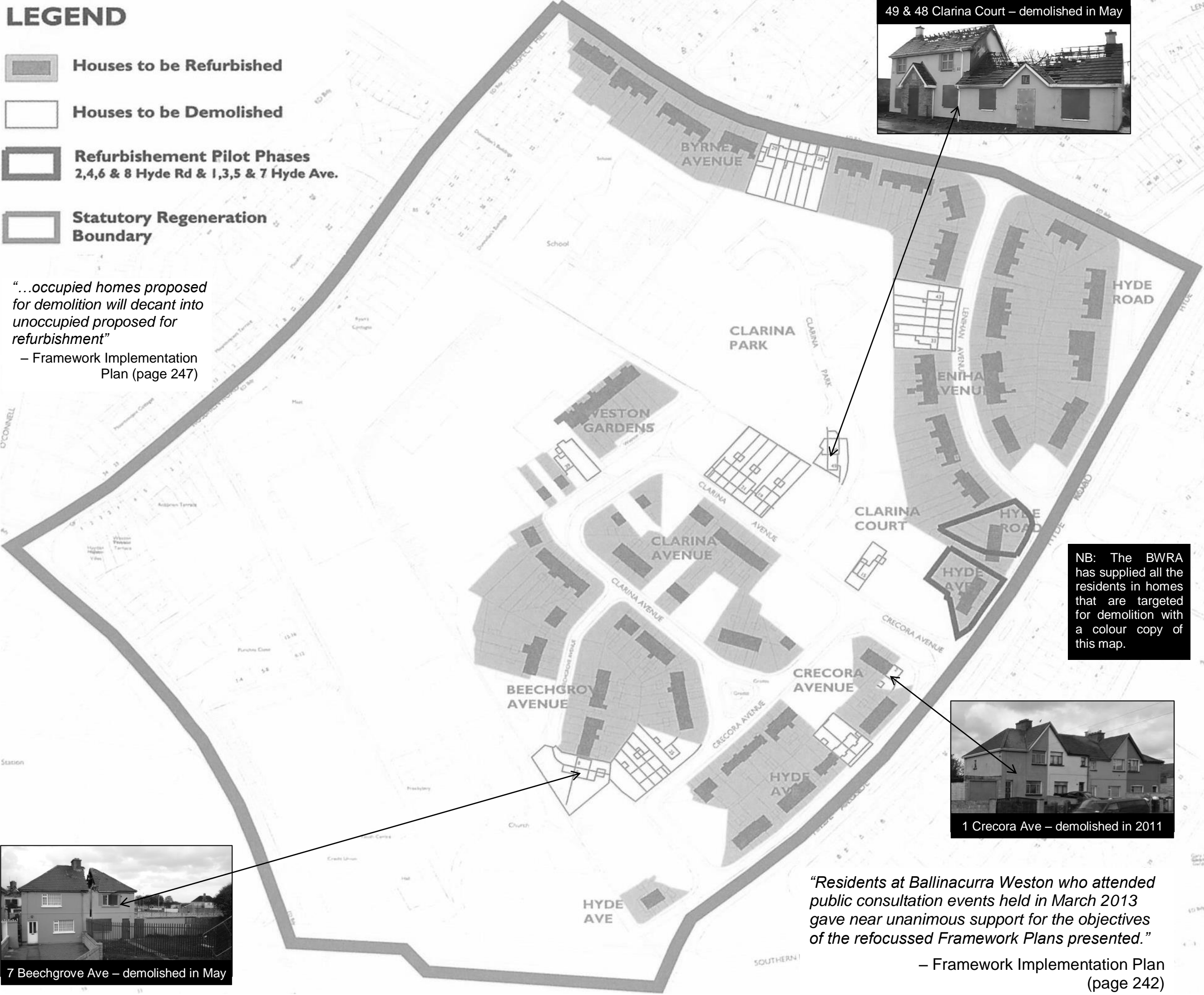


ABOVE: Map taken from page 254 of the Framework Implementation Plan. This shows the aspirational outcome in the long-term (6-10 years) "*should an uplift in the market conditions occur*" (page 258). Most of the new housing shown is for private development. Note how some of the homes on Clarina Ave identified for demolition on page 257 are retained.

LEGEND

-  Houses to be Refurbished
-  Houses to be Demolished
-  Refurbishment Pilot Phases
2,4,6 & 8 Hyde Rd & 1,3,5 & 7 Hyde Ave.
-  Statutory Regeneration Boundary

“...occupied homes proposed for demolition will decant into unoccupied proposed for refurbishment”
– Framework Implementation Plan (page 247)



49 & 48 Clarina Court – demolished in May



NB: The BWRA has supplied all the residents in homes that are targeted for demolition with a colour copy of this map.



1 Crecora Ave – demolished in 2011

“Residents at Ballinacorra Weston who attended public consultation events held in March 2013 gave near unanimous support for the objectives of the refocussed Framework Plans presented.”

– Framework Implementation Plan (page 242)

UP FOR THE KNOCK?

This map is taken from page 257 of the *Framework Implementation Plan* and shows the houses to be refurbished and the houses to be demolished.

31 houses are identified on the map for demolition while the plan states that a total of 27 houses are being targeted. This is because 4 have already been demolished: 3 in May of this year and 1 in 2011 (see inserted photos).

A total of 20 occupied homes (15 privately owned, 5 council) are targeted for demolition. Many of these residents were unaware of this fact as they were told during the March consultations that their home would be refurbished, even though their homes were clearly *blue-lined* for long-term development in the aerial photograph shown to residents.

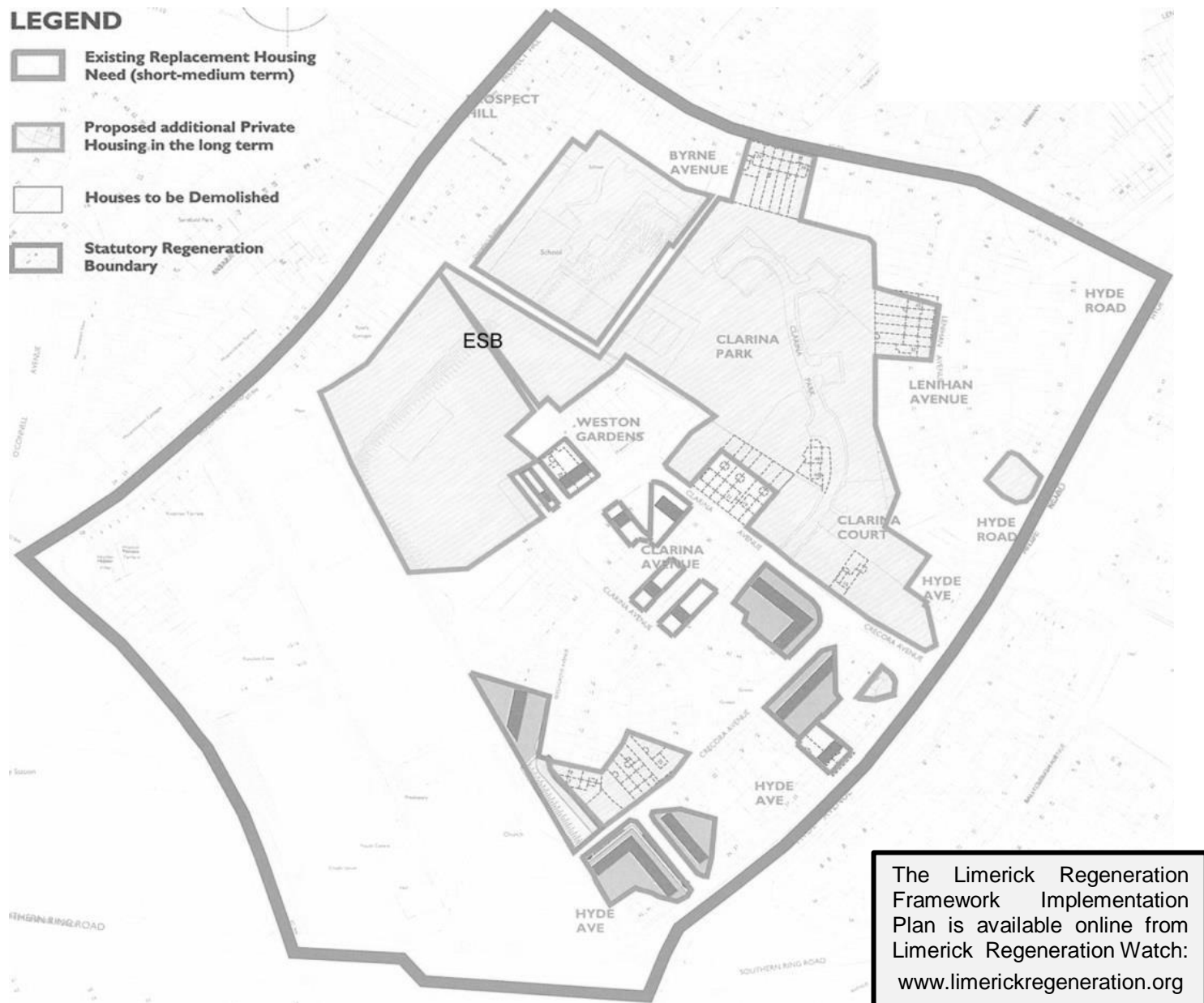
None of these residents were contacted by the Office of Regeneration for negotiations to agree to the demolition prior to the publication of this plan, which “Assumes occupied homes proposed for demolition will decant into unoccupied proposed for refurbishment” (page 247).

8 of the houses targeted in Clarina Avenue were added after the March consultations without contacting residents.

Of the 7 boarded houses targeted for demolition 4 are privately owned, 8 privately owned boarded houses are also targeted for refurbishment to provide replacement houses; to date the Office of Regeneration has refused to engage formally with the owners to agree a settlement.

There were no independent experts to explain to residents what they were being shown during the consultations held in March and many were misinformed; some residents were told that they were outside the regeneration area, even though the statutory boundary clearly indicates otherwise. It’s a disgrace that people’s homes are being targeted for demolition without prior agreement.

BELOW: Map taken from page 259 of the Framework Implementation Plan. Most of the land is earmarked for “*proposed additional private housing in the long term*” (6-10 years). This has been done without the agreement of the key stakeholders such as the ESB and the residents of homes targeted for demolition. It is stated on page 258 that the demolition of houses will occur in the short term (3-years). Note how more than half the back gardens of homes targeted for demolition in Clarina Avenue has been allocated for private development. The vast majority of homes targeted for demolition are on land that is set aside for private development,



The BWRA welcomes the publication of the Framework Implementation Plan and at a cursory glance, there much to be positive about.

For the first time ever, the legal remit of regeneration is acknowledged and the statutory boundaries are clearly indicated throughout the plan. However, it is important to note that the Vizes Court, Edward Street, Wallers Well, Nicholas Street and the Opera Centre developments are outside the legal remit.

While the legal remit goes well beyond the target areas in most instances to include neighbouring estates, it has partitioned Ballinacurra Weston, excluding most of the area and including parts of Prospect and Rosbrien. The statutory boundaries need to be revised and amended.

Priority spending should be given to the demolition of derelict and unsafe houses in the areas; privately owned houses that were abandoned by their owners because of the intimidation they experienced during the “*stabilisation period*” should be purchased and the owners fairly compensated and given deeds for deeds for a new home that is suited to their needs.

The Inclusion of an intention to comply with EU legislation when awarding contracts for developments so that provision can be made for local employment is to be welcomed; this is something that the BWRA and the other excluded residents groups have been highlighting since 2010.

Minister O'Sullivan has promised that her office will establish a “watchdog” to monitor the progress of the plan, this is something that is long overdue; it was first recommended by the 2007 Fitzgerald Report. Such an oversight committee will need to be independent and empowered to hold the Office of Regeneration to account.

The new plan is half the width and twice as thick as the 2008 ‘Master Plan’, not only does it look different; it aspires to be more than just an aspirational wish list and claims that it will deliver “safe and sustainable communities” over the next 10-years for a fraction of the cost of the previous plan.

It was announced at the launch that residents and members of the public will be asked for their feedback on the plan over the next 6-weeks. The BWRA and affiliated resident groups will study the plan in more detail and make formal submissions.

TIDY TOWNS – GOING FOR GOLD

The BWRA was disappointed to be eliminated from the Going for Gold competition after the first round; we failed to secure enough public votes, but we were delighted with the results and the feedback from Tidy Towns, which was honest and constructive.

We entered for the designated regeneration area, which includes parts of Prospect and Rosbrien – we were recognised by Tidy Towns as the voice of the area. Tidy Towns were given before and after pictures, as well other information about the BWRA. Most areas that enter Tidy Towns don't have a local estate management or any of the other numerous services and resources allegedly available to our community, Tidy Towns acknowledged the failure of such service providers to engage with the community. The results were better than we had anticipated and hopefully the powers that be will also heed the advice of Tidy Towns:

“Many thanks for your entry in this year's Tidy Towns Competition. Thank you for the frank and compelling information on your work and the challenges that you face. Ballinacurra Weston Residents' Alliance is doing important work and you are to be commended for your participation in this competition.” – Adjudication takes place in June.

“The adjudicator regrets reading of some of the setbacks that you've seen in the last year but you are persisting which is of utmost importance. Your material suggests that your lobbying has been effective, in part at least.” – We had informed Tidy Towns of obstacles in our way.

“Your group is working in a highly changeable and challenging urban setting. Is it possible for you to know which house are for demolition and which green spaces are to be kept? Only if you did could you target your efforts most effectively. In the meantime, do your best with petitioning the relevant agencies for action on the worst of the properties. Most importantly, try to ensure that the houses pose no immediate threat to safety.”

“The community garden with the mural of Our Lady - is this the Garden of Hope? - is a great achievement. The adjudicator saw a bench, flower beds, several planters, laurel bushes and other shrubs. Well done. Another area has a long raised bed, and several planters. Jimmy's Garden was admired. He has really made the place come alive with colours.” – Jimmy O'Donnell was the BWRA's nominee for the Going for Gold Individual Merit Award. Jimmy's house and the garden he developed on the adjacent derelict site are targeted for demolition in the Framework Implementation Plan.

“It's good that you have a CE scheme in place. There was a good deal of litter seen on adjudication day.” – We had explained how local Estate Management was competing against us in a non-regeneration area and were failing to provide the area with an adequate service particularly throughout the month of June.

“It is acknowledged that residents could well be disheartened by the ongoing changes and problems that attend it. However, some really good work to maintain house fronts and gardens was seen on adjudication day. Well done to all those who put in the effort. It may not seem so but all of these actions are helping.”

“It is acknowledged that there is a lot to do here and that your resources are seriously constrained. Do what you can. Your work on the community gardens is a real benefit to the area.” – We had explained that were trying to cut the Council owned fields left by demolition with lawnmowers.

“There are a number of issues that face Ballinacurra Weston. Some of these are not within your control but do your best to exert influence upon local authority and other bodies that can assist you.” – We are doing our best to engage with them.

“Try to engage constructively with the local authority on simple issues such as grass - cutting and work from there. Above all else your entry is a positive step. Every good luck.”



BALLINACURRA WESTON RESIDENTS ALLIANCE

THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH WE CAN DO ON OUR OWN

LIMERICK CITY COUNCIL – CLEAN UP YOUR ACT!

POSTCARD CAMPAIGN

Proposals for enhanced community participation and the meaningful involvement of residents in local estate management can be found in the unpublished *Nexus Report*.

Instead of implementing this report last year, Limerick City Council decided to defer the matter to the *Supporting Social Inclusion & Regeneration in Limerick* (SSIRL) initiative, an investment programme involving Atlantic Philanthropies, Government – though the Council, and the University of Limerick.

Just like the launch of the Framework Implementation Plan in Thomond Park, the current structures for resident participation on regeneration committees and local estate management are by invitation only.

Most residents don't know who represents their area on these committees and these so-called community representatives certainly don't keep residents informed; there is no communication with residents.

The *Nexus Report* and the role of the SSIRL is dealt with in the new plan from pages 150 to 152. Unfortunately, much of what is proposed ensures that the current representatives will remain in place for the foreseeable future as it is their intention to conduct more research as it is claimed that "*an assessment of needs in each area (with residents' representatives fully involved in the assessment process) is required.*" (page 152). This is unacceptable; all that is really required is an end to the invitation-only policy.

Resident's representatives need to be mandated by residents before they can claim to speak for them; currently they are not even known.

In the coming weeks the BWRA and our affiliates in *Limerick Regeneration Watch* will be empowering residents to call on Limerick City Council and the Office of Regeneration to immediately reform the structures for community participation, to empower residents to run local Estate Management and giving residents a real say in the regeneration process, with the holding of community elections that would enable residents to directly elect representatives onto reformed and empowered local regeneration boards and Estate management committees.

The present policy of selective inclusion and participation by invitation-only must be replaced by an accountable and democratic system that gives residents a **real say** in the decisions that affect our lives; it's the only way forward.



ABOVE: Postcard for real community participation.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN ACTION



ABOVE: Some of the residents and community workers from Limerick and Dublin attending the last day of the Human Rights Action Training Programme organised by the *Community Action Network (CAN)* on September 6th, including Cathal McCarthy (top left) and Matt Collins (bottom left).

The five-day training course empowered participants to develop a human rights based approach to regeneration with the option of a FETAC Level 5 qualification.

The negative impact that regeneration has had on our human rights is self-evident. The BWRA was delighted to participate in this programme and we are currently drafting a report documenting resident's experiences.

If you would like to get more involved with the work of the BWRA then contact Matt (087 65 77 063) or Cathal (087 784 50 70), or email westonalliance@gmail.com.

Ballinacurra Weston Residents Alliance

SHIP FORM ++ MEMBERSHIP FORM ++ MEMBERS

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____ E-mail: _____

I would like to participate on the committee (please tick) Yes ☐ No ☐

"The full enjoyment of other rights... such as the right to participate in public decision-making is indispensable if the right to adequate housing is to be realised and maintained by all groups in society."

– General Comment 4 of the UN
Committee on Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights.

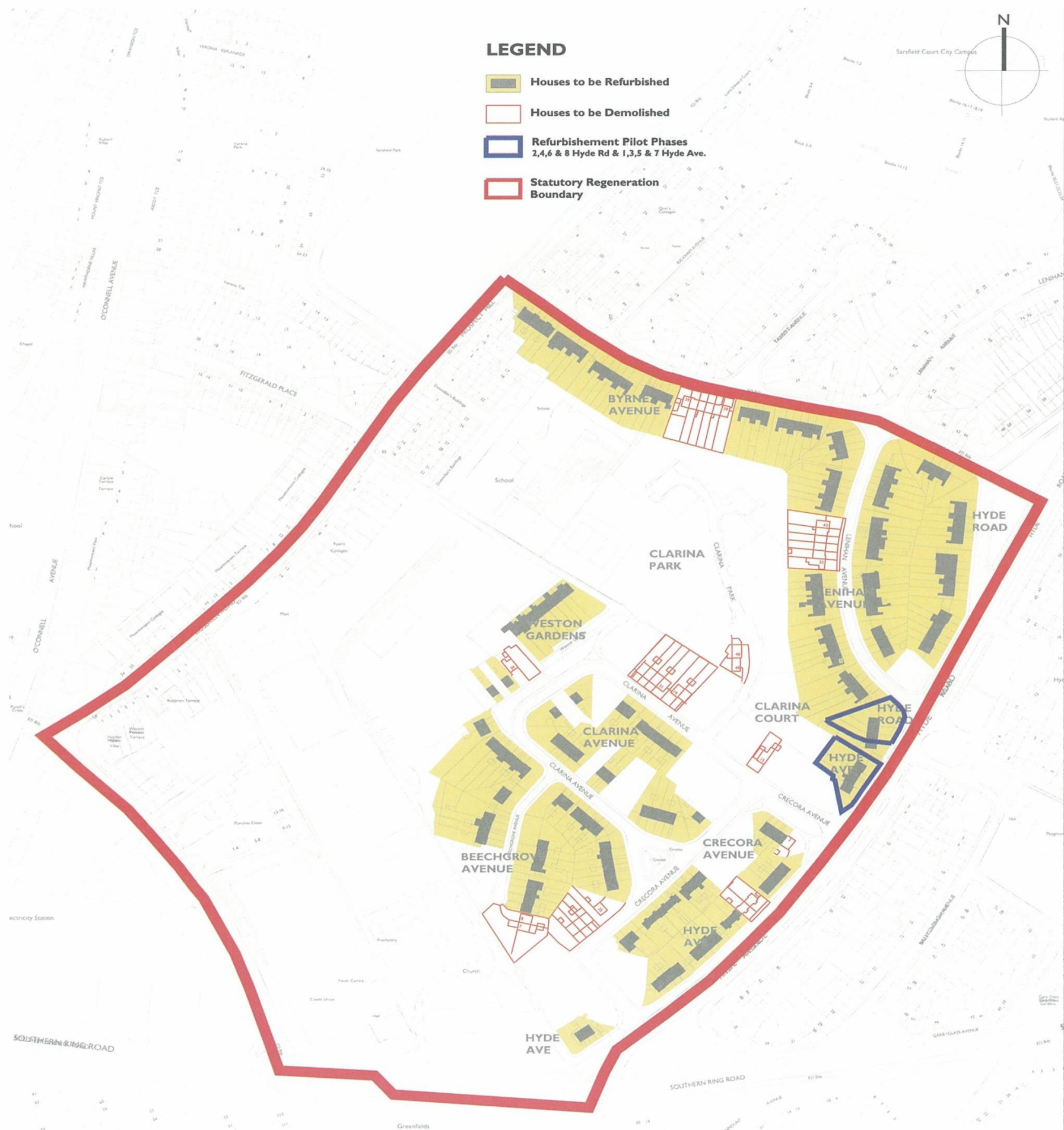


Figure 1.17 Note: The drawings set out the design principles proposed, but minor adjustments may be necessary during detail design of individual projects.