

## Chapter 4

## Development



High standards of design have been incorporated in new homes, as exemplified by the reinventing the *home* scheme in Cadbury Drive.

The redevelopment of Castle Vale wasn't just about housing. Commercial and industrial premises, healthcare centres, venues for community activities, retail and leisure facilities, transport routes, and open green spaces were all improved or replaced. Between 1996 and 2003 the process turned Castle Vale into one of the largest building sites in the West Midlands. It also consumed by far the largest share of the Housing Action Trust's budget<sup>1</sup>.

This chapter explains the mechanics of the development programme, emphasising what the Housing Action Trust did differently, and why. It also describes the diversity of architectural outcomes; homes and amenities that have completely changed Castle Vale's physical appearance, and created a post-war municipal housing estate unlike any other.

#### The masterplan

Castle Vale's masterplan was devised by Hunt Thompson Associates, a firm of architects already familiar with Castle Vale following its work in the build up to the 1993 ballot (see chapter 1)<sup>2</sup>. Over a period of 15 months, from June 1994 every corner of the estate was assessed. Which areas were intimidating? What was lacking? Why were some features more popular than others? ...

John Thompson was lead architect. "It was clear that the building forms didn't support the local population. It was a nowhere place, bad urbanism. To make improvements we had to persuade people to imagine something very different. It was essential to engage residents in the process".

As well as residents, Hunt Thompson Associates sought input from local businesses, voluntary and statutory agencies, and representatives of Birmingham City Council. The result was published in the autumn of 1995; shortly before the Trust's lifetime funding was agreed.

The vision was to re-create Castle Vale as: "A self-sustaining community living in high quality homes in a pleasant and safe environment. [At the end of the process] Castle Vale residents would enjoy an improved quality of life and economic opportunity. They would also have been empowered to make choices regarding ownership and management of their homes<sup>3</sup>." This was to be achieved within a decade<sup>4</sup>.

Alongside details of demolition, the masterplan included information about buildings to be refurbished. But it did not include details of the schedule, the first question on many people's lips.

Pat Riley was development manager with Sanctuary Housing Association at the time<sup>5</sup>. "It took a couple of years to work up a timetable. There was great concern that the money would run out. Those at the end of the list were particularly worried." The pay-off was the rent freeze, which meant that those dealt with last benefited from 1993-level rents for longer than anyone else.

The 15-month consultation process had revealed that residents wanted fewer alleyways between buildings, 'rat runs' that allowed criminals to hide in seconds. Improved road safety was another priority.

Action was required to make the straight roads less appealing to joy riders and speeding motorists. There was also support for well-maintained open green spaces, and improved transport links in and around the estate.

As covered in the preceding chapter, the masterplan recommended the demolition of 17 of the 34 high rise towers, including the five Bison Wall frame blocks, which were deemed unsuitable for refurbishment or retention<sup>6</sup>, and 24 maisonette blocks. As events unfolded, all but two of the towers came down. These included the 'Farnborough 14', two rows of high-rise tenement blocks along the southern fringe of the estate, and Concorde Tower, Castle Vale's tallest building. Over 100



Public consultation was a consistent feature of the HAT's work.

<sup>1</sup>Development consumed £206 million of a lifetime cost of £312 million. The breakdown of public and private investment in Castle Vale was: £205 million (public), £107 million (private). <sup>2</sup>The masterplan also built on previous research into Castle Vale, principally Birmingham's Unitary Development Plan, and a 1992 study into the feasibility of establishing a Housing Action Trust in Castle Vale, undertaken by Birmingham City Council.

<sup>3</sup>Source: Castle Vale Master Plan, Written Statement (September 1995). <sup>4</sup>The average annual cost of construction work over the decade was £30 million. <sup>5</sup>In 1998 Pat Riley was became the Housing Action Trust's head of development. <sup>6</sup>On 16 May 1968 part of Ronan Point – an East London high rise composed of similar pre-cast re-enforced blocks – collapsed, fundamentally discrediting the Bison Wall model.





Drop-in consultation in progress.

bungalows and the shopping (see page 48) centre were also razed.

Another alteration with implications for Castle Vale was the decision to scrap the West Midlands Metro, a light rail system that would have linked Castle Vale to Birmingham city centre.

“The Metro didn’t happen because central government changed its mind, but by that time the masterplan was approved,” says Riley.

It had been planned to run along Tangmere Drive, terminating at Reed Square. So space for two light rail lines was allocated either side of the road, but because the masterplan had already been approved and work was under way, it meant that even in the absence of the Metro the land could not be reassigned. This impacted on the arrangement of homes replacing the Centre 8, and Tangmere Drive itself. That is why today the road is lined by such generous pavements.

As for the residents, they were still stuck with the number 67 bus route to the city centre. “It did leave a gap in our transportation plan,” says Riley. The gap was partially plugged by the addition of new bus services. A decision to make the run to the city centre one of Birmingham’s showcase routes, with dedicated lanes and enhanced levels of service, also helped to cushion the blow.

### Demolition

Pubs were the first buildings to be demolished. All five in the estate had long been dominated by drug dealers and criminals. In 1993 there were five pubs in Castle Vale. Their removal demonstrated the Trust’s intention to tackle crime, but it was the demolition of the Centre 8 towers that really got the ball rolling.

The towers were demolished two-by-two, starting from the west and moving east, towards Reed Square. The process required careful planning to minimise disruption to displaced residents, and secure empty properties. To achieve this the Trust employed Allocations and Decant Liaison Officers<sup>7</sup>, to report to the housing department. Their counterparts from the development department – known as Resident Liaison Officers – were later brought in to create another link between contractors and residents.

In the early days contractors were selected in the traditional way, on the basis of competitive bids followed by interviews. The final decision was based predominantly on price. It was an approach that created problems.

“One of our aims was to have contractors ready to take possession of the empty blocks as soon as the last tenant moved out,” says Riley. But the reality proved different.



View of demolition of the last four of the Centre 8 tower blocks from Albert Shaw House, c1996. The area in the foreground was replaced by Eden Court Doctor’s surgery and the Sanctuary healthy living centre.



Demolition of the first four Centre 8 tower blocks.



Resident consultation led to plans to improve neighbourhoods across Castle Vale.





Demolition contractors talk pupils of Chivenor Junior School through the demolition of a tower block on Farnborough Road.



Tenants discuss refurbishment plans with a consultant.



Residents of the Sopwith Croft area, HAT staff and contractors celebrate the completion of new homes on Tangmere Drive.

If there was a delay in re-housing tenants, demolition contracts were postponed or cancelled, increasing the Trust's costs. And blocks that were vacated sooner than expected became magnets for vandalism and youth crime. Arson and vandalism were not uncommon. On one occasion an entire tower block had to be emptied overnight because vandals had tampered with a water tank, flooding it from the top.

As a result, the Trust was forced to invest in expensive security measures until the demolition contractors were able to begin work (see also chapter 3). The security guards were also targeted by local gangs. It was during this period that the Trust's offices were broken into, leaving a security guard with a fractured skull, and the staff short of computers.

A more productive approach to selecting and working with contractors was required.

#### Partnering

Partnering is an approach to contract management based on mutual understanding. Although widely applied today it was a novel concept in the mid-1990s. The idea is that the client, contractor, and end users (residents) work as a team to achieve agreed objectives by sharing risk and optimising each other's effectiveness.

The approach was adopted in Castle Vale from early 1997. From that point, sympathy with the ideals and ambitions of Castle Vale, and a willingness to work with tenants were critical criteria in the selection of contractors.

"Instead of working up the brief before inviting tenders we wanted contractors to be involved from the outset. This was important in terms of building relationships between the HAT and contractors, and for residents to have an input. Above all we wanted contractors who would buy into the Castle Vale ethos," says Pat Riley.

In 1997 Bullock Construction was working on an internal refurbishment scheme on Cadbury Drive. Steve Daniels was construction manager: "It took us about six months to understand how the HAT viewed customer care. They demanded very high levels of health and safety, and were determined that we respect tenants' possessions."

Bullock also got involved with the monthly Project Advisory Group meetings, attended by the architects, tenants, Trust staff, and anyone else involved in the scheme. Daniels remembers the meetings as: "An opportunity to share information and communicate." Bullock was retained to work on refurb' and environmental projects in Castle Vale for seven years, almost without a break.



A walk-up block of flats after refurbishment and (below) what it looked like in 1993.







Nearly 30 homes on the Farnborough Road scheme were developed for sale. All sold off plan.



Ron Hull Demolition was selected to partner with the Trust for the remainder of the demolition programme in 2001. At the time this included 18 high-rise blocks, over 100 bungalows, and a handful of maisonettes.

The certainty of workload encouraged the company to keep its equipment on site, which meant that it was ready to begin work as soon as blocks became empty, reducing the security costs, and minimising aggravation to those living next to an empty property.

“We also asked residents to tell us their concerns. It emerged that they wanted assurances about the removal of hazardous materials, like asbestos. I think they also appreciated having a point of contact with the organisation,” says Stuart Smith of Ron Hull Demolition.

During its lifetime, partnering permeated to the core of the Housing Action Trust’s development programme. The impact was particularly evident in the Trust’s handling of refurbishments, which became an opportunity to empower tenants, making them feel instrumental to the process, not pawns to be pushed around (see chapter 3).

#### Completing development

Unlike health, housing, crime, and education, it was not necessary to prepare a succession strategy for development. The programme had a

defined beginning and end. If the construction and refurbishment of homes and amenities had not been achieved by March 2005, the Housing Action Trust would have failed in one of its key objectives.

The only exceptions were Reed Square, Castle Vale’s second shopping centre in the heart of the estate (see page 46), and a nursing home that was not part of the original proposal. In every other respect the development programme described in the masterplan – and subsequently enhanced (see chapter 3) – was delivered on time and within budget.

Pat Riley was particularly anxious to get all the housing completed on schedule. “We had to allow time to check for defects. It would not have been fair on our successor landlord if we hadn’t. It might also have damaged the reputation of the Housing Action Trust.” The last large new-build housing scheme, on Farnborough Road (see page 49) was completed in 2004.

During the lifetime of the Housing Action Trust, Castle Vale changed beyond recognition. It is still strictly delineated, betraying the site’s previous incarnation as an airfield, but it is no longer dominated by decay and grey high-rise tower blocks. Today, with its mixture of styles and materials, it resembles a conventional garden suburb-style residential estate.



Over 1,300 homes were refurbished to high a specification, bringing them up to modern standards.



Resident liaison officers worked closely with tenants whose homes were being improved.



Typical 1960s low-rise home before improvement.





The old shopping centre seen from Concorde Tower.



View of the old shopping precinct.



The new Tangmere Square and main retail area (right).

## Retail in Castle Vale

### Castle Vale Shopping Centre

The urgent need to redevelop Castle Vale's shopping centre had been identified by Housing Minister Sir George Young in 1992. It was a 'window on the Vale', and a potentially major economic asset. Accordingly it was prioritised in the 1995 masterplan, and became a landmark in the estate's revival. The shopping centre was also among the more protracted and contentious developments undertaken by the Housing Action Trust.

Castle Vale has two shopping centres, one at either end of Tangmere Drive. To the east, in the heart of the estate, is Reed Square. It provides a range of local amenities including shops, a library, St Cuthberts church, and the bus terminus. At the western end is the main shopping centre.

In the late-1960s it was envisaged as a retail draw for a wide area, attracting visitors and revenue to Castle Vale. For a short while that looked like becoming a reality. "There was a market every week. It was a meeting point. Everybody knew everybody else," recall local residents Margaret and George Hadley. But the good times didn't last.

High rents meant that even at its peak the shopping

centre was never fully-occupied. In 1994, 30% of the 42 units were vacant. By then it had been a wind-blown, rubbish-strewn haven for criminal activity for as long as anyone could remember. The arrangement of interconnected squares created ominous alleys, and an earthwork barrier cut it off from Chester Road, meaning that the potential for passing trade was limited, and there was only one point of access. The flagship Kwiksave and Iceland stores were another problem – they didn't have the broad demographic appeal to attract customers from the wider area. The enclosed car park was another matter. By the mid-1980s it was the preserve of drug dealers and thieves.

The local authority had been trying to refurbish or redevelop the shopping centre for many years, but had not been able to secure the necessary agreements. From its inception that challenge was taken up by the Housing Action Trust. A dedicated group, including residents and Trust staff, was set up to facilitate a redevelopment opportunity, but ultimately the Trust, like the council, was unsuccessful.

Because the shopping centre was a priority, the Trust decided to use all the powers available to it to move

things forward. It served a dilapidation notice on the owner, who eventually went into liquidation. The Government Office supported the Trust's request to purchase the head lease, placing it in a far more influential position to coordinate a redevelopment scheme.

In 1996 the Housing Action Trust entered negotiations with prospective development partners. "We wanted to attract an anchor store that would transform the place, so we were really pleased when Sainsbury's tendered and was selected as the preferred bidder. They would attract a really broad range of customers. Getting people here was important both to generate revenue and break down negative perceptions," says Angus Kennedy. It was also agreed that Sainsbury's would employ local residents – at least 15% of its 420 staff would be from Castle Vale (in 2004 that figure was over 30%).

But progress was slower than anticipated.

The original idea was for demolition to begin in 1996, with the new superstore opening about a year later. But it would be July 2000 before Sainsbury's opened for business.



Reed Square (from left) the old row of shops were demolished and redeveloped to make way for a modern retail, residential and community centre at the heart of Castle Vale.



## Reed Square

The Trust's ambitions had already been delayed by abortive attempts to work in partnership with the existing long leaseholder. In 1998, having secured the long leasehold, it then faced another barrier to progress, namely a group of tenants with high expectations about the level of compensation that they were entitled to. It was not possible to reach a voluntary agreement, so the Trust was forced to embark on a compulsory purchase order to gain complete control of the site. It was a decision that did not make the Trust popular, with some accusing it of Big Brother tactics.

The £35 million redevelopment programme finally began in August 1999. Two years later it included a large supermarket, a number of smaller units, open air car parking and a petrol station. Several other large shops and local service providers followed soon afterwards. The shopping centre is unrecognisable from its partially-let and threatening predecessor, and attracts over 30,000 visitors per week.

Reed Square was the Housing Action Trust's last major physical development, begun in 2003. In its original format the estate's subsidiary shopping and amenity centre included poor quality retail outlets, a community hall, and library. All were unattractive and under-used.

"It was a different development challenge to the main shopping centre, which occupied a frontage site. The problem was that Reed Square had no value, and no likelihood of attracting passing trade from outside Castle Vale," says Pat Riley, the Housing Action Trust's director of development. The Trust had to find ways of making it attractive to the market.

The first step was for the Housing Action Trust to commit money to the site, showing that it meant business. "Stage two was to approach service providers and say, 'we'll give you the site free if you agree to move there'," says Riley.

The police force was the first to take up the offer, a decision that soothed concerns about safety and paved the way for others to follow suit – Somerfields supermarket is the anchor store for the new Reed Square.

The masterplan for the site also includes office space, housing for sale, a new vicarage for nearby St Cuthberts, and a range of small neighbourhood shops. The flagship building for the regenerated Reed Square is C3, the Castle Vale Community Campus. C3 includes adult learning facilities, a library, office space, and meeting rooms for community groups. For the first time in 20 years young people in Castle Vale have access to sixth form education within their neighbourhood.





## Re-building Castle Vale

The following developments were built in Castle Vale between 1994 and 2005. They give a sense of the diversity of architecture on the estate. It is not an exhaustive inventory, focussing principally on the largest new build schemes.



### Homes – Centre 8 replacement

The Centre 8 towers were replaced by 350 low-rise housing units and Phoenix Court, sheltered accommodation with space for 60 residents. The homes, arranged over four plots with space for Centre Park in the middle, were designed by Hunt Thompson Associates, who also devised the masterplan for Castle Vale. They were built by Sanctuary and Focus Housing Associations between 1996 and 1998. In recognition of their high levels of safety and security they have been awarded Secured by Design status by the police. The development was also one of the first in the UK to incorporate Home Zone principles, where pedestrians have priority in shared surface roadways.



### Concorde Tower replacement

Prior to demolition Concorde Tower was the tallest building in Castle Vale, occupying a gateway site near the main Chester Road entrance to the estate. It was demolished in 2000 and replaced by a total of 44, two, three, and four-bedroom homes in traditional suburban styles. The development, designed by Axis Design Collective, also included a three-storey low-rise unit comprising two-bedroom flats built to Lifetime Homes standards - homes that respond to occupants changing needs. Residents of Concorde Tower were closely involved in the design, selecting doors, handles and light fittings for their new homes.



### Eco Homes

In June 2000 construction began on 11 Eco-homes, energy-efficient houses built to demonstrate efficiency in the construction process. The scheme, which incorporates off-site manufacturing techniques, has been used as a national showcase of good practice. It was designed by PCKO Architects on behalf of Focus Housing Association.



### Self-build

Tucked away behind Farnborough Road is a cul-de-sac of 14 mock-Tudor style homes. These are the product of a self-build scheme, facilitated by Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services, and managed by the Accord Housing Association. At the outset in May 1998 eight of the self-builders were unemployed. By completion the majority were in full-time jobs.



### Farnborough Road new build

The colourful new build development along Farnborough Road comprises 237 homes on the site of six former tower blocks. The properties, designed by Walker Troup Architects and built by the Lovell Partnership, are a mixture of two-bedroom flats, bungalows, and a variety of family homes. When construction began in October 2002 all of the homes were designed for rent, but due to demand it was decided to sell 26 privately. All sold before completion.



### Farnborough Road children's home

The construction of a new eight-bed children's home, the first in Birmingham for at least 20 years, was part of the new housing scheme on Farnborough Road. It was developed on a partnering basis between Birmingham's Social Services Department, the Housing Action Trust, Walker Troup Architects, and design and build contractor Lovell Partnerships.



**Reinventing the Home**

In 2002 Mercian Housing Association began construction of 28 'Reinventing the Home' family houses along Cadbury Drive, one of three areas specified for new-build development in the 1995 masterplan. The innovative scheme sought to identify design characteristics which would adapt to their occupant's changing domestic requirements. As a consequence the houses and flats incorporate a range of features more typically found in speculative housing for sale.



**Environmental improvements**

**Centre Park**

Centre Park occupies an area of 2.36 acres in the centre of the former Centre 8 site. The open green space, designed by Birmingham City Council's Landscape Practice Group, includes play and sports facilities for children of all ages, and a small formal garden. It was completed in February 2003.



**Health and social care**

**The Sanctuary**

The Sanctuary – originally known as the Voluntary Sector Project – is located near the main shopping centre on Tangmere Drive. It is a facility for use by organisations without dedicated premises, principally charitable and community groups. The building, designed by TSP Architects and built by Chase Norton Construction, took nine months to complete. It opened in August 1999. The Housing Action Trust covered approximately half of the cost, which came to a little under £1 million. The remainder came from a combination of private and public sources including a contribution from Allied Dunbar (see also chapter 5).



**Economic development**

**Enterprise Park**

Situated on the far east of the estate, the Enterprise Park is a new-build commercial development with 44 units for use by small and medium-sized enterprises. The development, completed in March 2000, cost £3.58 million. Funds came from the Housing Action Trust, the European Regional Development Fund, Advantage West Midlands, and the private sector. It was designed by architect David Rowbotham Ltd.

