



# No Longer Notorious

The Revival of Castle Vale, 1993 - 2005



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No Longer Notorious - The Revival of Castle Vale, 1993 - 2005 (published March 2005), can be obtained through the Castle Vale Neighbourhood Partnership, telephone: 0121 748 8152.

  
Castle Vale  
HOUSING ACTION TRUST  
1993 - 2005



By Adam Mornement

## Preface

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In May 2004 Castle Vale Housing Action Trust commissioned the author to write an account of Castle Vale's revival since the formation of the Trust in 1993. The research and writing was carried out over the following six months.

During that period Adam Mornement interviewed a wide range of individuals, all with different perspectives on the transformation of Castle Vale. Interviewees included residents, doctors, midwives, policemen, teachers, politicians, and councillors.

The author was supported by Housing Action Trust staff past and present. The Trust's records and archives were also placed at his disposal.

He was encouraged to write an independent record of events.

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Published March 2005 © Castle Vale Housing Action Trust





Aerial view of Castle Vale in 2004.

## About the author

The London-based author is a former features editor of Regeneration & Renewal magazine. He writes widely on housing, economic development, and architecture.

Adam Mornement was selected to write this book because his professional experience suggested a broad understanding of contemporary urban regeneration practice and policy. He has known Castle Vale since 2001.

As an outsider it was hoped that he would produce a balanced and dispassionate overview.

Mornement is the author of Regeneration UK (DTI, 2004), a guide to British urban regeneration since 1980 (UK Trade & Investment). He contributes to the Times and Guardian.

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### Credit

Jamie Gladstone, Copy Editor

### Acknowledgement

With special thanks to Tess Randles, former Head of Communications at Castle Vale HAT, for her support, enthusiasm, and eye for detail.

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Aerial view of Castle Vale in 1993.

## Introduction

“I left my husband in 1991 and moved to Castle Vale soon afterwards. Until then I’d always worked. But I lost my house, furniture, clothes, and my motivation. I suppose we were classed as a problem family. Whatever Birmingham City Council tells you, this was a dumping ground full of single parents, alcoholics, and the mentally ill. It took me a good six years to get back on my feet,” says Beatrice Lunn.

In 1997 Lunn was employed by Castle Vale Housing Action Trust to assist with its clearance programme. Within a few years she was appointed manager of Phoenix Court, sheltered accommodation for the estate’s elderly and infirm. “The HAT changed everything, for everyone.”

There were only ever six Housing Action Trusts, one each in Hull, Liverpool, and Birmingham, and three in London. All were set up between 1991 and 1993; the last will expire in 2007. They were ambitious, controversial, and well-funded experiments in reviving urban areas afflicted by severe levels of deprivation.

The idea, which provoked public and political outrage when first proposed, was to transfer the management of social housing stock

to Non Departmental Public Bodies. These quangos would work in tandem with residents and partner organisations to establish democratic and accountable systems of sustainable self-governance. To varying degrees, physical redevelopment was also a feature of each Housing Action Trust. In context they were a radical response to a chronic problem.

Riots in Brixton, Toxteth, Handsworth, and Haringey during the early 1980s confirmed that action in the ‘inner cities’ was a matter of urgency. Large volumes of poor quality housing and sustained under-investment in services had contributed to the evolution of a disenfranchised urban underclass.

The Conservative administration needed to stem the tide of disaffection. But what was the most effective way to address the deep-rooted and multi-faceted problems? And why was it that however much money was invested, the same areas always seemed to be listed among Britain’s most deprived? Innovative thinking was required.

The Housing Action Trust model required that power and responsibility be devolved to local people. In the late 1980s this was not common practice. The Trusts were also among the first regeneration programmes to treat social, economic and physical

decay as related problems. But arguably the greatest legacy of the Housing Action Trust experiment is the hardest to measure, their long term viability.

During their relatively brief life-span the Trusts tried to create a robust infrastructure for sustainable self-sufficiency, to make sure that benefits didn’t evaporate once they had run their course. Instead of relying on the local authority or Housing Action Trust as their landlord, the vision was for these communities to manage themselves.

The logic is clear. Who is better placed to judge what changes are required, and where funds should be invested? But a genuine assessment of the Housing Action Trusts’ effectiveness as catalysts for lasting change will not be possible until around 2015, a generation after work began.

For Castle Vale the signs are good, as Beatrice Lunn and countless other residents are happy to testify. What follows is a record of how far the estate has already come.



Tenants move into a new bungalow built in 2003.