"ARE COMMUNITIES REALLY IN THE DRIVING SEAT? A CASE STUDY OF THE REGENERATION OF CASTLE VALE"

Mike Beazley and Mike Smith

Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS), University of Birmingham

Abstract:

Community-led regeneration is a common mantra of central government policy in the United Kingdom. Castle Vale, a typical sink estate located on the eastern fringe on Birmingham, was subject to a major central government regeneration intervention in the guise of a Housing Action Trust that was set up in 1993. The Castle Vale HAT was set up to:

- Improve and redevelop the housing
- Improve the "quality of life"
- Provide an effective service as a landlord and offer a wider choice of tenure and forms of home ownership
- Work with the community to ensure that positive changes could be maintained into the future

By the close of the HAT in 2005 the estate has been radically transformed. In total 2,275 homes were demolished (including 32 out of 34 tower blocks); 2,797 homes were built or refurbished; 1,461 jobs had been created; 3,415 training places had been provided; education and health facilities had been greatly improved, and the environment had been upgraded. This was achieved with a total of £197.5 million of government funding that was supported by an additional £102.7 million of private funding and other leverage.

The regeneration of the estate has been commonly regarded as a major success and it has received many accolades and awards. For example, in October 2002 the HAT won the Midlands Excellence Award, Public Sector Category; in April 2000 and June 2002 the HAT was a prize-winner in the Modernising Government Partnership Award and in May 2002, the Birmingham Civic Society awarded the HAT the Forward Prize, for making a major contribution to the life of the city.

The HAT was required to engage with the community in this process and the local residents were a key player in working towards such success. This paper explores the role that the community played in the regeneration of the estate and how effective this really was. It will attempt to identify the lessons that can be learned from this rather unique and high profile case that might be applied elsewhere.