

## Lessons from Hulme

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Hulme in Manchester has become a national symbol of the failures of 1960s system-built housing. The instigators of a 'community write-up' project, which sought the views and experience of residents, here present their view of the general lessons to be learned from the development of Hulme over the last six decades.

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- Existing communities are a major asset to be safeguarded. Re-development in Hulme during the 1960s was imposed as the product of political ideology and architectural fashion and local people were not involved in the assessment of needs. Positive features contributing to social cohesion, continuity and a sense of identity were lost and within 10 years there was again more demand to be re-housed.
- A 'scorched-earth' policy in the early stages of the Hulme development has proved a false economy in the long-term given the costs associated with social dislocation and loss of community.
- When re-development in Hulme has proceeded at a pace that allows local people to shape decisions, the disruption to the existing community has been kept to a minimum. The inflexibility of current funding systems, however, makes this difficult to achieve.
- A sustainable, integrated community requires the needs of young people, all-adult households and older people to be adequately met as well as those of families.
- A genuine partnership between government and local people in Hulme has only come about where the imbalance of power between the parties has been redressed. This occurred after tenants were provided with resources of their own to help them react to policies and to formulate their own proposals.
- Tenant participation is currently supported by full-time staff and, as currently practised in Hulme, has led to members of the existing community being re-housed in homes they can afford and that they have helped to design themselves. The authors believe this is a model that other communities may wish to replicate.

## History

Hulme in inner Manchester has, over the past 20 years, become a by-word for the failures of public housing policy. In particular, the Crescents - four elongated blocks housing over 900 deck-access flats - have epitomised the discredited, system-built estates of the 1960s and 1970s.

Between the Wars when wholesale re-development was first mooted, a campaigning 'Hulme Housing Association' was formed to press for the right of local people to move into any new homes that were built. The Human Needs Scale, devised by Seeborn Rowntree, was invoked as a measure of what they could afford. It was, nevertheless, another 60 years before official policy encouraged local people to become involved in regeneration plans.

By then it was too late. From the late 1950s, the bulldozers moved in and the former community was broken up and decanted into estates across the city and beyond. Few of the tenants who moved into the 4,000 newly-built flats and maisonettes were from Hulme itself. The consequences of a lack of shops and play areas and chronic problems like damp and infestation manifested themselves within months. However, the death of a child who fell from a balcony in the mid-1970s, was the event that made national headlines and led to mass demands for re-housing. Acknowledging the unsuitability of deck accommodation to house families, Manchester City Council began offering upper-storey flats to students, all-adult households and, later, to single homeless people.

In the early 1980s, the authority pledged itself to a partnership with tenants in planning improvements to its estates. Towards the end of the decade, the Hulme Study was established as a joint venture between local and central government and the community.

Moves towards tenant involvement were interrupted by the Government's 1988 intention to introduce a prototype Housing Action Trust (HAT) on Hulme where responsibility for the housing stock and re-development would be passed to a board appointed by Ministers. Tenants mounted a campaign against the HAT and the Government withdrew its proposal. The principle that no future HAT would proceed elsewhere without majority support in a tenants' ballot was subsequently established.

Work on the Hulme Study resumed, with tenants' representatives playing an equal role, alongside local and central government in the selection of consultants and working with them to identify the community's needs. In principle, the area was to be socially, economically and environmentally re-developed, the

needs of existing tenants addressed and mixed funding sought from public and private sources. Slower than expected progress and a failure to locate new money not only led to lower tenant morale, but also to central Government losing patience, opting for a limited proposal concentrated on the area's physical re-development.

Meanwhile, a cross-departmental consultation forum involving residents - the Hulme Committee - was established by the Council to consider service provision. Deteriorating relations between tenant representatives and the authority meant that it ceased to meet after 18 months. Some councillors and officials suggested that the involvement of tenants was a hindrance to progress.

The most recent chapter in the community's history opened in 1991 when Michael Heseltine, then Environment Secretary, approved a financial package to regenerate Hulme as part of the City Challenge initiative. A community-based forum, Hulme Community Homes, brought tenants back round the table with the council and housing associations to formulate social housing policy for the proposed re-development. The Hulme Tenant Participation Project has also been established, with government and council funding, to provide tenants with their own, professional support team, helping them to make an independent assessment of development plans and to argue for their own alternatives.

## Assessing community needs

Recent government initiatives such as City Challenge seek to involve and sustain existing local communities in the regeneration of urban areas. The experience of Hulme suggests that this is more likely to be achieved if the basis upon which needs will be assessed is accepted by all parties and defined more widely than housing:

- Failure to agree an objective measure of 'affordability' in the 1930s meant that rents were fixed at levels which made it difficult for many of Hulme's original inhabitants to move back into the new housing being developed.
- Viable communities need shops, health centres, schools, play space and leisure facilities as well as homes. The wholesale clearance of shops and small industrial units along the Stretford Road in the 1960s destroyed what had been the commercial and economic backbone of Hulme.

## People first

The history of Hulme suggests that the problems of individual urban areas will not be answered by imposing development that is based on ideology or contemporary fashions in architecture and estate planning. The administrative neatness of the 'scorched-earth' policy that was adopted in the 1950s and 1960s is likely to have proved a false economy in the long-term given the subsequent costs associated with social dislocation and loss of community.

Thirty years ago, government placed local authorities under pressure to adopt system-building for redevelopment by making it clear that funding would be tied to those methods. In Hulme, the experiment was on such a scale that the area became identified with its buildings, not the people who lived in them. The failure of the housing created a false presumption in government and in the media that the community must have failed as well.

Manchester City Council's policy decision in the 1970s to stop housing families with children in 'the Crescents' and other system-built blocks meant that young, single people and older residents increasingly came to predominate. There is current concern that the desire of today's policy-makers to achieve a more 'balanced' community by creating accommodation suitable for families should not allow the housing needs of others to become marginalised.

## The pace of change

Hulme tenants' organisations have pressed the case in recent years for re-development work to be phased. They have campaigned for a rolling programme of re-housing in which physical change is balanced by a sense of stability. They argued that:

- Too *protracted* a programme would lead to low morale, a faltering commitment and instability as demonstrated by slow progress with the Hulme study at the end of the eighties. (Even residents who expected to occupy a new or refurbished home in the area might choose to move elsewhere rather than endure a long period in 'temporary' housing.)
- A strategy of *rapid* demolition with scores of families being decanted at a time, would place an unreasonable strain on social support services. It would risk creating 'blight' as boarded-up properties and demolition sites increased the opportunities for vandalism and other crimes.
- A rolling programme of re-building and re-housing work would reduce the risk of mistakes made in

haste and without adequate consultation. It would give tenants a chance to see what their new homes will look like and to identify design improvements that can be incorporated.

Many elderly residents who supported a 'one move only' campaign in the early 1990s have since moved into new property close to their old homes without the upheaval of an interim transfer to 'temporary' accommodation. However, the co-ordination of later phases of the Hulme re-development programme has been adversely affected by delays in obtaining grant approval for demolition of the remaining deck-access blocks.

## Continuity with the past

One of the proposals being discussed under City Challenge is for the revitalisation of the Stretford Road commercial centre demolished in the 1960s. The plan marks a belated attempt to acknowledge the history and social identity of the area. The 'Hulme Views' project found other positive features of living in the area - including social, religious and educational activities - which local people would like to be retained. Local people would like plans to take account of the various geographical communities into which an area like Hulme is sub-divided. These include neighbourhoods identified with particular buildings ('The Crescents'), those that have a church as their geographical focus ('St Wilfrid's') or those that have acquired their identity for some other reason, such as a community centre.

In the 1960s there was an attempt to retain some links with the past by allowing landmark churches, pubs and cinemas to remain standing. But since the 'regulars' who used them had mostly been moved out, this ultimately proved an empty gesture. Today, Hulme has no secondary school, butcher's shop, no bank, or hairdresser's. The only surviving cinema, adult education centre and nearby shopping precinct have recently been demolished following a series of decisions that were locally opposed.

## Creating a partnership

The re-development of Hulme in the 1960s was carried out without attempting to consult local people who were, in any case, to be moved elsewhere. In the past decade there has been a shift in attitudes among central and local government planners. They are increasingly ready to acknowledge that community involvement can be a positive ingredient in the success of any re-development proposals.

A landmark in tenant participation was achieved during the late 1980s when the Hulme Study was

initiated, with four parallel working groups examining the economic, social, housing and environmental needs of the area. However, tenant representatives - who once served as full, voting members of Manchester City Council's Hulme Committee in the days before City Challenge - have since been restricted to the role of observers.

Participative structures remain in place in the field of social housing and the influence of residents during the past ten years has been significant. Tenant organisations, for example, instigated a successful 1989 bid for money under the Government's Estates Action programme, overcoming initial opposition from the City Council's leaders. More recently they argued the case for Hulme Community Homes, the community housing forum set up in 1991 to oversee the programme of new social housing.

To help them function more effectively in partnership with local and central government, tenants have been provided with their own source of independent advice. The Hulme Tenant Participation Project (HTPP) is funded by the Housing Corporation and by City Challenge and is possibly the largest area-focused project in the country. Its eight full-time staff, are to local residents what civil servants are to government, providing a variety of services that help tenants to stay in touch with development proposals and to bring forward their own ideas. By ensuring that its services are available to individuals as well as organisations, a body like HTPP can also safeguard against the emergence of a 'tenant-expert' elite, whose contact with those they claim to represent becomes increasingly remote. The authors believe it is a model that other communities will wish to consider.

## Conclusions

Communities can be destroyed, but not created, overnight. The history of Hulme suggests that if local people are moved out before re-development and newcomers are moved in afterwards, it may take decades before any sense of social cohesion or identity re-emerges. The lessons from latter-day experience are more positive. Evidence is accumulating that an active partnership between tenants and local and central

government can result in affordable housing that has been sensitively adapted to the needs of local people. Far from delaying progress or resulting in unrealistic demands, there are signs that tenant participation has helped to motivate the housing professionals, allowing design stages to be completed faster than normal. The houses and flats that are currently being re-developed incorporate many of the layouts and practical ideas suggested by residents. For example, plans for a network of cul-de-sacs were rejected in favour of the tenants' proposals for a traditional street grid with a more 'urban' mixture of houses and flats.

Tenant influence has also extended to the number of social housing units being created (increased to over 1,000 from 700 in the initial City Challenge proposal) and to bringing forward the start of work to secure higher levels of Housing Association Grant than would otherwise have been available.

Tenant involvement on the Hulme model is a principle that could be extended from social housing to other decision-making about shops, schools and wider planning issues. In the authors' view, local people could play a socially beneficial, potentially cost-effective part in determining their own future, provided adequate information and resources were made available to them.

## About the study

In 1989, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation supported a 'community write-up' of the Hulme experience from the viewpoint of its residents. Interviews, group discussions and written contributions were brought together describing six decades of urban regeneration initiatives. The general implications of this experience are drawn out here by members of the 'Hulme Views' project: Niall Cooper, Joe Fleming, Peter Marcus, Elsie Michie, Craig Russell and Brigitte Soltau.

## Further information

Two publications have been produced **Hulme Views: Self-Portraits and Views from the Crescents**. The original material collected is currently being archived. Further information is available from Peter Marcus, 30 Humberstone Avenue, Hulme, M15 5FD. Tel. 061-226 7815.



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