

CASTLE VALE (AREA 1)

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I wanted to photograph Castle Vale, another member of The Grid Project told me I was mad going there. Castle Vale has a very well-defined boundary and a fearsome reputation. Built in the 1960s on the site of Castle Bromwich Aerodrome it was used for slum clearance: 20,000 people from the inner city were put into 35 high rise flats over 30 four and three-story maisonettes as well as 100s of bungalows and terraced houses. By the mid-seventies the utopian dreams of the previous decade had turned into a nightmare of social deprivation, unemployment, drug dealing, violence and general antisocial behaviour.

These days things have changed. All but one of the high-rise blocks have gone, as have the majority of the other 1960s buildings including the pubs that hosted much of the crime. What has replaced it is rather pleasant. One of the things that struck me first was the public art and then I noticed a total lack of graffiti and litter. The 10,000 people remaining are obviously proud of where they live. This is the sixties dream, just 50 years late but unfortunately reputations tend to stick. "Don't go to the Vale, it isn't safe, there are muggers behind each of those public sculptures and no modern health care facilities."

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