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Coventry regeneration pioneers win national recognition

Lessons learned in Coventry could play a vital role in the latest Government-backed initiative to regenerate some of the most deprived areas of the UK.

Ground-breaking programmes launched by Coventry-based Whitefriars Housing Group to breath new life into the city as well as generate employment and training opportunities are to be used as national models of best practice.

The Construction Industry Training Board-Construction Skills and The Housing Forum have launched a partnership aimed at boosting training opportunities for local people who could be employed on long-term inner city regeneration projects.

The new partnership, called Sustainable Training for Sustainable Communities, has been forged against a background of a mounting skills shortage crisis in the nation's construction industry. Experts say around 76,000 people are needed to join the construction industry each year to meet demand and replace those leaving the sector.

The skills shortage is threatening key Government policies including a target to modernise and improve 400,000 social housing homes by the year 2010 and build 22,700 new affordable homes in 2003/4

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Sixteen projects – including Whitefriars Housing Group – have signed up to the initiative. It means that, for the next five years, Whitefriars will share information and act as a role model for other organisations engaged in regeneration.

Whitefriars has launched a series of initiatives to create employment and job training for hundreds of local people from different social and cultural backgrounds including Whitefriars Training and Development Agency, the group's continuing support of Youth Craft Apprentices and schemes engaging black and minority ethnic communities.

Housing Forum chairman Hugh Try, said: "There is a lot of commendable work that is currently happening which could benefit social housing providers and their contractors who are looking to provide employment and training for local recruits. "Sustainable Training for Sustainable Communities will allow this resource to be available to all for the first time. Organisations will be able to share information and visit each other to learn from each other's successes and mistakes."

Howard Farrand, Whitefriars Group chief executive, said: "As the first of the large-scale urban housing transfers in England, Whitefriars had no similar models to learn from and no examples to follow. We are delighted to be able to share our experiences through this important new initiative.

"The national recognition we are now gaining for our achievements is testimony to the dedication of each and every member of the Whitefriars workforce and board and their commitment to deliver tangible results to the people of Coventry. "We believe that we have now laid solid foundations upon which we can work with our partners to build a better future.

"A great deal of thanks is due to Coventry City Council for having the foresight to create the opportunity that allowed Whitefriars to deliver this regeneration agenda and for allowing the work to take place in the city."

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