

Birchfield Bugle

ISSUE 9

Spring 2011 newsletter of the Birchfield Residents Action group

RIGHT ROYAL DAY



The extra bank holiday this Spring, as a tribute to Kate & Will's Royal Wedding, was celebrated in style by locals. Pictured above The Grier family of Westminster Road proudly prepare to fly the Union Jack as they party.

However, local Councillor Don Brown, was not in the party mood after vandals had wrecked the men's toilet yet again. He has sent a letter of complaint to the Council Leaders claiming that his Public House is used as a Public Convenience by many passers-by and is claiming compensation for extra water charges. Life is getting tougher Don, and we are fully behind you in your complaints.



These locals enjoy the outdoor event that The Crown & Cushion Pub put on to celebrate the day, with plenty of Jerk, Fun for the Kids and Music.

Pictured raising his glass to the Royal Couple is young celebratory Chef, Kevin Annett, of Aston Villa Hospitality and Events. We will be bringing you more news on this talented lad in our next issue.

Happy 80th Birthday
MGR. FALLON



two moving tributes from parishoners, turn to pages 6 & 7

Which local school is described like this by OFSTED's government inspectors

"...is a good school with outstanding leadership"



"Pupils act responsibly and are very polite."

"Pupils enjoy school."

"They show very positive attitudes to learning and want to do well."

"Parents, carers and pupils very much appreciate the fact that it is a caring and welcoming place to be"

TURN TO PAGE 2

other features

page 3

Our Man in America

pages 4 & 5

Birchfield's Got Talent

page 6 & 7

Father Tom's 80th Birthday

page 8

Change All Around

LORD MAYOR COMES TO WESTMINSTER!

The school's head, Maneer Samad explained to the BUGLE that, "Last year, we were in the top 3% of most improved primaries in Birmingham and secured the best results in the school's history. We had an OFSTED inspection in December 2010 which judged the school to be good with outstanding leadership, making comments such as 'The headteacher and deputy headteacher have secured a remarkable turnaround'. As a result, the Lord Mayor offered to visit the school."

(the report can be viewed at www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports)

Now pupils Hafsa Begum & Zara Akhtar describe the visit...

Thursday 19th May 2011, is a day that will live long in the memory for everybody at Westminster Primary School. On this memorable day, the Lord Mayor (Len Gregory) not only visited Westminster but he also opened the brand new, luxurious Learning Hub and the newly built reception playground.

Shortly after 9:30, the Lord Mayor pulled over in his glistening, black Jaguar as the children, teachers, and parents waited excitedly. On arriving, the mayor was given a welcome book by a year 6 child – Timotei Hovat, aged 11.

After being introduced to the school, the Lord Mayor was taken to the Learning Hub where he was provided with a pair of scissors by Anisah Begum to cut the red ribbon. They had been beautifully decorated and the Lord Mayor commented that these were the best decorated pair of scissors he had used during his time as a Lord Mayor.

The corridor echoed with applause from the children and staff of Westminster. The overjoyed children rushed to the amazing new computers with the mayor leading the way. The Lord Mayor, who has a computing degree, proudly joined

the group of enthusiastic children on the computers. After logging on to a computer the mayor roamed around the suite asking the children what they thought of their recently built computer suite.

On leaving the Learning Hub the Lord Mayor stopped to look at the maths display board and said that he was very passionate about maths and could not understand why some people found maths boring. Similarly, the Lady Mayoress admired the school's displays, "The rooms are so colourful and it's so important that the children can see each others work being put up."



Proud head, Mr Maneer Samad (left) in the newly opened IT suite, with the Lord Mayor and pupils.

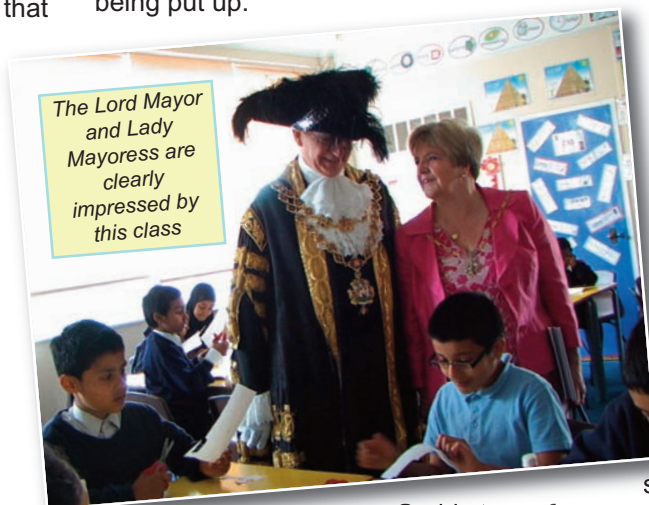
each part of the chain had the initials of the previous Lord Mayors and that it weighed an astonishing 3kgs alongside his 8kg cloak. It is surprising that he is able to walk around with such weight around his neck!

Towards the end of his visit, the Lord Mayor proudly opened the reception playground and enjoyed a small sing along with the reception children.

The Lord Mayor's visit ended with refreshments in the head teacher's office. It was there that he reflected on his enjoyable day with the school's leadership team.

As he left the building, he spoke of his pride for the city of Birmingham, describing it as a 'premier' city.

Let's hope that the city still have a 'premier' football club after the week end.



The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress are clearly impressed by this class

On his tour of the school the Lord Mayor paid a short visit to 5M and there he was presented with an entertaining story by a 9 year old student, Shamas Iqbal. On hearing this the Lady Mayoress explained that they had recently paid a visit to the Birmingham University and they had seen older students working in the same manner. They were clearly surprised by the astonishing work of the children of Westminster.

The younger children were curious about the grand uniform of the Lord Mayor and wanted to know the history of his outfit. Talhah Khan, a year three pupil enquired about the origin of his chain. He explained that



The Lord Mayor prepares to open the Reception Playground

OUR MAN IN AMERICA

Who is he?

in close relationship with West Midlands' Police were successful in having them removed. Last year, Shahid has led on the Young Citizens'

Shahid Frooq Madni

is a handsome, charismatic, twenty three year old. He grew up in Westminster Road, was educated at Westminster Road Primary School, Handsworth Grammar and later at Birmingham University where he graduated with a Theology degree. He joined his sister Sajida, pictured right, (who was interviewed in our Summer 2005 edition),

as an organiser of Birmingham Citizens and the co-ordinator of Birmingham Citizens' youth wing in 2010.



Prior to his visit to Pittsburgh we interviewed Shahid at his office in the impressive Nishkam Centre in Soho Road. It was a cold, dull day outside but inside we were warmed and energised by his welcoming smile, enthusiasm and joy in his chosen career. He delights in his organiser's role and his ambition is to be the best organiser ever! He is passionate about our local neighbourhood and in particular about motivating and supporting our local young people.

What is Birmingham Citizens?

Birmingham Citizens is a broad based community organisation which unites churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, schools, trade unions, womens' groups, neighbourhood groups and other faith based institutions who work for the common good. The core aim is to build social capacity to enable these community institutions to work effectively on the



pressures that face families and neighbourhoods by bringing them together into a close working relationship.

How does it work?

By joining together a strong and influential broad based organisation is formed capable of winning respect in the corridors of power and effecting positive change in their respective communities. Shahid and Sajida and other members of the organisers team work tirelessly on building relationships with influential people within our city: MPs, Councillors, police officers and other public officials in order to work with them to improve the cleanliness and safety of our neighbourhoods. An example of 'effecting positive change' was seen in last summer's campaign against the hundreds of CCTV surveillance cameras placed strategically in certain areas of our city.

They were considered by the community to be both intrusive and divisive. Birmingham Citizens working

Governance Campaign, training young people to get more engaged in civic society. He was successful in providing work experience for 75 young people aged 14-19 in media, retail, sports' grounds and other areas of interest to them.

Why America?

Birmingham Citizens is affiliated to the Gamaliel Foundation USA. This is a network of grass roots, inter-faith, inter-racial, multi-issue organisations working together to create a more just and more democratic society. It organises to empower people to participate effectively in the political, environmental, social and economic decisions affecting their lives. Greg Galluzzo, founder, director and active organiser of this organisation since 1971 invited Shahid to work and train with him for two years. Shahid considers him to be the best role model and mentor worldwide; Greg trained Barack Obama to be a community organiser!! Watch this space!!! Shahid will keep in touch with us during his training. He will be back!

We wish him all success in his venture.

Birmingham Citizens always welcomes new member institutions and Shahid offers an invitation to us.

How can we help you?

**For further information contact
Sajida Madni at**

**Nishkam Civic Association,
6, Soho Road Handsworth
B21 9BH. Tel 0121 515 4229**

**Sajida Madni smadni@yahoo.com
Shahid Madnisfmadni@yahoo.com**

FREE CARNIVAL MASK MAKING WORKSHOP

Midland Heart is offering local young people the opportunity to make their own beautiful carnival mask at a free workshop led by local carnival designer/maker Tunji Moore.

The masks will be made in preparation for the Midland Heart Carnival taking place at Mayfield School, on 2nd July 2011.

Bring along your carnival mask on the day and join in the procession!

The workshop will take place in a community venue in Lozells/Handsworth in June.

If you are interested, apply now for a place for you and your friends.

Call Tunji Moore - 07931 384 531 or Violet Williams on 0121 666 5310.



The Royal Banqueting Suite hosted Birchfield's Got Talent, this event was for schools in the Handsworth area. Schools were given an opportunity to show their talents which lie within their schools. The hall was full of hustle and bustle, there were parents talking to each other and small children screaming and shouting.



Westminster Primary School had three groups which took part in this event. Mrs Ruzena and Mrs Sabina is our brilliant, fabulous dance teachers who helped us to choreograph our dances. (They have been at our school for the last one and half years.) We are very happy that Mrs Khan(*Home School Liaison Teacher*) has involved our school in such an event. On Thursday 10th of March when we entered the Royal suite we saw brilliant break dancing from **Broadway School**.



Then it was the turn of Westminster our school, our group felt like celebrities on stage. The dance left us extremely proud of ourselves and very confident. After that, all of Westminster Primary dance groups had performed Mr Samad and Mrs Johnson came on stage and said thank you and explained how proud they were of the children of Westminster.



Then the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress came on stage and shook our hands and also said thank you, before sitting back down to enjoy the rest of the show. We were hungry so Mrs Johnson and Mr Samad got each one of us a token so we could have food and drink. Lastly Mrs Shelina handed over the children to their parents so they could go home after a long and exciting day.



Sadly Mrs Sabina has left so there is only one dance teacher Mrs Ruzena. We will still be carrying our dance club and hopefully one day we will be famous.

By Anisah Begum

BIRCHFIELDS



S GOT TALENT

This photo round up by Bugle photographer **Richard Baddeley** shows the range of talent enjoyed by distinguished guests, including The Lord Mayor, **Councillor Len Gregory**, parents and children. Organised by **Birchfield Residents Action Group** it hosted Display stalls, varieties of food and performance. **Yvonne Wager**, Neighbourhood manager, at the time, who provided the funds, described the event "as truly representing the wonderful community we have in Birchfield" It was filmed by **Aston Vision Association** and copies of the DVD of the entertainment can be requested from our website. We hope that this event will encourage local entrepreneurs, **Pervaiz Akhtar of Jazba Entertainment**, **Melissa Shervington of e-engage consultancy** and **Sumamakji of Hydra Theatre**, who organised the talent for this event, to organise more events where Birchfield's talent will be seen. Veteran local band **Kolkinnor** also played. **Broadway Dance School** made a special Guest appearance for which we are grateful, as we hope to feature them in our next issue.



Down at the DRUM in Newtown local groups are shown taking part in a **FAITHS in ACTION** event that marked the end of a project in local schools to bring different faiths together to celebrate their faith heroes.

Aston Vision had organised the project funded by the **Community Development Foundation**, which included workshops in Godly Play, Nasheed and & Gospel music, dance and drama, led by professionals in their various expertise.



Aashiq Al-Rasul Youth Academy Nasheed music



World Changers Army, Gospel Music

Jazba Entertainment had the difficult job of pulling it all together, not least, dealing with Birmingham City Council. Childrens Performance department, which resulted in cancelling one event.



photographer Humaira Razzaq





**Father Tom
in 1959**

THE "RETIREMENT" of Monsignor Tom Fallon

as seen by parishioner Tom Flanagan

The people of Saint Francis of Assisi parish, Hunters Road, may feel sad that 'Father Tom' Fallon has through ill-health, stepped back from his

post as Parish Priest but they know there is no way has he retired.

As Father Gerard Kelly takes up the reins of office we can reflect on his long-term service here in Perry Barr, Handsworth, firstly as curate at St Teresa's, Wellington Road, after ordination in 1959, for a period of four years, and then, 1977 to '2011, thirty-five years at St Francis'. In between he honed his priestly skills at two other local parishes for fourteen years

Mgr Tom helped Father Gerard in his vocation to the priesthood after he came to Birmingham from Donegal and now welcomes him again as he comes from 'Our Lady' parish in Wolverhampton back to St Francis. "A coincidence (or God-incidence?) is that Father Gerard's previous church is dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual help and now he serves at St Francis where Perpetual and Annual Novenas to Our Lady of Perpetual Help are held since Mgr Tom accepted responsibility for them when their previous home, a church in the new 'Canal' Quarter, was demolished. This theme of

Mgr Tom Fallon (pictured right) is shown with one of the many parishioners who greeted him to celebrate his recent 80th birthday and retirement .

accepting responsibility and the promotion of people to the priesthood and the religious life are strong marks of Mgr. Tom's ministry, well shown by the way he welcomed and greatly assisted the Vietnamese 'Boat People' into Handsworth and St Francis'. They have repaid his kindness by bringing vigour and joy into church services by their beautiful singing, the talents of our organist, Hanh, and the large number who have become priests and religious. The religious leaders who came with them became Mgr. Tom's firm friends.

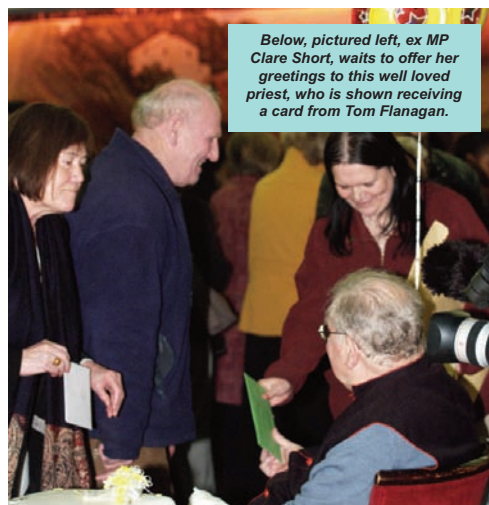
One, Father Peter Diem, was also promoted to Monsignor and was given responsibility for the Vietnamese Catholics of Europe. He was required to travel much and could have no better mentor in this skill than follow Mgr. Tom, often his companion on journeys, who

cornered the market on pilgrimages from Birmingham. Mgr. Tom led his flock to Fatima; Lough Berg; Knock; Medjugorje to name but a few. Among other places, he went with Mgr Peter to Australia. Tragically Mgr. Peter Diem was murdered in Vietnam, in 2003, when he made a rapprochement visit to that country. This mix of great joy and sadness have been interwoven in the life and ministry of Mgr. Tom. Brought up in Cavan, Mgr. Tom's father was a Garda (Policeman) originally from the West of Ireland, so Mgr Tom can and does empathise with those who are displaced from their homes as well as their country. His mother died when he was very young so he can empathise with those from broken families. He did hard physical work in the Birmingham of the post-war 50's before entering the priesthood, mixing with many people and able to get on easily with all. Skills he has demonstrated since during the Handsworth riots when, along with the then Father Peter, he was able to talk to and empathise with young Rastafarians and other fearful communities.



This 2011 Novena hints at the great strides made under the services of Mgr Tom. More than fifty different countries were represented on the altar at the first mass of 'Our Lady of All Nations', and quite a few, including, England, were not up there although they were in the congregation. Also to be seen were Religious Sisters of many orders, nuns from Vietnam, Irish, Indian, Pakistan, British and European backgrounds - including Sisters of Mercy from across Hunters Road. One very important to us - Sister of Mercy not present was Sister Mary Leonard, companion of Mgr Tom, pilgrimages to Fatima especially. After over 60 years ministry here she is now continuing her work/vocation in Fishguard. Two Mother Teresa of Calcutta, were present and one of the instructions they receive, from the now Blessed Teresa also fits with Mgr. Tom's ministry - "You have to be in the world, yet not of the world".

The recent sadness and scandal perpetrated by a few priests in our diocese has weighed heavily on Mgr. Tom, as on the victims and us all. We have been strengthened by the many good people - clergy, religious and laity who continue in their good work for us, and we know of the friendship and support Mgr Tom has received from Father Derek Meskeel, Redemptorist Priest leading our Novena, - who met and knew Mother Teresa while working in Calcutta. Not one but two weekly prayer groups, Nigerian and Filipino social groups, a Senior Citizen's weekly club in the St Francis Centre (of excellence), St Vincent de Paul, led by another of Mgr Tom's helpers, Frank O'Loughlyn, who does work helping families in the parish (Frank is also the uncle of Clare Short, ex- Ladywood MP, who was assisted in her work by Mgr. Tom's advice as she tried to reconcile the dilemmas of Modern Life and Parliament. The Short family once lived in Grosvenor Road).



Below, pictured left, ex MP Clare Short, waits to offer her greetings to this well loved priest, who is shown receiving a card from Tom Flanagan.

This inadequate snapshot of Mgr. Tom Fallon's life so far is in anticipation of what is yet to come. As he recovers from ill-health and recent operations will he resist the desire to lead us, as and when able, on pilgrimage? Does his heart yearn for a return to Ireland while Duty insists he continues his work here? He must know, come what may, he will remain in the hearts and minds of all who knew him, even those who, by virtue of his office, he was obliged to admonish or constrain.



The party continues on the next page.....

DOUBLE CELEBRATIONS FOR MONSIGNOR FALLON

as reported by **Susi Lightfoot**

Monsignor Fallon certainly knows how to party and he did it all again the very next day with his beloved Vietnamese Parishioners. He was only too happy to repeat a second day of special Mass Service and Celebrations organised by his beloved Vietnamese community of St Francis.

They also came together in their hundreds to join their local Chaplain, Rev. Peter Nguyen Tien-Dac who continues to provide pastoral care at St Francis with Vietnamese Masses alongside English Catholic Services.

"PROPOSE NEVER IMPOSE"

says **Monsignor Fallon**:

Mgr Fallon said he joined the priesthood to help different cultures be more tolerant of each other. "We have come a long way but we need to do more". It is important he cautioned that we should however always remember, "propose never impose".

He studied peace studies at Bradford University and in April 2003 submitted to the University of Birmingham to study to be a Doctor of Philosophy. His subject was "the Proclamation through dialogue and radical change in official Catholic teaching vis-à-vis the religion of Islam".

Birmingham City Library have recently asked for a copy of his thesis which will be included in the new library planned for the city and due to open in 2013. A copy will also be catalogued into the Local History Collection at Handsworth Library.

Pat O'Rourke says he was here when Fr Fallon arrived and "in our minds Fr Fallon is a hard worker always one to push the boundaries, doing business and bringing it back here to make the Parish work. St. Chad's might be the Cathedral in Birmingham but St Francis is the hub – every catholic knows St Francis"

WELL-WISHERS CELEBRATE WITH MONSIGNOR TOM:

Parishioners old and new and from all backgrounds, age and culture, turned out to honour his work. Among them, were Noreen Gough and her husband Paul who emigrated to Australia 30 years ago but returned to Birmingham for a family funeral and to attend Mgr Fallon's event.



photo thanks
to Vince

Noreen Gough said, "We visit family in the UK each year and never fail to attend Monsignor Fallon's services with our brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews at St Francis Parish Church on each return trip. In October 2008 Monsignor led the funeral service at St Francis' Church for my beloved father, Luke Peter Casey, where we acknowledged to the hundreds in attendance that Monsignor Fallon has always been a blessed gift to our family and that we love him for his kind care in our hour of need. We also shared a joke that as Dad had so many lovely nurses and carers by his side through his illness, that on one particular visit Monsignor Fallon declared, Blessed is he amongst women!"

Mr. Tom Hynes, here since the 1950's said, "In my opinion he was the best Parish Priest we ever had! I have a great appreciation of Monsignor Fallon and his love of the Parish".

Gerry Diggins another parishioner and member of the community since 1950's added, "he's a great man!". **Hazel Gooeen** said, "I came to Handsworth from Jamaica in 1959 and along with many others was welcomed to Britain, received into the Church, Baptised and Married, all by Monsignor Fallon".



Mr Pat Fitzpatrick whose son Fr. Paul Fitzpatrick was one of the concelebrants at the Mass service said, "Monsignor Fallon like myself remains an enthusiastic member of the Cavan County Association in Birmingham, who lives the Cavan life, dreams Cavan and is a Cavan man through and through".

Owen Ledwick, another Co. Cavan man, who drove the St Francis mini-bus for over 20 years, said, "Fr Seamus Hetherington went to school with Monsignor Fallon and always considers himself "superior" – as he's one year older!"



photo thanks
to Vince

Among the **Fallon family**, pictured above, attending from Ireland and Coventry were, Arthur and twin sister Ria, who were born the same year Monsignor Fallon was ordained; **Arthur** said, "Uncle Tom is a man at the very heart of his community. The vast amount of people queuing up to congratulate him after the recent mass to celebrate his lifelong service to his Church and Parish show how valued, respected and loved he is. It's true to say the queue was of truly Papal proportions."

Maureen Renshaw, who worked in the office for Monsignor made a tearful speech of thanks to Monsignor Fallon, then sang a beautiful rendition of "County of Mayo".

Jim Rafter and **Billy Martin** were also among the soloists along with **Peter Collins** who sang "My Father's Shoes" followed by "Tell Me You Love Me" and in giving his tribute stated, "Every ship needs a good captain and Monsignor Fallon has been a very, very good captain". **Irene** sang "A road that never ends" and Tom sang "Thanks a lot" and were accompanied by Irene's 3 year old grandson, Nathan playing guitar. Among other tributes made, **Father Peter Conley**, currently in residence at St Francis, made reference to the big photograph of Mgr Fallon with former Aston Villa manager Martin O'Neill hanging in the priests' house next door. Mgr Fallon has supported Aston Villa for over 50 years and Martin O'Neill remains a close friend.

Peter Mullholland and his wife Nuala were among the workers from St Francis Church and Centre, along with their son John who was M.C. at the Thanksgiving Mass Service for Monsignor Fallon Peter Mullholland has worked for Monsignor for many years and said, "Monsignor Tom has a really dry wit, he can cut you in two or make you feel like the King of England, whichever suits his purpose. He is well respected and he is always there giving us a "push" and gets the support from people others wouldn't get".

June Docherty who worked for Monsignor Fallon said, "Monsignor Fallon has always been hands on" while another local parishioner, **Lena O'Malley**, Parishioner, said, "he's a brilliant, lovely man".

Background Graphic Design by
Mr Hanh Nguyen

More pictures and story can be found on
www.brag.btik.com

CHANGE all AROUND



view plans in more detail at www.brag.btik.com

This is the proposed new exciting street scene for Wellington Road, at the junction with Westminster Road. 11 new designer houses are to be built by Boss & Co Homes of Walsall. Access to Westminster Road will be closed, let's hope the Birchfield estate will see - designs that will smarten up our area.

BROWNE OFF



Retired district nurse Linda Brown MBE is feeling pretty "browned off" with the standard of building work that was allowed for an extension to an adjacent property on Livingstone Road.

It seems that scaffolders and builders thought she was a tenant, as they started to knock bricks out of her own property, but she has owned her house for over 30 years.

Councillor Quinnen is awaiting a reply from the Planning Department. If you a similar problem with builders let BUGLE know.



Nurse Brown points to the slap of cement replacing the bashed-out brick in her wall. To use her toilet facing the extension she now has to put on the light.

COUNCIL CUTS NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGERS



The end of an era is pictured above, with the Council having to make cuts of several millions, axing the Neighbourhood Managers posts was one solution. Seen with their supportive colleagues from work and the community are (holding the flowers) Yvonne Wager (left) and Gillian Lloyd, at a farewell party to celebrate their success with Neighbourhood management in the ward.



Pictured left holding the candle is ex-councillor Mahmood Hussain who also is without a job now since the last elections. Times are changing and we wish his successor, Waseem Zaffar all the very best for the future.

"Out, out, brief candle..."

Birchfield Residents Action Group (BRAG) was set up to highlight problems within the Birchfield area. Our aim is to cooperate with all the organisations working in and responsible for the well being of our residents.

Our hope is to regenerate pride and find agreed solutions to the problems.

This quarterly newsletter illustrates some of the current activities that are happening in our area, and has been kindly funded by Be Birmingham's Successful Neighbourhoods fund.

Contact us at brag07@gmail.com / www.brag.btik.com.

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