

We asked Andrew Simons, who is OutReach Worker for this Project, to explain what is happening....

BIRCHFIELD BIG LOCAL

Birchfield is one of three neighbourhoods in Birmingham to be chosen for the Big Local initiative. Together with Firs and Bromford estate in East Birmingham and Welsh House Farm in Quinton, Birchfield is to receive £1 million over the next ten years to enable local residents to make the neighbourhood an even better place in which to live. Birchfield was included in the second wave of 50 Big Local areas announced in February 2012 by the Local Trust who are managing the programme, and is now coming to the end of the "Getting started" phase.

All Big Local areas are following a similar pathway, but as each neighbourhood is unique this pathway is not set in stone and is flexible depending on local circumstances. During the "Getting started" phase four important steps have been taken:

- Spreading the word about Big Local and getting people involved**
- Exploring people's priorities for the area and visions for the future**
- Setting up a Local Partnership**
- Creating a Big Local Plan**

Spreading the word and getting people involved is an ongoing process that will continue throughout Big Local. Priorities have been identified through in-depth interviews with people who live and work in the area; pop up events at locations around the neighbourhood; conversations with groups including young people, the elderly and parents; an online survey; and through two community conferences, the first held in April at St Clare's Catholic Primary School, and the second in September at Grosvenor Road Studios. This information has been used together with neighbourhood statistics to create a profile of the Birchfield Big Local area.

One of the features of Big Local that marks it out from many previous regeneration programmes is the requirement that it is resident led. Decision-making in each Big Local area is the responsibility of a partnership that has to have a minimum of 50% resident representation. In the case of Birchfield this is seventy per cent. After a number of initial meetings the Birchfield Big Local Partnership was established in July this year and elections held for chair and vice chair. Michael Tye was elected chair and Dorrette Hanson as vice-chair; the partnership is now looking to appoint a

secretary and treasurer. The partnership remains open to new members and membership is likely to change over time as the programme evolves.

To access the £1million each Big Local area also has to create a plan. For Birchfield this began life at the April community conference where the participants looked at the priorities for the area and started to formulate ideas for action around four key themes:

- Well Run, Active and Inclusive Birchfield**
- Well Built and Environmentally Sensitive Birchfield**
- Well-Served Birchfield**
- Thriving Birchfield**

Four theme or working groups were formed



A Big Local Partnership Board member makes a point with Councillor Zaffar

to take these ideas further and create action plans which together form the core of the Birchfield Big Local Plan. To deliver the plan, Birchfield Big Local will also need some basic infrastructure to be in place, for example, an office base, the means to communicate and engage with people, and the capacity to help support and nurture the skills, aspirations and talents of local people. This too is part of the plan. A draft of the action plan was discussed at a second community conference in September at the Grosvenor Road Studios and at the same event a shared long-term vision was created.

"We have a dream that Birchfield



Here participants in one of the groups at the second conference share their ideas

Members of the Community come together at the First Conference at St Clare's school



will become ...

A beacon neighbourhood where the diverse community feels empowered, engaged and enabled to address issues such as health, inequality, unemployment and environment, so creating a happy, safe, clean, prosperous and regenerated area in which to live and work.

A place where every citizen has a collective sense of ownership, belonging, pride, respect, creativity and an equal voice. A place where individual talent and skills are nurtured and people want to come and stay.

And so providing a lasting legacy to all people by giving them a new direction that helps break the cycle of poverty through creating a well-served and connected community."

The plan is about to be submitted to the Local Trust for their approval. Once accepted, the next step will be implementing it with the support and involvement of local people. To help with this, Birchfield Big Local needs a "local trusted organisation" to assist the partnership in administering the funds. The search for a suitable "local trusted organisation" and for an office base has already begun.

Big Local isn't just about the money. The key is having a shared vision and people working together to make the most of the existing community assets; above all the skills, talents and aspirations of the people who live and work in Birchfield, and also the physical assets that exist within the area.