

NEIGHBOURHOOD *News*

BULLETIN OF THE BIRMINGHAM ASSOCIATION OF NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS

July 2006



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In This Edition:

Boys in the 'hood - Neighbourhood policing is here • **Space Invaders** - Planning for the future
Brave New World - Will e-Democracy save the day? • **Still Waters** - Edgbaston latest

Neighbourhood News is published by the Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums. Its aim is to inform its readers about the work to improve the quality of life in Birmingham, stimulate debate in local democracy and encourage the growth of urban communities.

Copy dates:

Neighbourhood News is published bimonthly in the third week of January, July, May, July, September and November.

Editorial contributions are welcome provided the author is identified and a contact address and telephone number is included. The editor cannot guarantee a contribution will be included in a particular issue. Editorial contributions must be received one calendar month before the proposed publication date.

Advertising:

Advertising is free for Forums and community organisations based in or working in the Birmingham area.

Advertising rates for other organisations are available on request.

Circulation:

Each publication has a circulation of 3000. Copies are distributed free of charge to Association members, MP's, councillors and other members of the community.

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The Editor,
Neighbourhood News,
C/o BANF
NRFC,
Revesby Walk,
Nechells,
Birmingham B7 4LG



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The Chairman's Report



Welcome to the July edition of Neighbourhood News. The last two months have been busy times for the Forums. We have had a couple of successful outcomes to campaigns involving the development plans at Edgbaston Reservoir and mobile phone masts in Sutton Coldfield. (See pages 4 and 12). Lyndhurst residents finally saw the beginnings of the long overdue demolition of their estate, and Hamstead Hall Forum were tackling the Council over waste collection. The one common thing about these things is the Forums have used the media to get their message across. We're all struggling with limited resources, so it's vital to use what we have to get the best results possible. We have a number of newspapers in the city and they are interested in hearing from Neighbourhood Forums about local issues. There are Forums actively using publicity and the media to help publicise their efforts and achieve their aims. If you haven't involved your local paper in neighbourhood issues, I urge you to do so now.

BANF has also been busy. The new Mayor, Cllr. Mike Sharp, hosted a civic reception for BANF and our AGM elected a new management committee which will serve for the next twelve months. I believe that the outgoing committee has managed to put in place a number of policies which will serve to strengthen BANF for what promises to be a busy future. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed to the effort.

Speaking of BANF's role, we have been fully involved with the Birmingham Strategic Partnership and their review of community engagement and also the Local Services & Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which is due to report soon. We have started a series of briefings about major issues, such as the "Dealing with Emergencies" meeting, held in association with the Council's Emergency Planning Department, and the Drug Awareness briefing hosted by the Community Safety Partnership. We are planning a briefing on Neighbourhood Policing in the near future, and I hope to bring more news on the Neighbourhood Policing initiative in the next edition. The new policing plan is something that will affect all members of the community and I hope you take time to read the article on page 6. If you have any other topics which you think would be important to cover, please let us know.

Victor Cox

Chair of BANF

New Management Committee at BANF

Delegates from Birmingham local Neighbourhood Forums have unanimously elected a new BANF management committee.

The nine successful candidates were voted in at the AGM held on 4th July in the Council House.

The new Committee

Arthur Brown – *Vice Chair*

Neale Garner – *Treasurer*

Rickie Nicholson – *Vice Chair*

Victor Cox – *Chair*

Edward Howard – *Member*

Brendan O'Brien – *Member*

Mohan Lal Gaddu – *Secretary*

John King – *Human Resources*

Jacqueline Ryan – *Publicity*



Still Waters Run Deep

By Keith Taylor

In the last edition I wrote about the threat to Edgbaston Reservoir as a nature and recreation centre. Developers had gained planning permission to build four-storey apartments right on the water's edge. I wrote that they could still be stopped if Birmingham residents worked together. To be honest, I wasn't entirely confident about that. But on 22 June we won a real victory – for the time being, at least.

Along the way it has been a roller coaster ride. Although the developers have planning permission, they do not own the site. They only have a thirty-three years lease. The owner is Birmingham City Council's Leisure, Sport and Culture Directorate. If it refuses to sell, there is no way the site could be used for apartments. Councillor John Alden, who was Cabinet

member for Leisure, Sport and Culture, made clear that he supported all the residents who wrote to him: no sale. However, after the May Elections he was replaced by Cllr. Ray Hassall. Our fear has been that he might bow to pressure over the development.

North West Edgbaston Neighbourhood Forum wrote to Cllr. Hassall urging him to stand firm. This was his reply:

“As far as I am aware the site has not been declared surplus and appropriate officers are therefore investigating various options that may be available. I will write to you again when I have more information.”

So that was all right then... Or was it? Cllr. Hassall referred to “officers ... investigating various options”. Cllr. Alden had asked

for proposals to upgrade the reservoir facilities. It seems something may have been lost in transmission between Cllr. Alden setting out his wishes and officers instructing the urban designer. The proposals produced for upgrading facilities have been well received. However, they cover everything but the Ballroom site. The fear was still that the price for these improvements may be the sale of the site for housing after all. Call me paranoid if you like, but that doesn't mean they are not out to get us!

On 21 June residents groups were staggered to learn that the next day council officers were to ask the Cabinet Property Committee to declare the Tower Ballroom site surplus. That evening there was a flurry of e-mails involving Labour

and Conservative councillors, residents, the Friends of Edgbaston Reservoir and the Media. We feared the decision would go against us and were working out how to have the decision 'called in' by the Coordinating Scrutiny Committee.

That will not be necessary. At Committee, Cllr. Sir Albert Bore – a non-voting member – pointed out how much opposition there was to housing development on the reservoir. Unusually, the Chair, Cllr. Paul Tilsley, allowed representations from residents and Cllr. Deidre Alden. As Cllr. Alden later put it, "We all sang from the same hymn sheet."

The result was that Cllr. Tilsley postponed a decision. He said, "We have a bargaining chip with the developers if we don't declare it surplus to requirements and that allows us to enter into discussions with the developers."

Afterwards a spokesman for the developers said they had alternatives in the pipeline. "We've had approaches from major night-club providers from London and Ibiza, as well as a leading gentlemen's club so, no doubt, we'll need to discuss all this with the Council."

So, we still cannot afford to let up on the campaign.

Cllr. Alden said, "I have never known such strength of feeling on an issue from everyone in Ladywood and Edgbaston. People are united and determined to carry on fighting these plans, which would stick out like a sore thumb. The Council now holds the trump card as it goes back to the developers and asks for something acceptable to the residents, before it will consider selling."

Cllr. Bore said, "Months of lobbying have paid off. The users of Edgbaston Reservoir and all those residents around the reservoir can take some comfort from the decision by the Cabinet Committee not to dispose of the Tower Ballroom site to developers.

Councillors, residents and users have all argued that the proposals for an intensive housing development on the Tower Ballroom site were inappropriate. The decision of the Cabinet Committee gives us an opportunity to set down a development brief acceptable to us all - and one which any developers will have to work within. I think we can assume that the Countrywide proposals can now be confined to the wastepaper basket."

In the past I, for one, have said some dreadful things about local politicians. But this episode shows how they can get it right for people in Birmingham. Cllr. Bore is Labour, the two Cllrs. Alden are Conservative, and Cllr. Tilsley is a Liberal Democrat. An unlikely alliance, perhaps, but they came together to support local residents and slow the developers' juggernaut. Chris Vaughan of the Friends of Edgbaston Reservoir summed it up. "Everyone was afraid they would go into a side room and quietly strangle opposition to the land being declared surplus. Our local councillors delighted us."

We are winning, but we still have not quite won. It is clear the developers have not given up. If residents and councillors remain united any proposals from them that do not meet our needs will go into the wastepaper basket too.



New Development Officer for Ladywood, Perry Barr & Hall Green

Welcome to Rajinder Rattu, the latest addition to the BANF team. Rajinder comes from the City Council where he served as a Tenancy Support Officer with the Housing Department. He is also Secretary of the Sandwell One Neighbourhood Forum and until his appointment in June, Treasurer of BANF.

"This year is proving to be a whirlwind year for me, starting with my election to the BANF Management Committee. Being a Director is an experience I will never forget, especially at a time when there were so many uncertainties.

"In April I got married to my Indian Princess, Kulwinder, in India. June saw me taking a leap of faith and deciding to work for BANF after several years employed by the City Council.

"I am looking forward to working with the dynamic and diverse groups of people who make up the Forum networks within Birmingham. It is proving to be a very challenging and yet rewarding arena in which to work in."



Boyz in the 'hood?

Neighbourhood Policing comes to Birmingham

By Andrew Cowin

“When was the last time you saw someone breaking into a house or a car?” Sitting on the tenth floor of Lloyd House, the West Midlands Police HQ, it’s hard to imagine having to deal with such questions. But aren’t these the realities of everyday life? I try to remember if anyone I know has been the victim of any crime recently.

“I haven’t,” I admit, finally. Chief Inspector Greg Oakley of the West Midlands Neighbourhood Policing Team, clearly thinks that’s the right answer. He nods slightly and explains why. “If you go to a meeting and ask that question, most people give the same answer as you do, but they still tell us

that they think crime is on the increase. Every British crime survey since 1995 has shown a fall in overall crime in the key categories of house burglary, robbery, vehicle crime and violent crime have consistently fallen in the last ten years. What has risen is people’s fear of crime. It’s this perception, what we call the “reassurance gap”, that the Neighbourhood Policing Plan is designed to address.”

So if most of us have never seen any real crime, why do we think crime is on the increase? Recent research found that certain disorder and criminal events act as warning signals. These are known as signal crimes and have more of an impact on

feelings of safety than actual levels of crime. According to Greg Oakley most of us are familiar with the concept.

“If I ask an audience which road in their area they wouldn’t want to live on, there’s usually a clear winner. It’s the one with rubbish in the gardens, broken down fences, graffiti on the walls, or teenagers hanging around on the corner. These visible signs have an effect on people’s sense of security, and it’s that fear that people translate into increased criminal activity.”

Following the Government White Paper “Building Communities, Beating Crime” (2004) which set out its commitment to forging a better

relationship between the police and public, the West Midlands Police (WMP) have been trialing a new Neighbourhood Policing strategy. Instead of concentrating on reacting to crime in the usual way, the emphasis is on being more pro active by putting communities needs and priorities at the heart of local policing. To do this there has been a significant change in the way the police work. Police officers no longer patrol a clearly defined beat but work in a geographical area. There has been an increase in the use of bicycles to patrol, and Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) have been introduced to work alongside police. PCSO's provide a visible and accessible presence in the community, deal with incidents of nuisance and anti-social behaviour and gather intelligence which is fed back to the police for evaluation and action.

The WMP are also forming 21 Neighbourhood Teams within the various Operational Command Units (OCU's) throughout the city. These new Neighbourhood Teams have a wide ranging brief which includes:

- Getting to know and understand their local neighbourhoods.
- Engage communities to identify safety concerns.
- Agree the top action priorities for each neighbourhood.
- Coordinate the action with partners.
- Feedback success or failure to the community.

The key to success of neighbourhood teams is developing partnerships with

local health and education authorities, community groups and businesses. These partners will be able to take an active part in resolving the community's problems. Because each neighbourhood is different, the make-up of neighbourhood teams will be tailored to the needs of community.

Partners on the teams will include local ward councillors, neighbourhood and housing managers, community and voluntary organisations, wardens, private security companies, and youth workers. They also may include those who are accredited under Community Safety Accreditation Schemes which allow those who are involved in a community safety role to be given a limited number of enforcement powers.

"We can't do this on our own. By pooling resources and expertise we can succeed in curing the problem where before we would just manage to put a plaster on the problem and hope it wouldn't get worse," said Greg. "I was directly involved in Neighbourhood Policing in the Quinton area. There was one particular individual - lets call her Sue. Single parent, kids from various relationships, lived in a council house with no furniture, bare floors and the doors hanging off. The kids were running wild and constantly disrupting school or truanting. A really dysfunctional family with a lot of problems which affected the whole neighbourhood. We called a case conference with our community partners, identified the various issues Sue faced, talked about what each partner could do and agreed a plan of action. But before we did

anything, Sue had to guarantee she'd cooperate fully. We cleared the rubbish out the garden, cut the grass and weeds, found her some furniture, fixed the doors back on the hinges and laid some carpet. Sue had to keep the place maintained in reasonable order and made sure the kids went back to school and attended regularly. The kids are still attending school, Sue completed an educational course and now has a job."

Another example involves Highfield and South Quinton Forum who became partners in a local issue last November. Brenda Da Costa recalls the operation "No Name Lane is an unadopted alley running at the side of the Infants school at Four Dwellings. The whole area was in disarray with broken fences and litter. It really needed attention. Our Forum, along with the police took the matter in hand to improve the situation. The police contracted a company to instal a dummy fence and mounted a surveillance on it. After an hour they'd caught eight people."

There is a great deal of evidence to show that neighbourhood policing works. Between 2003-5 the National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP) has introduced schemes across 16 sites in England. Results are consistently positive. The evidence shows that levels of crime, perceptions of anti-social behaviour and public confidence in the police were improved. More importantly, there were significant improvements in trust amongst communities themselves.

For more information :

www.neighbourhoodpolicing.co.uk
www.homeoffice.gov.uk
www.crimereduction.gov.uk

Planning for the Future

You may not know it but there is a war raging which either threatens our basic civil rights and our freedom to behave how we like, or will improve our lives and how we view our neighbourhoods. I'm referring to the debate on urban design and anti-social behaviour. With large areas of Birmingham being redeveloped following the planning outrages of the 1960's communities are increasingly being drawn into the debate.

On the one hand, there are crime preventionists who think urban design should be used to minimise criminal activity and anti-social behaviour. On the other hand, we have the new Urbanists who think design should be used to create more sociable public spaces where people enjoy a pleasant quality of life. Whatever camp you're in, the underlying principle is that urban design can affect behaviour.

The crime prevention enthusiasts argue that there are certain places that encourage anti-social behaviour or crime. These tend to be areas of brutally designed buildings and poorly designed open spaces which look neglected and abandoned. They say that it's not the design of the place which creates criminals, but existing criminals have more opportunity to flourish.

By contrast the New Urbanists argue that given the opportunity and the right environment people will become socially responsible and caring for each other and the environment. For Joe Holyoak, Urban Planner and Reader in Architecture at Birmingham University, the arguments are not so clear cut. "You can encourage good behaviour to some extent

and you can discourage bad behaviour, but ultimately the environment doesn't govern what people do. There's always the element of free will. The street and all the other public spaces are the democratic public realm and I think in that sense they are the public living rooms of the community. They have that very important role in allowing a community to be itself, to express who it is, what kind of people they are and what the relationships between them are."

The idea of democratic public spaces is an important one as increasingly public land is being placed under private control. An interesting example is Brindleyplace, which is held up as a success for managed design. Situated close to the centre of Birmingham, Brindleyplace is 17 acres of apartments, offices, bars, restaurants, and visitor attractions built around three public squares. According to Gary Taylor, Director of Argent Estates who manage the area, crime is non-existent. "In ten years there has been one instance of graffiti. In the six years the car park has been operational, four million cars have been parked, but there has only been three incidents of car crime."

Gary puts the success of Brindlyplace down to a high standard of planning, management of the whole area, and owner/occupiers managing the public space. A calm haven compared to Broad Street, next to Brindleyplace, which has become a byword for binge drinking and anti-social behaviour.

Joe Holyoak, although an

admirer of Brindleyplace, has reservations. "You've got a whole battery of influences which is tending to bring public space under private control. The Bull Ring and Brindleyplace are examples of that, where part of the deal is that big commercial developers say, yes, we'll come and invest in your city to the tune of hundreds of millions, but we want to have management of the spaces between the buildings themselves. In the case of Brindleyplace, the land was assembled out of several urban blocks of public land that had public streets in them. When the overall boundary around the development was drawn, everything in the development became private.

The Bull Ring in a different sense is the same. All those spaces in the Bull Ring which one might naively imagine were public space, are all private space. That to me seems a pretty sinister kind of process in which the old idea of a democratic public space gets privatised. One sector, an economically powerful sector, gets a greater degree of influence and control over the management of a public space. But it's spreading, it's happening everywhere because if for no other reason than local authorities are pressured for cash.

"There is a political dimension as well. All the attention is on the centre. The idea is that the centre represents the city to the world and this is where the economic interest is, and this where you put the huge investment. There's obviously sense in that, but I would say the proportion is unbalanced. The

great majority of the population live in the suburbs and that's the environment they interact with. No one seems to be spending much time thinking about how the physical environment of those kind of areas can be radically changed. It just isn't high up on the list of priorities."

The biggest single problem Birmingham faces with regard to urban planning is the disastrous legacy of the 1960's. In one respect, Birmingham was a victim of it's own success. Since Joseph Chamberlain in the 1870's, the city has always had big civic ambitions. It has always done things faster and more completely than other cities have. The sixties saw the construction of council estates on unprecedented scale in Castle Vale, Frankley and Chelmsley Wood. At the same time the inner city areas of Ladywood, Duddeston and Highgate were being rebuilt. Uniform boxes where residents looked out over stark canyons and concrete deserts which invited trouble of one sort or another.

Joe Holyoak who graduated at the height of the 60's boom, is familiar with the problems which have resulted in these communities. "Castle Vale in it's own way is a typical Brummie example. It was one of the biggest disasters of the sixties, a single lump of mechanised housing, that was built like Lego and pretty quickly became a byword for estates of that period and a dead end place for council tenants to live. If you lived at the end of what was the 66 bus route, you were just about the most disadvantaged community in the whole city."

Gradually the city planners are tearing down these tragic mistakes. They recently started on the notorious Lyndhurst



estate and plan to rebuild it when they find a private partner.

Which brings us back to the problem of how you design a community for the best outcome. In an increasingly vocal age, residents are demanding an increasing say in the planning. Joe Holyoak believes this is vital to ensure a successful outcome.

"A lot of the work I do is about regenerating clapped out old housing estates, typically ones built in the sixties under the influence of pretty misguided ideas which turned out to not be able to stand the test of time. We develop the brief for what we are going to propose for the area through public meetings on the basis that the residents are the experts. They've been living

there for years, they know which things work and don't work

"But you can go beyond that, you can start suggesting alternatives or improvements and test them out. We have meetings to discuss how the estate doesn't work, and what needs fixing. Then we'll go away, do drawings of changes we think will work and then go back and test those out. Depending on feedback, we'll make further adjustments. It's a continuous process of engaging with the community and sounding them out. It's crucial that residents get involved in the design, because space is not something you can give from outside the community as a present. It should be brought into being by the community itself. It's about giving people some share in the process, some degree of participation"



Brave New World

Can e-Democracy force councils to listen to the voter?

By Andrew Cowin

For better or worse, democracy has got a pretty bad reputation at the moment. Apathy has traditionally been blamed for low turn out at the polls and a reluctance for people to engage in political activity. However, the recent Power Commission report into the state of British democracy painted a picture of a population with a high degree of interest in politics, who are becoming more involved in pressure politics, such as petitions, consumer boycotts, campaign groups, etc. People complain that the current process forces voters to commit to too broad a range of policies and feel they have no input into decision making once the ballots have been counted.

The problem is not one of apathy, (there are over 150 million internet links to action networks and groups and a further 60 million political links in the UK alone), but a change in expectation and a rejection of administrative policies which fail to take into account peoples desire to be consulted in a real and meaningful fashion. It's no good consulting the public on what colour the curtains are if they can't have a say about the view from the window.

"Clearly people are fed up with the old ways," says Gez Smith, a local government consultant with Delib, whose clients include the The Cabinet Office, Sheffield City Council, and the Electoral Reform Society. "Councils have a big problem, really. They have

to consult the electorate but they are unable to deal with the results if they clash with council policies. The traditional approach to community consultation is to hold surgeries where the public turn up and bend their ear about various issues. It's usually the same people who come every time and the temptation is to assume that these individuals represent the voice of the people. The whole process lacks balance. Now with the coming of the Internet and the Freedom of Information Act, councils are being forced into engaging with people who actually challenge them and are going to take them to task. It's increasingly harder for councils to make unpopular decisions without someone using the Internet to highlight the issue and mobilise popular support. They no longer have the luxury of disappearing into the bunker until the next election."

Like most dysfunctional relationships, the solution lies in regaining trust. Most relationship councillors will tell you that the key to any good relationship is communication. In order to be constructive, dialogue has to be a two way process. Birmingham, as the largest unitary authority in Europe, has put a great deal of effort into getting their messages across using the newspapers, leaflets, posters and banners. The City Council has also embraced new technology. The BCC Web site is host to a wealth of information on virtually every

subject you could imagine - except one. Public opinion. The Council's primary mechanism for public feedback is still the People's Panel made up of 1,000 residents, still consulted by the traditional means of post and meetings. According to government statistics¹, 63% of the UK adult population had used the Internet in 2005. That would equate to around 424,000 adults in Birmingham who have access to the Internet. Even in areas of economic deprivation, Internet access is around 18%. Most polls, including the People's Panel, work on a 0.1% sample of the population. Despite central government plans to enable e-Democracy, (democracy via the Internet), an increased interest in politics, and a huge potential user base for e-Democracy and e-Consultation techniques, BCC is still not using the biggest single interactive communication tool in history to hold a dialogue with it's citizens.

A senior council official said, "*The City Council decided not to participate directly in local e-Democracy, although we had some contact with it through other initiatives. The outcome of the original review, including the Consultation Strategy was published on InLine in 2004 and a "Consultation Portal" has been added to the Council's web site. There is also a generic email address: consultation@birmingham.gov.uk.*"

1 www.statistics.gov.uk

According to Gez Smith, e-consultation saves time and money over conventional surveys, the results are quicker to release and it allows people to see just where they stand in relation to others in their neighbourhood or city depending on how focused the survey is.

"It's a scary concept to have real time public opinion about current issues. If you make that information available to everyone as it's collected, you have a completely new political process. People can see where they stand on issues and it's hard to ignore if you have a big response for or against an issue. If you get the right issue, the response can be overwhelming. One such consultation got 17,000 responses in the first week."

Another advantage to e-Consultation is that it provides a balanced mix of background information so that people can make a more informed response. Unlike many paper consultations, e-consultation provide a real opportunity to inform and educate the public as it costs the same no matter how much background information you provide to download.

The biggest hurdle to overcome, according to Gez Smith, is getting citizens and councillors to buy into the concept. Maybe by using quick polls or discussion forums to allow residents feedback on consultations and council proposals, the public can be persuaded to re engage in the political life of Birmingham. The City has the ability to turn this into a continuous meaningful conversation. The City Council aims to turn Birmingham into the UK's premier digital city - is it too much to ask for a process of digital consultation and democracy to match?

LETTERS

The Editor, Neighbourhood News,

C/o BANF, NFRC, Revesby Walk, Nechells, Birmingham B7 4LG.

You can also email us at editor@banf.org.uk

Too many Chiefs...?

Many congratulations on the articles in the last edition, especially the "Faith In The Neighbourhoods" & "Inner City Treasure Under Threat".

I would like to make two comments on "Is Neighbourhood Management the Answer?" To Duplicate or not to Duplicate appears to me to be the right question for the article!

1. The neighbourhood managers will be doing work covered by existing line-managers in the new district set-up.

2. The community safety bureaux based in the district set-up are already working jointly with police, health, housing, social services, etc....and other public service providers.

The next heading could be "Too many chiefs and not enough Indians?"

Best wishes

Roger Cobley
Beech Lanes.

There's no excuse for parking abuse!

Abuse of car-parking spaces for disabled motorists generates frustration and anger and causes real, practical problems.

The 2005 Baywatch survey shows that little has changed for disabled people when it comes to the abuse of parking spaces allocated for disabled customers.

A survey shows that rates of abuse remains at just over 20%, or one in five bays occupied by cars not displaying a valid blue badge. When pointed out to people who abuse disabled parking spaces comments such as "so what", "I'm just as entitled to park here as them" are made or they become abusive. Just who are "them"?

Non-disabled people are acting with total disregard to the needs of disabled people. But why are car park operators allowing them to get away with it? In more than a quarter of car parks there was no abuse at all, showing that where there's a will, there really is a way. This shows that some companies have a total disregard for disabled people. Birmingham City Council has little regard in some instances, have you ever seen a disabled parking bay in a cemetery or crematorium? The only comment you get is "you can park on the drives". But can you park close enough?

Even the Resource Centre has no parking facilities for the disabled. There are two spaces marked but they are always blocked by other vehicles. The spaces are not regulation size or marked out correctly. There may not be many disabled visitors but it is not an excuse for Birmingham City Council failing to provide disabled parking.

Terry Edwards
Yardley & Warstock

Neighbourhood Briefing

Jewellery Quarter Seeks Forum Status

The residents of the Jewellery Quarter are in the process of setting up a new Neighbourhood Forum. Gill Robinson, who is in charge of setting up the new Forum, said, "The area has been represented for the past few years by the Jewellery Quarter Community Web which has achieved a number of successes. Residents now feel it's time to move forward and become a Neighbourhood Forum and benefit from the increased access to representative bodies.

Lord Mayor Hosts BANF Reception

The Lord Mayor recently played host to a civic reception in honour of BANF in the Council House. The reception, held on the same night as the BANF AGM, was attended by over 70 Forum delegates and guests.

We're Having a Heat Wave...

The Met Office, in conjunction with the Department of Health, is issuing the following heat wave advice for the West Midlands:

'Stay out of the sun. Keep your home as cool as possible – shutting windows during the day may help. Open them when it is cooler at night. Keep drinking fluids. If there's anybody you know, for example an older person living on their own, who might be at special risk, make sure they know what to do.'

People worried about their health during the heat wave are advised to talk to their GP, pharmacist, call NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or visit the website www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk for more detailed advice or Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Unit www.birmingham.gov.uk/emergency

Mast Victory for Falcon Lodge

Falcon Lodge Neighbourhood Forum is celebrating a victory in their campaign against the siting of a phone mast on their estate.

The campaign involved petitions, leaflets, letters from residents and a public meeting organised by the Forum.

The Neighbourhood Forum recently received confirmation that the plans for the erection of a telegraph style mobile phone mast at the corner of Falcon Lodge Crescent and Carhampton Road was refused by the council.

The official letter said, "After considering all the issues, Council was dissatisfied as to the design/visual amenity impacts and the proposed location of the mast within a residential area, and that alternative locations for the proposed equipment had not been fully investigated."

Highgate in Bloom

Highgate Forum have entered the gardening arena with a flourish. In partnership with the ward support officer, local community reps, the Housing Liaison Board and Nechells Garden Centre the area is

bidding for glory in the Heart of England in Bloom competition.

Nechells Ward to get Development Officer

The Nechells ward committee have agreed to fund a development worker for the four Neighbourhood Forums active in the ward. The successful bid, headed by Highgate Forum, will finance the post initially for one year.

Handsworth Wood Carnival

Handsworth Wood Ward is holding a Fun Day and community conference at Hawthorn House on 2nd September. Along with the bouncy castles, face painting and stalls, local residents will be able to talk to the police, health providers, and various council departments. The aim of the consultation is to involve the public in shaping the future development of Handsworth Wood.

Knife Amnesty

Lidl have abandoned the proposed sale of a 6" diving knife after receiving complaints originating from residents in the Bordesley Green North Forum area. The knife, due to go on sale in June, was part of a diving-themed sale. John King, Vice Chair of Bordesley Green North Forum said, "It's ridiculous that Lidl could think of selling this sort of knife when we had a knife amnesty underway. We contacted the police and are delighted with the swift outcome".