

Birchfield



Commonwealth Connections

Tide~ ET Publication
in partnership with
Birchfield Big Local



Photo: Games visual on new station

Big Local Birchfield



Tide~ET publication in partnership with Birchfield Big Local

See website: www.tidegloballearning.net

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Taneisha and Sam at the Birchfield Night Light event
See link to video on page 15

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Birchfield Big Local ... Commonwealth Connections

This online publication has been put together to stimulate discussion about the Commonwealth - reflecting on individual connections in Birchfield - the Games - and their impact.

The Commonwealth Games celebrate sport, people coming together, and a festival of cultural events.

We propose that they are also an opportunity to reflect on the Commonwealth itself ... and its history.

The re-development of Alexander Stadium, the building of a new station and an athletes' village [though plans for this changed], as well as major changes to the roads have also contributed to local awareness. These things have brought both concerns and opportunities, for example for jobs.

Tide~ [Teachers in development education] is a teacher network. We are seeking to use the opportunity of the Games to stimulate learning about the Commonwealth in schools.

Where did it come from? Where is it going? How do we build an awareness of its complex and contested history?

This publication, which is like a supplement to Tide's online magazine, contributes to that work. We hope it generates local conversations in schools and in the community, and that it also is a stimulus useful to others further afield. In the process of producing it we have learnt a lot from the Birchfield community.

Three editions of the 'Elephant Times' introduce this work using Sathnam Sanghera's book 'Empireland' as a starting point. See:

- ❑ [ET 2.2 Commonwealth Awareness?](#)
- ❑ [ET 2.3 Commonwealth Connections 'Three people - Three life stories'](#)
- ❑ [ET 2.4 How do we know?](#)



Birchfield Big Local is a resident-led organisation which aims to connect the gifts, passions, skills, and aspirations of local people to help make Birchfield an even better place to live and work. It is part of a national programme that focuses on the neighbourhood as the primary unit of change with citizens in the lead. It is about starting with what is strong in an area – the capacities of local people, their relationships and the community assets that already exist there.

All Big Local areas have a partnership that is responsible for overall decision-making and most of the members are residents. Each Big Local area is required to develop a community plan in conversation with its residents and this is regularly reviewed and refreshed in response to the priorities for each area.

A charity – Birchfield Community Association – has been set up as part of the legacy of Birchfield Big Local with the aim of creating a community hub – an inclusive space for people to come together and find ways of meeting the needs and priorities of their neighbourhood.

For more information see – www.birchfieldbiglocal.org

On the next few pages five people involved in Birchfield Big Local reflect on their Commonwealth links, the Games and their impact.

I was born in the UK but my heritage through my parents and grandparents is from Pakistan, part of the Commonwealth. My family came from Haripur, a district in northern Pakistan. My great grandfather and great uncle came to Britain in the 1950's and 60's. My great uncle brought his son and my father over.

My father was only 13 years old when he arrived. I can only imagine how hard it must have been at such a young age arriving to a new country not knowing the language or the culture, and the climate was totally different. I think that generation were made of stronger stuff – they worked hard and just got on with it.

Initially they settled in Bradford where my father started very young working in the textile mills. For him, the main purpose was to be a bread winner for the family back home. He struggled so that he could give us all a better life.

The Commonwealth does mean something to me, but I wish I knew more. I take pride in it now because I understand the stories and struggles of my relatives. In school we learnt about the Commonwealth with its roots in the British Empire.

As I've grown older, I have found out more about the British Empire and how it impacted my family and people I have grown up with. I've had conversations with family about their experiences and stories from when the British ruled in what was India at that time.

Growing up I remember my father was a big fan of the Queen. He took pride in being a British citizen but loved his Pakistani roots. He and many others from Pakistan had the opportunity to migrate to find work because of being part of the Empire and Commonwealth.

It opened opportunities - though mainly for men - leaving women back home, managing the affairs and bringing up families on their own.

History is relevant. Why are we here today? What are our roots?

I think there needs to be more education and awareness about the Commonwealth - celebrating

the stories and finding out about family connections and the rich history.

Empire means different things to different people depending on where you come from and how your ancestors were treated. It has roots in events that have caused turmoil and loss. Countries were divided; people faced discrimination and racism; but the Commonwealth is where we are now – what happened in the past has made us stronger.

If you are not aware of the importance of something then it loses relevance, you lose the value of it. We take pride in our history and the sacrifices made by so many.

It would be great to have an annual event where people from diverse cultures can celebrate, share stories and talk about their Commonwealth connections, the many contributions made, and what our ancestors struggled through - which will never be forgotten.

Maz

Working for Birchfield Big Local as the Volunteer Coordinator



Sam

Member of Community Elders Group. Co Chair Neighbourhood Forum.

Dominoes enthusiast.

I was born in St Thomas Parish which is in the eastern part of Jamaica in 1938. After school I moved to the UK in 1961 as there were more opportunities and better pay in my trade. Within four years I was able to buy my own home and was travelling around the UK installing and maintaining pipe work to run factories – for example in the car industry.

I worked for the same company for 18 years becoming a charge-hand responsible for twelve men.

Jamaica became independent in 1962, within the Commonwealth. This has caused problems for some in terms of British citizenship. I had to apply to be a British Citizen in 1983 which cost me £80.

I still have relatives and a house in Jamaica, so try to visit every two years.

I think the Games will help bring in wealth. They will help with growth – maybe not now, but in the longer term. The community will benefit as it will bring people closer and be an experience. The work on the Games is slow and disrupting but it will be a good thing in the longer term once it is finished - a new Perry Bar [that Birchfield is part of].

The legacy will be more accommodation, a cleaner environment, a bigger and better railway station, and better bus services. But these benefits must be maintained after the Games have moved on.



Nenah

Nenah attended local schools and recently graduated with a degree in Fine Arts. She is now working for Birchfield Big Local as a Communications Assistant.

I was born in the UK, but my grandparents were born in the Punjab, India. They moved to the UK in the late 1940's or early 50's to find a better life and settled in Handsworth, Birmingham, where my grandfather worked in manufacturing.

As a family we have many connections with India. My grandmother is one of five sisters, four of whom still live in India, and I have visited many times, though Covid has made travel more difficult of late.

I think the Commonwealth and especially the Games is a good thing as it gives a boost to diversity and equality. It helps increase cultural awareness and brings countries together, encouraging greater connections.

The Games will help make connections between people from different countries and may boost the local economy – especially tourism.

I hope that it will create a friendly space for everyone involved and provide the opportunity to focus on the mental health of the athletes and all those involved.

Covid has had an impact on us all including the athletes. The Games will help us move on.

Marvet

Marvet is a director of a social enterprise called New Beginnings Creative that runs a Job Club in Birchfield – supporting local people into employment, education and training.



My parents were part of the Windrush generation that came to the UK from Jamaica in the early 1950's. They were encouraged to come to work in the NHS and manufacturing. My parents were in constant employment from when they arrived; my mother worked in a hospital and my dad in a factory. Since retirement they have moved back to Jamaica.

The Commonwealth means different things to the different generations. Despite the discrimination they faced, my parents were proud to be associated with what they described as the "mother country". They moved to the UK before Jamaica became independent.

However, people of my generation are more aware of the historical injustices that have resulted from being colonised by Britain.

The Games will help bring people together and create a better understanding of the countries involved. It should create more opportunities locally, but I fear that the local community may be marginalised with the benefits going to larger companies, and small businesses and the community missing out.

A legacy for the Games is the opportunity to root out racism, injustice, and inequality.

It is an opportunity for Birmingham to highlight its diverse cultures, including new arrivals, and to promote a more equal and fair distribution of opportunities in the future.

It is also an opportunity to acknowledge past injustices – perhaps through a Remembrance Day or memorial.



Helga

Helga is involved in several local community groups including Birchfield Big Local, the Neighbourhood Forum and Handsworth Helping Hands.

I was born in the UK, but my father was born in St John's, Newfoundland in 1911 which at that time was a self-governing dominion of the British Empire [along with New Zealand, Canada, Australia, & South Africa]. Go west from Ireland and the first land you meet is Newfoundland, often called "The Rock," and now part of Canada.

In World War 2 my father was one of the first people in Newfoundland to sign up and had a strong sense of duty. He was on the fire boats protecting the North Atlantic convoys and was bombed and torpedoed. He lost a leg, retrained after the war as a telephonist, and ended up working for the Austin - Morris company – later British Leyland – in Longbridge, Birmingham.

My Great Grandfather came from Sweden and was a fisherman. "The Rock" was the source of the finest Cod and people – especially fisher folk – were encouraged to go there.

My Grandmother was born on "The Rock" but her family originated from Devon – again a fishing connection.

The Cod were overfished, and the economy collapsed, and it was then that Newfoundland began to explore permanent links with Canada. Following a referendum Newfoundland joined Canada in 1949 as the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'm a bit ambivalent about the Commonwealth – it doesn't mean much other than the historical connotations. There's a dialogue going on about whether it was a good or a bad thing. Whether England just exploited the world, through for example the East India Company and the Hudson Bay Company.

The Empire was formed for money, not for the greater good of people – it industrialised the exploitation of people and resources. But the Empire did give opportunities to young men – though not women - in the colonial service as administrators, engineers, architects.

My last proper job before retiring from the Civil Service was looking at the legacy of the Games. For me it is not the hard stuff. Yes, the Alexander stadium will be fabulous, a centre of excellence for athletics – but for me the legacy is much deeper rooted. For example, the small grants programme and wider participation with cities twinned across the Commonwealth and richer cultural exchange and understanding.

I'm more hopeful this time around about the role of social value and social enterprises being part of the supply chain rather than the contracts always going to big companies.

I worry that there won't be the opportunities for local people. There will be entry level jobs and training in for example security, and catering which may lead to further opportunities after the Games. We will have to reflect on the legacy after the Games have been and gone.

For me, the key is how it benefits individuals. Having a new Alexander stadium is fabulous because it can host bigger events in the future and bring more money to the area. Also, the swimming pool in Smethwick means we now have the facilities for diving – a West Midlands Diving Hub - with new opportunities for people in Sandwell and more jobs in the area.

The new train station should improve transport, and the road works – though torture at present – should improve things. The One Stop shopping centre should benefit, with more footfall and more jobs.

But how does this fit with what else is planned in the area through the master-plan? How will allotments benefit? I'm concerned that residents are pushed to one side. Until they want us, we're not really included. Don't assume what people want until you talk to them.

- ◇ What are the key themes that these interviews highlight for you?
- ◇ What questions would you like to ask those interviewed?

'Stories about Change' builds on this by exploring aspirations for change.

See page 20

Birchfield - getting ready for The Games

Plans in the area are transformative. They offer opportunities but also raise concerns. *What debates arose? What different views??*

These photographs highlight some key features of the plan ...

A] The re-development of Alexander Stadium - the core venue. It is now complete - [see article](#). There have been concerns about the disruptions.

B] A poster for the new station. But the station had to close for a year.

C] Protect our Flyover - a protest including MP and local Councillor. What are the concerns about traffic flow and safety?

D] The flyover on the main road to Walsall is demolished. A new road layout is being built.

Next page > E] The Birmingham City University Perry Barr campus demolished. The site for an Athletes' Village that will then add to housing stock. But plans changed so now the athletes will be housed at local Universities.



E]



The local landscape is changing.

- ☐ What will the impact be?
- ☐ How will the area change?
- ☐ Will all these new apartments be affordable?

Birchfield - a sense of Community

Images of some aspects of Big Local's work [on page 16]

- A] Meetings - Things to decide.
- B] Birchfield Gardens in Bloom
- C] Seikou Susso and Phil McKenley at one of the many music events
- D] Table football in the park. Family fun day.
- E] Domino competitors - pointing to their photo.
- F] Birchfield Light Night. Watch the short video. [Click on image]
- G] Volley Ball in the Secret Garden

Birchfield Ward Basic Statistics



Population

There are 12,531 people in Birchfield (2020 estimate)

Birchfield has a younger population compared to the West Midlands average with 27.8% aged 0-17 and 8.6% aged 65+

63.6% of residents are of working age (18 – 64)

Birchfield is a multicultural community with 52.2% Asian (eg. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi); 27% Black (eg. Black African, Black Caribbean); 13.7% White

Many faiths are represented including 41.9% Muslim, 30.6% Christian, 6.9% Sikh, 3.7% Hindu and 0.6% Buddhist



Economy

Birchfield has one of the highest unemployment figures (17.2%) in Birmingham

Birchfield is the 7th most deprived Ward out of 69 Wards in Birmingham and the 90th most deprived out of the 7,511 Wards in England.

Average income in 2016 was £12,764 in Birchfield compared with £16,185 in Birmingham and £18,788 in England.



Housing

38% of houses are owner occupied

32% are rented from social landlords - Council or Housing Associations

The remainder are privately rented

Many households are overcrowded – population density 8,321 /square km



Health & Wellbeing

People in Birchfield are:

3x more likely to be admitted to hospital for preventable conditions

3x more likely to die prematurely from preventable conditions

3x more likely to be in contact with mental health services

16.4% of residents of working age have work-limiting health conditions or disabilities

Birchfield is one of 13 Wards in Birmingham in need of access to good quality green space



Education & Skills

25.8% of people in Birchfield have no qualifications compared with 20.8% in Birmingham and 14.8% in England

11.8% of residents cannot speak English or speak English well

Birchfield - a sense of community



A]



B]



D]



E]



C]



Click to see video

F]



G]



Stories about change ...

We asked five people who are well known in Birchfield:

- ♦ about themselves and their involvement in the community;
- ♦ about their Commonwealth Connections;
- ♦ and about change.

The section concludes with an activity to synthesise the key issues.

Page 34 offers an activity using a shorter version of these interviews as a stimulus, for use in schools, to explore ideas about change in the community.



Vanley Burke out and about in Birchfield talking and taking photos.

As follow-up we have selected a few websites, some of which include videos, that offer further insight in to the five people interviewed

Vanley Burke

- ❑ [Style Birmingham](#) features a series of different styles of photographs that capture Vanley's ideas and principles.
- ❑ A Guardian article: [‘We’re not just passing through’](#)

Reverend Cannon Eve Pitts

- ❑ Her story as [the first black female Church of England vicar](#) is told in a Guardian article.
- ❑ In this [ITV interview](#) Eve explores many of her ideas and highlights the need “to get rid of the demonic forces of racism”. It is very relaxed. You feel you have met her.

Gilroy Brown

- ❑ A BBC piece from 2018 about [‘England’s Pioneering Black Headteachers’](#) – including Gilroy. There is also an interesting video from 1969 featuring Yvonne Conolly’s experiences at that time.

- ❑ A sound interview from [A Head of Our Time](#) website features Gilroy’s time at a teacher, headteacher, school advisor and educational consultant. His ideas and experience are discussed in a relaxed style.

Ammo Talwar

- ❑ Ammo is Chair of The UK Music Diversity Taskforce, influencing policy around diversity and inclusion on behalf of the commercial music sector. This video [interview by Lozells First](#) is almost like meeting him.
- ❑ [Punch Records](#) is a leading music and arts agency with a commitment to working with Black Music, Arts and Culture.

Lekan Babalola

- ❑ [Ifa Yoruba Contemporary Arts Trust](#) - website gives you a sense of the organisation and includes a section with a video from the Birchfield Jazz Festival.
- ❑ This article on the [‘guide to the world of music’](#) website includes a video of Lekan’s music.

Vanley Burke - photos for change

I've had the opportunity to visit a few Commonwealth countries, for example, South Africa, Gambia, Canada and obviously Jamaica where I'm from. I've been to these places, and I suppose the Commonwealth and the fact that people speak English helps make connections, but I wouldn't say the Commonwealth featured in my thoughts.

I think I've been more influenced by my own past and the migration of people from the Caribbean. When you think about it, the whole of my district [St Thomas, Jamaica] – pretty well the majority of the people there – had family that came to England, and it was a constant reference when we were at school.

There were always conversations about – What's England like? What are the places like? What are people like? From time to time, we would hear family conversations when they talked about letters received from people in England. We would hear about fog, and about snow, and would hear about people having accidents on building sites and things like that. We were desperate to hear where our parents had gone. As kids you just have to find out.

My work is community based in that I'm not really that interested in the well-established or the famous. I'm interested in how ordinary people go about their daily lives and so in that sense going to South Africa with a fresh eye – I wouldn't know if I see things differently – but I photograph things a little bit differently because of what's of interest to me. I mean one of the things I found is that in South Africa – although there was the Apartheid regime – there was seemingly an element of freedom which we didn't seem to have here somehow.

My visits to South Africa were many. I went there first in 1990 when Mandela or Madiba was released. I went back in 1996 and spent six months there and then went back in 2002. I've since been invited by the University of Johannesburg to display some of my work. I've also donated a set of photographs to the Museum of Africa.

I think issues, for example social justice and equality, will be raised by my work, but it isn't primarily about that. It is broader than that.

My photography is really about having the opportunity to help write our own history. I think it is important that you know history is written by those who live and share that experience and we've rarely had the opportunity to do that.

Artist and photographer Vanley Burke was born in St Thomas, Jamaica, in 1951. At fourteen he came to Birmingham to join his mother, bringing with him the "Box Brownie" camera she had bought him for his tenth birthday.

Vanley has documented the experiences of the African-Caribbean community from the inside as someone at the heart of the community. His interests expanded to include other communities and collections of posters, clothes, records, ornaments, and other artefacts that provide insights into the personal, social, and economic life of communities.

His work has been exhibited in museums and galleries around the world, but also in community centres and pubs.



So, when I started taking photographs it was to document the rising experience of people as they struggle to establish themselves. But later, I thought of all those people who had arrived before me that I might not be able to photograph so what I would do is collect ephemera related to their experience and that's how the archive grew. So it is, let's say 50:50. The collection of that material is just as important as the photographs.

The Commonwealth is never really at the forefront of my mind but I'm aware of the history, and the Commonwealth Games, and the Heads of States meetings but I'm also aware that it came out of a long legacy of Empire and colonialism so in that sense my work does address those issues but not specifically. It's an attempt at being the custodian of our own history.

I've heard it said that when an elephant passes the bones of its ancestors it picks them up in its trunk and turns them over and spends a few minutes and time with them before it moves on. I think what I'm doing is collecting objects and photographs which will give people the opportunity to spend a little bit of time with these objects either personally or collectively to engage with that material and hopefully informing them about our lived experience or past experience.



A few photographs from Vanley Burke's local collection.

The two marches highlight local connections to the Commonwealth in 1977:

AJ "We want Africa freed from imperialism" - "Hands off Jamaica"

BJ "Kashmir"- "Bangladesh" - "India" - "Smash Racism and Fascism"



"Women demonstrating"

[Lozells 2005]



Rev Eve Pitts - in chains for change

The Commonwealth has a complex history. There is a tendency at times to think of the Commonwealth as predominantly poor countries. They weren't poor countries; they were exploited. Let's get real. Jamaica and those Caribbean islands, we're mostly exploited. We have to ask the question: How did we get where we are? I grew up being interested in the history of the Caribbean because that's where my parents grew up.

My mother's generation came here reluctantly. They were invited here. This "motherland" idea I find objectionable having been invited here after the assets of Jamaica had been stripped of its resources. We have to be honest ... "No dogs, No Irish, No blacks" was the reality. I'm not into sentimentality; we have to understand that my parents' generation came, leaving a beautiful place but stripped of its economic assets.

Wider British society can't pretend that racism simply went underground. The Black Lives Matter movement has brought it back into the open. People of my generation couldn't complain because of the accusation that we had "chips on our shoulders", so we went inwards and found a way to deal with something that was deeply shameful for everybody because racism doesn't just hurt black people, but white people too. Black people aren't the only victims. We are all victims here.

You can't shame one people's humanity without shaming all. It is a profound understanding. We want schools to take history seriously not just black history but black and white history. We can't talk about one without the other.

The idea that black history started with the slave trade is just nonsense. It demeans us to even begin there. Africa was a highly developed culture before the rampage of slavery and colonialism.

At least now we are talking about racism but I'm not sure that much is changing. A profound conversation needs to take place. Racism pretends that the people who are different from you are not worthy of respect. That's how it works. You continue to feed the lie that Africa was a basket case, and you went to relieve it - the Jesus syndrome. The whole idea underpinning slavery was that black people were inferior and less than human. Wider society is not ready to give black people dignity; it's as simple as that.

Eve Pitts' parents had Jamaican roots. They came here in the 1950's. She came later. They were devout Christians, and very political. My Grandfather had deep political roots in his community. That shaped me as a little girl. That shaped my political thinking.

I was very conscious of being a black person in a Caribbean culture, but also very British.

I went to a very good private school [in Jamaica]. I was very conscious of the Caribbean, the Commonwealth, the Queen, and all that entails – for good or for bad?

Eve, who is now a canon, was the first Black female vicar in the Church of England. She is vicar at Birchfield Holy Trinity Church.

[Note the chains in the photo.]



I'm not a sports person. Contrary to the view, not all black people are good at sports.

I admire anybody who can run, box and high jump – I can't. My problem with sports and black people is this: whenever it's sports, we are very visible, we come out, we dance, we sing, and we run, and we win things. It is only in sports that we are allowed to excel and the rest of the time it is a struggle to excel.

I'll go down to the Commonwealth Games. I'll watch them. I'll walk with everybody and cheer them on, but it is not going to change anything unless there is a profound change in cultural and political will. A profound change in our world and society.

I'm glad that it's going to be a relief from the relentless march of the Covid pandemic, but it will not fundamentally change our society – to being a society that deals with the radical issues of how we live together as human beings.

Gilroy Brown - schools for change

My parents were part of the Windrush generation that came to Britain from Jamaica just after the end of World War Two in answer to the call from the British Government to help rebuild the country. I was aware that Jamaica was part of the Commonwealth but beyond a project celebrating Commonwealth Day I was not aware of how it came about.

It is now time for a critical look at the Commonwealth so that future relations between countries are on a more equal footing. We are not responsible for the past, but we can learn from it and change things for the better. For example, we can't talk about the last one thousand years of European history without bringing in Africa. Both continents are inter-linked and have been for longer than we think, and at a deeper level than we realise. World history is everyone's story. The more we tell the truth, the better we are.

As one of a team of ex-head teachers supporting Primary Schools in Birmingham, I worked on raising the attainment of children from ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly African Caribbean children. The biggest concern at the time was the lack of academic progress and that such children were being excluded from school.

It was about working creatively with schools – encouraging them to look at their attitudes towards children from ethnic minority backgrounds; the strength of their family and community; and whether schools reflected the community they served.

I also worked throughout the city to support people from minority ethnic backgrounds with the aspirations and potential to be leaders in schools with the aim of increasing diversity in senior leadership positions.

Generally, things have changed for the better in schools. There is more awareness of the role schools play in the community. But more could be done and should be done. Schools should see themselves as a hub for the community – a cornerstone. As a black teacher I wanted to make a difference in education following from how my peers, myself included, were regarded, and treated at school – though not by every teacher. Also how black children were often in the lower streams at school.

Gilroy Brown qualified as a teacher in 1975 and after ten years teaching, became deputy head at Grove Primary, Handsworth.

Four years later at the age of thirty-six he became Head at Foundry Primary, Winson Green.

Gilroy was the first Black Primary Head in Birmingham.

Later, as a School Advisor, Gilroy, worked on issues around raising the attainment of children from ethnic minority backgrounds and supporting teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds with aspirations to be head teachers and senior leaders in schools.



What saddens me is that there has been a lack of political will at Government and Local Authority level to make a difference. The opportunity to recruit more teachers from black and ethnic minority backgrounds wasn't taken. If reports in the 1980's had been acted upon [Rampton, 1981 and Swann, 1985], then 40 years later we would be in a much better place. Think what could have been achieved by now, that's the tragedy.

The Games will change lives but won't make as much difference as it could. A sense of oneness and cohesion between nations will be celebrated, but more could have been made of the opportunity to turn things around in a seminal way.

Just as the response to the murder of George Floyd was a turning point, the Games could have provided a unique space in time to do something different on an international stage that will affect us for generations.

It could be an opportunity to address issues that need critical thinking; to look at the history of the Commonwealth. How was it set up? Who benefited? What have we learnt? – and how can we move forward in a different way?

Raising these issues could help heal wounds and set the scene for ways forward.

Ammo Talwar - music for change

My parents were from the Punjab in India. My mother arrived in Liverpool by boat aged fourteen and my father flew to the UK as a student to study at Faraday College – an electrical engineering college in London. My parents married at an early age, and I was their third child, born in Lozells, and grew up in Aston, Lozells and Handsworth.

As children growing up in north Birmingham, we never really spoke about the Commonwealth, but I later realised that countries colonised by Britain such as Ghana, Nigeria, Jamaica, and India have strong connections with Britain, underpinned by trade.

We have a deeper understanding now of how colonialism and imperialism work and how trade works and the dark side of colonialism which includes wars, famine, and inequality. There has been a global shift around justice, equality, and inclusion. People now want to decolonise perceptions of the Commonwealth, including tools for teaching and what is taught in schools. I'm not anti-Commonwealth but I'm for the truth.

At Punch records our headline mission is “Transforming lives through music”. We see music and the arts as a tool to change people, communities, schools It is about access, support, opportunities, respect, and excellence; these are the values that underpin our mission.

What we do needs to be reflective of citizens and the community, and respect and engage the people we serve.

Some 40 – 50% of Birmingham residents are non-white British who are part of a unique history. Birmingham is in competition with Leicester and London to become the first plural city. It is not about throwing statues into rivers, but we should be able to have a critical discussion about these issues – it is about truth.

All around the city there is a rich history of migration that has had a positive impact. Caribbean and Asian communities helped build the city's infrastructure. With the Commonwealth Games coming we need to celebrate the successes but also unpack the truths.



Ammo Talwar is CEO of Punch Records. Ammo started the business in 1997 selling vinyl records at his specialist record shop on the Birchfield Road. This soon became a hub for local DJs and other artists. He has built the organisation into an award-winning music and arts agency and received an MBE for his contribution to music and young people.

He is currently Chair of The UK Music Diversity Taskforce, influencing policy around diversity and inclusion on behalf of the commercial music sector.

My aspiration is for society to become fairer.

We need to rethink what we're doing.

For example, we can't go on consuming the way we do because it has an adverse effect on the environment. This cuts across all classes and cultures. We need to move away from a greed culture. We need to democratise opportunities – learning, living and care. We need to work as a city and city region to ensure that arts and culture are reflective of modern Birmingham.

Lekan Babalola - arts for change

We don't know what we mean by common [in Commonwealth] until we come to the mother country. That blue British passport that tells us we are a British citizen but when we come to England, we realise that there is nothing in common because we have been studied as another species, especially if you come from Africa and have darker skin.

England was head of the Commonwealth and when England goes to war – World War 1 and World War 2 – the subjects of the Commonwealth have to go to fight to help England, but when they finish the war do they get compensation? We are children of England, but the mother doesn't know us.

Nigeria was formed in 1914 by Lord Lugard – a British colony. Nigeria is a country of 3 nations – the Igbo in the southeast, Yoruba in the southwest and the Hausa in the north. The English created Nigeria and put these three different nations with their own languages together – a bit like putting Korea, China, and Japan together – into one country. Education is English, religion is English - even though we have our own religion.

So, we have been looking up to England for its food, style, even though we have our own food, clothes, thinking. It is a tradition that you come to Oxford and Cambridge to study medicine, law, that's why I had a scholarship to come here, but when you get here you realise it is very different. When you get here your mother doesn't recognise you.

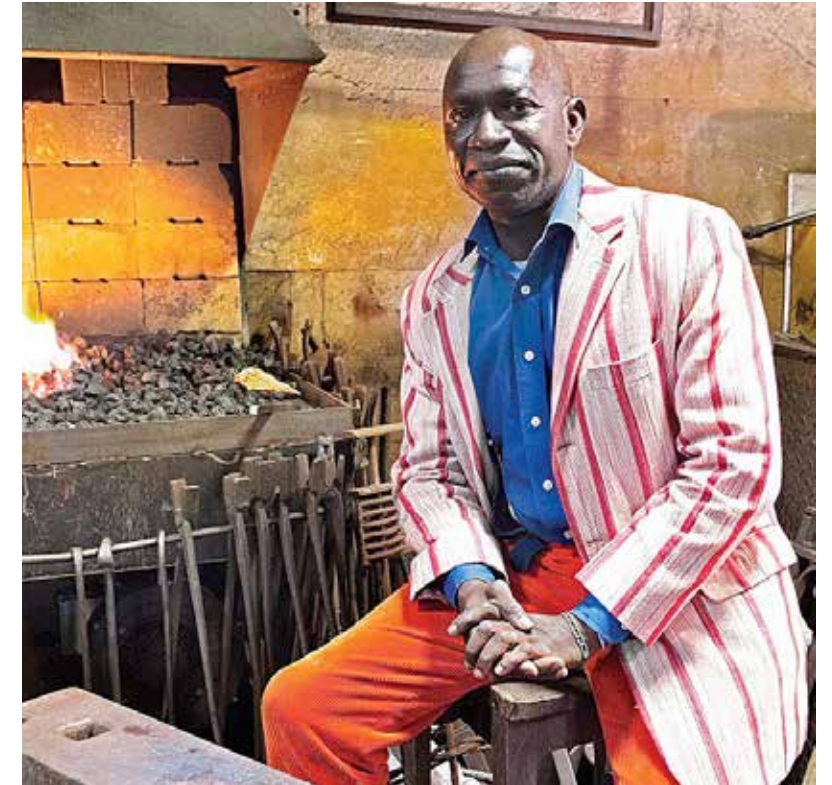
Nothing is pure; English culture is not pure. It has been influenced. Black African culture was influenced by European culture. Ifa Yoruba Trust has been influenced by English culture - we recognise that we are part of England - it is a combination of Yoruba and English folklore weaved together, to create a new hybrid of contemporary arts.

Ifa is a way of life, not [just] a religion, just as Hinduism and Buddhism are a way of life. Yoruba is a nation of culture and the contemporary element of it is the journey that it is making from Africa, the homeland, across to Europe and the New World and how the influences are weaved together.

Olalekan (Lekan) Babalola is a jazz percussionist and musician and two-time Grammy Award winner.

He was born in Lagos State, Nigeria. He won a scholarship to study engineering at Chelsea College but dropped out to pursue his interest in art and music. Lekan later enrolled at St Martin's College of Art & Design where he studied filmmaking.

Lekan formed Ifa-Yoruba Contemporary Arts Trust in 1995 with his partner Kate Luxmoore who is a classically trained musician with roots in the English folk tradition, but with a shared world vision.



Commonwealth is an exchange of ideas, of commerce, of economic growth that has been going on as people met. For example, in Ghana and Nigeria in the 1940's the main export was cocoa. My father and grandfather in Nigeria grew cocoa that was brought to Cadbury's in Birmingham to be turned into chocolate and sold back to Nigeria, but when people came here to study, they found out that the people who make chocolate did not really want them. They were not welcomed.

I began to question: What is the Commonwealth? We are both eating bananas – banana is banana worldwide; Paw paw is paw paw worldwide; Farmers are farmers across the world. How come in the Commonwealth that humanity is not in common?

The Ifa Yoruba Trust has been going for 27 years. The foundation or root of it is Ifa which is a way of life. Ifa is the way that West African people communicate with God. Artists can tap into that from any background, any culture, because it is universal, and can begin to trade ideas and create a fusion.

With the Games, people are coming together to party – not just for sports but for ideas, discussion, climate change, health issues such as Covid ... about everything. Whatever is done we can learn from it.

We should not wait for the Commonwealth to solve the problem. We should make a legacy of art and Commonwealth friendship. This is urgent. Humanity is the legacy I seek.

Birchfield - what are the issues?

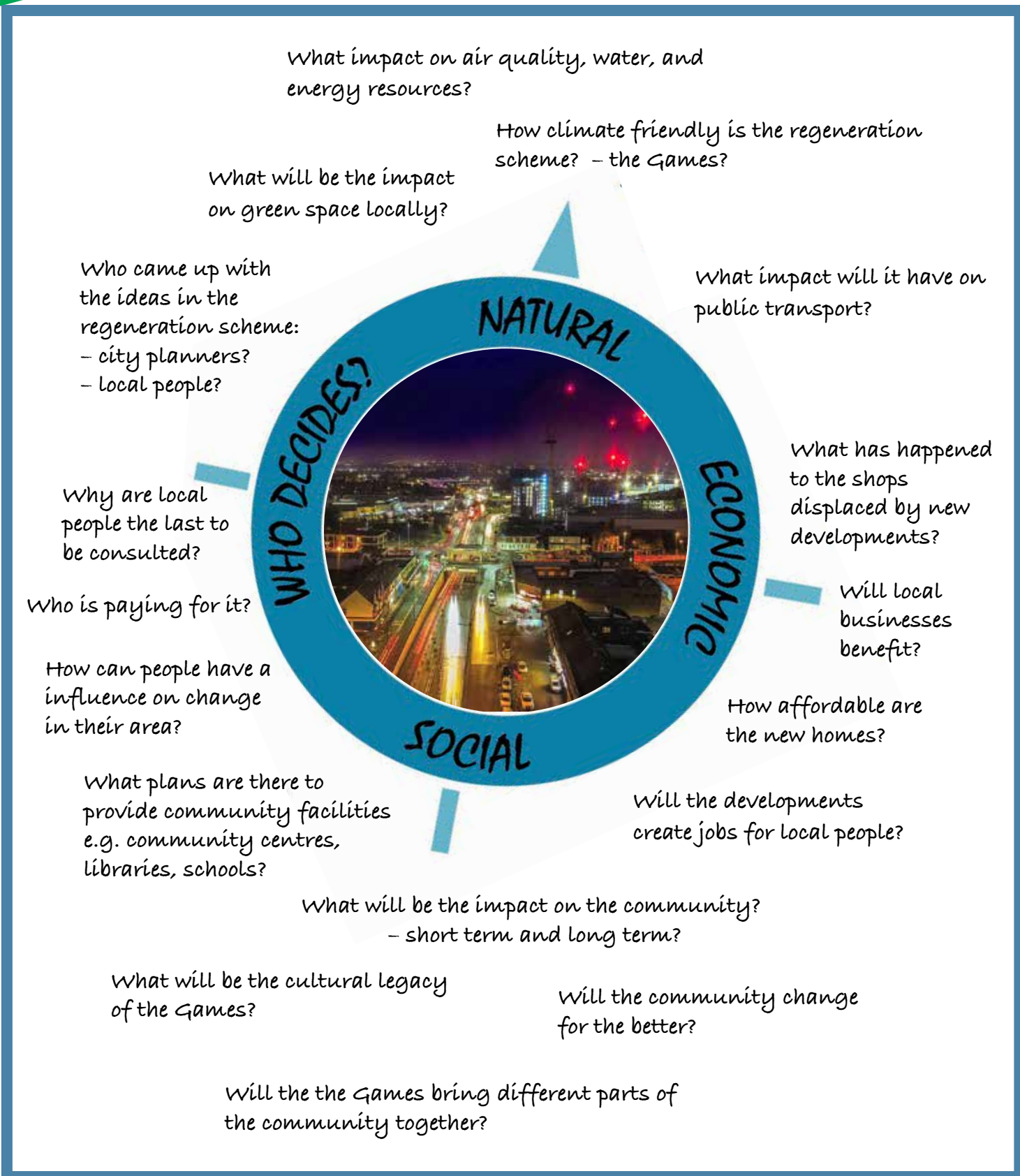
Birchfield and the wider Perry Barr area are not new to change. In the 1960's the area was subject to a major road scheme to create an expressway, an underpass and flyovers on the Birchfield Road. This separated one part of Birchfield from the other. Three 16 storey tower blocks were built and then demolished in 2010, to be replaced by new housing.

The current Commonwealth Games developments are part of a wider regeneration scheme which will not be completed until 2040. The successful bid for the Commonwealth Games in 2017 provided the stimulus and the funds to take these plans forward.

This top-down master plan approach contrasts with the bottom-up approach taken by Big Local. The master plan focusses on infrastructure – flats and houses, a major highway scheme, a revamped station, the Alexander Stadium, and a sprint bus service. The Birchfield Big Local plan starts with existing residents, their needs and priorities and how those priorities can be better met locally by people within the community, whether that's enabling better health, shaping an enterprising local economy, caring for the elderly, raising children, providing green space

The Development Compass Rose provides a means for generating questions about any development, here or in other parts of the world. Questions about the impact on the environment, the economy, people and the local community, and how decisions are taken – who benefits and who loses? [See for example the questions on page 35].

- ☐ Are there other questions that you would like to investigate?
- ☐ How might you go about finding answers to these questions?



From the Tide~ website - see [Development Compass Rose](#) - a tool for asking questions. This includes a blank proforma. This activity, designed to get groups to prioritise questions that they think are important, can be adapted to suit different age groups in school.

Aspirations for Change

An activity ...

This activity uses interviews with five people who are well known in the Birchfield Community to explore ideas about change.

It then asks you to consider your own aspirations for change.

We asked the five people:

- ☐ about themselves and their involvement in the community;
- ☐ about their Commonwealth Connections;
- ☐ and about change.

Proposed process

- a. **A brief introduction* to Birchfield - its location - the connections many people have to the Commonwealth - its proximity to the Alexander Stadium, which is the core Games venue.**
- b. **In groups [of about 5] each read one of the interviews:**
 - ◇ What are the key matters to share?
 - ◇ What kind of change do the interviewees suggest?
- c. **Compare notes with others in the group.**
 - ◇ What are the interviewees saying about change?
Do you agree with any of their suggestions?
 - ◇ What changes would your group like to see?
How could The Games, and the events linked to it, help move towards those changes?

* This introduction could use some of the material in this publication for a brief teacher overview or as a stimulus to group discussion.

Ammo Talwar ... seeking change



Ammo started a business – Punch Records – in 1997 on Birchfield Road selling rare vinyl records and tapes to local DJs. It is now an award-winning music and arts agency that tours artists internationally and provides training to young creative entrepreneurs. Ammo has an MBE for his contribution to music and young people.

Ammo's parents came to the UK from the Punjab in India. As children growing up in north Birmingham – Aston, Lozells and Handsworth – there was little talk of the Commonwealth. Now, however, there is a deeper understanding of how colonialism and imperialism work, how trade works, and the darker side of colonialism which includes wars, famine, and inequality.

Ammo and Punch Records see music and the arts as a tool to enable change in people, communities, and schools. Punch runs education workshops and master classes as well as tours and festivals.

Ammo is concerned about colonial injustice, truth and reconciliation.

Around 46 % of Birmingham's population is non-white British. In Perry Barr, the main site for the Games, it is 70-80 %. He was one of fifty-three people to sign a letter to the organising committee for the Games challenging the make-up of the board that was almost entirely white and male. Changes have since been made, improving diversity.

Ammo is still hopeful that the Commonwealth Games can be a catalyst for change.

“All around the city there is a rich history of migration that has had a positive impact. Caribbean and Asian communities helped build the city.

With the Commonwealth Games coming we need to celebrate the successes but also unpack the truths.”

Vanley Burke ... seeking change

Artist and photographer Vanley Burke was born in the district of St Thomas, Jamaica, in 1951. Vanley's mother moved to the UK to train as a nurse and for the next ten years Vanley lived with his aunt before joining his mother in Birmingham aged fourteen. He brought with him the "Box Brownie" camera his mother had sent to him for his tenth birthday.

Over the past fifty years Vanley has recorded the experiences of the African-Caribbean community from the inside - protests, work, religion, and social life - every aspect of Black life in Birmingham.

His interests have expanded to include other communities and to collecting objects such as posters, clothes, records, and ornaments that provide insights into people's everyday lives and social change.

Vanley has visited many places including Commonwealth countries such as South Africa, Gambia, Canada, and Jamaica.

His first visit to South Africa was in 1990 when Nelson Mandela was released.



His photographs raise issues about social justice and equality.

It is about having the opportunity to help write the history of the African-Caribbean and other minority communities in the UK. It's about documenting the rising experience of people as they struggle to establish themselves.

It is about contributing to that change.

"My photography is really about having the opportunity to help write our own history.

I think that it is important that history is written by those who live and share that experience and we've rarely had the opportunity to do that."

Reverend Eve Pitts ... seeking change

Eve Pitts became the first Black female vicar in the Church of England in 1994. Her parents moved to Nottingham in 1956, where her father worked in a chemical plant. Following her father's early death, Eve had to leave Jamaica aged twelve to join her mother in England. For the past 13 years Rev Eve has been vicar at Birchfield Holy Trinity Church.

Eve has spent decades fighting racism wherever she has met it, including in the Church of England. She has called for a National Day of Remembrance for slavery on Emancipation Day. The Slavery Abolition Act came into force on 1st August 1834. Each year on 1st August, Eve Pitts holds a service to remember all those who were enslaved during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

She wraps herself in chains as a reminder of the ancestors' suffering at the hands of slave traders. She believes that slavery still has an emotional and psychological impact on the African and Caribbean communities.

For Eve, the Commonwealth has a complex history. Many countries such as Jamaica



were exploited and stripped of their resources. People of her parents' generation who came to England were met with racism. "No dogs, no Irish, no Blacks" was the reality.

For Reverend Eve, the Commonwealth Games will be a relief after the Covid pandemic but will not fundamentally change society.

That will need a radical change in how we live together as human beings.

"Black Lives Matter has brought racism back into the open. It doesn't just hurt Black people, but white people too. We are all victims here. You can't shame one people's humanity without shaming all. It is a profound understanding. We want schools to take history seriously, not just Black history but Black and white history. We can't talk about one without the other."

Gilroy Brown ... seeking change

Gilroy Brown was the first Black primary headteacher in Birmingham. After four years as deputy head at Grove Primary School, Handsworth he became head at Foundry Primary at the early age of 36.

Following ten years as a headteacher, Gilroy joined the Schools Advisory Service. He was determined to make a difference in education following his own school experiences, growing up in Wolverhampton.

As a Schools Advisor one of his biggest concerns was that children from ethnic minority backgrounds were not making the same progress as other children. Also, too many were being excluded from school. Gilroy worked creatively with schools to challenge attitudes towards children from such backgrounds and strengthen family and community links. The aim was to encourage schools to better reflect the community they serve. He also worked across the city to support people from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds aspiring to be senior school leaders.



Things have changed for the better in schools. But more could be done and should be done. Gilroy would like to see a national campaign to recruit teachers from minority backgrounds. Had this been done in the 1980's when it was first highlighted there would be much better representation now.

On the Games, Gilroy feels it is an opportunity to address issues about history - and explore how we can move forward in a different way.

"It is now time for a critical look at the Commonwealth so that future relations between countries are on a more equal footing.

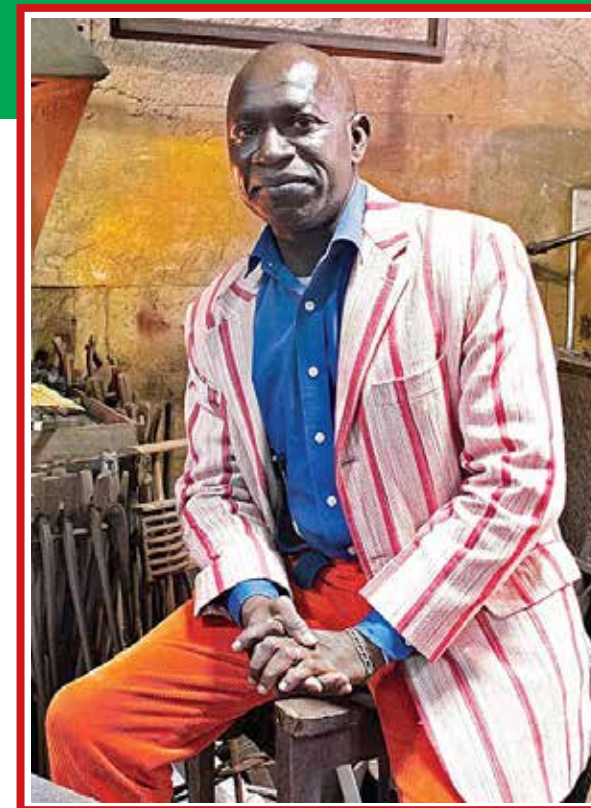
We are not responsible for the past, but we can learn from it and change things for the better."

Lekan Babalola ... seeking change

Olalekan (Lekan) Babalola is a world renowned artist and musician who in 2006 became Nigeria's first Grammy Award winner for his work on Ali Farka Tourés - 'In the Heart of the Moon'. He has played with notable musicians including Tony Allen who with Fela Kuti was one of the founders of Afrobeat.

Born in Lagos State, Nigeria, Lekan won a scholarship to study automobile engineering in the UK but decided to pursue his interest in art and music, at St Martin's College of Art and Design, where he studied film-making.

Lekan is aware of the impact that Empire and colonialism had on Nigeria. How three distinct African nations – the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani – with their own languages, religions, political systems and cultures – were forced together into one country as a British colony in 1914. Nigeria became an independent country in 1960 but shortly afterwards a civil war – the Biafran War - broke out in which the mainly Igbo, Biafran state, declared independence from the rest of Nigeria. This conflict was linked to Nigeria's colonial past.



Lekan questions: What is the Commonwealth? We have lots of things in common and yet if you come from sub-Saharan Africa and have a darker skin, you are not treated equally. How is it that in the Commonwealth, humanity is not in common?

Lekan formed Ifa Yoruba Contemporary Arts Trust with his partner Kate Luxmoore. It aims to foster Yoruba arts and how it intertwines with other traditions – for example English folklore and African-American jazz.

"With the Games, people are coming together – not just for sport, but for ideas, discussion, climate change, health issues such as Covid ... about everything. Whatever is done we can learn from it. We should not wait for the Commonwealth to solve our problems. We should make a legacy of art and Commonwealth friendship. This is urgent. Humanity is the legacy I seek."