

# MAINDEE LIBRARY, NEWPORT

## SUMMARY

- Name: Maindee Unlimited
- Established: 2014
- Number of Employees: 0.5 FTE
- Number of Volunteers: 50
- Legal Structure: Charitable Incorporated Organisation
- Tenure: Community Asset Transfer with 25-year lease
- Turnover: £195,800
- Website: [www.maindee.org](http://www.maindee.org)

## PRODUCT/SERVICE

Maindee Unlimited is a community led 'place-making' charity, that undertakes community improvement projects within Maindee, a socially and economically deprived ward in the east of Newport.

Its flagship project to date is Llyfrgell Maindee Library, which was transferred into their ownership from Newport County Borough Council in 2014. The library now acts as a community hub within Maindee, used by 500 people each week. Run entirely by volunteers, the library provides a range of community services.

Maindee Unlimited also facilitate other improvement projects such as 'Incredible Edible Maindee', which aims to improve Maindee's public outdoor spaces, and the 'Maindee Village Partnership' an initiative to regenerate its main shopping district.

## HISTORY

'Maindee Unlimited was formed as the result of several community groups merging with a shared vision. Maindee Festival Association was established in the early 1990s by a group of like-minded artists who wanted to undertake community arts projects in the local area. The Arts Festival became an annual event and the association became interested in the need for wider community development beyond the festival itself.

In 2014 The Anglican Parish of Maindee was looking to re-purpose St Matthew's Church as a community centre. Other groups, like Maindee Festival Association, joined meetings to help progress this vision. According to key member, John Hallum, the groups realised that the business case for the church to become a community centre didn't stack up as they realised it was the wrong building. However, the diverse groups continued to work together to pursue the ambition of a community space, that could help regenerate the local area and stimulate social capital.

## MAPPING COMMUNITY ASSETS IN WALES: CASE STUDY

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Maindee Unlimited was formed out of this, in 2014, by members of several of these local organisations with the aim of being a catalyst for 'place-based' change.

The charity was successful in securing a £350,000 'Ideas, People and Places' Arts Council of Wales grant that aimed to transform both an internal and external space in Maindee. Concurrently, Llyfrgell Maindee Library was about to permanently close its doors to the public due to public sector funding cuts.

Maindee Unlimited recognised the potential of the building to become the community space it was looking for. They approached the local authority who agreed to transfer the asset to them with a 25-year lease. The Arts Council of Wales grant was pivotal in providing the capital funding needed to ensure the building was brought up to the required standard needed for continued community use.

The library re-opened under the management of Maindee Unlimited in 2015 and has since undergone a further £200,000 refurbishment. The library is actively used for book lending, IT access, printing and copying, and hosts meetings of a range of small community groups and events.

The Maindee Village Partnership, another initiative developed by Maindee Unlimited, has helped to develop the main shopping district of Maindee. According to John Hallum, Project Lead, better street and car park signs have been produced and an online shopping guide and map, to help boost local trade and encourage footfall. This may have helped reduce premises vacancies and stimulated the establishment of a range of new businesses in the area. The charity is now looking at other initiatives, such as taking over the management of the local public toilets in Maindee.



*Maindee shopping guide, copyright of Maindee Unltd*

### ACHIEVEMENTS

- The community asset transfer of the library into the hands of a community group is understood to be the only example in Newport, and the library re-opened its doors to the public in 2015.
- They undertook a £200,000 library refresh in 2019.
- Edible Incredible Maindee is another community-led project by Maindee Unltd, using public green spaces to grow vegetables and herbs for public use.
- The retail occupancy rates have risen in Maindee District Centre, since the Maindee District Partnership initiative began.
- Over £0.5m project finance has been raised.

### CHALLENGES

According to John Hallum, who is one of the groups key founders, funding has at times presented difficulties, with two instances where a significant amount of time was put into developing large funding bids which were turned down. As volunteers, this was a great blow for people who had put so much time and energy into developing complex applications. Community volunteers felt disappointed and realised that significant time had been wasted or lost, that could have been spent in much needed other areas.

Another particular challenge noted by John, has been the ability of the trustees to keep motivated and focused in the face of significant blows to morale. With no 'employer' or necessity of any of the volunteers to undertake the work and commitment required, he says it can sometimes be challenging to remain focused.

Some volunteers do not stay the course, which is to be expected. Additionally, it can be challenging to identify and recruit the diverse range of skills and abilities that are needed to successfully progress an ambitious project of this nature.

Having the right combinations of skills, attributes, time and tenacity can be challenging to achieve and John recognises that one of the reasons they've been successful is due to his ability to commit time and expertise to the project due to his retirement.

At the same time, he warns of creating too much dependency on one person as this is unsustainable. He has at times found this challenging and feels strongly that it is important to empower the organisation itself to take the actions that are needed, rather than over-reliance on an individual.

### SUCCESS CRITERIA

John describes how having a 'trigger' is a normal starting point for community activism. For Maindee, it was the closure of the local church and the associated loss of a home for many community groups which galvanised local people.

He also believes that having diverse and different groups working together (a group of artists, and a group of church trustees) helped make the project a success. It bought power in numbers, but also a greater range of viewpoints and skills. Often each group had to move out of their comfort zone and have their ideas challenged.

According to John, other success factors have included:

- Having effective, credible and robust governance systems, and meaningful policies and procedures to help guide the organisation.
- Having the right team in place, and the right people sitting round the table is essential.
- Having someone with the time, skills, commitment and tenacity to drive the project and keep up the momentum has been critical.
- Working through things and accepting relationships will sometimes be difficult - like a marriage you need to work through things.
- Making sure each new venture can sustain itself and has a viable business case is important to ensure all projects are able to stand on their own two feet.

Lastly, he comments that its vitally important to develop the organisation so that it does not become dependent on one person. There is always the danger that someone who is an effective leader becomes indispensable. The organisation must undertake the actions, not an individual!

