**Maghull Town Council : Leaders Blog /update June 2022**

In the recent past some councilors, one or two who have now left were asking questions of fellow councilors (who were trying to introduce an innovative project), why are we doing this? The answer was simple. We are doing what we do because we were elected on a manifesto that said we would develop social value and social capital in addition to managing the parks and that is what we have been doing for the last 9 years, turning a moribund council into an award winning one and one of the most proactive councils around.

In our final year all our efforts are coalescing under the adopted strategy for managing the core business and community wealth building (see later).

Before we took the council was moribund and withering on the vine, saddled with debt, with little engagement with the local community, with a staffing compliment that wasn’t fit for purpose (remember this was at the height of austerity with shrinking budgets). The only major function was to manage the parks that were in a poor state of repair, with poor play equipment. Productivity was poor with ageing machinery etc.

We collectively were elected on a clear manifesto that was based on local municipalism and a politics that seeks to make the land and assets of the TC work better for the people of Maghull. The Manifesto outlined our new vision for the town where we would develop more facilities for residents, improve the parks, ensure the staffing reflected this new agenda, be a prudent and entrepreneurial council with a green agenda and reduce the burden of debt. This new model for TC fitted in with the agenda for change.eg the new model for local government and it has acted as the dynamo to drive this agenda forward. So we are mandated by the public to deliver to the best of our ability what we said we’d deliver until our term of office expires in May 2023.

**Implementing the vision in the manifesto**

MTC established a series of new Summer festivals, MaghullFest etc. re introduced annual firework displays, Christmas Hampers for housebound residents, Christmas Party for older residents, Christmas tree and Christmas lights switch on, established Maghull Radio (where we have trained over 100 people in radio production techniques, some now running their own shows), the monthly Maghull Press Magazine, the Maghull Business over Breakfast Club, The Maghull Business Incubator Emporium, leading to five new businesses being established, we have also worked with other local stakeholders, e.g. LCP, introduced the Christmas window dressing competition, dramatically enhanced and developed the annual Community awards, so now it is a valued annual event by the community.

We started a community grants scheme, giving seed corn grants to bona fide community groups, allowed community groups to use the town hall at no cost, and supported groups such as Maghull in Bloom and the station volunteers. We consulted on and developed a Neighbourhood Plan for Maghull in the teeth of opposition, which has proven to be a real boon for the town and gone some way to mitigate unbridled development, we fought the developers and won in a three-day public inquiry to prevent traffic going through the town.

We also introduced a greater emphasis on heritage resulting in the creation of a heritage group leading to the partially completed Compassion in Conflict peace memorial and a Moss side display at Maghull North. We reduced the burden of debt and through prudent financial management managed a zero increase in the annual precept for most of our tenure. Many of the innovative developments were underwritten by external funding at no cost to precept payers. We established the first of a new generation of community police stations in the town hall, simultaneously increasing income generation.

 We undertook a root and branch review of the staffing leading to appointment of a new town clerk ( who would achieve the qualification enabling the council to gain the power of general competence. The Town Clerk achieved the qualification to enable us to become ‘an enterprising council’) and the establishment of new posts including facilities / deputy and a community services post. All the above was to drive the agenda forward. We invested in new machinery and grass cutting equipment leading to massive gains in productivity and the parks being much improved, we have invested in play equipment, improving the offer, conducted tree surveys. We Reviewed and updated policies, which were out of date. In short the TC has improved the operations of its statutory functions and massively increased the social capital and social value for residents through its operations.

As a result of this work and an analysis of what we do MTC was awarded a quality mark. Like everything in life it still isn’t perfect and we have had to refine how we do things to deal with a changing environment, we stopped the facilities external business activity as it failed to reach expectations, however this was only one potential aspect for generating additional income and door has always been kept open for additional income generation, e.g. renting space to the police, the Venue, and occasional one off events. At times we have had to react quickly, and the pandemic has had an impact on what we can do.

The current manifesto which was consulted on before its publication outlined how we would continue to develop the agenda outlined above, and the agreed business plan operationalizes the vision outlined in the manifesto. The updated post COVID (hopefully) business plan was presented to and accepted by the council and the full council has agreed unanimously (3rd November 2021) to take forward the Community Wealth Building agenda(CWB),which is now council policy and basically provides a framework that seeks to make the land and assets work better and allowing officers to proceed and to take this forward for the people of Maghull. This will help us with the post COVID recovery as this is essentially what we have been doing for the past eight years, e.g. developing social capital (assets and services owned by the people of Maghull) and social value enhancing the value of our operations to Maghull residents.

**Community Wealth Building**. This is an approach that is being used successfully by many councils, in Maghull this is still evolving and will help us achieve the objectives in the Neighbourhood Plan and provide a contribution to the regeneration of Maghull in the absence of any coherent strategy for Maghull from Sefton Council. One important aspect is to work with local stakeholders/businesses to seek ways to maximise our collective efforts for the people of Maghull. To achieve this ‘anchor ‘organisations are invited to join a strategy for improving the town. We are in the process of pulling together a list of key players in Maghull to explore how we can all work together (LCP, all major Retail outlets, Parkhaven for example). Initiatives could include shop local campaigns, working with organisations to look at employment opportunities for Maghull residents, linking into the radio station. And support training opportunities. In short it could become a voluntary mini BID (Business Enterprise District) Many larger companies have a corporate social responsibility fund and this would be an opportunity to ensure the impact of any funding is maximized.

Another important aspect is to maximise social value in procurement, e.g. how can we, through our procurement, increase the returns for the people of Maghull. Another aspect of CWB (and what we had in our manifesto) is to maximise income from our assets, eg how can we get more income through reviewing what we are doing. The income from the police station/The Venue contributes toward this. We are also negotiating with Sefton Council/Meadows gym regarding any potential contribution to the running/aims/objectives of the town council.

**Fair Deal for Maghull Campaign**

Many of you will be aware of the Fair Deal for Maghull Campaign that we are running. This came about as a result of the scale of development happening in Maghull. Many councilors felt that we are taking all of the pain with little gain ;

The following bullet points highlight the situation

Income

* Sefton withdrew our double rating costing us £130,000 per year ( hence some Town Councillors have signed up to an email to Sefton council leader asking for our£130,00 per annum back on behalf of MTC.
* The Community Infrastructure Ievy was withdrawn potentially costing us £1 million pounds
* We haven’t received any new homes bonus for any development in Maghull potentially costing us over £400,000
* We were excluded from Section 106 payments costing us over £350,000
* Sefton are proposing to top slice, from developers, £62 from every house built in Maghull to ‘fund Sefton Coast’. This is a double edged sword, as not only are we losing about £155,000 that we could use on our parks, it will encourage developers to concentrate their developments on Maghull (potentially Reserve sites in LP) as the topsliced charges for development closer to the coast in Formby and Southport are at lot higher, acting as a disincentive to build in these areas as it is less profitable
* In total we have potentially lost over £2 million pounds
* Staff costs will increase 2% and we will incur pension cost increases
* Inflation is projected to be at least 5% for next year
* A 7% increase in costs without an increase in income will mean we will need additional income or cut services

We cannot simply continue passing on these rises to residents, when they are already paying twice for the parks, through the loss of double rating

So the situation is getting very worrying, Maghull is taking over 26% of Sefton’s housing needs, when Maghull’s need is 12% (over twice the local need). We are losing huge swathes of green belt and green space. In short, the area is taking all the pains of development, with little gain. We all agree that we need some development, but we are not getting a fair share of resources that have been generated by development.

**Community Wealth Building and the cost of living crisis**

In Maghull we have a settled community , people move into the area and tend to stay as a result we have high percentage of over 65 year old residents (27%). Many are retired and on fixed incomes, these people will be hit hard by the cost of living crisis as they tend to be on fixed incomes, which depletes through high inflation (projected 10%).

Within our Neighbourhood Plan there is a stated ambition to develop a greater sense of community support. Although we don’t have a statutory responsibility to do this, we want to help our residents during this period of uncertainty. We are currently undertaking research into the potential for establishing a one stop shop/ community advice centre in the Square. To provide advice and guidance for residents on a range of issues related to the rising cost of living and legal advice on debt and dealing with energy companies etc.

Simultaneously we are researching the potential for re-establishing a business support network for local businesses.

The community engagement manager (Phil Dillon) has been working on developing the ‘Friends of Groups’ this is essentially the community engagement element of Community Wealth Building. Phil has been liaising with LCP. We have invested in Common Place (a community engagement online platform) and will be using this to liaise with the community. Findings from this exercise will help to inform the Council as to what residents’ priorities are and where resources should be focused. It also provides an opportunity to reinforce our business plan and campaigns using objective data provided form our community. Phil is also exploring the potential for other projects related to additional income generation

**The Green Agenda**

MTC is viewed positively by some important external organisations. Our Work work with FOMD has resulted in the UK Centre for Climate Change and Hydrology based at the University of Bangor planning to undertake some cutting edge research on reducing carbon emissions with the TC (as part of our manifesto green agenda, we have involved Sefton’s air quality and flooding team in the initial discussions who are keen to partner up with us) If the university gains funding and the project comes to a clear proposal , it will be put before council for a decision, This initiative would fit perfectly with our green agenda and is timely because of the scale of development about to happened across the town and the increase in pollution. A second piece of research will focus on multiple use of green space and explore the health and wellbeing benefits of using green space for residents. This fits in perfectly with the CWB approach and will essentially codify the social value of our parks and green space, in turn enabling us to use it to bid for funding to organisations like the CCGs, We are also meeting with Sefton’s recently stablished Flood Group (Officers, EA and UU) to explore what actions are being taken to reduce the risks associated with CC.

**Asset depreciation** We need to think about how we are to fund the next generation of vehicles, based on reducing carbon emissions. We are upgrading the play equipment, but costs are rising, changing facilities in parks etc need upgrading. The assets are depreciating generally and this won’t stop

We are facing a perfect storm. There are no regeneration plans from Sefton for Maghull, our costs are about to spiral, so we need more creative thinking around income generation. We are looking at bids, but because we are not, on the face of it a deprived area we do not qualify for a lot. I would much rather look at income generation to get us out of the financial difficulties than consider other alternatives which go against the grain in terms of what we have been trying to do over the past 8 years.

Cllr Patrick McKinley