

Preston Model Project Committee Meeting

8th June 2021 10-11am

Present:

Adrian Wright
Ali Al-Assam
Alina Belousova
Alison Hitchen
Andy Birchall
Bob Cannell
Chris Davis
Craig Garner
Garry Cook
Gaynor Wood
James Moore
John Taylor
Julian Manley
Julie Ridley
Kate Smyth
Louise Doswell
Mark Porter
Martin Hill
Matthew Brown
Mick Mckeown
Olga Kuznetsova
Phil Whyman
Rachel Stringfellow
Shirley Bailey
Sue Smith

Agenda

10.00-10.05: Introduction: Julian Manley

10.05-10.15: Quick round of introductions, name and stakeholder position (briefly)

10.15-10.30: Cllrs Matthew Brown and Officer Rachel Stringfellow speak on the vision of the Preston Model and how the Ecosystem described in the Report connects to Council policy, community wealth building and Towns Fund projects

10.30-10.40: Julian Manley on the Report's 4 challenges: Inter-cooperation; Shared leadership; Social value business approach; Culture/awareness. Proposal to have four sub-groups to lead on each Challenge

10.40-10.45: Alina Belousova on the simple website that will be created to communicate and disseminate project outcomes

10.45-10.50 Ali Al-Assam on NewsSocial platform to use for the 4 action groups discussions and public discussions

10.50-11.00: Discussion and close

Meeting minutes

Julian:

To make this meeting as concise and to the point as possible. So maybe just introduce your name and affiliation or point of interest, stakeholder interest would be great, thank you.

That's followed by Councillors Matthew Brown and Freddie Bailey if he's here, and Rachel Stringfellow from Preston City Council, talking about how the vision of the Preston model and how the ecosystem described in the report connects to council policy, and the community wealth building part two, and the town's fund project.

After that, I'll be giving a very brief summary of the report's four challenges, and a proposal about how we might go about dealing with that. And there'll be a brief time at the end to discuss or provide any more ideas - just 10 minutes or so - for future planning.

In addition to that we have Alina and Ali from News Social, who will be discussing web platforms to help us with the project.

So, I'll begin. My name is Julian Manley, and I work in the University of Central Lancashire. I'll pass on to Garry.

Garry: Hi everyone, my name's Garry, my background is in journalism and photography, but mostly in Preston I'm heavily involved in the arts. I'm part of the Brewtime Collective, an independents creatives group, and am an independent governor on Preston's Cultural Framework Board. I'm trying to adopt the Preston Model into a Preston Arts Model for the city. Ali...

Ali: My name is Ali Al-Assam. I work with News Social UK company which has been converted into a social enterprise, or a coop in cooperation with Preston colleagues. Thank you. I'll pass on to Mick McKeown.

Mick: Thanks Ali. I'm Mick McKeown. I'm a mental health nurse at UCLan, and I'm also affiliated to Unison and Preston Cooperative Development Network. I'll pass on to Kate.

Kate: I am Kate Smith. I'm a non-executive director at Lancashire Teaching Hospitals, and I'm the lead for Health Inequalities, Social Value and Anchor Institutions.

Andy: I'll go next, Andrew Birchall from Preston Cooperative Education Center, it's just been registered last week, so I'm the secretary of that. I've been involved in the Preston Model right from the early stages. Hello everyone. Gaynor Wood...

Gaynor: I'm Gaynor Wood. I'm a lecturer at UCLan and also a chair of Preston Cooperative Development Network. Over to Rachel...

Rachel: Morning. My name is Rachel Stringfellow, I'm a Research Policy Officer at Preston City Council and I work specifically on community wealth building. And I will pass over to Craig...

Craig: Morning. I am Craig, Resources Director at Community Gateway Association. I'll pass over to Louise.

Louise: Hi, I'm Louise Doswell. I'm the Principal and Chief Executive at Preston College and I'm in my second week.... John.

John: Okay, I'm John Taylor. I'm a director of the TAS Partnership. It's a small passenger transport consultancy that is employee owned, and I'm also a treasurer of Preston Community Transport, and I'll pass on to Bob...

Bob: Thanks, I'm Bob Cannell. I'm an independent cooperative development worker with a lifetime's experience of worker co-ops. I've been involved in PCDN since the beginning. Hello everyone.

Martin: Good morning everybody, my name is Martin Hill and I am leading on Social Value across the LEPs projects and programs including the Growth Deal and City Deal programmes. Can I pass on to Alina, please.

Alina: My name is Alina Belousova, I work with Julian in the University of Central Lancashire on cooperative development. I'll pass on to Shirley.

Shirley: My name is Shirley Bailey, and I'm here representing (as is Garry Cook) The Brewtime Collective which is a network of creative practitioners in Preston, and I'll pass on to Adrian Wright.

Adrian: I am Adrian Wright. I'm from the University of Central Lancashire. I'm currently doing a piece of work looking at the creative impacts of the Preston model on the creative industries in Lancashire. I'll pass on to Alison Hitchen.

Alison: Thank you. I'm Allison. I work in the Center for SME Development at UCLan and Sue, who has to stay muted due to technical issues, but Sue is the director of SME development at UCLan, and I'll pass on to Phil Wyman.

Phil: Thank you. Good morning everyone. Phil Wyman, I'm a professor of economics at the University of Central Lancashire. Matthew Brown...

Matthew: I am Matthew Brown, the leader of Preston Council. I'll pass on to James Miller.

James: I'm James Miller. I'm a director of Northwest Mutual which is aiming to become the corporate bank for the Northwest. And if anyone who hasn't introduced himself could wave and I'll pass on to him, Chris.

Chris: Hi everyone, my name is Chris Davis from the mighty Brookfield Estate. I'd like to pass it on to the mighty Julie Ridley.

Julie: Oh Chris. I'm Julie Ridley, and I am co-director of the Center for Citizenship and Community at UCLan. I'm also on the PCDN board. I also work with Climate Action Preston which is thinking about the green economy. So I've got several hats. Thank you.

Julian:

So, as most of you know, - not all of you, because not everybody has been involved in the project committee, but most people here have been involved in a project committee, - we had a virtual visit from LKS Mondragon to help us develop a cooperative entrepreneurial ecosystem for Preston. They came up with two reports: one very big, large, chunky report on the way they do it in the Basque Country in Mondragon and Bilbao, and the second report, which was specifically directed towards action in Preston. And it's the second report that we're going to be interested in because obviously it's directly focused on Preston and action.

One of the ideas behind the work that we do here and the project committee is how it fits with the general overall plans for the Preston model. We have a leadership from Preston City Council on that. And there's a need at all times to make sure that the dots are dotted and the T's are crossed and that everything is interconnected. So, it's great to see that Rachel and Matthew Brown from the Council are here to ensure that these different projects, that are becoming ever more complicated, ever more complex, are properly, mutually supportive and feeding into each other.

So, I will pass on now to our colleagues in Preston City Council: Matthew Brown, Rachel. But if I could pass over to Matthew and Rachel, so that you can give us a vision of how you see this project

committee work, and the Mondragon reports could feed into and be mutually supportive with the Council's community wealth building projects. Okay, thanks to you and I'll let Rachel share the slides.

Matthew: Unfortunately, Freddie Bailey can't be with us today. He had an addition to the family very recently, so I convey his apologies for not being here. So, Rachel's got some slides that she'll take us through and then obviously I'll follow up after that. So over to you, Rachel.

Rachel: Yes, thank you and I've got some slides as Councillor Brown said. So thank you very much for asking us to share about the strategy, and I read the Mondragon report with great interest. And what I want to pick up with the slides is respond really to two of the two major parts of the report. One dealt with the overall Preston model and what we would call community wealth building. And then the second section looked at specifically cooperative development. So, the first important message to get across this morning is the issue of defining a strategic framework.

And what many of you will know is at the beginning of this year, towards the end of February, the council actually launched its new community wealth building strategy, which was a response to Covid and to the increasing threat of the climate emergency. In that context, the council needed to develop a framework of Covid response, that took into account both recovery from the pandemic and future resilience of Preston, in the face of future threats. And of course, of opportunities, because there are opportunities for investment in the town through the Towns Fund particularly. There are other projects that the council committed to some years ago with the cinema and reimagining the Harris. So, there are great opportunities for present moment and the threats that we face as well.

But of course the foundation for the strategy was very much the achievements that Preston has delivered so far with its community wealth building agenda which goes right back to 2012. So, this is an ongoing project, but at the same time a need was recognized for a new strategic framework in response to changing circumstances. The themes of what we call community wealth building 2.0 are very familiar to those of you who, who have been following the Preston Model, have taken an active part in the Preston model and the community wealth building over the last few years, continued working around progressive procurement. Reinforcing the commitment to social values has been hardwired into many of the projects that Preston has been delivering over the last few years, including the city deal but a renewed commitment to that, a more diverse and democratic economy which is where cooperative workstreams fits very strongly, decent and fair employment, making financial power work for local places, using the council's assets for social and environmental benefits, harnessing the power of place to cover collaboration with anchors so that's very much linked to the theme this morning about collaboration and bringing partners together to work on projects of shared interest and in shared ambition and place leadership. So, just to highlight the theme of collaboration in partnership with anchors, and with the community is a recurring theme throughout strategy and what I put on the slide there are some of the specific priorities, taken from the different themes that...

I think the key thing to emphasize is that one of the messages that came through Nweeda Khan's report was the need for strategic framework and I think you've got the impression of what I said already that what the council has developed over the last few months and launched in February is a very clear

strategic freight framework, the next phase of the Preston model, and community wealth building that builds on the work that has been developed to date. And then specifically on cooperatives.

We have developed again a strategic framework for progressing the work that we're doing, which has built very much on the experience of the work done in Stir to action in which we have a fuller understanding of the different layers of activity that underpin the progression towards the establishment of cooperatives and specifically worker cooperatives. So, as a partnership across Preston, the county, we have the council, we Centre for SME development, we have the PCDN. We've been working with partners (Coops UK, Stir to Action) brought together in a steering group that is progressing a range of activities to raise interest, awareness in cooperatives to provide different levels of support. And this work is starting to take off and is reaching out as well to community groups, into other anchors to find projects where there's a shared interest in progressing the work of cooperative development.

So, again apologies for not being able to show the slides but I think those are the two key messages really. The council has a strategy and an ambition that is reflected in the priorities of that strategy, and specifically in relation to cooperative work. There is a strong foundation of work that's been evolving over the last 18 months really to drive home the cooperative agenda.

Julian: Thank you Rachel, and Rachel maybe you could email us the presentation, so we can all look at it in our time.

Rachel: Yes, I will certainly do that.

Julian: Thank you, Matthew, did you have something to add to that?

Matthew: Just very briefly. Obviously, the success is a matter of people in this meeting, organisations, individuals, businesses and others. So, we got lots of interest in taking the Preston model forward, but we need to bring it to scale in the next two or three years, which is my ambition. Obviously, we want to have quite a number of people employed in cooperative businesses in the city. We've got aspirations for a bank, and Education Centre and looking at other forms of economic democracy. So, it's just really a plea that we've got our own strategy and we've got this report. I think we need to start work together and cooperate and make sure that all the binds that we have here, both at the Council, in the anchor institutions, but as part of this process, we actually just work together to make it happen. Because things we are going to face after COVID will be tough in terms of the community and economy. It's going to be very different, there's gonna be lots of businesses that were there before that aren't there now on the high street, a lot more poverty, potentially a lot more unemployment that we got to try and make sure the city recovers from.

So, I just think we need to get our heads together and making sure that the strategy we have as a council along with the other work that we're doing. We work together really well. There's good ideas, everywhere, to be honest. And let's make sure that through this steering committee we all coordinate, that by coordinating we deliver on the ground, because that's what it's all about. We've got to deliver change on the ground and that's what my administration is about really. You know my ambition and my motivation is to tackle the inequalities within Preston which go back decades, often through austerity

policies and other things and to deal with that we've got to really coordinate and work together and deliver something that's really powerful. I've read the conclusions of the reports, but also we do have this strategy which we need to interact with. So, let's make sure that we do something that's going to be practically deliverable in the next few months and years. Thanks.

Julian: Thank you, Matthew. So I'm just going to briefly now summarize the part of the second report which is the second half of the report, which identifies four challenges, and it seems to me that the message from the second report from Mondragon is that these are the four challenges that we've got to incorporate in our strategy within the project committee, but also as Rachel and Matthew have just said within the strategy of community wealth building for Preston, as a whole. It's not going to be possible to enter into any detail now in this very short meeting, but I just want to point out that the four challenges are:

1. Inter-cooperation, defined as increasing the collaboration and work together, among different stakeholders.
2. Shared leadership, creating an ecosystem where different stakeholders in Preston can develop complimentary leadership.
3. A social value business approach, the creation of competitive companies with a robust business model. And this is very much the Mondragon style which is of interest to us in Preston, and although we're interested in social value and transforming the social and the economic situation in Preston, at the same time, we have to create businesses that are competitive too. So, it's quite a specific approach, I think.
4. Co-operative culture and awareness. And I know that the fourth one is very much in the sights of Rachel in the Council and Gaynor's - chair of the Preston Cooperative Development Network. So, there's a lot of work in cooperative culture and awareness already on the go.

So those are the four strategy areas, therefore challenges: inter-cooperation, shared leadership, social value approach and collaborative culture and awareness. And in the second half of the report each action line, each challenge has three aspects to it, which are very interesting, very concise and very well done in the report. The first is a definition of what each one means. The second is a Mondragon example.

So, when it talks about inter-cooperation, they give an example of Mondragon of what inter-cooperation means and I think it's really important so that we understand that these ideas, these challenges, these strategy action plans are not just pie in the sky. They actually exist somewhere on the planet and so if they exist in Mondragon - they can exist in Preston too.

And the third part of each challenge are Preston action lines. And these are of course, crucial. There's about six, seven or eight action lines for each challenge, and they're also divided up into four year strategy. My proposal for today is that we create four subgroups: one subgroup for each challenge, which could investigate, and proceed with the action lines of each challenge, and do that on its own steam and report back to the whole committee on a quarterly basis.

So, every couple of months each subgroup is working on its action line, and every quarter, we get back together as a full committee and disseminate back information about how the strategy for each action line is proceeding.

In a minute I'm going to pass on to Alina and Ali from News Social, because, although I think it's up to each subgroup to decide how they want to pursue the different aspects of that particular strategy, we do have a proposal about how to facilitate such a thing. So, there's an online platform proposal from News Social, which might be useful for subgroups to work through and Alina is going to talk about a simple website that we're setting up in order to upload the reports, the agendas, the minutes, and any other information from the larger group or from each subgroup. So, if I could pass on now to Alina, and Alina if you could maybe tell us a little bit about the website, and then maybe pass on to Ali or vice versa. I don't know how you've decided to do that.

Alina: Yes, that's fine - I can start. Hello again. So, we are working on developing a website, which will be prestonmodel.net, and we want it to provide a public face for the Project Committee's work and link the Project Committee with other aspects of Preston Model's development process. So, anyone from the public could download the two reports that you've all received, see agendas and minutes of the project committees dealings, check upcoming events, click on the links to Preston Model related sites, and the key with the website is to provide transparency to the Project Committee's work. So that was the summary of it. Thank you, and I'll pass on to Ali.

Ali: Okay, thank you very much. So, we've been developing a platform for a number of years. And what we are hoping for is that this could help, especially with inter-cooperation activities, with the various task for the various subgroups. And I hope it could be linked well to the website that Alina is developing. What we provide currently are moderated group discussions with an outcome in private or public circles. So, for example, our meeting today with various participants, with the agenda, with an outcome could be done in the end with the video meeting. So, we could have video meetings like today's as an event, we could have moderated discussion that could follow up or could be linked to it. And our emphasis is always on an outcome.

We could have a group and then the various subgroups that Julian mentioned could be there. With discussions and the moderation of it. There is the relevant content. The relevant content could come from all the documents that we upload over the months plus anything external from Mondragon, for example. The system will intelligently bring external content that is relevant to what we are researching and what we are working on. And also we could involve partners and the public, so some of the discussions could be made public, it could involve Citizen Assemblies, the various actors in Preston. So, there is the private discussion that we hold with some groups, and you could have public discussions.

That's what we built and that's what we hope we could do now. Of course, to go forward, we have to probably agree with Alina on the details about the structure of the groups the structure of the system, then get you all easily join these subgroups and groups by inviting you through the software. And then, proceed from there. Hopefully, it could serve us.

We've just finished a Google funded project. And we've been very active with various groups on sustainable energy and other things in the Middle East. This has been very successful with hundreds of people taking part so we are really hopeful that we could serve what we are doing in here. And that's what we do.

Julian: Thank you, Alina and Ali. It's also true that you and colleagues will be offering a little bit of advice and training and maybe do a presentation on how it all works?

Ali: Yes, what I propose initially is to agree the structure with Alina. And get me and Alina to create these groups, initially. Then what I propose is that we do a 30-minute tour for everybody. And then I will and my colleague Robert will be available to handhold everybody. It's very easy to use. We need no more than a 30-minute tour with everyone to show them how the system works.

Julian: And Ali, could you say something about you has some plans maybe of converting some of this into a cooperative in the future for Preston.

Ali: Ok. So we had an MOU which we signed with UCLan and with the Preston City Council that News Social over the next few months, becomes a social enterprise, or a co-op as part of the Preston model. We are quite determined to go ahead with it, and hopefully, News Social conversion into a technological coop can be a case study in what you are doing, in the various tasks. So, one of them is a social value enterprise. My hope is that soon we can work with Julian and Preston City Council to turn News Social into that. In in News Social we have a clear idea of how to do it, because we engaged solicitors in London who are experts in legal structures. We've done our first coop actually in 1982 in the UK, because we've been following Mondragon for a long time. So, we hope that we could contribute to that, as well as to the thinking process: how do you create a democratically structured technology coop, that will push this the whole case study in Preston.

Julian: Thank you, Ali. Just to mention that the University of Central Lancashire and the Center for SME development in the university have been working closely with Ali from News Social for a while now. We've been trying to acquire some funding for work but as yet we've been unsuccessful. But we still have a future aspiration to find some funding to make those connections between the Center for SME development and News Social.

Ok, so we now have quarter of an hour left. I know it's not much, but if anybody's got any questions, ideas or thoughts - you can obviously comment now. And, of course, you can also write in the chat. I can see that Bob - you have your hand up.

Bob: Yes. Awareness of coops in the UK has really gone down over the decades. I've been involved in coops for 40 years. And I've been interviewed by journalists several times during that time, showing them examples of wonderful really well functioning cooperative businesses, and they're always amazed - like the first time they've ever heard of anything like this. And then as soon as they've done their article it fades away again. So, you're quite right that cooperative awareness is a major, major issue. The lack of coops in business books, in universities and colleges, in School Business Studies courses... They're just seen as some sort of exotic beast: "It's not for the rest of us, it's just for those weirdos that get involved in".

So, I think that's really important, but one of the other aspects of that is that people actually don't know what coops are. So, we're getting all kinds of things coming into the field, saying: "Well, we're are a coop", but they're not. We need to be very clear what we mean by a coop. It is the enterprise that is democratically owned and controlled by its workers and all users and customers. So, I think we just need to be aware of that. I mean I'd be very happy to be involved in both talking to business people about coops and raising awareness of them. Thank you.

Julian: So, Chris raised his hand.

Chris: I want to comment on what Bob was just said but also ask a question to Ali and Alina. It would be well for the website to potentially be a vehicle to promote the culture and the beauty of cooperation and coops because it seems to me that transparency is really important. And the information and structures are really important, for people need to see that cooperative stuff is beautiful and stunning, that it has smacks of quality, that there's a joy in it, and that cooperatives have a human face. So, I'm thinking of people talking to camera describing what it's like to be the beneficiary of a coop, what it's like to be working in one, what it's like to have started one...

Julian: Thank you Chris and I know, Bob, that you yourself mentioned the idea of a film, to promote the way these wonderful things can happen, and how they do happen in different parts of the world and how maybe they could happen here too...We just need to find the money. Anyone else? I'd quite like to invite anyone who has not been on our project committee before, if you have any thoughts or ideas. If this is your first project committee meeting it'd be nice to hear from you, or anyone else for that matter.

Ali: What we've been doing in the last few weeks is piloting various meetings on topics like energy and green energy and so on. But the question is: how to make it very popular to millions of people, and how to get journalists to report on them. So, the purpose of it is really exactly what Chris said... No point just doing things internally. We have to popularize it with the people and get a larger number of people to be involved.

Also, as part of this experiment, we are doing a 3-5 min video on that principle exactly to popularize cooperative thing that's done in the Middle East, but it's very similar to what you are talking about now. So, that is a film production. That is: how do you do media popularization, and how do you invoke the people.

Julian: Mick, you have your hand up?

Mick: I think it builds on what Chris and Ali and Bob said about, you know, deepening the involvement of the wider population of Preston in this plan to get and strategy to go forward. And I'm really heartened with the idea that the digital platform that's proposed will begin to facilitate things like Citizen Assemblies. I think that's fantastic. Julie has put in the chat: let's do face to face as well. I'd only get to one or the other. I think once we begin to get out from under the pandemic we can do both. But I think both Preston Cooperative Development Network and the newly emergent Preston Cooperative Education Center will be looking for members to grow into hopefully mass membership organisations,

and it'd be great if we could all sort of interact on that, so it's part of the inter-cooperation agenda. That thing is already emerging on this call and could be about encouraging people to become active in the organizations and structures that are already there and will be set up so that it moves beyond the sort of activist, hardcore, merry band of a few to something that's a properly democratic collective of many.

Julian: Thank you. Do we have any further comments?

Garry: Yeah, just about what he said about the communication aspect and getting the message out then popularise our work. You know Shirley and I in Brewtime Collective are really invested in cultural activities in Preston in the arts and the main failing in Preston is communicating what's going on, engagement with people. So, I think it's really important that whatever we're doing that there is a serious consideration of how to get the message out there and engage with people, not just on social media platforms but direct engagement to get the message out there and make as exciting, a proposition as possible to the general public.

Julian: Totally agree. And of course, this is where arts and culture fits in as well and I think one things about the Preston model which is really exciting is that it tends to be holistic. It's not just about economics, it's not just about social, it's not just about cultural, it's about how all of these things can fit together, and I think that's one of the exciting aspects about the Preston model in fact. So, thank you for being on this call, Garry, to bring in that aspect as well. And Shirley... to anyone else.

Question: Just a quick question Julian. How will we indicate which working groups we want to join in with?

Julian: Yes, I was going to mention that towards the end of this call, maybe now is towards the end of this call. The idea is that Alina will send out an email or poll or something of that nature, to everyone in the committee asking if you'd like to be involved in this strand or that strand. It's possible to be involved in one particular strand only, or it's possible to be involved in all of them via News Social platform. You can go from one to the other. Or indeed, if time is not good for you and you haven't got much time, then we appreciate the people's presence at these committee meetings. So even if you feel you haven't got time to dedicate too much to one strand or another strand, it is great if people can nevertheless come to these committee meetings and we ensure that we still have a diversity in opinion and ideas that can feed back into the project. So, we will follow up this meeting with the minutes, and with further information about the News Social platform, and the website, and also with an invitation for joining one of the particular strands. Would anyone else like to say something, at this stage?

Martin: It's very useful for me to engage with this particular group in terms of the journey that overlaps in terms of embedding social value, in developing social value charter that spans not necessarily just across economic and social infrastructure projects or physical projects, but also in terms of our delivery of things like the career sub service, which has social value embedded in there, and boost services as well to support businesses and also the linkage there. In terms of supporting SMEs and community, community interest companies and cooperatives, from business support perspective as well. So I'd very much like to be in get involved in the social value development side of things.

Julian: Oh, that's fantastic, Martin. And obviously be great to have you there - it makes all the sense in the world. And I think there are some interesting connections there too with the Centre for SME development. You know, during the pandemic it became clear that social value was of increasing importance to small businesses. And I think it's going to be a much more obvious part of businesses in the future not just in Preston but in the UK in general so it's great that here we have a framework for doing that, which is quite a clear framework. So, thank you for that. It would be great if you could be involved in that strand.

Anyone else?... Ok, well, if there are no more contributions, no more comments at this stage... Well, thank you very much indeed for coming. It's great to see so many people so interested and committed and engaged enough to be present at this meeting. I'm still dreaming that one day we're gonna have a face to face meeting, but who knows when that'll happen. But in the meantime, we'll push on. Thanks to Rachel and Matthew from the council. It's great to have the council, obviously, centrally involved in this project, as well as stakeholders from the different anchor institutions: Preston College, Community Gateway, community representation from Chris, lots of representation here from the University of Central Lancashire, and as I mentioned before with Garry's representation from the cultural and artistic aspects of what happens in Preston, and thank you to Gaynor and Mark Porter from the Preston Cooperative Development Network for your continued activity as well, - in particular cooperation with Rachel in developing cooperatives and cooperative cultural awareness for Preston.