

Preston Model Project Committee Meeting

15th October 2021 2-3am

Present:

Alina Belousova
Andrew Birchall
Matthew Brown
Garry Cook
Chris Davis
Olga Kuznetsova
Julian Manley
Mick Mckeown
Roberto Minio
Ioannis Prinos
Rachel Stringfellow
John Taylor
Ann Vanner
John Wainwright
Phil Whyman

Agenda

- Introduction (Julian Manley) (5)
- Feedback from Challenge Circles: It's early days, so we don't expect too much feedback at this stage, but ideas from the different Circles about moving the agenda forward are appreciated. (15)
- Moderators for the Circles. Moderators to feed back on role and what this entails. There may also be an opportunity to elect a Moderator to a Circle. (10)
- News Social - developing plans to turn News Social into a co-operative to serve Preston (20)
- AOB (10)

Meeting Minutes

Julian: Okay, thanks everyone. I'm going to make a start now. We don't have Ali with us from News Social, because, unfortunately, Ali has to attend a funeral, but we do have Roberto here from News Social. Roberto, I hope you wouldn't mind just saying hello and explaining that you're from News Social.

Roberto: Hi. I'm Roberto. I'm from News Social. I worked a lot closely with Ali for many years and we're working together to try and make News Social cooperative.

Julian: Okay, thank you. And Robert is here to maybe answer a few questions later on in the meeting. So, I've distributed the agenda. Just a general word on the general meetings. The idea is that we have general project meetings such as this one once every two months or so. So, the next meeting is on the 15th February, and the meeting after that is on the 12th April. And the purpose of the general meetings is largely to feedback from the circle groups - the circle groups being the four challenges as identified by LKS.

So, this meeting today is one of those meetings. I'm going to give a longer introduction than I had intended before, because I feel that it's probably necessary to try and get the momentum going on the four challenges and see if we can get those four groups working. There's been of course a bit of a break from the time that LKS Mondragon published their report. And now, I suppose, many people might think that with the ongoing pandemic, it's kind of very tiring and difficult to keep going and to concentrate on these things. But so you know, this is why I'm going to give a sort of slightly longer introduction at the beginning. After the introduction, there's going to be a moment for any feedback from the four circles. Now, I don't expect there's going to be much feedback because we haven't really made too much of a start, but there may be some feedback. And then there may be an opportunity as well for electing a moderator to each of the circles. Now, I know that we have one moderator here and that's Mick. And, Mick, I'm going to ask you to say something about how you see the role of moderator for the particular group that you're in. And towards the end of the meeting, this is Roberto's chance to shine here, as he brilliantly answers all your questions and doubts and comments about the News Social platform. And if there's time at the end, we'll open it to whatever else needs to be talked about.

Okay, so just to talk a little bit about the challenge circles, hopefully this this works. First of all, just to remind you that we do have a project committee website. The purpose of the project committee website is to archive all the information that we've gathered up till now. So, the website includes the minutes and the agendas, it includes a little bit of information about how the project committee came to being. It has a little bit of information on News Social, which is a digital platform for debate and discussion. And there's a new section on News, and as time goes, on, we may want to put some news up there. At the moment, there's some information about the Preston meets Mondragon, second meeting, we had quite recently but for the purposes of this particular meeting, I just want to remind everybody that one of the things you can download from the website is of course the two Mondragon reports, and this is the page where you can do that.

So, the first report is about the Mondragon ecosystem – it describes how in Mondragon, in Bilbao, and in Basque country in general, they're further developing their cooperative ecosystem. And I suppose it's a fascinating thing. You would have thought that after 50 or 60 years of successful cooperative development and successful development of their ecosystem in Mondragon, that they'd be sitting back and patting each other on the back, but not at all. What they're doing is they're further developing ideas and ways to bring in cooperative working beyond Mondragon and, in particular, in the city of Bilbao. So, the idea of course is that we're not beginning as they began with absolutely nothing. We're beginning with the experience, knowledge, skills, and expertise of Mondragon and maybe we can get some ideas from their own ecosystem. That's the first report.

And the second report is more directly related to the work of the project committee and that is where they talk about the development of a potential Preston ecosystem. And they identified four challenges, which is what we're about, and they put action lines next to those challenges. If you want a cozy read by the fireside over Christmas time, those reports are highly recommended. I'm just going to flag up on the slides the four circles, the four circles being the groups of people who are wanting to discuss the challenges as depicted in the report. The first challenge is the challenge of inter cooperation. And it seems to me that this is a fascinating and an exciting challenge. I don't want to go on about it, but in terms of thinking about this conceptually, and thinking about it from my own personal perspective - to replace the feel like the neoliberal development of the competitive society, where winner takes all with the idea of cooperating instead of competing, that idea which works in Mondragon, because the different cooperatives in Mondragon agree to mutually support each other, not compete with each other. What they do is they compete, of course, because they have to, with the market if you like, which is outside of Mondragon. But within the Mondragon ecosystem the cooperatives are supporting each other in many different ways. The first challenge for us is then inter-cooperation, and it's a challenge because I think Bob Cannell, who's not here today, keeps on mentioning that for people like me, at least, and maybe some of us here, the idea that you can cooperate within the social and economic systems we have in our country is quite a difficult one for some people to get their head around. There's a definition here, which comes from the report. Collaborating: work together between different stakeholders to get to a common premise; that all members gain or obtain some kind of benefit from this cooperation.

And on the left I've just put in the first three challenges and action lines there. There's more in the report, of course, but I just put these up for reference. First one here is to identify new inter-cooperation projects between educational stakeholders of Preston, foster collaboration between coops and social enterprises of precedence. I do think it's interesting to point out here that in Mondragon they're not just ideologically obsessed with cooperatives. I mean, of course, they are cooperatives, but, above all, if any of you ever go to the Basque country, you'll notice that they are absolutely pragmatic. They are pragmatic and practical. And if, for example, as in the case of Preston, there aren't that many cooperatives (we hope that in the future there will be, but at present there aren't that many cooperatives, but there are quite a few so called social enterprises) then maybe it's possible to foster collaboration between social enterprises as well as between coops. The third one here - foster the collaboration within and between communities and grassroots organizations. And I'm glad that Chris Davies is here because I believe this is something close to your heart, Chris, and close to our hearts - the idea that communities and grassroots organizations can become a significant and leading part of the inter-cooperative fabric of Preston, but it doesn't always have to be led by people in elite situations or by businesses. It can be led from the bottom up - from the grassroots up. Initially, we have a list of people there who originally put their names down for this. So, there we are, that's if you're there, you're there. And if you're not there, you can put yourself there and if you're there and you don't want to be there, you can take yourself away.

The next challenge is that of shared leadership, which to me is beautiful. It's a very beautiful thing to consider as a possibility. Once again, in a place like England or Preston, the idea of flattening the hierarchies and sharing the leadership, giving a democratic and participating voice to people is not part of our regular discourse. You know, just today in the Houses of Parliament, I couldn't help but notice

the kind of leadership that we're talking about. You got Boris Johnson on the one hand and Starmer on the other who keeps waving the flag, believing that waving the Union Jack makes him a great leader and so on. We're talking about something which is way different to all of that. The definition in the report is: create an ecosystem where the different Prestonian stakeholders which includes the council, of course, can develop some complimentary leadership beyond the city council. And, you know, this is obviously something for the council to consider as well, because, as elected representatives in Preston, there will be many people who regard the council leadership as being above and beyond all other forms of leadership.

But the kind of leadership that we're talking about here is a shared democratic participatory leadership. And here are the three examples from there. (1) Identify some shared common values or common sense elements between the different stakeholders. You know, during the course of my work with the Preston model, it's been very interesting for people to consider the Preston model as being common sense. And if you talk about the aspects of the Preston model in one way, many people would say: "Oh, you know, that's very radical, that comes from Corbin type economics and so on." But actually, if you take a step back and think about the things that people are trying to do in Preston with a Preston model, I think that's a common sense and many people in Preston say that common sense is something that they are happy to embrace.

(2) Define and select a "neutral" organization to dynamize the entrepreneurship ecosystem. Then take collaboration opportunities among different stakeholders, and support the creation of cooperatives. I think the word "neutral" in inverted commas there is the important word, isn't it? I mean to what extent can we be common sensical and neutral in our approach, so that we don't put people off because we're representing some extremist ideology. If we're talking about common sense, then there should be something neutral in all of that that all of us can buy into. And if we can find that we're more likely to share leadership.

(3) The next one - facilitate the engagement of other relevant stakeholders in the Preston model: Chamber of Commerce, etc. And once again, a list of people who willingly volunteered to put their names down on the list for shared leadership circle.

The next one is a social value business approach. I have to say that this idea of social value is very much in the air at the moment. You know, the buzzwords at the moment are very much connected to the idea of social value. Social value, of course, as an alternative to economic or financial value. And in our case, the definition that Mondragon put in is: foster the creation of competitive companies with a robust business model, but at the same time comply with cooperative principles and values and have a positive impact in employment generation, improvement of living standards in minorities or communities, and the application of more democratic models of shared ownership. And once again, the first three in mind: (1) Support the creation of worker-owned coops. Well, we've been doing that for a while. Perhaps we haven't been doing it that successfully because we're rather slow in getting together some work around coops, but at the same time, it has to be recognized. First of all, that the idea of a worker coop is quite alien to a lot of people. And secondly, the Coronavirus pandemic hasn't exactly helped mentoring services and grant assessment. (2) Mentoring is a big thing in Mondragon. I mean, I hadn't realized the extent of this until about a year ago. And if you read the first report, you'll see that

the Mondragon bank, Laboral Kutxa, has a mentoring programme, where a mentor is attached to the startup businesses and they're helped along the journey with grants, assessments and so on. (3) Support collaboration and cooperation among coops and companies that have a social value approach. It can be a win-win situation here for if a company and/or a coop demonstrate the desire and wish to pursue social value approaches. And as I said before, that's a popular thing at the moment. Then, as they support each other, I would imply that actually the cooperation among them is in itself a social value. Instead of a company competing with another to try and bring the it down and get a greater market share, they can mutually support each other for the common good. And that of course, is a social value in terms of developing relationships in community. Once again, a list of people who put their names down for that particular circle.

And finally, culture and awareness. Before I became an academic, so before 2010, I was working in Mondragon giving training and consultancy. To me, this is an incredibly interesting area because once again, after so long and so many successes in Mondragon, you would have thought they would have got their culture sorted, but actually what they're doing in Mondragon is putting more and more emphasis on cooperative culture, not less, instead of taking it for granted. What they're seeing is that the younger cooperators in Mondragon have difficulty necessarily accepting or understanding what cooperative values and principles are. They do a lot of work now with cooperative culture and awareness.

(1) One of our challenges is to support the development of a more collaborative and cooperative culture in Preston including, for example, the creation and launch of the Preston Cooperative Education Center, which is done. The PCEC is launched and exists as a legal entity. It's a union cooperative and it's in the process of development, but very exciting things will be happening there.

(2) Support the education institutions in Preston to include cooperatives and collaboration examples, principles, concepts and current training. We can have a go at UCLan. It's not necessarily easy to introduce cooperative ideas into UCLan's curriculum, but we can give it a shot.

(3) And support the creation of apprenticeship programs in cooperatives and social companies in Preston. And once again a list of people who've signed into that.

One of the most important things that we need to develop in order to get the circles going is the figure of the moderator within a circle. Now, when Ali from News Social was giving us some training and discussing the way we could use the News Social platform, a moderator became a very important figure. When I was thinking about that, I've come to understand that the moderator is a moderator of the group as a whole. It's not only a moderator for the News Social platform but it's someone who moderates the discussions and facilitates and organizes other meetings. Now, I was hoping that by this time, we'd be able to have face to face meetings. Unfortunately, as we all know, the pandemic doesn't seem to be abating very much, but in theory, any kind of meeting can be convened by the moderator. They can be meetings on Zoom, and if we ever we get the chance, in a café, a pub or a hired room in UCLan. They can be meetings by email, etc. The moderators is not only a moderator of the New Social platform but also a facilitator and organizer of all meetings. For the purposes of moderating on New Social Ali and Roberto are willing and able and have already given some training and support to

develop the role of a moderator. I completely get that it might be a bit daunting, certainly daunting for me to take on the role of a moderator for a platform I'm not used to, but there is training available for that, and I think both Mick and Chris have been doing some of that training and maybe later on you can tell us about it.

And each group should elect its moderator and I also think that each group or circle should change the moderator every three months, every six months, every year, whatever the circle decides, unless the moderator is keen to carry on in that role, but changing a moderator might not be a bad idea. Of course, that kind of decision should be up to each group to decide and carry forth governed in a democratic fashion as we would expect. We have the four circles and then we have this committee here, the general project committee, which consists of people from the four circles, but it may also consist of people who are willing and wanting to continue thinking about the project, but don't have time or don't want to be members of the individual circles. That's what the general project committee is, and it meets periodically, as I said, next meetings 15th February and then 12th of April.

The idea of the general project committee is to listen to feedback from each of the circles to join the dots between the different circles. Things that are being done in one circle are very likely to be relevant to another circle. That's another role of the project committee to support and provide suggestions for issues and problems that arise and to suggest modifications and developments. What's useful today may not be useful tomorrow, and so the project committee is obviously open to modifications according to the ideas, wishes, thoughts and desires of its members. At some stage we'll need to concentrate on making these things time bound. We do have a strategic timeline in the second report, which you can download from the website. I think we should have a look at that once we get the circles up and running. And we can modify the timeline according to how the circles are going and so on. I think the first thing is to get those challenge circles up and running and see if that works. As soon as that works, we'll want to make it time bound and there's a four year strategy in the report. Okay, so thanks for that. I'm going to stop sharing now.

Maybe it's time now to go back to any feedback from the circles. I don't know if anyone would like to give any immediate feedback. I mean, as I said before, I don't expect there'll be that much at the moment. If there's some immediate feedback about the circles, that'd be great. And if not, I just like to call upon Mick and, maybe, Chris, to say something about moderation and your experience so far with the News Social platform and Roberto is here to answer questions.

Mick: Should I jump in then? Taking the platform first ...I'm a bit of a technical ignoramus and I found it once explained, quite easy to get to grips with. And I like the fact that you get email digests and that sort of thing is helpful for me, even if it's only to remind me to go and have a look at everything. I think, personally, it's the rest of life and work the issue in terms of the amount of time you can devote to it rather than anything to do with the actual platform itself. I think the platform is really useful, especially when face to face meetings are limited. And I think for a while I've been interested in how social media, generally, digital platforms could be a really useful vehicle for ongoing conversations. I think the sociocracy that we've committed to is interesting and for me a personal dilemma is: when is the discussion finished? And who calls that? And I think I'm a bit nervous, if it's the moderator who is calling close on discussions.

I quite like the idea of discussions, not so much discussions that drag on and go nowhere, but discussions that are alive, and keep an idea fresh and take us to new places and such like. I think the platform gives us the opportunity to do both. I sort of put my hand up really because no one else wanted to be a moderator on that platform. And also, I think in recognition that some of the other people may be less privileged of time than myself. This privilege comes with working in a job where I can devote some of my job time to this. To be a moderator hasn't been too much of a chore. I think you could probably do a better job of it, and spend more time over there on the on the platform. We started off a discussion thread around the different challenges because we were interested in contributing to building a map of our assets and strengths in communities. And we think, if we had resources, we could do this a lot more systematically, but it's for another year, we could park that discussion. And we were doing it a bit Stone Age and just trying to take advantage of lists and knowledge that's out there in terms of membership and that's where the general project committee might come in.

I think all of us are part of discussions in other groups some of which could migrate to this if it was agreeable with people. For instance, I'm a member of the board of Preston Cooperative Development Network and we have our own online discussions on a completely different platform. And I find that a challenge in itself now to be having discussions that may crossover elsewhere and with the same principles at stake, to be able to track all discussions and keep an eye on, facilitate democracy and everything. At the moment I'm trying to persuade comrades in PCDN to come over to News Social for those discussions. And it might be that the Preston Cooperative Education Center try some of that as well because I think we're in that quarter of the world discussing things by email, nice Zoom meetings and WhatsApp. In my mind, if we could bring them together into one place, it would serve two purposes – one, maybe save a bit of time, and the other one would be to other discussions that are relevant to an ecosystem a bit more transparent and inclusive. That's just a thought. I haven't got an easy idea of how we might work that out. And that's just some of the groups that I'm involved in. I can see that some discussions have to be private, but not all of them. Digests and updates that are public facing could be usefully posted. In a way that's not additional work. If we were all on the same platform, it shouldn't be extra work. If we don't all move on to the same platform, it could be extra work, and then that's adding a chore.

And the other little spin off from our social value thing is the discussions that Chris, I and his comrades in Brookfield had about the social care cooperative. We are going to be meeting next week to look at some grassroots ideas around this. There's been other discussions with what you might call more institutional stakeholder groups and, hopefully, going forward we can bring some of those together and then right at the heart of what this challenge is about, because that would hopefully be a very concrete example to get to grips with. That's what we're up to in a nutshell. It's been a little bit slow getting going but hopefully is going to gather pace from now on and I think the enemy of all this is a lack of time. Ideally, it's many people doing a little bit rather than a few people doing all the discussion. I think we've got to get over that in some way by involving more people.

Julian: Yeah, thank you Mick and in terms of time, I couldn't agree with you more. It just seems like we get less and less time to do things. But in a way, if we can get working with News Social platform, that could be in a sense a timesaver because you don't have to gather all together live in one moment. We

learned this new word recently, didn't we? It's asynchronous. You can put it in your comment whenever you like whenever you have a moment. Maybe it would help, and something that I hadn't thought of which you mentioned, Mick, is concentrating on a single platform as opposed to a lot. I'm in various different groups as well: Slack, Loomio, Trello. And it is hard to remember which one to look at next. Concentrating on one platform, if we could get committed to this platform (and we have a lot of support from Robert and Ali) could work. Chris, I don't know if you have something to add or to say and comment about your experience of new social and stuff

Chris: Hi, everyone. I had a phone conversation with somebody from our group who wasn't confident tech-wise (because it's a technological platform ultimately). They preferred to have a conversation over the phone. Along with that, there's the amount of time you might usually spend on online platforms. I don't do a great deal of social media. I'm dyslexic. So, that kind of writing and reading is sometimes problematic for me. I think for some people, a technological thing is a barrier to the platform. But also, culturally, I just don't do a lot of that which, which is partly where I'm at. I would much rather have conversations with people. And the pandemic obviously doesn't help. I think there are limitations inevitably within it. Some people will hit the ground running because they just do a lot of it already. I don't, but I understand your point how that can be efficient use of time and that you can inject it when you can do that. But I think it can also mean that it can be like the social media in trying to give brief explanations and brief insights into things, when sometimes you need a bit of depth and a bit of length to get to the bottom of stuff. I think that's kind of an issue that I discussed with Ali about the amalgamation of slack and other pieces of software, that might automatically connect to the platform. And I think he was looking at that. I think, for me, it's been useful.

I'm intrigued to know how much traffic and how much action has been happening in other circles. Because we've tried to do our bit so that would be an interesting insight for me. Are there any waste wastelands out there in any of the circles? I think that for me, there's lots of potential for it certainly going forward. If nothing else, as an archive, I think it could be really great as a research thing you could just tap into and search. Because it's all important stuff as Mick was saying. There's a lot of cross interest. If you can search that - that's really important. Probably the final thing that I would say about it is that I'm not into talking shops, I work on the ground, we kind of do stuff. We do stuff and it either works or it falls over and then we do something else. We need for actions to come out of stuff. It's absolutely key to me. I think that one of the things that we got talking about was the mapping thing. For me that's a really important thing that affects all of the groups and should be done with great integrity. And "meaningfulness" is the first word. Because it's really key. We need to know what's out there, who's out there, where the energies are, before we start making any decision going forward. And it needs to be quite thorough, I think, but that costs money and resource and I know that was talked about on our circle.

Julian: Thanks, Chris. I do have a question for you, Chris. At the moment we are trying to get the people of the project committee to use the circles but in some future scenario I think we all would like to have different people to be involved. Can you honestly see people in your community, for example, wanting to and becoming involved in this kind of thing?

Chris: Maybe not, certainly not the majority. Maybe a few. It's a bit too scary. I would say looking at you guys, you all look as though you know what you're doing and have intelligence and all that kind of thing. So it's a bit of a scary platform. But there's a potential. Yeah, let's keep the door open. And let's keep asking. Definitely. It's not immediately the friendliest thing. Meeting in a pub for a drink is a more friendly thing.

Julian: Yeah. Sure. And your point about actions I think is really important. I think there's always a big danger with this kind of group and committee that we end up just talking and talking and talking and I know that the News Social platform is designed for action, and not just for talking, so I don't know if Roberto, you'd like to sort of comment on that, because a particular feature of the News Social platform is to reach decisions and action points, isn't it?

Roberto: Yes, yes, that's right. Yeah. I am hearing quite a lot from you and that's very encouraging, I must say, for us to even get so far. It's been a great experience. We've learned an awful lot and have been finding lots of things that we'd love to add to the News Social, like trying to model the sociocracy approach. We added the voting and other things to try to meet some of these needs. We have been doing quite a bit of new stuff and will have new releases quite soon. Then it will be running more smoothly.

The idea with outcomes is that you should be moving towards action. Let's say there's a discussion or a debate. Whatever you want, one will want to know that there's a goal. It doesn't have to be the whole goal. And finish the whole discussion. There is perhaps a temptation probably to try and pack too many things into one post or one place, but actually it could be very easy for people to continue to add things to a discussion. I think, Mick, you were saying that that you don't want the discussion to stop necessarily, right? It can go on? Well, it can go on but there have to be some outcomes along the way to take some of the value with you and actually do the next thing or decide what to do and then do so. I think we can make that more easily available to add stuff to a discussion. Maybe in retrospect, maybe because something new related has come up and to bind that in. Certainly, there's a close relationship between outcomes and actions. I think we had a question in one of the previous meetings that I was in about how do you make sure that the actions actually get done? And the approach to actually doing things is quite important. Spelling them out. Presumably, it's important how these are going to be done. It's going to be watched. Another thing which we found is that it can be a lot of work. And there can be a lot of pressure on the moderators to keep reminding people, keep reminding themselves and trying to move forward to this outcome. But the system can also do quite a lot of that. One thing that we've been doing was adding more different kinds of emails for the system to remind people, hey, look, we've only got another couple of days to do this, or we said we would do this in eight weeks, how we're getting on and take some of that load off the moderators. We hope that that can be useful, too. It's been tremendous. And to take you through things and for you to spend the time being taken through that, I think, has been very useful for us indeed. And we feel with the voting and small comments and making it easy to ask other people involved asynchronously, what they think of the discussion, what they think of these points, what they think we should do, and maybe get into the habit of using it to vote or to call a vote or to say: "hey, look, I think that's enough of this - let's do that", - that can a quick way of working well together. There are some things that we could do too that we've done for other people. We can set conference calls very quickly and easily. And one can also automate the text defining of the goals. I

mean, getting a document out of it, which may or may not be a useful way of passing it around, asynchronously, being able to use it as a way of communicating well, but also to be able to use it as a way of potentially archiving things. I hope those are some useful things.

Matthew: Good afternoon, apologies for being late. I've just done my booster jab, actually. So, feeling a little queasy. Now, obviously, there's a lot of correlation between the Mondragon report and our the council's Community Wealth Building 2.0 strategy. I think whatever we need to do, needs to be based around those two documents, because myself as a politician, I'm really at pains to bring these to scale. I have more democratic companies that operate in communities or benefit communities. In terms of the platform, I'm haven't got an awful lot of time to engage with it. But I think it's got to be based around that delivery. Because we're coming to a stage now where, as an authority, we really want to deliver that change, expand the democratic economy, and make sure that we especially recover from COVID. A lot of the announcements we're making about the bank, about some of the work that we're doing with the towns from the local public ownership, potentially The Land Trust there as well.

And then obviously, the desperation we have to have more worker and employee owned businesses. It's really got to be in communities now. We can't just talk about it as a theory. We've got to find a way of getting into communities and getting concepts that we're not aware of, into people's heads that they can actually take control of their own economic destinies. Now, obviously a lot of the infrastructure we got planned. Especially I feel things like the quality of education center with the unions is a really good way to do that. And I think we'll get to a tipping point, but we've been at this now for, I think, five years. You know what I mean? We got four or five worker cooperatives at various stages, better than what it was, but everything we need to do, every level has to be about delivery, because potentially we're going lose credibility if everything's talked up as being the best thing since sliced bread in Preston, and then we don't follow through with delivering to a high standard. Now, we have delivered to a high standard, I would argue, in terms of public investment, public procurement with anchor partners, raising wage levels, upgrading skills, delivering new affordable houses. But the stuff that I always believed in was how we can create a new economic infrastructure that's more democratic, and that is not easy, because people aren't used to hearing it. And we're very restricted in this country compared to what we can do.

I can see there's discussions around whether News Social would consider becoming a cooperative. Now the big question is: could it employ people in Preston? Would it need funding when there's not a lot around and if it does, who's going to apply for it, and do we have a business that will be sustainable long term? I think we've got to ask all of these hard questions with everything we're doing because, as a leader, that's where I want us to go off in the next few years so we can actually bring that change to our communities. Cheers.

Julian: Thank you, Matthew. And I'm not going to go into details now. But I know that Ali and Roberto, are definitely working towards becoming a cooperative to serve the people of Preston. I've suggested that should become a community benefit society run as a cooperative so that you can have everybody within the community becoming a member. And I know that Ali is working on a business plan that makes News Social autonomous and sustainable as a business. I do think that there's an awareness of that and it's obviously very exciting. And we can have News Social based as a cooperative within

Preston. That really would be a fantastic thing. We're looking forward to developing that and maybe we can have a further meeting when Ali, Roberto and others in News Social have finalized a business plan. Maybe we can have a meeting to further discuss how that's going to look like. There is also, of course, a memorandum of understanding between Preston City Council, UCLan and News Social, which provides the basis for developing this digital cooperative. The sort of foundation stones are there if you'd like.

Well, it is three o'clock. Is there any other business? I just wanted to emphasize once again, as I said it at the beginning that, although we're talking a lot about News Social as a digital platform, and although we want to make it work, and although it's great, it's going to become a cooperative and so on, - I do think that challenge circles are able to meet in different ways. So, if somebody finds it challenging or difficult to work with the platform, I think we have to provide different ways of working. Is that your hand raised again, Matthew, or is that a legacy hand?

Matthew: I'm afraid it's raised again. Julian, I just wanted to give a quick update, obviously, in terms of what's happening in Preston. Obviously, there's been some reports about regeneration of our city center assets that will include this house being redeveloped in municipal ownership, so that potentially could have a new cooperative and other democratic and social enterprise companies within that. There are also proposals for the old Tea Bar, where Gaynor is involved, which potentially could be a community land trust. And again, there's going to be opportunities for business incubation where that could have new cooperative businesses.

But quite interestingly, just yesterday, the Welsh Government announced that they're moving forward with the regional cooperative bank, the Community Bank of Wales, and obviously we're very keen with our partners in the region to establish a similar bank because the issue we have around trying to genuinely support the local economy, including the social economies is that big banks behave in a way that's very anti-social. They don't want to lend to local businesses, cooperatives, charity, social enterprises. Interestingly in Wales they're actually partnering with a small building society, which is going to expand to become the Community Bank of Wales, which will be a cooperative. We're exploring a partnership approach ourselves in the northwest, which would mean that potentially our bank could be launched a bit quicker and a bit cheaper, but obviously, we can't reveal the institution that's looking at that. For me, it's like delivering these things on the ground where this change comes. I mean, the idea is fantastic we know that. You know, we know that ideas do work, but we've got to deliver this and having a bank and getting this development, especially when it's in public ownership, so we have a say around procurement and other things, is very positive. You know, this has taken years to get where we are even now, but obviously, we want to take it to the limit of account. Thanks.

Julian: Thanks, Matthew, before you sign off. Do you have any idea of a date when we might have a branch of the bank opening its doors in Preston
+?

Matthew: There's obviously a potential change in the sense that it could be done a lot quicker with an existing institution. We need to speak with all the politicians if they're prepared to support that, but potentially it could be done within a year if we get a move on and that might not be the first branch but it

could be going through the process of converting to a bank and then beginning to expand because it's a very small institution we're looking at at the moment, so it will need to add another 27 branches in addition to what we have already, but if the will is there, the first branch we hope would be opening within 18 months, because the Welsh one is looking to get their first branch in 2023, which is not that far off. For me, it's actually having these institutions in place where we can deliver that change because, I'm surprised many of them in the banking system didn't go to jail with the way they behaved and continue to behave when they caused that economic crash and some of the other activity they get involved in and the large banks who, in my opinion, let down communities that withdrawing from the High Street and obviously, we need an alternative and this is why even when we have the institution in place, we got to get community support and make communities aware that it's good you have your money within a cooperative bank because there'll be more jobs. Potentially the return you'll get will be more growth in local communities. Because it's easy for a large bank to lend 10 mill. to another large bank, then 5000 lots of 3000 pounds to small businesses. I'm just trying not to be negative because I'm actually in a good mood at the moment. I just think we've all got to focus whatever we do on actually bringing this to scale, because we're onto something special with Preston, and we've inspired many, but we've got to deliver for the people out there who need that change in communities because people are struggling with inequalities.

Julian: Okay, that's great. I regard the development of the bank and development of the Education Center as being key elements of the Preston model jigsaw, so that's fantastic that that's going to happen. Okay. Do we have any final comments? I just want to hand over to Roberto for final word on thoughts on News Social in a minute, but before that, do we have any final comments, observations, thoughts? Okay, Roberto, just a few closing thoughts from you about anything related to what we've heard today and anything else we need to do to move forward.

Roberto: I think we carry on. I think that we've got some things which we learned from you and which we've now done some of, and so I think we can support you in an ongoing way. And that's what we'd like to do.

Julian: Okay, that's great. I'm going to sign us off. I just do want to remind you all, again, of the dates of the next project committee meeting, which is on the 15th February at two o'clock. And the one after that is the 12th April, at 10 in the morning, so we're trying to sort of change the times a bit to accommodate different needs. Okay, so thanks very much. Great to see you. Have a good Christmas and I suppose these days it's: stay safe, as well as have fun. Cheers. Thank you. Merry Christmas.