

Preston Model Project Committee Meeting

15th February 2022, 2-3am

Present:

Ali Al-Assam
Alina Belousova
Marta Boixados
Matthew Brown
Chris Davis
Olga Kuznetsova
Julian Manley
Mick Mckeown
Ioannis Prinos
Julie Ridley
Kate Smyth
Phil Whyman

Agenda

1. Check in.
2. Feedback from Chris Davis and Phil Whyman on mapping resources.
3. Feedback from Ali Al-Assam regarding NewsSocial co-op development.
4. AOB

Meeting Minutes

Julian: Hi, everybody. Welcome to this general project committee meeting. Thank you for coming. We just have a brief agenda today. We'll begin by checking in a bit, seeing if anyone has any particular feedback on the project as a whole and then we're going to ask Chris and Phil to give some feedback on a project that we hope might be funded by the university in order to create asset mapping for us. After that, we'll have some feedback from Ali regarding the development of NewsSocial as a community benefit society co-op. And it's a very exciting development and it is, of course, very much linked to the whole project committee in the ecosystem development. So it's linked to the wider, if you like, vision of the Preston Model, but it also has implications for some of us personally, which is great. After that, there's any other business and we'll see how that goes if anyone has anything more to say. So, first of all, can I ask people to go round and say hello and where you are at with the project, starting with Olga.

Olga: In terms of learning, Ali has generously shared his time with me and I think I'm probably a better user and better understand NewsSocial and how the circle works and how we can communicate together.

Chris: I've been contributing to the Social Value Business Approach circle. Been very sociable. Looking forward to getting stuff going and doing stuff.

Ali: Me and my colleagues in NewsSocial have been in the listening mode mostly and watching how people are using the platform. Admittedly it has been used in a limited way in one group only, but I was very encouraged actually by the quality of the way the people who are new to the platform use the discussion threads, and what we call as current discussions, and the way it helps us fairly rapidly to arrive at some conclusions. So this is quite encouraging to me. And I think we kind of build on it.

Mick: Hi everyone, for anyone I haven't seen since Christmas - Happy New Year. Everyone else I just saw an hour ago at the meeting. I'm involved in the development of the Preston Cooperative Education Center. And I think that's going to develop a life of its own that we could all feed into, as well. And I think it's going to be a crucial part of whatever ecosystem develops out of this project in other spheres of activity that that I've been involved in in Preston. It's usually been face to face stuff, but I think in these COVID times we've got used to know the supportive digital technology to meet with people. And I'm really excited about the potential for having a platform that allows us to engage with people. It doesn't preclude us meeting face to face once we have the time and the opportunity, but I think it's a really neat way of ordering decision making and keeping a record of it as well. And I wish some of the other groups I was involved in would come across and start populating this sort of domain as well. And that's something that I'm suggesting to the groups at the moment. They're a bit nervous and anxious about doing so. And I think like in any group you've got the people who will dip the toe in first and others will be sort of sleeping in the background. But I think we can move this along as we do go along. So, I think that's great. And I think it's good to have people like Chris on the call and others, hopefully, as we expand this out to give it more of a community feel, so it's not just people working in the Anchor organisations. It's actually facilitating the involvement of people in Preston. I think that's a fantastic development of where we're up to.

Giannis: Hello. I have mostly been working with Julian and Mick on the NIHR funded project regarding health inequalities in the Preston model or in general community with BP initiatives and it's good that we are now trying to insert in that investigation some value framework, something that has a lot to do with corporate development and economic democracy.

Alina: You know that I have been involved in this project for the last one and a half years in the background, helping with different admin work. And now my role has come to an end and hopefully it will continue in another capacity working closely with NewsSocial and helping on the other end.

Phil: Good afternoon everyone. Apologies that I've not been able to attend the earlier meeting, as I was double booked, as I think I said in an email. I found that in terms of the circles and the site it takes a bit of time investment to get used to it, but once you do I've started to see the value of it actually. Seeing the threads, the history and things being recorded is extremely valuable and I can't think of another way of doing it. I don't know whether that's Ali behind the scenes pedaling very hard to actually do it all or whether it's all automated, I don't know. But it seems quite valuable to me.

Matthew: Yeah, happy new year for me as well. In terms where we are in Preston and obviously very keen to deliver stuff on the ground. I've been looking sporadically at the NewsSocial website. It really is delivery on the ground.

So, in terms of practical things, obviously, we're still working on the establishment of the regional property bank. We're having a conversation with Liverpool City region about that later this month. Obviously, that's quite a large organization that we can get to support the community bank.

We should have a housing cooperative very soon. Community will organize in a housing cooperative that will have Preston model principles. So, in terms of practical delivery on the ground, this is something that we're doing that we can expect to be formulated on the first of April.

Obviously, we've got the Towns Fund project. That includes a municipally owned cinema, where we got Community Benefit Agreements around procurement. We might struggle in the construction supply chain, but we'll still try on that.

Also, there's a housing project at the Tea Bar, which is part of it and people from university are involved in that. So again, that's very positive.

There are obviously really practical things in terms of what our NHS is doing. They're starting a project, I think next month, targeting the recruitment in the most deprived communities of Preston, in the most deprived wards and especially targeting it towards minority communities who've been disproportionately affected during COVID.

And then obviously, we're all here for worker and employee ownership. So, I'm pleased here that we're expanding the project for another six months because COVID has put us back. It has been quite a surreal dynamic, hasn't it? I did have an off the record chat with Gareth Nash, and he seems quite confident we should get 10 worker cooperatives by the end of the year or close to 10. Ministry of Justice, former prisoners, minority communities, makers, translators and retrofit.

And then we're looking to bring in reports to our cabinet in March, which will be kind of like an exit funding project from this project, but also the council's contributing as well to it and this will take community wealth building even further and look at specific sectors around worker and employee ownership as well as other forms of community wealth building. So, I obviously want to get on with it.

I've been leading now for nearly four years and we only have a certain shelf life as politicians. It's not what could be called a stable profession in any way, shape or form. So, I'm really keen over the next couple of years to bring this to scale really. And I think it's like a jigsaw puzzle, isn't it? The pieces are in front of us. We just got to make sure we have a pretty picture at the end and put our hands together to actually finish that job off. Cheers.

Kate: Hello, everyone. I'm Kate Smith. I'm a non-executive director at Lancaster Teaching Hospitals. And I'm the lead at the non-executive level for anchor institutions and social value. So, we've not long been going on this area of work, but we are picking up speed and we've just got a monthly meeting now of all the relevant people in the trust. So, it will include our green plan, our social value plans, and a lot of the work that Matthew mentioned around recruiting people who struggle in the ordinary way to join the trust. So, I'm looking forward to getting involved.

Julie: I have joined the board of PCDN over the past year and I've been trying to put my energies into that. And I come along to the meeting today because I think there needs to be closer links between PCDN and this project. So, I've come along to really hear about how this project is going. Thanks.

Marta: Hi, everyone. Thank you very much for this invitation. I cannot give a lot of feedback about the circle, because in fact, I'm not engaged and I'm not participating. But it's nice to see you again and to see how you are advancing how you are moving forward in a new way of doing things and that's the reason why I have connected, just to see how are you doing. And to see if we can help you in any way. Thank you very much.

Julian: Thank you, Marta. And just to say that Ali and I particularly invited Marta to help us with the NewsSocial cooperative that's being designed which Ali will talk about later on. So,

thanks for that. Okay, can I now hand over to Phil and Chris just to talk about a project that Phil is leading and Chris and I are supporting.

Phil: Thanks, Julian. I'm part of the Social Value Business Approach circle and we've been discussing for a while how to do community asset mapping, how to get mapping on the way. There were some interesting comments, models, lots of very useful things mentioned. But the fundamental issue for me is always time. I think a lot of us are busy doing other things. And, you know, when Matthew talks about getting on with it and making things happen on the ground I think a lot of us struggle with the time aspect.

So, a while ago, I came across a little pot of money sitting in the university that could be used and circulated it amongst people. And by the time discussions have been had northwest of it that opportunity disappeared. Fair enough. There's another little pots of money that I came across. That's a current element of the university that actually Julian and I both noticed. And so, we decided to try and grab it quickly. So, we put a bid together. And Chris was very deeply involved in this and actually, it's very largely down to Chris how the actual project will work. So, I'm not entirely comfortable about being the lead of this thing. I certainly was the lead in terms of putting the bid together and trying to get money from the university. And I see that as part of my role you've got to use the professorial title for something so maybe that's the lever which I can use.

And then the three of us have devised roughly how we think this should work. And it will do some element of the mapping process that we've been talking about in the circle. Not all of it, but some of it will certainly kickstart things. So, Chris can probably tell you a little bit more but the basic idea is we're using Citizens' research approach. It's trying to get local people to wander around their own areas and try to map the resources that are there to document it. Maybe we could turn that into a small film and then celebrate in an interactive, as well as an artistic map that will be created by this process, and hopefully, therefore, provide information to some of our policymaker friends, Preston City Council or even Lancashire County Council about what the local citizens say exists and maybe it makes it easier to spot where there might be gaps in provision or whatever. And for members of the community who might simply not know that A happens in place B.

Most of the money will go to the Citizens' researcher teams that Chris will effectively be leading on. We will then turn it into some sort of research project with the product university will be quite happy with. Because we can't just simply take research money and use it for non-research purposes, it's Research England money, which is where this originates. So that's what we've done and we had a deadline of about 10 days from the time Julian and I both became aware of it independently and until we turned it into something which I submitted and hopefully we'll find out soon. So, apologies if we've kind of circumvented the circle approach. I

just didn't think anyone would particularly mind if we actually got a bit of money from somewhere and did something with it that would help. Whereas last time I tried to go through a process and it took too long, and we just had to move quickly. So, from my point of view, that's really where it came from, what it is and the intention of it. Chris, do you want to add to that?

Chris: I think you've explained it very well there. In terms of the approach, we were keen that the people who become the citizen researchers are people who are good listeners, which isn't always the activist people in local areas. So, it's got to be the right kind of people. I'm hoping to really help with that. And for those researchers and other people we have put in the design of it opportunity early on to help them see what we're looking for, why we're looking for it to determine what we do. So, there's still an open conversation that we can add a bit of depth to because I think it's really important that people know what they're looking for. We were keen also to find people who might know what's under the radar, as Phil said, rather than just the usual suspects, although indeed it'd be important that they go on the map as well. Yes, we wanted to celebrate every element to the thing because it's really important to convey and celebrate the rich kind of tapestry of things that we have in our communities. But also, we're hoping this thing's going to have legs and will be a continuous thing and will be an organic thing. That electronically can be fed into, as well as conversational kind of realization. And that could be an annual celebration. Sometimes, the most relevant and the most important things are the new things that are reacting to situation at the moment. So, we're keen to pick some of those. We're suggesting that each researcher is appointed a ward. The makeup of those wards varies from rural to the city center. So, we'll see how we kind of divvy that up.

Julian: Thank you. It's good that Marta is here, because of the things that we're doing here is joining the dots. Yeah, the map is joining the dots and that was one of the lessons that came in the Mondragon reports. And although Phil apologized for rushing it through in the end, it emerged from the discussion in the circles that were set up as a result of the Mondragon report and as a result of the setting up with the NewsSocial circles. So, it's very much an example of how working in a circle with the Mondragon reports, working with a project committee, can begin to generate development on the ground. So, that's great. I'm very pleased about that. Thank you very much. Matthew has his hand up.

Matthew: Yeah. Good news, obviously. I'm just thinking, at the moment we got the Connected Communities project, which we do with Julie Ridley, who's with us today at the moment. So obviously that is ongoing and obviously the pandemic has put it on hold. We also have the research projects involved in Preston model and the effects on reducing health inequalities. So that's ongoing then we've got this as well. And I'm just wondering how can we actually weave this into the practical delivery on the ground that we're doing? We could use this to potentially feed information into where there could be opportunities for work or cooperative businesses and all the democratic companies. I think that's what we're trying to do really, you know, as I

said, we've spent a lot of time putting infrastructure in place and now the time is to actually build the transformation on the ground, really. So, it's just a few questions about that because I think the two things shouldn't be mutually exclusive. They should support each other.

Julian: Thank you, Matthew. And I should add something we didn't add - this project is viewed as a scoping project for future funding. So, if we get some good results from this project, we're hoping to use that to get further funding. And as part of that, in the back of our minds we want to create a cooperative of the citizen researchers who are working with us. They will create a cooperative, and we have to work with them to understand what kind of a cooperative it would be. To create a legally constituted cooperative is actually one of the final aims of the project. Mick...

Mick: Yeah, just to answer Matthew's question, I think for me it's an organizing project. It's about people in their own communities getting out and talking to other people in their own communities. And it's in the context of the development of a cooperative ecosystem. On the understanding that not enough people know about that, and that work has to be done and I think once that work is done the stuff that you're looking for Matthew will come in a more democratic way because people are actually engaged in it. For instance, PCDN and PCEC need members and the actual extent to which people are aware of them, willing to be members and are coming in as members is limited by the fact that this sort of engagement activity hasn't happened yet. So, I think, those organizations will be doing their own outreach. But this sort of thing on the NewsSocial platform is an attempt to actually knit all that together. So, I think, it's both indirectly and directly going to lead to things like cooperative development, because it'll open up the channels by which people can communicate with other elements in this ecosystem that we're building. It needs a movement building. It needs people talking to people, not just people in this virtual room, who talk to each other and that's the end of it. I think it's an important development. So, the mapping isn't just to produce the map. It produces all the interconnections between people.

Julie: I'm picking up on what Matthew said about those different things going on already. And trying to think about how these could knit together, because I'm hearing something about asset mapping and I'm not quite sure what assets are being looked at. And I'm hearing something about awareness raising and talking to people, having conversations about different ways of working, a different way of doing business and spreading the word.

The Connected Communities project. We had two of these projects. One of these projects has been done in Broadgate and that was from 2018 to 2019. And the project is basically working with local residents in an area, defining assets, their resources, the different stakeholders that are in that group in that area, too, who then actually work to identify people who live in that community who want to be community researchers. Down in Broadgate we had 20 community

researchers across, who are representatives of that community in all sorts of ways and they conducted a community survey. So, this is a survey which is looking at the relationships between people in an area and between them and the resources in that area. And it's looking to identify the strengths or weakness of connections between neighbors, the kind of places that people rely on. In Broadgate it came out that faith organizations were particularly relevant for a lot of people, but they didn't know their neighbors all that well. Even though there's a sense of pride in the area and satisfaction of living in that area. And in Broadgate they've taken that to form Broadgate and Hartington Community Connectors group. So that is completely separate. It came from the research but it isn't the research and that is driven by the community. And it is set up as a community association. It's not a cooperative, but they could look at becoming a cooperative.

And then there's a second Connected Communities project which is, as Matthew said, has been on hold because of the pandemic, but we're just getting going again now. So, we will be recruiting people in Plunginton area of Preston but it's a big area. So that's why I asked the question about Preston. We've actually narrowed down an area of Plunginton, so it's not the whole of Plunginton. So, we will be doing this community survey in that area to look with people at the resources that they have, at the relationships and issues. So, it isn't quite an asset mapping as you are planning to do. And we won't necessarily be talking to people about cooperatives. But I think it would be good if we could link up some of the things that are going and I'm quite happy to talk to people about how we might do that.

Julian: Thank you, Julie. And you know your offer, of course, is fantastic that we should all try and sort of make the links between these things. And I can recommend your chapter in the book that Phil and I edited on the connection between communities and cooperatives in Preston, and how working together in community, connecting communities together is a form of cooperation. And so, the more you cooperate in community, the more likely you are to develop actual cooperatives. So, I think it's a very interesting aspect. And since Marta is here, one of the things that has always impressed me whenever I've gone to Mondragon is that although Mondragon advertises itself as a cooperative businesses, actually, there's a huge effect in community. You go to Mondragon and you can feel that the community is cooperatively minded. And that must be because of the cooperative businesses of course, and so you know, this connection between community, good healthy communities and cooperation, I think is a very interesting one that we can be developing. So, let's move on because time is marching on and we have Ali with us, who's going to talk a little bit about this fantastically exciting project coming up. He's going to tell us a bit about developing NewsSocial as a cooperative.

Ali: Well, as Julian have said, this really is quite exciting. So, I'm very happy to share it with you really. NewsSocial presently is restructuring into a Community Benefit Society anchored to

Preston, so it will add up to two list of cooperatives being done in Preston. We want it to be a digital co-op of co-ops governed democratically by its members. So really Preston in core but the scope is UK and global. And what we want to help co-ops in the UK with is something very specific. It's not just about sharing content or about knowledge sharing whatever. A specific benefit is that users go into circles, they go into rational discussion and debate (where we use sociocracy), they employ tools for democratic constitution making and they come up with positive outcomes. We allow cooperatives to inter-cooperate. So, another thing comes out of it: not only it helps to sort out challenges and opportunities in the way we do sociocracy, but it allows collaborators to inter-cooperate, to innovate and build community. So, we are helping to create an ecosystem that we wanted to do in Preston and that's what we hope will come out. And this co-op is going to be for UK and globally. That's what we are doing.

So, our business model has to be sustainable. It has to make money so that it can benefit society and benefit the stakeholders. So, the business model is that NewsSocial cooperative becomes a group ideation knowledge sharing platform for cooperatives worldwide. Cooperatives who will be using the NewsSocial platform services become stakeholders. They become stakeholders by paying subscriptions and using it. They have right to go to the General Assembly, they can vote, they can be a part of the governance of the co-op itself. So, it's a multi stakeholder type of co-op and I'll show you a diagram on the next slide. So, co-ops can decide how this NewsSocial platform can best benefit their needs and what they want to do with it to inter-cooperate and generate wealth for their members and for the community, and the revenue generated from licensing. The slide shows a proposed structure. This is not the final structure because we are forming a board that will look into it and make it in details. But we are learning from Mondragon, what for example Mondragon University and others have done. So, some of the stakeholders, workers, partners, and user co-ops all form the general assembly and they vote the governing board and they affect the executive board. I mean, probably we shouldn't call it the executive board. This is in the discussion. We might call it the management board. So really, it's a democratic community benefit society multistakeholder where the workers are part of it. And then there's a trade union thing in it, and eventually as we grow bigger there will be an auditing committee. So really what we are creating here is a tech co-op with a very powerful periphery technology. So, it's adding to the Preston assets, and to the co-op movement globally, starting with the UK.

And so, in our business plan, we have to set the right foundation which is months 1, 2, 3. We started month one and then we are dealing with investment and funding months one to six, make first wins month 4-9, and the official launch in March 11. And there are some conditions for being ready for doing an official launch. So let me talk about what we are doing with setting the right foundations. What we are doing now is appointing what we call it the foundation board. And with help from Alina, me and Julian have sent invitations to various colleagues. And I'm glad some of you in here have already accepted that. So, we are appointing the

foundation board. That foundation board will meet once every two months and it will agree on the core mission structure and business plan, and it will supervise the work of forming the co-op. We have already applied to Co-ops UK. We want to fine tune the pricing model. Our business plan assumes that we will be profitable from end of year two. Potentially co-ops will be paying 2 pounds per person per month.

NewsSocial already has members like me, Roberto, Julian, Mick, Michael, Olga and Marta and we would like other woman colleagues to join it to strengthen the female element. So, we are sending invitations to other colleagues. We hope to finalize this in the next few days. Then we'll start the ideation process in another circle. So, there is a circle called NewsSocial structure on the platform that I started with Julian a few months ago and we've been ideating together but now we'll expand it. So other colleagues on the board will receive it now. The board duration is a few months. Once everything is done then we'll go on to the assembly and the new board will vote its democratic organization. We are also very happy that Alina has agreed to help us with this and she will be engaged with us from March on helping managing all these activities in terms various things to do with the formation of the co-op, but also doing some of the activities in Preston, going out to the communities, get other people to use the platform, which will merge well with what Mick and Chris been talking and Julian about this community asset mapping so it could come together. We are making big steps. Also, in the meantime, we are engaging other younger developers to help learn from what we did with you on the platform to make the platform more user friendly, introduce elements like gaming and rewarding which will be nice. So, to get the community to engage with the system more. The main activity really is getting the founding board set up in the next few days and then working quickly to sort out our mission.

Julian: Thanks very much. I'd like to add that we're trying to get this balance between Preston communities and cooperatives and the Preston model, and how that might be transferable to other areas and places as well. So, that's why we're so pleased that Marta can join us. And we're intending to expand the cooperative membership beyond Preston or Lancashire boundaries as well, because of course the whole advantage of digital platform is the reach. So, I think that's another aspiration which is really interesting. So, thank you. Do we have any comments or questions? Yes, we have a hand up from Matthew.

Matthew: Yeah, it looks like it's got a lot of potential. I'm just wondering, in terms of practical delivery. Do we envisage that soon this new cooperative will be able to employ people, and if it did, could that potentially be another OSF funded co-op?

Ali: Although it's targeting the co-op movement in Britain, in the first instance 7000 co-ops or so, but it will be based in Preston, so as it expands it will be employing people in Preston definitely. That's the intention and that's what we hope to do. NewsSocial as a company now

has assets and they will be transferred to the co-op. NewsSocial has technology, it has clients, some funding, so of course it will benefit from its own funding in the long term. It needs external funding as well, but it's not a startup as such, it is something which has a solid technology and it has clients and the money keeps coming in. And certainly it would be fantastic to be part of the whole Preston 10 co-op eco system and contributing to it because we hope the circles we form will be used by the various Preston co-ops and that would be fantastic. It's a co-op for all the stakeholders using it.

Matthew: Just to push the point a little further. Obviously, the funding is time limited for new worker co-ops. I was just wondering if there'd be an openness to employ people from within Preston and whether that could be done within the short time scale that we do have. I mean there are other examples like the Larder. They are a CIC, but the actual business is a worker cooperative. So, it can be done that way. I am keen to see if that potentially could be something that you'd be interested in exploring. But it's good news either way, really. I'm just conscious there is a little pot of money for worker ownership that is still there. I look forward to seeing progress going forward.

Ali: With my colleagues, founding members on the board, we will certainly discuss this. This is one of the first things that we will be discussing. If we're talking about the OSF funding, we have to find a formula to enable that to happen. So, if it's a community benefit society, it's not a worker-owned co-op, but there may be a way of combining worker ownership and community benefit society. So, I think we can discuss that and that's really an important part of it.

Julian: I do want to emphasize a couple of things that Ali's mentioned in terms of employment and so on. First of all, the business plan is to make NewsSocial cooperative absolutely sustainable and profit making. So, this is a really important aspect. So, if NewsSocial is making money, then it'll also make jobs and that's an absolutely fundamental part of it. We're kicking off from the very beginning with NewsSocial funding Alina for three months. So, when it comes to walking your talk, that's an example of NewsSocial doing that. Mick?

Mick: With a bit of wit, we could find some hybrid model that has got an element of worker co-op. People in Union Co-ops UK, which is a national organization that's got significant Preston representation in it is beginning to develop some conversations with the leadership of the Communication Workers Union, who would also show an interest on a national scale in the idea of union co-ops as they intersect with the communications industry, including things like digital platforms, and media production type industries. And so, it's possible that we could knit some of that together. I wouldn't want to dogmatically say, that's the way to go, but I think within our discussions, we could try and find an imaginative way through some of that. But it doesn't have to go that way. And the important thing is, like Julian said, that if it works, it will create jobs, it will add to community wealth and it will be a cooperative. But we wouldn't want

to turn our nose off the possible funding via the OSF route. It needs a bit of work in terms of governance structure.

Julian: Do we have any more comments or contributions? If not, we'll just go to any other business? Okay, on that note, we'll get a transcript as usual, which we do for the project committee. We get a transcript down and we'll put it up on the Preston model website. And we'll continue with the project and see you next time. When we get news on the funding, we'll send it out. And when we get news on the developments of NewsSocial and the new founding members of the board we'll send that out as well. So, thank you very much, and we'll see you around.