

Preston Model Project Committee Meeting

12th April 2022 10-11am

Present:

Ali Al-Assam
Alina Belousova
Matthew Brown
Olga Kuznetsova
Julian Manley
Giannis Prinos
Kate Smyth
Ann Vanner
Phil Whyman

Agenda

1. Welcome (Julian Manley, 5 Mins)
2. The process of debate and democratic decision-making:
 - a. Presentation by Ali-Al-Assam on how NewsSocial is converting into a co-operative to serve the community and how this supports the Project Committee (10)
 - b. Feedback from Chris Davies, Alina Belousova, Phil Whyman and Julian Manley on how discussion in a Project Committee Circle led to action on the ground: community resource mapping (15)
3. Next steps (Julian Manley and Ali Al-Assam, 10 minutes)
4. Feedback from the group regarding the process and content of the Project Committee goals (15)
5. AOB (5)

Meeting Minutes

Apologies:

John Taylor, Mark Dooris, Alison Hitchen, Julie Ridley, Gaynor Wood

Introduction from Ann Vanner, a senior lecturer in architecture and architecture and technology at UCLan. Ann has been trying to put together a project looking at how to reuse existing buildings and empty spaces for community-based projects, and learned a lot about the hurdles that are often on the way of re-housing, reusing existing buildings.

Presentation from Julian Manley on 4 challenges.

The four challenges are inter-cooperation, shared leadership, social value business approach, and culture and awareness.

They were identified by the LKS Mondragon consultancy team in conjunction with this project committee as important areas for development in order to maintain, sustain and develop the Preston model in the future.

In order to support these areas, we are bringing in a digital platform called NewsSocial.

We've had some immediate success with the Social Value Business Approach circle with a debate that's led to concrete funding from the University of Central Lancashire and work with Chris Davies from Brookfield Spaceplace.

Presentation from Ali Al-Assam on NewsSocial.

We are trying to build a multi-stakeholder cooperative, which is designed to provide services for the cooperative movement in general, which will include social enterprises and other forms of cooperative companies in the form of the platform that allows to democratically develop solutions to mutual challenges and opportunities in circles.

NewsSocial will be owned by the cooperative movement in general, as well as the workers who work in it and that's what is meant by multi stakeholder cooperative. It's a thoroughly democratic organisation, which has an ethical approach towards content and other issues.

People can go into circles and develop positive outcomes for their solutions, but not in isolation.

The various cooperatives and other organisations in our movement can share experiences across the community.

In a sense we are creating an ecosystem for inter-cooperation and that's where it fits very well, with the project committee work.

Any cooperative using the system will become a stakeholder and can vote in the general assembly.

We have a founder-members governing board of 10 people, which has its own circle.

We are using the platform to develop the mission statement and to develop a business plan to make it profitable, because we want to build a sustainable business.

With the help from Marta Boixados, we are developing our value proposition, which means the value that we give to the cooperative movement to make it happy.

One value that we give to cooperatives is that when they go into circles they can have moderated discussions using the sociocracy approach to arrive to solutions in concert.

The second value is a community-wide aggregation of content. As people go into circles and hold meetings, discussions, share content - this is shared across the community, and this leads to inter cooperation. So, we are not only going into these meetings to solve problems, but are communicating to each other and to the outside world what we are doing.

Olga mentioned mainstreaming cooperatives with challenges facing societies with the climate change, etc. Cooperatives are very much part of the solution that society faces, and mainstreaming is one big objective I think that will come out.

The Social Value Business Approach circle discussed the need for a live and dynamic community asset mapping and NewsSocial can help with that - people can exchange experiences, cooperate and create wealth in the process.

We could link NewsSocial to Google, for example, enterprise network, and we could map all of the assets and do it very effectively and efficiently.

[Ali showed NewsSocial platform on the screen]

Alina Belousova on NewsSocial and work on the ground.

Discussions in Social Value Business Approach have led to a fruitful meeting. There were a lot of notes that Chris Davis took from that meeting and finally, different actions have been taken.

At the same time, Phil and Julian have applied for the grant to go on with a citizen asset mapping project.

Chris has distributed these notes to the three citizen researchers, and he is due to meet with them next week, where they will be discussing practical beginnings and how they might go about finding different assets that they need to gather and eventually present on the map.

Chris has been in touch with drone people and they're getting back to him with their quote.

He has also contacted the representative from other three groups about the project and asked their thoughts about how it might be useful for their work.

This week I'll have a meeting with Chris on Thursday to discuss how I personally can help with a project.

The grant that Phil will talk about has been transferred to Chris's organization, Brookfield Spaceplace, to start the work on this project.

[Julian shared his screen with Chris' notes on it]

This is the latest addition to the discussion on the platform, which summarises where the research mapping project is right now.

A general discussion on NewsSocial platform on mapping of assets in Preston, bringing up ideas have been made concrete by an opportunity that arose to fund such a project and to bring in people from the Preston community into actually doing the work on the ground.

Although Phil and Julian are the researchers involved in this project, most of the work will be done by people who are brought into the project by Chris Davies, who knows his community. And they will develop their own ideas and ways of how to map the assets.

Olga: NewsSocial encourages you to think because you have the space to think, it's very welcoming and forgiving – you can't spoil anything. I think the way the debate is organized will eventually lead to an outcome because it's a joint thinking. It's not obvious from the very beginning, how much it matters that everybody's involved, but when you get there, it becomes obvious that you become an integral part of the system and it will not let it you leave it as you are a part of it.

Phil Whyman on NewsSocial discussions and funding.

What's useful about the circles is that it brings everything together in one place. You can have discussions without necessarily having to wait to call a meeting, to formally be in the same room together, or even just do a Zoom or Teams meeting.

NewsSocial is good at developing the threads. I found that to be a quite a useful place because I can read what people have been talking about for a week because I haven't had a chance to log in for a week and then you go back in and you chuck something into the mix.

And then you get on with whatever else you do and you come back and it spawned more discussion.

When we're talking about community assets:

- What are they?
- Where are they?
- Who has access?
- How useful are they?
- Are they all equal?
- Are they redistributed properly, or equally or equitably?
- Which areas are deficient?
- Which areas could be built up?

These are very useful pieces of information for the council or public bodies, on how to spend public money. It's useful for the citizens of Preston because we're not all aware of what exists around us.

I'm not sure how we would be able to get around to doing a big mapping exercise, unless we got a bit of funding. And when the funding came up, we grabbed it.

And if you think about an activity like the Preston model, one of the things I think is absolutely essential whether we are organising into cooperatives or doing other things, is trying to give people a chance to participate and become empowered.

Hopefully, this research project creates a bit of pride in the area and gives people a chance to do things that they never done before and find out what they are good at it; to understand what's around them a little bit better and make more use of it; and creates a bit of information that will be useful for us as the project develops, but also for the council (on how to spend their money, etc.) .

If this project works out very well, we can apply for it again.

Julian:

We'll be creating a sub circle for citizen researchers to get together in order to create a platform for themselves to discuss things, to suggest things and maybe to be open to suggestions from other people in a democratic and participatory way.

NewsSocial signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Central Lancashire and Preston City Council.

A comment from Cllr. Matthew Brown on the work of Preston City Council.

The Community Engagement team is working in communities like Brookfield and knows Chris Davis very well.

Leighton Street cooperative was formed on the 1st April. That was a site that was in the ownership of the County Council. The county council was going to auction it on the open market, which would have meant that it was very likely that the existing Traveller community would have been displaced. The site has been adopted by the city council and it's now formally a housing cooperative. It will adopt Preston Model principles.

There will be another worker-owned cooperative launched in June or July that is working with former prisoners, which will be formed of the staff and residents at Edith Rigby House, a women's hostel based in Preston.

PCC is looking at the NHS anchor network. There's now a subgroup which is looking at community wealth building and it does include the hospital and the university as well. And I'm chairing the subgroup. The social value statement from the anchor institutions does look at real living wage, local procurement, local recruitments.

We're even looking at how we can generate energy in local, public and cooperative ownership going forward.

The Communication Workers Union have adopted community wealth building as one of the political and industrial strategies.

We should have six worker-owned cooperatives by June.

There's going to be lots of regeneration of the city center that's going to be in local public ownership.

If we do want to have people in worker ownership in significant numbers, we have to look at sectors where there's a significant amount of Prestonians employed within them. Construction is a big one. We're building lots of stuff in the city center by the council.

There's potentially a very large regeneration scheme in the Stonegate area by another local anchor institution, which people will find out about very shortly. What I'm trying to do is to work through the supply chain around firms in construction. There's been a conversation with Danish worker-coops backed by the trade union movements and whether they'd be able to actually have a branch of a construction cooperative.

There's a big role for the trade union cooperative education center there. Potentially, there might be a trip to Denmark.

Ann Vanner:

I'd be very interested in looking or working with Matthew on the cooperative construction industries. It's an area that I've been interested in and had a look at what they're doing in Germany, from bringing in the contractors much earlier into the design scheme of things as well. There's a lot that can be learned from that.