

# COMMUNITY WEALTH FOR SHEFFIELD

## PRESTON THE MODEL FOR CO-OPERATIVE FUTURE

'People like working together; altruism isn't an unknown factor'. So says Julian Manley, Research Fellow at UCLAN and guest speaker at the Sheffield Co-operative Party's recent event on Community Wealth Building in the UK. The phenomenon is demanding ever more attention within Co-operative circles – and beyond – with the reference point for many being the so-called 'Preston Model' which Mr. Manley played an intimate role in helping develop.

### THE PRESTON MODEL

But what exactly is the Preston Model? And more importantly, how can we replicate some of the successes of the model here in Sheffield? A panel including Mr Manley and fellow guest speakers Anna Birley (Co-operative Party Policy Officer) and local Councillor Lewis Dagnall, sought to unpack this question with the help of an audience of co-operators on the evening of 31st May at Victoria Hall Methodist Church.

Ms. Birley introduced those present to the concept of 'anchors' in each local economy; those public institutions which 'weren't going anywhere', ranging from schools to hospitals to universities and beyond. As outlined in the Co-operative Party's 2017 publication *Six Steps to Community Wealth Building* (available to download online) local councils need to work together with these anchors to identify 'leakages' in the local economy. Leaks in this case refer to the loss of potential local labour and investment and its diversion to other parts of the country. To rectify this, anchors should work to procure as much as possible from the local area. Not only does this help 'repatriate' wealth from elsewhere



"PEOPLE LIKE WORKING TOGETHER; ALTRUISM ISN'T AN UNKNOWN FACTOR."

back into its point of origin, it also serves to identify areas of weakness in local economies, allowing for future investment to be directed into such weak spots. This precisely targeted investment results in a more efficient and balanced local economy. After all, says Ms. Birley 'diverse economies...are more resilient' to the vagaries of the global marketplace.

This is not just abstract and untested theory, however. We have already seen the successes of putting this approach into practice – the most pertinent example for us being that of Preston, but also in places as far flung as Cleveland in the United States and Mondragon

in the Basque Country. This isn't just about microeconomics either; for Community Wealth to be built, the process requires cultural and social elements to be integrated into the movement, to truly re-empower local communities. If Sheffield is to take steps in the right direction its people, its council and its anchor institutions need to come together to produce an 'overarching vision' for the 'post-growth era', that emphasises the value of place, of collaboration, and of democratic ownership within the community. Rather than having to wait on the goodwill of investment from national government, or on the good luck of that of big busi-

ness, residents should be handed the opportunity to take their local economy into their own hands.

### THE CHALLENGES

While this sounds ideal, Councillor Dagnall was quick to emphasise the practical difficulties of putting such a project into place. The Council is at present beholden to the very large, very long-term contracts put into place by administrations previous with private companies for the provision of essential services; the recent furore over trees being only one such consequence of this practice of

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# LOCALS CAMPAIGN TO SAVE BIRLEY SPA

FATE OF COMMUNITY ASSET IN THE BALANCE AFTER COUNCIL DECIDE TO SELL

Campaigners in Hackenthorpe have expressed dismay at the decision made by the Council to sell the historic Birley Spa Bath House at auction on the 4th of September.

The Friends of Birley Spa, formed in response to rumours that the Council were planning to sell, had been told as late as July that the Council had no plans to sell the Grade II property.

Following the announcement, a variety of activities have been planned in order to persuade the Council to change its mind, but to no avail. Public meetings are

planned, and there has even been a discussion about whether the building could be taken into community ownership, to be run as a community co-operative.

The campaigners have been supported in their efforts by Clive Betts, MP for Sheffield South East, who criticised the Council for allowing the Bath House to go to sale without conditions for community involvement.

With the sale imminent however, the Friends face a race against time if they are to successfully halt or the sale. Their website is: [www.birleyspa.co.uk/](http://www.birleyspa.co.uk/)

## THE HISTORY OF BIRLEY SPA

Birley Spa Bath House was built to collect water from Birley Spa in 1843 by Earl Manvers of Beighton as a commercial project. It is one of the few remaining Victorian Spa buildings in the UK that is intact in its original form.

Designed to rival Buxton, the bath house comprised a small hotel but the whole project never made a profit. By 1895 only one plunge bath remained and the hotel had ceased to function.

Hence in 1913 a subsequent Earl Manvers sold the site, which was then developed mainly as a pleasure garden, charging sixpence for a dip in the very cold bath!

The pleasure gardens were closed at the outbreak of war in 1939 and the Council became the owners in the early 1950s. During the 1980s, Sheffield Countryside Management Unit worked with local schools, volunteers, and B.C.T.V. volunteers, to clear and replant the site, including clearing rubbish from the bath itself.

In the 1990s there was considerable input from the Shire Brook Valley Heritage Group and from the the Shire Brook Conservation Group, who restored the bath house with the aid of £500,000 of Heritage Lottery funding.

All this needed both City Council and voluntary support, but this declined and the building went into decay. Because the building was not attended, there was a problem with vandalism. Over the past ten years, the volunteer base has fragmented.

-CHRIS OLEWICZ

## THE SHEFFIELD CO-OPERATOR

The Sheffield Co-operator is edited by Principle5: The Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre.

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# CO-OPERATIVE PARTY AND LABOUR PLOT CO-OP REVOLUTION

CO-OPERATIVES UNLEASHED REPORT PLAN TO DOUBLE SIZE OF CO-OPERATIVE ECONOMY

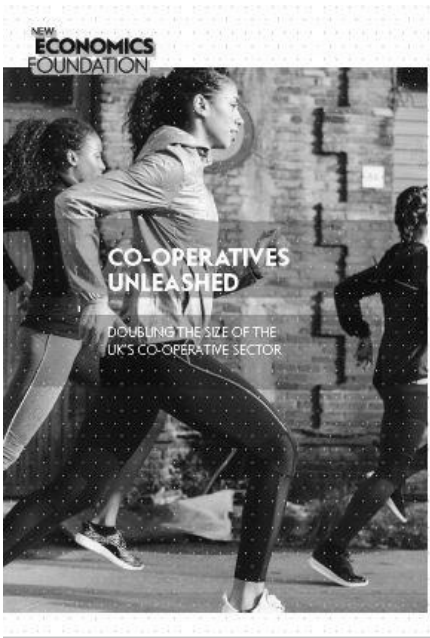
A lack of political support is holding back the potential for co-operative models of ownership, according to a new report from the New Economics Foundation commissioned by the Co-operative Party. The report is the latest intervention of the Co-operative Party in helping to shape Labour's economic strategy.

*Co-operatives Unleashed* calls for an overhaul of co-operatives in the UK, including a John Lewis Law which would force large companies to hand over parts of their profit to workers and stakeholders.

In the report, authors Mathew Lawrence, Andrew Pendleton and Sara Mahmoud say: "With an economy that does nothing to help co-ops thrive and everything to create a hostile environment for models of co-operation, it is unsurprising that the UK has one of the smallest sectors of any country.

"Growth in co-operation and the democratisation of business will likely stall unless we transform the hostile economic environment into one that is conducive."

Labour's Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell, speaking at the launch of the report, praised its



recommendations. He said: "This is a really exciting period where we're developing the ideas and commissioning expert resources." He suggested he would be putting the proposals from the NEF into a Labour Government's first Queen's Speech.

McDonnell has previously highlighted the central role that co-operatives can play in the future, describing the efforts of Preston Council as "inspiring."

-ROBIN WILDE

# SHEFFIELD HOSTS CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES CONFERENCE



Academics and co-operators from around the country will gather in Sheffield at the beginning of September for the 2018 UK Society for Co-operative Studies conference.

Taking place over three days from Friday 31st August 2018 - Sunday 2 September, delegates will debate topics relating to the diversity of people, places and organisations within the co-operative movement since the 2008 Financial Crash.

**FAIRSHARES**

One highlight of the conference will surely be the Professorial Lecture of Rory Ridley-Duff, Professor of Cooperative Social

Entrepreneurship at Sheffield Hallam University.

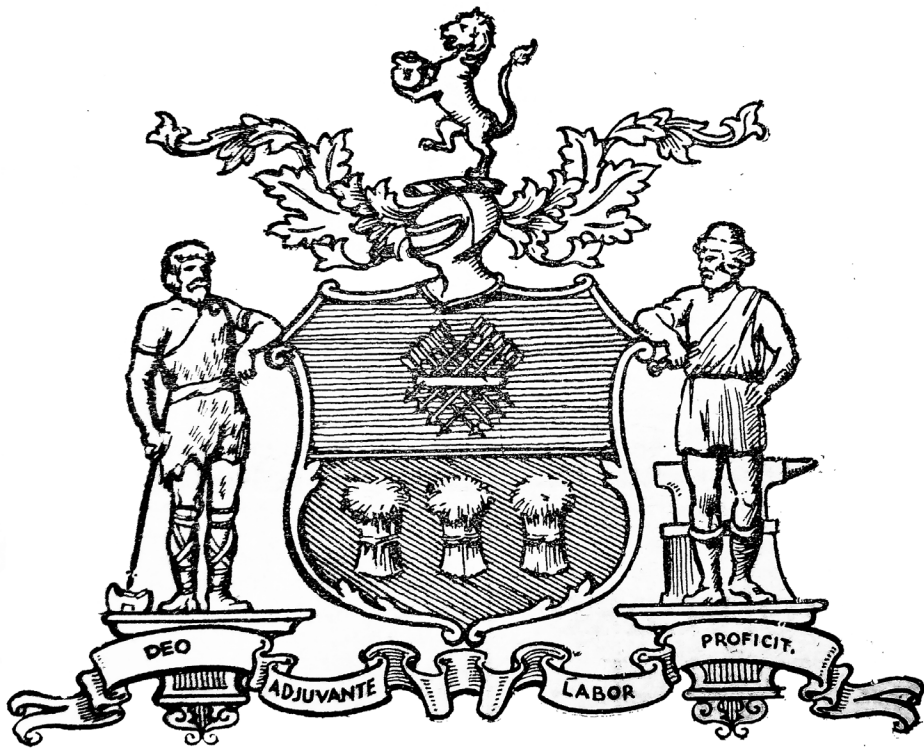
His lecture "Diversity, Co-operation and the FairShares Model" will highlight the cooperative origins on the social enterprise movement in the UK, and how changes in the field of social enterprise over the last 15 years have necessitated the definition and development of cooperative social entrepreneurship (CSE).

This 'hidden history' underpins, he believes, work to develop a new international platform for extending the application of cooperative values and principles.

Ridley-Duff was a director and CEO of the worker co-operative Computercraft Ltd for 12 years. In 1997, he participated in the formation of Social Enterprise London Ltd (which founded the Social Enterprise Journal). He is one of a network of academics who have championed the FairShares model, following resistance to the strategy of New Labour following the 2002-03 Community Interest Company (CIC) consultation.

"The application of the FairShares Model to social enterprise" Duff states, "gives explicit consideration to wealth and power sharing amongst founder, labour, user and investor members within a community of interest."

- CHRIS OLEWICZ



"GOD WILLING, LABOUR ACHIEVES"

## NOTES FROM THE COUNCIL

**A NEW LIBRARY SCHEME:** A New Library Scheme "Discover More" has been introduced after a Freedom of Information Request revealed that the number of books borrowed from libraries in Sheffield has plummeted in the three years since the libraries in Sheffield were handed over to volunteers. Cabinet Member Mary Lea stated: "What we all love about libraries is that they're truly at the centre of our communities. You can get really involved, or just walk in, sit down and simply read your newspaper if you want to. You don't have to be there for an event or to read a library book. You can just visit and enjoy the space." A number of campaigners had suggested that if the number of books borrowed from a library falls below a certain amount, then that library should be returned to council control.

**THE CO-OPERATOR RESPONDS:** While volunteers are to be commended for saving our libraries, the council and the volunteers should investigate the possibility of mutualising the library system and turning it into a co-operative. This has been successfully achieved in York. Explore York came into being in 2014 as a mutual society with charitable status, jointly owned by staff and community members. It has a contract with York Council to operate the city's libraries and archives. Though they have faced challenges, the project is a success and has been subject to a government case study for innovation practice.

**THE SALE OF BIRLEY SPA:** The Council have announced that the historic Birley Spa in Hackenthorpe is to be sold at auction, with the building likely to be sold for housing. Birley Spa has a long history. The Bath House was built to collect water from Birley Spa in 1843 by Earl Manvers of Beighton as a commercial project, at a place where previously local people had come to bathe and drink the water freely. It is the only remaining Victorian Spa in South Yorkshire and is Grade II listed. In the early 2000s the Spa was renovated to allow tours and public events but was largely run by volunteers. Eventually the volunteers lost heart and the building fell again into disuse. The Council state that if the building is not sold, it faces collapse. Additionally, they cite the fact that the community have not done anything with the building as a justification for the sale. Recently, a new Friends of Group has been formed and they have challenged the decision, with the help of Clive Betts MP.

**THE CO-OPERATOR RESPONDS:** The *Co-operator* understands that the Council is short of funds, and that the Spa has fallen into disuse. The fact remains however that the community was not consulted about the sale until it was announced. Assumptions can be made about whether a bid by the community to take on the building would be viable, due to the location of the Spa in an area of relative deprivation, but the fact is that Birley Spa is a significant building, meaning that there could be interest in a community purchase. The suggestion that the property should be sold due to lack of interest is disingenuous. Local people have not been empowered to take a lead in managing the building. The Council should at least pause the sale, allowing the Friends group to submit an application for the Spa to be named an Asset of Community Value.

**THE STATE OF SHEFFIELD REPORT 2018:** The latest *State of Sheffield* report, 'an annual stock take of the city,' was recently published. David Robinson of the University of Sheffield stated: "A theme running through *State of Sheffield 2018* is the idea of inclusive growth. Sheffield, like many other towns and cities, is facing economic uncertainty and rising inequality at a time of austerity. Is this an inevitability? Do we have any control over the city's direction of travel?"

The report notes that Sheffield had around 3,300 voluntary groups, above average for a city of its size, but that many of its charities, social enterprises and co-operatives were operating 'under the radar.'

**THE CO-OPERATOR RESPONDS:** Co-operatives needn't operate under the radar if they are supported by the Council and the Combined Authority. With a support strategy and opportunities for growth, the Community Wealth Building agenda can transform Sheffield.

## COMMUNITY WEALTH FOR SHEFFIELD

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'outsourcing'. While the local picture is mixed (with the work of the Manor and Castle Development Trust repeatedly heralded by panel and audience members alike), 'the National context is very bad' with funding cuts limiting the council's ability to help support such community organisations in their efforts.

The audience was reassured, however, that new Labour & Co-operative Mayor for the Sheffield City Region Dan Jarvis is looking to establish closer ties with the co-operative sector within the Yorkshire and Humber region, with prospective networks providing a safeguard against future cuts to local government. The specifics of exactly how this would be achieved by the Mayor were however - much like his current powers - unknown at this stage.

### THE LESSONS

The lesson from Preston, however, is that ultimately, Community Wealth Building can succeed where it is driven from the bottom-up, using the willpower and resources of local residents and activists, not just that of elected representatives and business leaders. Community Wealth Building is a long-term, ambitious plan for reforming the way public services procure, with



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much of this procurement going towards local businesses and organisations, ideally co-operative in their structure. As Mr. Manley puts it: 'We're not seeking to replace public services with co-operative enterprises' as the two are not mutually exclusive. It seeks instead a cultural shift that is as much about education as it is about economics; people show a 'natural interest' for working co-operatively, even if they don't know the technicalities behind what a co-operative organisation is. While the difficulties should not be downplayed, there is no reason why such a cultural shift, combined with a potentially more favourable national context, cannot take place in Sheffield also.

-ALEX LUSUARDI

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## CO-OP DEVELOPMENT FUND EXTENDED UNTIL 2020

The Hive, a support programme for co-operatives delivered by Co-operatives UK in partnership with The Co-operative Bank, has been extended until the end of 2020.

A £1 million programme spread over three years, The Hive was launched in spring 2016 and has so far helped over 500 groups and co-ops access specialist support and training.

As well as a website offering free resources, The Hive offers a range of support options. It provides workshops for groups considering setting up a co-operative, and will help get your co-op registered. It can also advise existing co-ops

who need advice or support in specific areas from business planning to governance.

The Hive is also branching into community shares. They aim to help co-operatives raise a projected £6.5m of finance – enabling communities to take control of valued local assets that otherwise would have been lost.

The local preferred provider for the Hive is the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group (SCDG) based at Aizlewood's Mill, Nursery Street, Sheffield.

Contact: [alan@scdg.org](mailto:alan@scdg.org)  
Tel: 01142 823100 / 0771 7357137  
-ALEX LUSUARDI

## CORBYN OUTLINES CO-OPERATIVE FUTURE FOR NEWS MEDIA

A TAX ON DIGITAL MONOPOLIES COULD FUND CO-OPERATIVE MEDIA, SAYS LABOUR LEADER

Jeremy Corbyn outlined Labour's vision for local media at this year's Edinburgh TV Festival. In an ambitious "Alternative McTaggart Speech," delivered on August 23rd, Corbyn promised to pursue policies targeted towards protecting funding for local media, as well as encouraging greater co-operative ownership in the sector.

Praising the work of the *Manchester Evening News* for its investigation into the rates of homeless deaths in the city, and the *Hackney Gazette*, who successfully forced Hackney Council to take new action on homelessness following an extensive undercover investigation, Corbyn stated that more had to be done to support quality local journalism. "This type of journalism needs support and the government has a role in helping develop a business model to strengthen and underpin it," he stated. The solution? A tax on digital monopolies such as Google and Facebook.

ernment and court reporting have been neglected.

In some areas however, investigative journalists are looking to alternative models of ownership to carry out their work. Examples include *The Ferret*, which uses a cooperative model, with a board comprised of readers and reporters. The paper covers issues such as human rights, environment and housing, and local government. *The Bristol Cable*, launched in October 2014 is co-operatively owned by over 2,000 members.

"This important part of the media, and its fantastic workforce, could also be supported by reform and expansion of an existing BBC scheme, which sees ring fenced funding for 'local democracy reporters' employed in local papers," Corbyn suggested. "Part of these funds could be made available to local, community and investigative news co-ops, reporting on public institutions, public service providers, local government, outsourced contractors and regulated bodies."

It seems that people around the country can look to successful examples in the fight to ensure that their local newspapers continue to provide the investigative journalism that is needed to hold our democracy to account.

-ROBIN WILDE

### NEWS CO-OPS

Already, faced with declining revenues, local newspapers have been forced to cut back on reporters, meaning that local gov-



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# BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN WESTFIELD

Community activist Dennis Chambers writes about his response to the decline of Westfield Township.

I moved to Westfield in 1974, at the age of 44, and have lived there ever since. That's half a lifetime ago!

At that time Westfield was one of the new Sheffield townships which were created to provide a mixture of housing for council tenants and home owners. These townships were designed to provide all the facilities for self sustaining communities with provision for families and children and all that might be expected from a small town, with the benefit of a rural setting.

Since then, the area has become run down due to political policies which have marginalised places like Westfield, with a resulting loss of amenities and community.

Local communities all over the world are finding ways to respond to the weakening of social well-being through 'austerity' measures. As always, there are co-operative ways forward, not always easy but well worth working for. The successes of the co-operative movement have always been a result of projects gaining inspiration and learning from one another.

The co-op message then, is that one person or one community can-

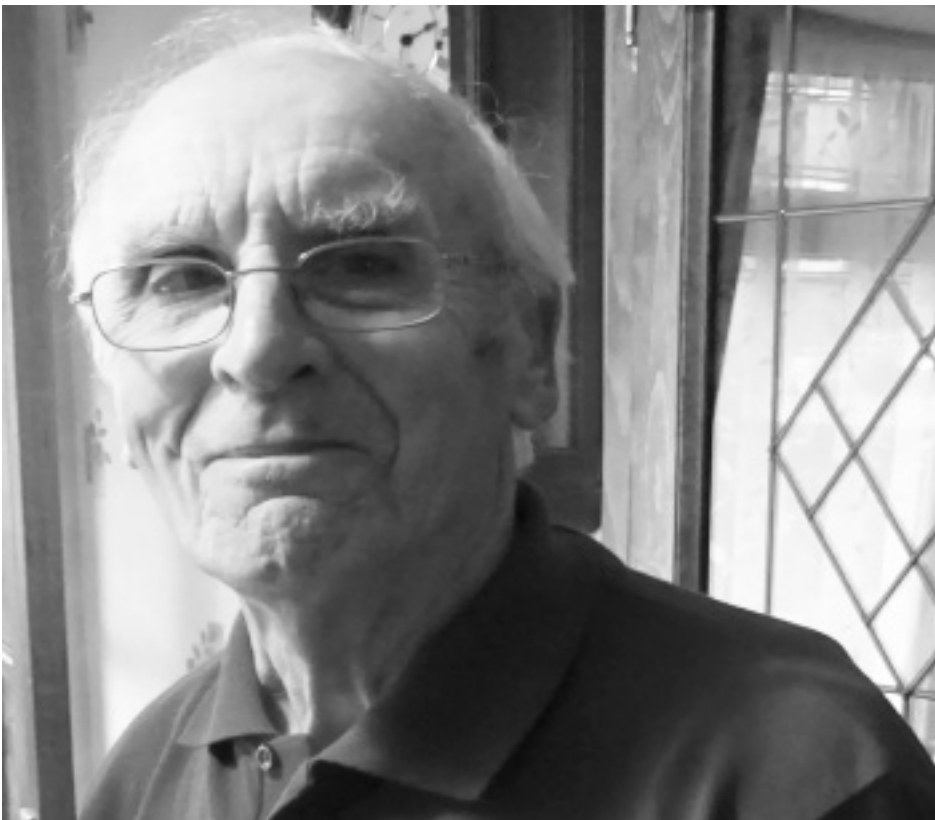
not stand alone but through co-operation and commitment, anything can be achieved if we work together for a common goal.

The important feature of this approach is that the power to drive change rests within the community of residents, local businesses, local services, community groups and voluntary sector organisations with a direct stake in the economic health of the area.

Putting into practice ways to live more sustainably leads to community well being. It is heartening to see community co-operatives like Greening Wingrove in Newcastle upon Tyne where there is collaboration between complementary groups and more strategic organisations.

It all starts with people talking to each other. In Westfield, I began to consider what could be done to make it more resilient and sustainable and how community pride could be encouraged. We have tried a number of things:

- Community Gardens, which have helped to bring a greater pride in the locality.
- Litter picking.
- Working with the primary school on these things. There are plans to grow food and flowers on the community allotment with the help of the school.
- Seeking help from the Local au-



DENNIS HAS WON AN AWARD FOR HIS EFFORTS TO BUILD COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN WESTFIELD

thority to address the problems of anti-social behaviour.

The time will come when the residents start to take back ownership of their patch. If this does not happen, people will be more and more marginalised by the interests of faceless corporations.

The daily care of the flower beds and fruit and vegetables which are being grown around the shopping area and the school is attracting attention and people are starting to have conversations. This is a start.

There is now a need to find more people in Westfield with commitment to help the community on its

path to resilience.

A local organisation in Westfield was granted a large sum of money to be used over a period of ten years for community development in 2013.

But this can only be used effectively with more community participation. That is why I believe that a co-operative response to this would be most appropriate. As a first step towards this, I have set up a community group in order to build a basis for further co-operative activity. Now is the time for people to come together and make things happen.

- DENNIS CHAMBERS

## EVENT REVIEW: DO CO-OPERATIVES WORK IN PRACTICE?

JUNE 12: 7:00PM - 8:30PM: REGATHER TRADING CO-OPERATIVE, SHEFFIELD



One of the highlights of this year's Sheffield Festival of Debate was a free event organised by Chris Olewicz and Jonathan Cook of Principle5: The Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre and academic Kiri Langmead. Hosted by Regather Trading Cooperative on 12th June the event responded to claims made by the Degeneration Thesis; that co-operatives will either fail or adopt a capitalist approach to business in order to survive. Following a presentation by Kiri and two reflections on cooperative practice from local co-operators, attendees aimed to answer the question 'do cooperatives work in practice?'

Kiri kicked off the event by highlighting the importance of democratic organising and decision-making in the fight against degeneration. The presentation argued that, through ongoing debate and discussion, co-operators are able to identify, negotiate and creatively respond to the pressures of operating within a competitive

and money-based economy. In addition, she claimed that democratic practice challenges key assumptions underlying the Degeneration Thesis: that individual interests will always prevail over the interests of the collective, and that managerial hierarchy is essential and inevitable.

Then the reflections. First was Gareth Roberts, founder and member of Regather, who contributed his experience of operating in profit drive and often-bureaucratic environment. He recognised that the regulatory environment and limited provision of cooperative business education poses barriers to cooperative development, and stressed the importance of subverting and creatively using the capitalist economy for cooperative benefit. Reflecting on Regather's successes, he went on to emphasise the importance of focusing cooperative energy on appropriate sectors. Food and other 'Foundational Economy' sectors were identified

as offering exciting opportunities for growing a mutual economy.

Second was Chris Olewicz, who reflected on his experience as a board member of the Gardener's Rest Community Society, a co-operatively owned pub in Neepsend. He focused on the challenge of engaging with over 400 society members, each of whom owns a stake in the pub, and the difficulty maintaining balance when there are disagreements over strategy. He also highlighted the need to avert 'founder syndrome' in which the board becomes disconnected from the membership because of a lack of oversight from the rest of the membership.

The evening ended with an engaging and lively discussion. Participants agreed that the success of cooperatives relied on them having a clear business plan. Cooperatives, like any business, need to understand their core customer and membership base, and what they want to achieve. They need to be able to communicate this through effective marketing, and deliver high quality products and service efficiently and to a high quality. Further discussing the issue of efficiency, participants identified challenges associated with democratic decision-making. Trying to achieve consensus and maximise member participation can be time consuming, making cooperatives slower

to respond to a rapidly changing and competitive economy. For some, this highlighted the need for a charismatic leader, able to steer the cooperative and make decision on members' behalf. However, for the majority, democratic decision-making was seen as valuable and beneficial, embodying cooperative values and principles and ensuring these were maintained over the long term. Participants agreed that, in this context, leadership is offered by different members at different times depending, not on their status or character, but on their skills and passions.

Overall, the session highlighted that, while cooperatives face challenges, their degeneration is by no means inevitable. So long as they remain aware of and responsive to the threats they face cooperatives can and do work in practice!

-KIRI LANGMEAD

### THE HOST: REGATHER

Regather is a trading co-operative owned and managed by its members and traders, trading locally-made products and services and delivering projects that benefit local communities and neighbourhoods. Regather offers a co-operative alternative to sole trading and membership with the benefits of mutual trading, share dividends and voting rights. Creating work for local people, self-employed traders and trading organisations.

Regather organises opportunities for local volunteers, students and community groups, promoting the values of fairness, co-operation and common wealth.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We invite letters to be sent to the editor at [sheffcooperator@gmail.com](mailto:sheffcooperator@gmail.com).

We do not print anonymous letters.

## OLD TOWN HALL COULD BE A MODEL FOR CO-OPERATIVE OWNERSHIP



THE OLD TOWN HALL HAS BEEN EMPTY FOR ALMOST TWENTY YEARS AND IS IN POOR REPAIR.

The *Sheffield Co-operator* of October 2017 makes instructive reading for those of us concerned with the preservation of Sheffield's historic buildings. There are two reasons for this. The first (I'll come to the second later) is the reminder that in Aizlewood's Mill the city has a wonderful exemplar of what can be done through co-operation – of every kind – to save and restore to useful purpose an important historic building whose loss would quite literally have left a horrible gap in the streetscape, to say nothing of the loss of a slice of our history.

### THE OLD TOWN HALL

This is very much to the front of our minds in the Friends of the Old Town Hall, a community-based organisation set up in 2014 to find a new role for the Old Town Hall and courthouse – the OTH – on the corner of Castle Street and Waingate. You may not even notice it as you pass by; it's dirty, neglected and clearly not in use; not a lot to catch the eye (unless you are very observant and pass often, in which case you may just notice that the hands on the four clock faces up in the elegant tower don't stay in the same place all the time, thanks to urban explorers). Indeed it's been empty since November 1995. Since 2004 it's been owned by a small private company based in London. No-one knows why they bought it and until very recently they appeared to have no plans for it.

Yet this is a building of much historical significance. Built in 5 phases between 1808 and 1955, it was originally financed by Sheffield Town Trust, then a major player in local government and still – after many centuries – in operation as a charitable trust. It was the base for Sheffield's first-ever elected council, in 1843. It was already recognised as the focus of power and authority in the town; there was an election riot at its doors in 1832, when a twitchy Yeomanry shot 5

men dead; Sheffield's Chartist uprising of 1839 had capture of the building as its prime objective. It was the centre of relief operations after the Great Sheffield Flood of 1864, and much later, in 1983, the scene of the dramatic collapse of the state's attempt to prosecute over 90 miners after the Battle of Orgreave.

### THE CHALLENGE

The Friends have been trying since 2014 to publicise the state of the OTH – internally it's an awful-mess, because of theft of lead and the resulting water damage. We've raised grants for advice on what you could and couldn't do with it, for a condition survey and fully-costed schedule of repairs, for phased plans for restoration and to test the business model we've developed for new uses.

We've looked from the start for a financially sustainable future use. And while the Friends came together out of common concern for the fate of this great building, we found we had a common set of values, too, about how it should be owned and operated. We all wanted community ownership and a community-based business to run the mix of uses we now know will work. We know we can restore what was a great public building and make it an asset for the people of Sheffield.

And that brings me to the second reason why the *Co-operator* was an interesting read. The Aizlewood's Mill story demonstrates the value of co-operative working by interested parties, including the City Council. No-one is saying it was an easy task, but is it getting harder now? We happily acknowledge the importance of what the Council did for us early on; a welcoming public statement followed by commitment to consider the use of compulsory purchase powers if we had a viable use and business plan for the OTH, and were on the path to raising the first tranche of the very large amount of money

that it's going to take to restore the OTH to use. That commitment enabled us to raise the grants we got for all the professionally-supported planning we commissioned in 2017.

### WHERE NEXT?

The owners of the OTH won't talk to or even acknowledge us. We concluded early on that the only way we could get hold of the OTH would be for the Council to buy it and sell it straight on to us. Put simply, the Council has powers of compulsory purchase, but hasn't any money, for reasons we all understand. We don't have the powers but we are prepared to raise the money.

Must be a deal there somewhere? But we can't talk to potential major funders until we know where we stand with the Council. But it's taking an awfully long time to get round the table with the Council to work out the way forward, even though they say they are hoping someone will come forward to take on the OTH.

Meanwhile the water damage just gets worse and the repair bill even bigger. We were encouraged by Julie Dore's commitment as Council leader to encourage co-ops – we want to set one up, a community benefit society, to raise funds to buy the OTH while giving everyone in Sheffield a chance to be a co-owner. We all know that councils are strapped for cash and short of staff these days. That sadly is the 'new normal'.

But there are plenty of people ready to make the effort to work in partnership with the Council and to use the co-operative route to do things the Council can no longer do. Meanwhile, the OTH's owners have finally stirred and appear to be preparing a planning application for conversion of the building. Of course they have every right to do that (why have they waited so long?) but getting planning permission doesn't mean the work will actually be done and we know the bill for repairing internal damage after 20 years of neglect is so big that it will be difficult to make a purely commercial solution work. A community-based solution looks much more feasible to us.

Thirty-five years on from Aizlewood's Mill, we know we can make a co-operative model work again, for public rather than private benefit. Following a recent public meeting at the Gardeners Rest, one of Sheffield's newest co-operative, we feel that there is certainly a great deal of goodwill in securing a future for the town hall. We want a co-operative effort with the Council to act as a stimulus for similar initiatives elsewhere in the city. That would be good for all of us.

-VALERIE BAYLISS

The Friends of the Old Town Hall website can be found at: [www.sheffieldoldtownhall.co.uk](http://www.sheffieldoldtownhall.co.uk)  
Alternatively you can visit their Facebook page for more information about the campaign.  
Email address: [fothsheffield@gmail.com](mailto:fothsheffield@gmail.com)

## POLITICIANS NEED TO BE PREPARED!

The old Boy Scout Motto of Be Prepared has clearly been forgotten by British Society.

It was a round 1997 when I spoke to the Sheffield District Labour Party about global Warming & Climate Change, shortly after the International Rio Accord was Signed by John Prescott on behalf of the United Kingdom, committing the UK to begin Work on reducing Carbon Emissions into the atmosphere.

When I spoke to the DLP it was as though I was speaking a foreign language. I was obviously speaking about some issues they appeared to have little knowledge about.

I am using this little story to demonstrate how the Membership of the Labour Party can miss very important political events. At a local level they become so absorbed in parochial issues they are out of touch with the wider world. I genuinely believe this is a recent development. When the city was the centre for Heavy Engineering and Steel Production we appeared more closely linked to both National and International Politics.

One of the assumed advantages of democracy is the opinion that Politicians will listen. The amount of areas where serious short comings are being identified tends to suggest there is a good deal of "Political Deafness" at play. The fact is that the UK Government has been in breach of the internationally agreed Carbon Emissions levels Since they were introduced in 1997.

### CHILD POVERTY

The same is true of child poverty. According to official figures Child Poverty in the UK is at its highest level since 2010 when the Austerity Programme was introduced. About 30% of Britain's Children are now classified as poor, of whom two thirds are from working families. The upward trend in Child Poverty in the UK has continued for the third year running, with the percentage of children classed as poor is at its highest level since the start of the decade. In March 2017, the Guardian reported that about 4 Million Children were living in Poverty and classed as poor.

I was so concerned that on the 18th of June 2018 I wrote to the Chief Executive of Sheffield seeking the latest figures on Child Poverty and whether or not the City was monitoring the trend in malnutrition since 2010.

He answered that my questions were valid, but that he could not answer me until he consulted his colleagues. After a month, I reminded him, and received a response from his assistant to inform me she had spoken to the officer dealing with my query, and that they were working on the case. I know this is an assumption on my part. The fact it is taking so long clearly suggests the Council have not been monitoring and recording the Condition of children.

We are told democracy is being threatened by the use Of Fake News and so it is, however Political Deafness on the part of Politicians and their Parties is equally dangerous. Without truth there cannot be any democracy!

- KENNETH CURRAN



NEW SOLUTIONS CAN HELP US REBUILD OUR SOCIAL ECONOMY

The economy ought to serve the well-being of the population at large. This means that while it may be impossible to totally abolish inequality it should be moderated at the extremes. The rich should not be excessively rich. The poor should not be too poor. Yet a decade on from the financial crash of 2007/8, inequality has increased enormously in many countries, and it seems recovery is slow.

Austerity is hammering citizens on low incomes and there is increased use of food banks. The strong vote for Brexit in various parts of the country was surely a cry of rage about political neglect by all established parties, and the collapse of traditional industry and employment, rather than supposed European impositions.

Modern capitalism then isn't effectively serving the general well-being. The political parties don't appear to have radical policies to ensure it does. How then could we produce effective policies to create a social economy?

NEW SOLUTIONS

The traditional socialist remedy for curing the ills of capitalism was to put the commanding heights of the economy into public ownership. But we know from the historical experience of Soviet communism that this can be a bad thing; stifling enterprise and curbing living standards. The more moderate measures of social democracy, while beneficial in stabilizing economic fluctuations after the Second World War, also ran into their limits. New thinking is required!

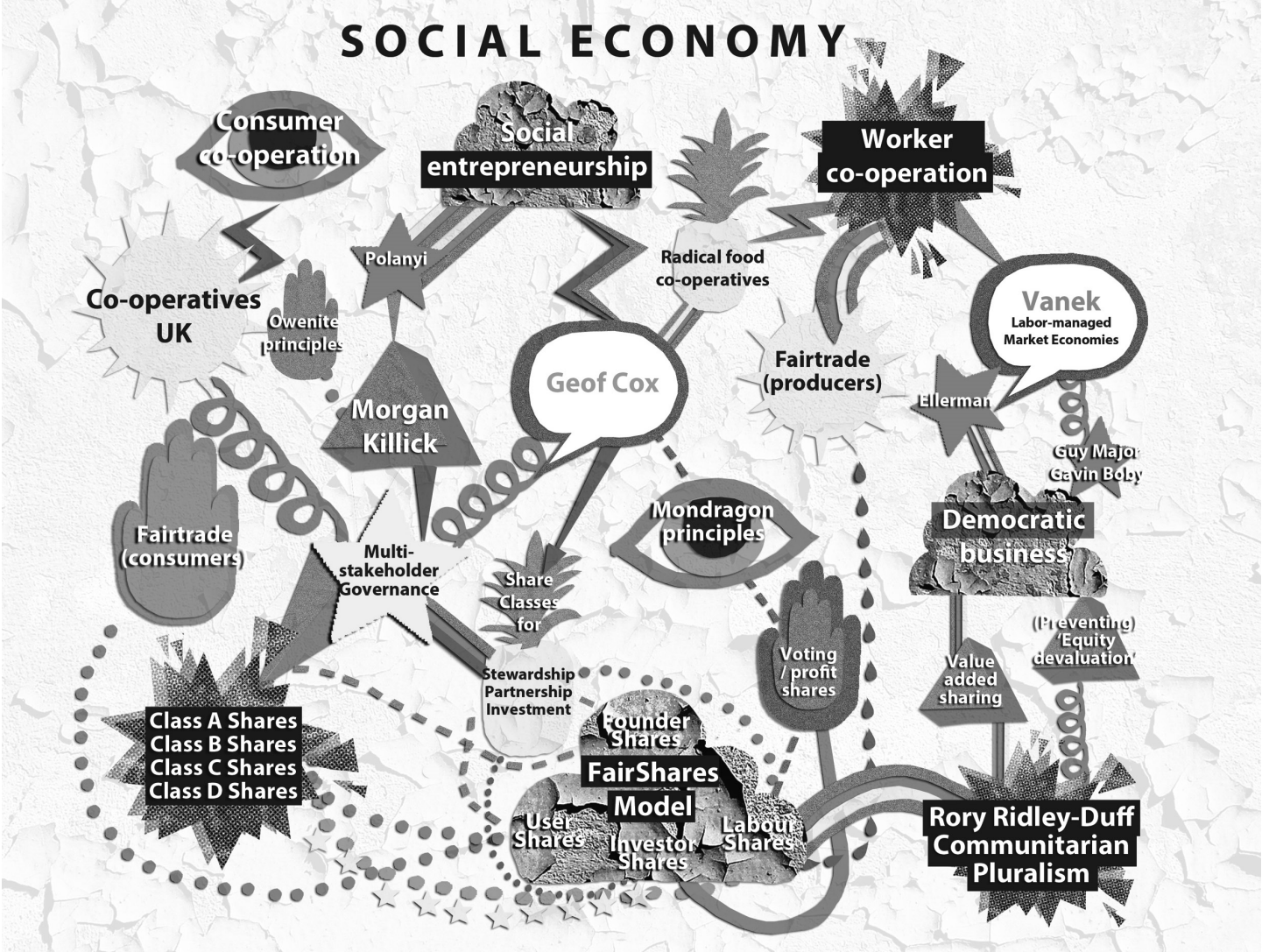
The law governing private companies should be reformed to limit the power of shareholders and managers, ignoring the interests of other contributors to the enterprise, such as the employees. Stakeholder interests should be enhanced against those of shareholders.

Means should be found to limit excessive pay differentials, promote long-term development over short-term returns, control undesirable financial activity, and regulate foreign takeovers.

There are of course, other ownership models, such as mutuals and co-operatives. The difference between the two models is that the equity [capital] of PLC's can be traded, giving rise to stock market speculation (akin to gambling), short-termism, and a Mergers and Acquisitions industry (where banks like Goldman and Sachs earn immense fees), whereas the shares of mutuals and co-operatives are not.

The advantage of the latter model is that it is designed to serve the interests of stakeholders and promote long-term development. The stakeholder model, if we can put it like that for mutuals and co-operatives, does not always produce excellent management or ensure an avoidance of difficulties, as the troubles of the Co-operative Bank have illustrated in recent years, but the general record has been good, particularly in the housing sector (housing associations).

There are even those within manufacturing industry, such as



A MULTITUDE OF STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING A SOCIAL ECONOMY EXIST. BUT IN WHICH DIRECTION DOES PROSPERITY LIE?

Creative Commons 2013, Rory Ridley-Duff and Mike Bull, BY-NC-SA, adapted by Gemma Cotterell.

Gripple at Sheffield. This stakeholder model, where profits (better termed surpluses) are generated to serve a social rather than completely private purpose, is what should be applied to enterprise in all situations of natural monopoly and network type industries, such as water companies, railways, telecommunications, and so on.

It should arguably apply to any company providing out-sourced public services, such as in Sheffield. There are political difficulties of course. But if it is impossible to change the model of companies such as Amey, Veolia, Capita (Crapita, as Private Eye puts it), Serco, Carillion (of infamous fame!) and the like, public authorities should be on their boards to ensure competent and social-value management.

A particular difficulty with this general line of argument is that it would apply to such as Amazon and Facebook, American and multi-international companies. National action, especially for a diminished formerly Imperial economy such as Britain, intent of doing its own Dunkirk, will necessarily be ineffective. International action, such as that of the European Union's Competition Commissioner, Margaret Vestager, has demonstrated - 27 countries rather than one - is what is required.

The creation of a social economy requires much more detailed thought and analysis. How to provide finance for the stakeholder model? How to ensure that anything created is not privatized, like the Green Bank, the student-loan bank, and so on? Joined-up thinking is required, which relates to devolution, the British constitutional position and the quality of our hollow democracy, if these problems are to be tackled.

Unfortunately, the political parties apparently lack the vision and don't seem to be doing the detailed work that is required.

- JOHN HALSTEAD

MAKING ETHICAL CHOICES

For a long time now, I have been conscious that the mainstream media, institutions, business, politics and all that makes up our social fabric, has narrowed into a pro corporate capitalist consensus. A culture which perpetuates the status quo. This is reflected in the microcosm, from individuals, to small groups and onwards through the whole of Society. It tempts one to believe that Mrs Thatcher was correct when saying that there "is no alternative."

To take an example, are there really enough people who make a considered choice when buying a product or service? How many people first ask:

- Is this from a co-operative?
- What is its environmental impact?
- What is its social cost?
- What are the conditions of the people involved in making it?
- Above all for a socialist, am I buying into the co-operative commonwealth or am I buying into the capitalist orthodoxy?

The dominant culture of de-regulation and privatisation is, I feel, the cause of a spiralling downhill of the well-being of people and the degradation of the environment.

It is difficult to understand why so many people choose the servic-

es and products which are thrust upon them simply 'because that's the choice that everyone makes'.

ALTERNATIVES

But we really do have alternatives. Why shouldn't money be in the service of local communities, of benefit to us all, rather than used to further the interests of private corporate interests.

We really do have a say in how our money is employed. The *Sheffield Co-operator* carries adverts from co-operatives who offer alternatives, eg. community ownership and democratic accountability, high quality services and products as well as the values which we expect from any co-operative.

Whilst co-operatives need to make a surplus, unlike the private corporations, profit is not their only consideration. Co-operatives at their best are not stand alone businesses but are part of the Movement.

This fraternity of business gives mutual strength to all. This is why the old symbol of co-operation was the wheat sheaf - one stalk alone cannot stand but a bunch stands by mutual support. Co-operatives make mutual links with each other in local, national and international ways and it is the International Co-operative Alliance which has agreed the standards for co-operatives everywhere.

- STEVE THOMPSON

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# “COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING” IS ALL THE RAGE, BUT IT FACES STRONG HEADWINDS

David Berry of Sheffield Renewables explores the challenges faced by those who champion the Community Wealth Building agenda.

As a member of a Community Benefit Society building and operating solar PV schemes across the Sheffield City Region, I have always felt heartened by bringing together two of the benefits of mutuality and co-operation. The willingness of people to invest capital in local schemes and the generosity of local organisations to host our schemes in order to benefit the environment at a time of climate change. This has allowed us also to employ local staff and volunteers and to use local contractors to install and to maintain our schemes.

On the environmental side the schemes have generated over 500 megawatts of green electricity and saved over 250 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, a not insignificant contribution to the changing face of power generation. But the investor side of the model has also been an incredibly satisfying element to the members of the Society. For our investors the raising of £250,000 to fund the schemes was a signal of faith and trust to see something being done locally and to recycle their money through a local economy to share their benefit with other local citizens. The reward of 3% return we are now paying has been more than matched by their patience in waiting for the return and their unwavering support. It is also a demonstration that even in a City as unequal as Sheffield the recognition of mutual concerns can be achieved to the benefit of everyone. Community renewable energy has provided the bedrock of the growth of co-ops over the last 10 years, and although Government policy is now squeezing this area, they have been supplemented by Community shops, pubs and other local services across the UK.

It is pleasing that after such a long journey promoting the model, more recognition is now being given to mutuality and co-operation and the co-operative model and local engagement now seems to have gained a new title as “Community Wealth Building”. The idea of buying and investing locally and creating “sticky money” is not a new idea with Keynes “multiplier effect” previously recognised in the field of economics but disregarded in favour of globalisation and economies of scale. For me, the renaming of economics as political economy would be a useful step forward and one that also recognises the human and social interaction implicit in any transaction instead of the purely number based science of the “invisible hand” of

the market. Control of their economic lives was a key driver in the extension of the democratic franchise for the working class throughout history.

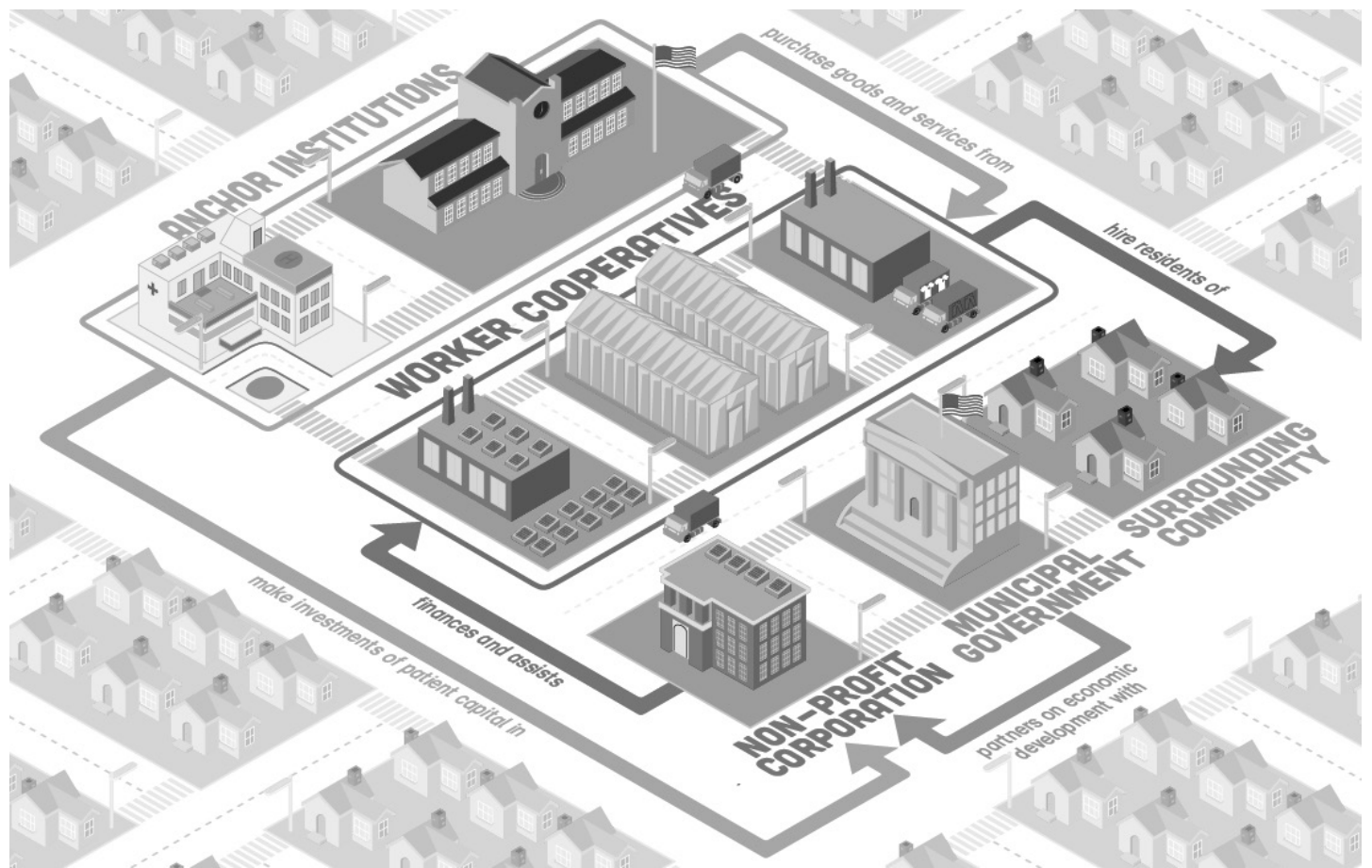
The interconnectedness of economic transaction needs to be considered as a way of binding us together socially and helping to create the benefits delivered by more equal societies described in *The Spirit Level* written by researchers Pickett and Wilkinson. There are also lessons to be

even the Coalition Government passed a Social Value Act in 2012. The Act calls for all public sector commissioning to factor in (“have regard to”) economic, social and environmental well-being in connection with public services contracts, although this present Government seems to have added little encouragement or enforcement since its inception. Two cities, Preston in the UK and Cleveland in the US, have been at the forefront of the development of using

than creating co-operatives from scratch, Neil McNroy, CLES chief executive, says they sought existing business that could win contracts, such as a £600,000 printing contract tendered by the constabulary and a £1.6m council food budget, which was broken into lots and awarded to farmers in the region. Preston also signed up to a co-operative initiative to help initiate new co-operatives. It is estimated that the project will help retain up to £111 million pounds and 3000 jobs in the local economy. The use of Councils themselves as providers and the resurrection of “municipal socialism” may offer a route for energy companies, social care providers and education establishments.

Alongside community co-operatives procurement policies such as Preston Labour’s plans for Regional Investment Banks may also add another tool to community wealth building on a larger scale. The French and German model of Regional development is far more established than the centralised system of the UK but signals the benefit of intervention into a market system prone to centralisation.

However, there are challenges to this model of Community Wealth Building that will need to be tackled and these may prove insurmountable and make it a short



**“THE IDEA OF BUYING AND INVESTING LOCALLY AND CREATING “STICKY MONEY” IS NOT A NEW IDEA...THERE ARE CHALLENGES TO THIS MODEL OF COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING THAT WILL NEED TO BE TACKLED”**

learned from the unlikely source of Adam Smith, author of the *Wealth of Nations* and oft quoted father of capitalism. Many forget that before *The Wealth of Nations* Smith wrote his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, his recognition that trade “led to people serving their own interests best by serving the interests of others from whom they needed daily necessities” was also balanced by the need for “sympathy and empathy for others” and the need “to treat others as one would want to be treated”. A far cry from the rapacious capitalism we see around the world today.

John McDonnell, Labour Shadow Chancellor, has recently created a Community Wealth Building Unit, looking at local procurement and the use of worker co-operatives to provide public services and

public bodies such as Councils, the NHS, Universities and others to recycle money through procurement processes. In 2013, Preston Council employed a thinktank, the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), to help identify 12 large institutions anchored to Preston, including the city and the county council, the university, the police and the hospital. It looked at redirecting the £1.2bn total annual spending power of these anchors to local businesses. Preston city council has since spent an additional £4m locally, from 14% of its budget in 2012 to 28% in 2016 and projected to 70% in 2018.

Preston, like any city, had its own particular challenges that meant a straight transplant of the Cleveland model was impossible. So CLES adapted it. Rather

lived phenomenon. In theory the practice flies in the face of orthodox economic policy that drives most of the major financial institutions of the world and most Government legislation. The orthodoxy of abandoning firms and industries and buying wherever things are cheaper under the theoretical Law of Comparative Advantage underpins competition rules across Europe, the IMF and WTO. Favouring local firms against global competition may also breach State Aid rules and be seen as anti-competitive with compensation liable to be paid to the Richard Branson’s and his Virgin Empire as in a dispute over an NHS contract. Even where local firms win contracts they may be susceptible to takeover or buyouts and the co-operative legal structure with “asset locks” may

be best used to prevent that. Where “municipal socialism” has already taken off across Europe it is already facing challenges as even City scale organisations have trouble matching the oligopoly power of many multi-nationals. The only answer here may be to make public ownership monopolies de-rigueur with regulation through democracy rather than economic power.

In terms of Council procurement those of us with a history of local Government will recognise how “best value” procurement of

the Blair Government was driven out by budget cuts and the onward march of the likes of Serco, Capita and Veolia only to end in the disaster of the Carillion cost. Again the dominance of economic capital over social capital. Never again should we allow this mopping up of contracts based on borrowed money gain dominance.

Even with the above provisos I am hopeful that the idea of economic capital working alongside social capital for the greater will allow us to return to more models

of co-operative working, the sharing of wealth, democratic control and the concern for our fellow citizens will begin to gain ground. It may need much change to our institutions, our cultures and our academic theories but will be to the benefit of our children and the planet. For me the return to mutual benefit and Smith’s sympathy and empathy”, business decided on a handshake rather than a multi page document makes for a more productive and satisfying world.

It is worth turning again to

Keynes for a final view of economics in a time when we often hear calls for expanding growth and intensifying competition. “To Keynes, economic activity was merely a means to an end: a good life, where there is time for “friendship and the contemplation of beautiful objects”. He was content with the economics of enough-enough to provide for needs so that the good life could be enjoyed.”

- DAVID BERRY

[www.sheffieldrenewables.org.uk/](http://www.sheffieldrenewables.org.uk/)

# WHAT IS COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING?

*Source: Co-operative Party: 6 Steps to Building Community Wealth Factsheet (Anne Birley, 2017)*

Community wealth building is a place-based approach to economic regeneration which empowers local government and enables communities to create and retain wealth locally. Our Six Steps are designed to provide practical guidance for councillors, local authorities, public-sector insitutions and those working in regional economic development to implement community wealth building in every region of the UK.

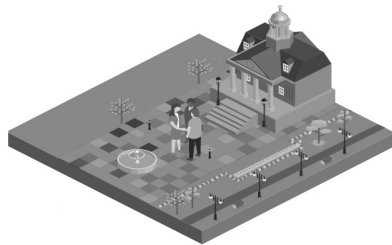
For too long, local economic policy has followed a trickle-down path. Rather than waiting for investment from a new shopping centre or factory, community wealth building shifts the focus to harnessing existing local wealth.

Although these steps have value individually, they will most likley be transformational when implemented together. They are intended as a starting point - every region has its own particular challenges, and local representatives should use this guide to shape their work with partners and experts to develop their own approach.

*This factsheet is a summary of the full Guide, which is available to download at: [www.party.coop/publication/6-steps-to-build-comunity-wealth/](http://www.party.coop/publication/6-steps-to-build-comunity-wealth/)*

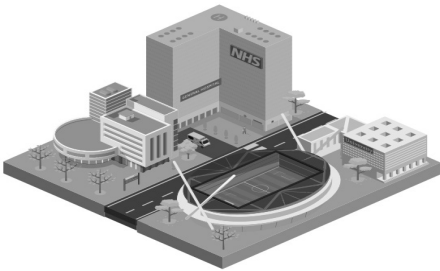
## 1. Co-operative Political Leadership

The community wealth building agenda is an ambitious, long-term shift in the way councils have traditionally operated, requiring deep and enduring partnership with local organisations, businesses, and community-ties. Local leadership is a critical ingredient in culture change, and co-operative councillors, new metro mayors, and devolved authorities must be at the forefront of turning these ideas into action.



## 2. Anchor institutions

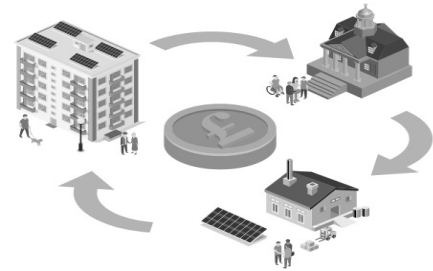
An anchor is a significant local employer that is tied to its location — meaning institutions that can’t move, or at least not easily, thanks to their locally invested capital, their purpose as an organisation, or their unique relationship with their customers, community, and employees. For example, an anchor could be a university, religious institution, utility company, military base, local authority, hospital, or even a local sports team. This step involves identifying anchors and engaging them in a local wealth-building vision.



## 3. Progressive Procurement

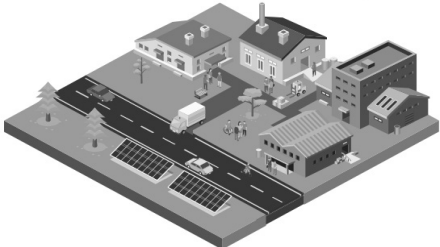
Public sector procurement offers huge opportunities to shape the economy, but there is a tendency for the same big firms to dominate the market as insitutions seek bigger contracts and frameworks.

Anchor institutions, working together and using the gap analysis of their spend, should embed strategies to increase their local spend and, where appropriate, to prioritise partnerships with co-operatives and businesses with a purpose or social outcome, as well as exploring opportunities for insourcing. Anchors should also become Living Wage employers and require this and the Fair Trade Mark in all contracts.



## 4. Co-operative Development

The local authority, working with anchor institutions, should play a significant role in developing new worker co-operatives to deliver goods and services to the anchor institutions. In companies where employees have a real influence and an ownership stake, workers are happier, better remunerated and more productive. Supporting the development of local worker co-operatives, and procuring goods and services from them, means meaningful local jobs; profits reinvested or shared between employee-owners; and democratic decision-making.



## 5. Local Investment

Key to the community wealth building model is the growth of existing co-operatives, the creation of new worker co-operatives. and support for them to take on significant contracts from local anchor institutions. However, new ventures require start-up capital to enable them to get established, grow, and compete. For example, a co-operative development fund using patient acpital, supporting more community share offers, or exploring setting up a regional bank that can lend to SMEs and co-operatives.



## 6. Assets and Services for the Community

A resilient local economy is not simply about jobs, its about ensuring that people can afford the everyday things they need, from housing to energy. This final step therefore, focuses on tackling unfair practices so that everyone benefits from community wealth building. Local assets and services should be owned by, and delivered in the interests of the community.



This could mean community, co-operative, or municipal ownership — a combination of these models could ensure that the goods and services they provide are affordable and that profits are reinvested in the service or distributed locally as dividends.



# CITY REGION MAYOR PLEDGES CO-OPERATIVE FUTURE FOR SOUTH YORKSHIRE

In a keynote speech at the recent Co-operative Party Local Government Conference in London the Mayor for the Sheffield City Region, Dan Jarvis MP (Labour and Co-operative) set out his co-operative vision for devolution in Britain.

Over two years have passed since the EU referendum, and in that time, millions of hours, and column inches have been spent debating both its causes and its consequences. For the first year, it seemed that not a day went by without some commentator or academic offering their unifying theory as to exactly what happened and why. Whilst for the last year, the debate has been characterised more by concerns, and conspiracies, relating to the influence of the media. But the truth is, that in June 2016, 17.4 million people voted to leave the European Union. And each of them did so for a combination of reasons and conditions unique to themselves and unique to that times. And any desire to find a single common answer by you, me, or anybody else,

powering the individual, or centralising the state. And in doing so, ignores the fact that many of the political solutions we need lie at the community level, and that the full potential of our society can only be achieved by putting working people at the heart of decision making and giving everybody a voice.

With that in mind, I believe that the time for political solutions built around organisations and unions, societies and institutions, mutuals and co-operatives, around the common good and the reconciliation of estranged individual, around the places we live, and a politics that represents those places, and more than anything, around working people, leading themselves and delivering their own solutions.

But to do this, we must learn from the origins both of the Co-operative Party and the Labour Party and make systemic changes that are so deep rooted and resilient that they cannot easily be reversed by the Conservative Party. Last year's Labour Party manifesto offered much in its pledge to bring utilities and infrastructure back into public ownership, but I believe that if the next Labour and Co-operative government is to be truly radical, it must accept that whilst nationalisation changes ownership, it does not necessarily optimise the way in which organisations are governed.

We need to do more to put working people back at the heart of our economy and our democracy. This will in part come through the adoption of co-operative structures and values. But it can also come through regional devolution. Regional devolution and co-operative principles go hand in hand. Both are concerned with putting power into the hands of the people, and ensuring that their voices are heard. When we get devolution right, it offers a fair way of governing at local level, one where working people have a stake in the services that they rely on.

When I stood to be Mayor of the Sheffield City Region, I did so because I saw it as a perfect opportunity to do three things. First, to produce a policy program called Our Co-operative Community, putting our party's principles and values at the heart of my electoral offer. Second, to show in practice,

that those principles and values can offer a new radical approach that can offer prosperity and public services. Third, to demonstrate how co-operatism and regional devolution were two sides of the same coin.

My vision, employed in part by twenty-five years of Co-operative Party membership was clear. I wanted to put local people at the

to fair rates of borrowing if they need it. All of this work and much more besides, will be informed by a new co-operatives advisory panel, which will be set up in the coming weeks. It will help me, as the mayor, to follow the example of our Co-operative and Labour councillors in Whitton, Oxford, who have put the needs of their communities ahead of private bus



## CO-OPERATIVES WERE AT THE HEART OF THE JARVIS MANIFESTO

will nearly always result in either frustration, or over-simplification.

That said, I do believe that one phrase, had a particular significance. That of "taking back control". This phrase didn't just resonate with those people who voted to leave, it also resonated with millions of people who chose to remain. And the reason that it did was less to do with our membership of the European Union than it was the resentment people feel toward the economic and political status quo. A status quo that is in part a product of a political conversation that distils everything down into a false choice between either



*"THE CO-OPERATIVE PARTY HAS...BEEN LISTENED TOO FAR TOO LITTLE. THAT NEEDS TO CHANGE."*

heart of everything I did. And now that I've been elected, that's exactly what I'm going to do. So first, to improve the way public services are delivered, I will support both new not-for-profit bus services, offering a greater voice for passengers and staff in decision making, and I will support the development of co-operative housing schemes, offering affordable, accessible housing options, so that everyone has a place that they can call home. And to develop a stronger, more co-operative economy, I will establish a new employers charter, encouraging employers of all sizes to adopt ethical values and business practices.

I will support new co-operative startups, as well as helping the existing ones to grow. And I will work with the South Yorkshire Credit Union and the Sheffield Credit Union to ensure that every resident of our region has access

profits, by starting the peoples bus services. The Castle Community Bank in Edinburgh, owned by its members, and providing inclusive, sustainable, and ethical banking. And the Mayor of London, who has championed the potential of community led approaches to deliver genuinely affordable housing.

The Co-operative Party has been around for over 100 years, and much like the working people of our country, its views have been listened too far too little. That needs to change. Through both mutualism and devolution, we must put working people at the heart of our decision making. We must end the status quo with which so many people have become disenfranchised. We must give working people the platform they need to ensure that their voices are heard and are taken seriously. Let's work to make that happen.

-DAN JARVIS



# COMMUNAL MEALS AND THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

Communal eating can be an engine for the co-op movement in Sheffield, writes Elliot Woodhouse.

Utopian thinking is the act of imagining possible or impossible futures built around the ideal communities of their authors. In their lofty dreams, utopian writers often diligently describe the eating habits of the inhabitants of their worlds. Why is this? And what can these texts teach us about the co-operative movement in Sheffield today?

## THE UTOPIANS

From the earliest Utopian writings, there is an identifiable trend of authors describing meals in common as a core part of their perfect societies. In both of his dream worlds, described in *The Republic* and *The Laws*, Plato describes members of his society gathering together to share food; and in turn these common meals foster the communal and public virtues necessary for the flourish of his perfect society. In *Magnesia*, the Utopia described in *Laws*, participation in these meals is of such central importance that a magistrate or official leaving to eat at home could be a potentially treasonous activity:

“The wardens and the overseers of the country... have common meals at their several stations, and shall all live together; and he who

is absent from the common meal, or sleeps out...let him be deemed to have betrayed the city.”

Plato deliberately inverts the common wisdom of his day in doing so: a tyrant should fear public gatherings of the citizens, but in *Magnesia*, the threat is from an official eating alone, out of sight, and plotting in secret.

In *Looking Backwards*, Edward Bellamy tells the story of a time-traveller learning about how a new utopian society came to arise out of the turn of the century American world he grew up in. In it, Bellamy takes some time to describe an outing to a “public kitchen”:

“The meal is as expensive or as simple as we please, though of course everything is vastly cheaper as well as better than it would be prepared at home. There is actually nothing which our people take more interest in than the perfection of the catering and cooking done for them”.

In Bellamy’s public kitchen, food is prepared by an industrial workforce of volunteers, who all take shifts as caterers and cooks. The perceived indignity that Bellamy associated with is lost, as everyone is committed to fulfilling their roles and creating a pleasant

experience together. In his utopia, the public kitchen is a microcosm of the full society — everyone working together in dignity to fulfil a common purpose. All life is open and public, no one desires a meal behind closed doors, but remains fully immersed in public life, chatting to the waiters as friends and comrades rather than servers.

## THE SHEFFIELD SCENE

Communal eating is also a recognisable feature of many social and cooperative projects in Sheffield. Groups across the city have incorporated a role for social eating into their operations. Burngreave Ashram, a radical Christian group based in Pitsmoor host a weekly (Wednesday) communal meal, where their members eat side by side with some of Sheffield’s neediest. New Roots, the sister project of Burngreave Ashram holds regular volunteer meals, to share food but also talk about what’s going on with the project, how we all feel about it, what could be done better. Meals are simple but filled with a great comradeship, partly because of the excess endorphins from a hard ride up Sheffield’s many hills, but also the joy of sharing, talking, and the feeling of completing a task together.

No discussion of eating in Sheffield without talking about the brilliant work done by Foodhall. Foodhall describe their project as a “genuinely public space” where people can exist and be equal without the expectation that they ought to buy something to use the space. Meals are cooked and shared using food saved from landfill from the local Sainsburys. These are shared on a pay-as-you-feel or pay-as-you-can-afford basis with the neighbourhood, with the intention to build a functioning, healthy community which can look after itself. They see the Foodhall as an opportunity for people to come together and share culture and

support one another with the domestic act of cooking and sharing. They write:

“The Foodhall project was developed after discovering there was a lack of open public spaces for sharing food in our society... we decided to create Foodhall in the city centre for people to come together and share culture and support one another with the domestic act of cooking and sharing. The problems of food waste and social isolation are implicitly linked; these can be traced back to a lack of infrastructure for communal dining and food sharing.”

This is surely the sort of thing Bellamy envisioned in his descriptions of public kitchens in utopia. People sharing together what was before a private and isolated act, in a political way: with a clear focus that this activity has a purpose in creating a society built on communal values. The dinner table, and the dining room are often the “heart” of the domestic life, the home, and the private sphere that liberal political theory thinks of as removed from political activity.

Public activities are the domain governed by rationality and law making, where as the home is a feminised sphere, governed by informal norms such as familial care, and mutual aid. Feminists have often warned about the dangers of seeing the home as apolitical, because such a reading obscures the politics of male dominance that happens in the so called “private sphere”. For animal rights activists, the dinner table is often a visceral political space: as seen when the very presence of dissenting vegan views disrupts the sanctity of the domestic dinner. However, just as much as we should welcome these political voices into our homes, we should also allow the values traditionally associated with domestic, unpolitical or private relationships influence our political, public lives too.

- ELLIOT WOODHOUSE

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# GARDENERS REST SHOWCASED AT MORE THAN A PUB CONFERENCE

FULL HOUSE AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF  
CO-OPERATIVE PUBS HELD AT SHEFFIELD  
TOWN HALL.

Over a hundred delegates from community owned pubs around the country descended on Sheffield Town hall on 26th of June for the fully subscribed More than a Pub Conference.

Organised by the Plunkett Foundation, the event brought together delegates representing many of the 60 pubs that form the network that has benefitted from the £3.85 million pound More than a Pub scheme, funded by Power to Change and operated by Plunkett. The scheme has enabled groups in rural and urban communities to save their local pubs, from closure or demolition. Many of the pubs saved are assets of historical significance.

One of the pubs featured was the Gardeners Rest in Neepsend. In late 2016, following a successful community share issue which locals raised £237,000, the Gardeners Rest was purchased by 387 investors, each of whom invested a minimum of £100 in order to secure the pub's future against re-

development in the fast changing Neepsend/Kelham area. The Gardeners Rest Community Society (GRCS) took ownership of the pub in April 2017.

In line with Power to Change's aim to build community businesses, the Gardeners is offering opportunities for people who are socially isolated to learn new skills in a supportive environment.

"The Gardeners Rest is a place where individuals can come on their own and find safe company," their case study explains. "Opportunities for work and training will be given to people... who are desperate to play a meaningful part in the world of work...It is often unhelpful to put labels on people — their barriers to fulfilment increase when they don't quite match up to the label — but the beneficiaries will include people with mild and moderate learning disabilities, people with an autistic spectrum disorder, and essentially people who just don't fit anywhere else."

- CHRIS OLEWICZ

## GARDENERS VISION FOR COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

MARK POWELL OF THE GARDENERS REST  
OUTLINES VISION FOR "MORE THAN A PUB".

It's the 24th of June 2019 and we are having a heatwave. The Gardeners Rest Community Society has been running The Gardeners Rest for 2 years now and our Members see it as More Than A Pub.

At 8am on this Monday morning, Gary, the cleaner arrives, opens up and switches off the alarm. There is a written list on the bar of today's extra tasks and the regular check off list is inside the door of the cleaning cupboard. Gary has a learning disability but he can travel on his own to the pub from his supported living accommodation and he knows what to do.

By 10am the place is buzzing — Andy, a committee member is working with a small team of member volunteers preparing to level out a small patch of concrete in the garden to eliminate a trip hazard and Mark, another committee member is waiting for Daniel to arrive before placing today's bread, ham, cheese and pie order. Three Society Board members are in the Bar at 10 to plan events for the next two months. What music,

what exhibitions, what campaigns? It's summer and everyone wants to party.

Work in the kitchen gets under way. Monday is a special day of the week for men who are over 50 and socially isolated — member drivers collect a dozen or so of them around mid-day and they enjoy a light lunch and a game of cards. Although the pub doesn't open till 3 on Mondays, we are licenced from 12, so they can have a drink if they want — and they usually do!

The pub opens at 3 and more transport arrives outside. It's the group from Clifford House, the hospice day centre the other side of town — on their way back from craft workshops and a film show — their lives might be limited by illness, but a drink and a pork pie can round off one of the better days left to them.

While they relax, members are busy in the snug putting up framed poems on the wall — not Wordsworth or Yeats, but Smith and Waterson — members who are part of Gorilla Poetry — a feast of home grown poetry declaimed



THE GARDENERS REST IS OWNED BY OVER 400 MEMBERS WHO  
HAVE PURCHASED COMMUNITY SHARES IN THE SOCIETY

every Monday evening to a full bar of attendees. Nearly all of the poets use mental health services, and Gorilla Poetry gives each of them a chance to express how they feel in a trusting and respectful environment.

As the poetry reaches a participative climax, and the working party dates are agreed, the City Morris arrive from their evening practice with the intention of singing and playing their instruments until last orders is called. They soon finish the last sandwiches and pies of the day before leaving.

Tuesday quickly comes. Gary has to whip round the bar with the Hoover today, because the space needs to be cleared for a new exhibition. Kelham Island Artist Co-operative displays something new every month — all work from local artists — and the bar is transfigured yet again. It was local street scenes last month and Eastern gurus the month before, but this time it is abstract.

The garden is busy too — Tim, the work supervisor is in to prepare for James, who has short term memory loss, so there is no point in asking him to do two things at once. He was head boy at his Special school before a decade of unemployment, but with the help of a white board and a lot of patience he has become really useful in the kitchen and a dab hand at cleaning the beer lines. Strangely, he never forgets to have a couple of pints at the end of each shift.

Tuesday afternoon is the Information, Advice and Guidance session in the conservatory. Becky knows a lot about Personal Independence Payments — she had one, lost one, appealed and got it back again. Now she advises others on the process.

Some people stay on from the session for the learning disability social evening (6 till 8) called Tree-Tops for reasons that are lost under the canopy, and the Rowing Team also manage to find a corner in the snug for a committee meeting. The day finishes with a jamming session in the bar and everyone joins in.

You don't need chapter and

verse to know what happens from Wednesday to Friday — it's more of the same with a few little twists and some extras. Wednesday includes work with Holgate Meadows Special School for young people with behavioural problems. We have set up a partnership with the school. Well, the young people might think it is the rest of us who have the problems, but they are the ones excluded from almost everything and they will need help in finding a job when they leave school. Our members visit to talk about the jobs that they do and how they got them, and the young people come to the pub to try their hand in the garden, the kitchen, the cellar and the office — under supervision, of course.

A heritage walking group leaves the pub at 2pm — led by member Andy and ably assisted by Paul, who can fill in the gaps in Andy's knowledge on the journey from the past to the present. The remarkable thing about Paul is that he has lived on his own for thirty five years since his parents died — he is 56 now — and he has isolated himself from society for all of that time — no television, no internet, no friends, no social life. When asked why he carries on, he tells you that he loves knowledge and that there are still things he doesn't know. He uses encyclopaedias and sneaks into the local library at quiet times. He has a particular interest in local history and is really helpful on the walks as long as people just think of him as a barely visible information source and not as a person. He calls everyone 'mister' or 'miss' to keep a distance from them because he is very lonely and fears rejection if he gets on to Christian name terms.

The rest of Wednesday is filled with social media meetings, a training café with trained chefs for curry night, a life drawing class in the club room and the Wardsend Cemetery Group in the conservatory. The 'Not the John Keane Music Session' is on in the bar — called that because John has now left the session that he once started — everyone understands.

Thursday is even artier — with



THE GARDENERS HAS GAINED A REPUTATION FOR ITS QUIRKY BEER GARDEN

an art therapy group in the morning, run by a member of the bar staff and a theatre group in the club room in the evening. There is more line cleaning, of course – and Chris is in to make the sandwiches. It’s bar billiards night in the snug – a lot of fun and noise and plentiful consumption of beer.

Friday is finance day — paying out, reconciling, the usual stuff — and the finance team of member investors is on the case. There’s a meeting about a campaign to get the obscene car parking charges at the Northern General Hospital removed, and a Dementia Friends

group meets in the conservatory before the pub opens at the week-end time of mid-day. The beer tickers are all in to see what is new on the pumps — they come from far and wide — and we keep a supervisory eye on volunteer glass collectors and washers, all of whom have additional support needs and an enthusiasm to whisk your glass away before the last drop has hit the back of your throat.

The week-end is full on, as you might expect, and there is an autism acceptance course running on Saturday mornings. The course leader is an autistic man with great

ability as a circus skills trainer and also in origami. He gets involved in art therapy, but we draw the line at fire eating in the pub garden — even though the river is at hand. Some lucky people leave the pub at lunchtime for the local airport. A member is a pilot and gives training tuition in a small plane to winners of the Sunday quiz and other deserving beneficiaries. They’ll be back in time for this week’s quiz and possibly for the Sunday afternoon ukulele group. There’s a band on Saturday night so the place is packed, but it is quieter on Sunday — just right for reading a book or

a newspaper by the river, playing a board game or holding a meeting in the club room — it’s the adoption group meeting there this week.

### THE REALITY

Of course, those of you who manage community-owned pubs will realise that this vision of the future is high on aspiration and short on probability.

The Gardeners Rest is owned equally by more than 420 people, all of whom have different wants, needs and expectations. Only a handful of them actually get involved in running the place and each of them has a different view of what needs to be done.

The choices are stark. Either, you try to influence proceedings through committee structures and grow long white beards or the female equivalent in the process, or you take the bull by the horns and do something. Deciding by committee on whether or not to use lined beer glasses causes resignations and entrenchment of opinions.



Almost everyone thinks that involving disadvantaged people in pub life is a great idea – but many would prefer it if it could happen in someone else’s pub. They come out to relax, not to be social workers!

Writing in July 2018, with the vision of harmony and inclusion still a year away, let’s take stock. How much of the vision described above is in touching distance of reality? I’m not going to tell you – it’s a committee secret – but come down and see for yourselves.

- MARK POWELL

Co-op News is a media co-operative that has been telling the movement’s stories for nearly 150 years.

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# IN PROFILE:

## PRINCIPLE 5: YORKSHIRE CO-OPERATIVE RESOURCE CENTRE

The *Sheffield Co-operator* speaks to Steve Thompson of Principle5 about its role in revitalising co-operative culture in Sheffield.



I joined the Co-operative Party eighteen years ago because my enduring belief has been that without ownership and control, people have no power. Living in Sheffield all my life, I have seen the demise of municipal socialism and an erosion of civic pride. Citizens used to own and control their services through their elected councils and ratepayers paid for direct labour without having to pay the profits of private contractors. Sadly, the nationalised industries, services, and utilities have been privatised and they are operated for the benefit of a small elite. We no longer have truly public services.

### DISCOVERING CO-OPERATION

In September 2000 when I went to my first Co-op Party Meeting, I was enthused by another form of common ownership, that developed by the Co-operative Movement since 1844. But by then co-operative culture and awareness was in decline. Gone were the days when a vigorous co-operative

movement spent money and resources on member education. It was difficult to find answers to my many questions. If the co-operative alternative is to mean anything, it is essential to know all about it.

A good starting point was the International Statement of Identity (Co-operative Values and Principles). Principle 5 is Co-operative Education, but where was it to be found?

An elderly co-op society director used to bring copies of *Co-operative News*, then a weekly newspaper for the Co-operative Movement, to the meetings and they formed the basis for learning more.

In due course, I collected pamphlets and books about co-operation as well as saving *Co-operative News*. It became clear to me that there had been a time when there was a strong co-operative culture in Britain (and all over the world).

Up until the 1960's the Co-operative Movement, principally the Co-operative Union, the C.W.S. and retail societies, particularly the big ones like the Royal Arse-

nal Co-operative Society in London, spent a great deal of money fulfilling the co-operative principle of education. The aspiration in the early days of co-operation was to spend 10% of the surplus on education. In the 1930's and 40's the co-operative movement even went into film making. Given that in those days there was a large membership because the benefits of co-operative ownership were a reality which included social and cultural life, profit sharing and other financial benefits, it is not surprising that there was a co-operative commonwealth in the making.

Despite much talk in the last decade about a co-operative renaissance, the big co-op retail giants have offered little in the way of co-operative education and culture. But there is a great development in the making which is receiving support from the Co-operative Party and the Labour Party and being put into practice by local authorities like Preston – Community Wealth Building.

We can all play a part in reversing the decline in co-operative

education by joining and using the facilities of our co-operative. We need new members to ensure financial sustainability into the future.

### PRINCIPLE 5

In response to the dearth of co-operative education and awareness, I set up Principle 5 Yorkshire Co-operative Resource Centre which was incorporated as a co-operative and a company limited by guarantee in 2014. Principle 5 provides a facility for members to develop ideas about co-operation. How the Movement evolved the potential to transform society for the better, and how co-operatives are changing the world.

The lending library is full of books which tell stories of the successes and failures of co-operatives, practical information for people involved in co-ops and research materials for social historians. The Centre is a friendly and accessible place where members can learn more about the Co-operative Movement.

Principle 5 is based at Aizlewood's Mill, Sheffield, a co-operatively owned building and home of the Sheffield Co-operative Development Group. The Centre is open for members to use by appointment, and is funded by subscriptions. Please consider joining us.

Aside from protecting the materials in the archive and making them available for members, the resource centre provides a focus for co-operative education and culture through talks, discussions, film screenings, social events, visits to other co-operative venues, study groups etc. It is proactive in helping to cultivate co-operative community, and working with other organisations with compatible aims. Let us know when you would like to visit and I'll get the kettle on.

- STEVE THOMPSON

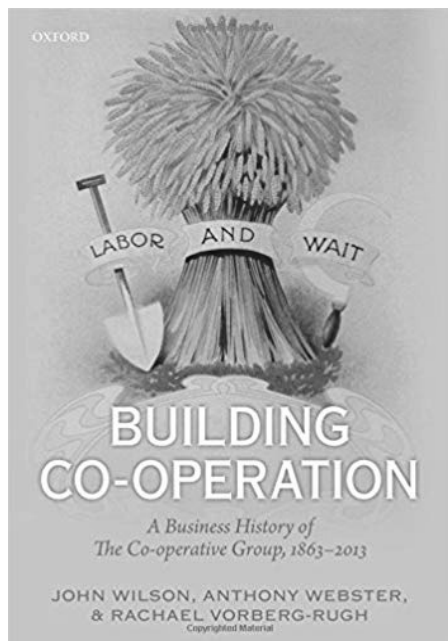
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THE COZY AND COMPACT OFFICE AND READING ROOM OF PRINCIPLE 5 CONTAINS A WEALTH OF MATERIAL ON CO-OPERATIVE HISTORY AND CULTURE.





## BOOK REVIEWS



### *Building Co-operation: A Business History of the Co-operative Group, 1863-2013*

The first new history of the Co-operative Group in a generation, *Building Co-operation: A Business History of the Co-operative Group, 1863-2013* is a comprehensive, if dense, academic account of the rise of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS), and its successor the Co-operative Group.

In accounting for the success story that is co-operative retailing, the authors highlight that many of the innovations in retailing can be sourced back to the movement. The CWS for example, created the first national retail distribution

network in Britain, and led in the development of 'own brand goods.'

More than just a wholesaler, the CWS was a manufacturer of a host of products from soap to biscuits, and clothing. Sheffield, for example, had a CWS shirt making factory on Trippet Lane, that marketed the Sheffield Oxford Shirt. The CWS Bank became a well known brand. Further afield were the tea plantations in India and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). There was even the SS Pioneer steam ship - the first ship to sail down the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894. More recently, the Co-operative Group has led on the introduction and normalisation of Fair Trade.

The recent financial crisis within the Co-operative Group, which occurred just after publication, means that the final section of the book, which discusses the 'renaissance' of the Co-operative Group following decades of relative decline, is bittersweet.

The lessons the authors ultimately draw are that movements should never be scared of change, and it was fear of change which caused the decline in the CWS prior to the creation of the Group.

Overall, the book paints a vivid portrait of a business which tried hard to do business in a different, and fairer way. What impresses the most is the sheer ambition of the CWS effort to create a co-operative commonwealth.

- CHRIS OLEWICZ



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# SUPPORT LOCAL CO-OPERATIVES

Together we can build the co-operative movement in Sheffield

(source Sheffield Co-operatives) [www.sheffield.coop](http://www.sheffield.coop)

#### Alt-Sheff

[alt-sheff.org/](http://alt-sheff.org/)

Volunteer-run co-op publicising "alternative" events and organisations.

#### Beanies

[beanieswholefoods.co.uk/](http://beanieswholefoods.co.uk/)

Tel: 268 1662

Wholefoods and Greengrocers in Walkley since 1986.

#### Brambles Housing Co-operative

Tel: 279 7164

Resources, information and meeting space.

#### Edumake

[contact@edumake.org](mailto:contact@edumake.org)

Tel: 07583 445696

Open-source software for digital making and learning.

#### Fireside Housing Co-operative

Tel: 272 5908

Housing co-operative in Burngreave happy to offer advice and support.

#### Gardeners Rest

[thegardenersrest.com/](http://thegardenersrest.com/)

Tel: 232 2597

Co-operatively owned Pub in Neepsend.

#### Jamboree Arts Ltd

[jamboreearts.co.uk/](http://jamboreearts.co.uk/)

Tel: 0114 261 8600

Marquee and Equipment hire.

#### Lembas

[lembas.co.uk/](http://lembas.co.uk/)

Tel: 258 6056

Wholefood Wholesalers.

#### Pedal Ready

[pedalready.co.uk/](http://pedalready.co.uk/)

Tel: 241 2775

Urban cycle training.

#### Portland Works

[portlandworks.co.uk/](http://portlandworks.co.uk/)

Tel: 275 9354

Low-cost workshop space for manufacturing companies.

#### Principle 5: Yorkshire

**Co-operative Resource Centre**

[principle5.coop/](http://principle5.coop/)

Tel: 282 3132

Co-operative education, training, and information. Lending Library.

#### Regather Trading Co-op

[regather.net/](http://regather.net/)

Tel: 273 1258

Social enterprise and co-operative development, focusing on creating employment.

#### Sheffield Co-operative

**Development Group (SCDG)**

[scdg.org/](http://scdg.org/)

Tel: 282 3100

Co-operative development agency.

#### Sheffield Credit Union

[sheffieldcreditunion.com/](http://sheffieldcreditunion.com/)

Tel: 276 0787

Savings products and loans.

#### Sheffield Creative Guild:

[sheffieldcreativeguild.com/](http://sheffieldcreativeguild.com/)

Creative enterprise Network

#### Sheffield Hackspace

[sheffieldhardwarehackers.org.uk/](http://sheffieldhardwarehackers.org.uk/)

uk/

Creative hackspace for IT projects based at Portland Works.

#### Sheffield Renewables

[sheffieldrenewables.org.uk/](http://sheffieldrenewables.org.uk/)

Tel: 250 8367

Renewable energy and environmental sustainability.

#### Sheffield Student Housing

**Co-operative**

[sshc.sheffield.coop/](http://sshc.sheffield.coop/)

Student housing co-operative based in Crookes.

#### Shipshape Health and

**Wellbeing Co-op**

[sharrowcf.org.uk/](http://sharrowcf.org.uk/)

Tel: 2500222

Health and welfare service based in Sharrow Community Forum.

#### The Roco

<http://www.theroco.org/>

Tel: 07873 345709

Creative co-operative hub including cafe, bookshop, and creative spaces.

#### Union Street

Tel: 399 2270

Offers co-operative office space for individuals and businesses.

#### Webarchitects

[webarchitects.coop/](http://webarchitects.coop/)

Tel: 276 9709

Web hosting, virtual servers and GNU/Linux sysadmin support services.

#### Wortley Hall

[wortleyhall.org.uk/](http://wortleyhall.org.uk/)

Tel: 288 2100

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#### The Phone Co-op

[thephone.coop/](http://thephone.coop/)

Tel: 01608 434 000

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#### Swann-Morton

[swann-morton.com/](http://swann-morton.com/)

Tel: 231 4966

Surgical blades and other blade products.

#### Suma (Triangle Wholefoods)

[suma.coop/](http://suma.coop/)

Tel: 01422 313861

[info@suma.coop](mailto:info@suma.coop)

National co-operative supplier of wholefoods, organic, and vegetarian products.

#### The Co-operative News

[thenews.coop/](http://thenews.coop/)

Tel: 0161 214 0870

Monthly newspaper of the British co-operative movement. Published in Manchester.





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