

Annual Paish Meeting 13th May 2026 Appendix 1.

Statement From Mr. & Mrs Croft

We'd like to start by saying how extremely disappointed we are that the Co-op has made the decision to close its shop in Dorchester-on-Thames. We know it's a lifeline for many in the village and is well used by residents as a local convenience shop – including ourselves.

We also want to recognise the amazing team of staff who work there and who are most affected.

There have been many mis-messages and rumours circulating so please let us share the facts with you, as we have already with the Parish Council. Nothing has changed since speaking with them and we hope that the narrative can now be shared more widely to the village.

A decision was made by Co-op for the store to be closed and the freehold of the building to be sold, which includes both the shop and our family home within the same Deed. As the leaseholder of the residential parts of the building, we were approached by the Co-op and given first refusal for the freehold, which is completely usual in cases like this. It was made clear to us that this was commercial in confidence as people's jobs were potentially affected. Contrary to rumours, we were completely happy with the *status quo* and did not approach the Co-op.

In our conversation with them we explained that the shop is a lifeline to the village and asked if there was any way we could work together to ensure the store remained a Co-op. Suggestions we made were:

1. Reconsidering altogether – the village needs a shop and we were happy with how things were
2. If there was no other option to selling the freehold, could we make an arrangement where we bought the freehold, were responsible for maintaining the whole building, with the Co-op renting back the store so it remains a Co-op?
3. Was there another Co-op region that could take it on?

Unfortunately, the Co-op confirmed there was no other option to them selling due to the reasons outlined in the Oxford Mail <https://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/26083322.oxfordshire-village-co-op-store-permanently-close/>

After very careful consideration, we decided the best thing to do was to purchase the freehold, for the following reasons:

1. It gives us the freehold of our family home. This means we are not dependent on a landlord and are solely responsible for our own building maintenance rather than seeking approval and funds from others or a committee
2. We passionately want to retain a shop within the village. If we didn't buy it and it was put up for sale on the open market, without being an Asset of Community Value, there is no obligation to offer the village opportunity to bid and whoever buys it may not have the same community interest and desire to keep a shop on site.

When the Co-op made it clear their only option was to sell and close the Co-op, we then discussed areas where they could help to ensure any cross-over was as quick as possible: Do

they have links with other retailers? Can they retain all the shop fittings so we could get someone in with minimal closure?

The Co-op put us in contact with Christies, a commercial estate agent specialising in these sorts of shops with previous experience working on ex Co-op stores. They also confirmed that the shop would be sold vacant possession with fridges removed to be relocated to other stores.

As soon as we knew the staff had been told by the Co-op that the store was closing and we were permitted to discuss the transaction publicly we contacted the shop manager and the Parish Council, in confidence, to reassure them that we would be keeping a shop and that we had a strong will to work with them on how to minimise the disruption for the village. Together we produced a statement that was posted on the PC website.

We were invited to meet with two Parish Councillors on Bank Holiday Monday, which we welcomed. We attended the meeting believing we would have opportunity to discuss and make plans for the shortest transition between closing and re-opening of a shop and to discuss ideas for how those who rely on the shop could be helped during the closed period.

The meeting was very different to our expectations. We had two take aways from that meeting:

1. The PC will be running a campaign: Save our Shop. This is confusing as we have openly shared that we will be retaining a shop and that we want to work with them to register it as a Community Asset on the day we buy it.
2. The PC will do everything in their power, on behalf of the village, to stop us buying the freehold, including approaching the Co-op to put in a counter bid using Community Land Trust funds.

We are extremely upset and saddened by how the meeting was conducted, that it was not used to work on solutions, and that opportunity for collaboration between us was not explored further at that meeting. We hope there is opportunity to re-engage with the PC to move forward in a positive way.

Thank you to everyone who has approached us directly since our details were posted on Facebook, including many, many of you who have shared useful insights and contacts and a desire to work with us to support a viable future shop.