

To:

Allan Leighton (Co-op Chair)

Cc:

Steve Murrells (Chief Executive)

Nick Crofts (President of National Members Council)

Dear Allan,

Co-op Funeralcare premises in Chorlton, Manchester - The Picture House

We write as representatives of community and business groups in Chorlton, Co-op members and shoppers, individual community members, and elected representatives, in connection with the land and associated buildings which sit in the heart of our community - The Picture House, Chorlton (Co-op Funeralcare premises).

We greatly welcomed the Co-op decision to make Chorlton Community Land Trust (the CLT), with their development partner Brook Finch, the preferred bidder for the site in January 2020. Since then, the CLT and Brook Finch have worked hard to create a viable and credible community-led offer to develop the vision for this site to become a thriving economic hub, acting as a catalyst for the post-Covid revival of our district centre. You can read a summary of the [Outline Proposal](#) here.

Despite these efforts, we are aware that the commercial terms they have proposed may not be what the Co-operative Group (the Co-op) had hoped to secure, and you have provided an opportunity for the CLT to improve the offer.

The CLT is working hard to improve the terms of the bid but we want to use this opportunity to echo their position that the proposal has much wider significance and value than can be reflected in a simple land value assessment. The CLT proposal will bring a new anchor destination to the centre of Chorlton which will attract new visitors to our district and retain a heritage asset for economic and community use. These plans may struggle when assessed solely through a lens of financial value, particularly where proposals involve demolishing a 100 year old building to develop the site for exclusively residential purposes. The lost potential is irreplaceable.

We strongly urge the Co-op to reject any plan that would destroy this part of our heritage and to support a positive investment in our community. We believe this is the only option that aligns with Co-op values, and it is what the community wishes.

This letter has been signed by many community groups in Chorlton, along with traders and elected officials.

Here are the key points we would like to emphasise;-

1. Social value

The plans are integral to long term growth and Covid-19 recovery for this area.

The site is located right in the centre of Chorlton, immediately next to a local primary school, our public library, and our central shopping precinct. This puts it in a strategically important location with enormous potential to anchor economic and social regeneration in the heart of the community

The proposal will directly lead to;-

- 50 new local jobs
- Five new businesses
- Homes for 65 residents
- And we estimate a boost of 10% to footfall (currently down by 40%)

As we emerge from the pandemic it is now even more important that our town centres make best use of their assets such as The Picture House to drive their recovery and preserve their identity.

2. Strength and unity of community support

The CLT bid is supported by the community of Chorlton, from school teachers to business owners, from young parents to older people; from community groups to the local school and the nearby health care centre: people here are eager to invest their own money in a better future for the place we live.

Over 1000 local residents have pledged their own savings to support this proposal and raise an astonishing amount - more than £400k in pledged investments so far.

3. Retaining a distinctive historical asset for future generations

The Picture House has a historic place in our community where it has stood since 1920. Discussions with the Co-op, the CLT and Manchester City Council has confirmed the site as a heritage asset. It is an historic site with many local associated memories; not least that it was the venue where the Bee Gees, as young boys, performed their first live gig.

With your creative flexibility, we can save a local space and restore this building to be a vibrant hub at the heart of our community.

4. Climate crisis mitigation

We urge the Co-op to take account of the huge carbon footprint of demolishing the building and building flats - not just the embedded carbon in the old building, but that contained in the materials needed for the new ones.

The proposal retains the building and has a much reduced CO2 impact - and furthermore includes plans for renewable energy generation and promotes sustainable transport.

5. Maintaining Chorlton's status as a centre of co-operation

The Co-op has three well-used and well-valued supermarkets in Chorlton - and two other currently vacant properties all within a square mile - and in three prime retail locations.

The Co-op as a brand has a prominent place in Chorlton retail life. The Barlow Moor Road store has been continuously trading as a co-operative store for nearly 100 years. Other co-operatives include the famous Unicorn grocery and more recently the Chorlton Bike Deliveries co-operative that grew out of a community response to the pandemic.

Our recent participatory online discussions, Re-Imagining Our Chorlton, have included a desire to see the growth of co-operatives in Chorlton and the Picture House proposal would help us achieve this goal.

We urge the Co-op to recognise the strength of local feeling and the opportunity to work with the community in retaining a valued asset and in breathing new life into the heart of our community.

Signed

LIST SIGNATORIES TO BE ADDED FROM GOOGLE FORM