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## Deadlock in talks over sale of shop



John Foster: 'What Scotmid are looking for is still too great'

NEGOTIATIONS on the sale of a village shop have reached deadlock.

There are just 18 days left before Hallbankgate's only shop is due to close and a sale has yet to be agreed.

At this crucial stage the group campaigning to buy the Co-operative do not have the funds to purchase it outright and have turned down a five-year lease deal, offered by owners Scotmid.

Although Hallbankgate Hub Community Benefit Society has been offered a reduced price it was still much higher than it could afford.

The society wants to buy and run the shop as a hub facility, continuing with its current post office and library services. It is due to close on June 1 if no deal is made and five jobs will be lost.

Chairman John Foster said negotiations were "at an impasse".

He said the shop, which was being sold as a going concern, had been independently valued at £46,000 but a survey had revealed that £30,000-worth of repair work needed to be done.

"We have offered what the local community could raise, but the gap between this and what Scotmid are currently looking for is still too great," he said.

On the grounds that it would discourage investment by stakeholders and make their financial plan "unworkable", the lease was turned down.

Mr Foster said: "It would have locked us into five years of rent totalling more than we think the freehold is worth, with no asset at the end of it. So we are still fundraising hard towards purchase."

The society is calling for financial support to help them secure the future of the shop, near Brampton, which has existed since 1878.

Malcolm Brown, head of corporate communications at Scotmid, said he was "disappointed" confidential business details had been made public as they had entered exclusive negotiations.

He said the lease was "both affordable and attractive". After five years there would be the option to buy or walk away risk free.

"We have spent months trying to make this work. We wanted it to work. We have delayed the closure of the shop to give them time to make it work," Mr Brown added.

The lease offer still stands if the society wants to reconsider. Mr Brown stressed that the co-operative wanted to see a successful conclusion but at no cost to its wider membership.