

Dedham will get a better Co-op, but it will

Repairing the Dedham Co-op is expected to cost about £500,000, after the ram raid that smashed in the front of the building. Roger Grosvenor, joint chief executive of the East of England Co-operative Society said the work was unlikely to be completed before the end of May, largely because the Co-op is a listed historic building for which detailed approval is needed. But when the repairs are done, the store will be considerably improved.



The Co-op in a dangerous state soon after the Sunday night raid

The raid, at about 2.20 am on Sunday, 10 December, was launched in a stolen 4X4 Toyota Hilux. Although the burglars did extensive damage, some structural, they failed to remove the cash machine in the centre of the building. They fled in a dark estate vehicle.

Mr Grosvenor said the Dedham raid would be the most expensive of the eight recent attacks on Co-ops in the region, four of them ram raids. After the front of the Brightligsea Co-op was destroyed in August 2017, the repair bill was around £330,000. The most recent raid was in Great Cornard and there

was another cash machine ram raid in Lavenham in the early hours of 21 December.

After the Dedham raid, the police and Co-op security team responded quickly. It was soon evident that the building was unsafe and needed to be supported by scaffolding.

A mobile shop was set up on the Tuesday and the Co-op extended its delivery service to include Dedham.

Mr Grosvenor said: "This was quickly followed by a temporary store being located in the Duchy Barn on 19 December. The Barn was kindly made available by the Church with the co-operation of the standing committee of the Parochial Church Council and Sheila Beeton, chair of the Parish Council. The event brought together true support and collaboration and has resulted in stronger ties between the East of England Co-op and the village."

Events that were scheduled to take place in the Barn have been relocated, most to the Assembly Rooms. (See page 23.)

Sheila Beeton said that the parish council had tried to persuade Colchester Council to treat the work on the Co-op



Roger Grosvenor – stronger ties with Dedham

take time and the cost will be high



The morning after the abortive smash and grab the Co-op is propped up with scaffolding building as a simple repair and so reduce the time needed for planning approval. However, because the damage was so extensive it was decided that the lengthier process of full Listed Building Consent was needed.

Mr Grosvenor says the society will take the opportunity to upgrade the Dedham shop and to make it more relevant to local needs. He would also like to remove an old fireplace that had been concreted over in the centre of the shop, close to the cash machine.

Another important change will be to strengthen the frontage of the Co-op against future ram raids. Because it is a historic building in the centre of Dedham it cannot be protected by large unsightly bollards. Instead the front wall will be strengthened internally with steel

rods to resist impact.

The cost of the repairs is not the only loss suffered by the Co-op. Although Diane Roper, the Dedham manager, has tried hard to maintain a full service in the village, the temporary shop has only about half the capacity of the high street store. Its fridge and freezer volume is much smaller because of limited electricity supply. Mr Grosvenor says sales at the Duchy Barn are running at only about a third of the Co-op's previous level.

Has the Co-op chain been especially targeted by raiders? Mr Grosvenor thinks not. "With 125 food stores in the region many with cash machines, we just have a big presence in the high streets", he says.

Max Wilkinson