

Press release: CMA clears Co-op / Nisa merger

After closely examining all the evidence, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has found that the proposed merger does not give rise to competition concerns.

The Co-operative Group Ltd (Co-op), as a groceries retailer, and Nisa Retail Ltd (Nisa), as a groceries wholesaler, do not compete head-to-head. However, since Nisa supplies over 4,000 groceries stores, the CMA has carefully considered the potential impact of the merger on competition between shops.

During the course of its 'Phase 1' investigation, the CMA took into account that Nisa-supplied stores would still be free to set their own prices and decide which products to stock after the merger, and so the merged company would not be able to directly determine how they compete.

It also examined whether the merged company could raise prices or reduce service quality for retail or wholesale customers. It found that existing retail and wholesale competition made this unlikely.

This is because there are enough local alternatives to both Co-op and Nisa-supplied stores to ensure that people could still shop around to get the best value for them.

Furthermore, Nisa-supplied stores are able to choose between several different wholesalers and would be able to switch supplier if prices were to increase or the quality of service go down as a result of the merger with Co-op.

This all means that the merged company would be unlikely to be able to raise prices or offer a worse service to either stores or to shoppers.

Sheldon Mills, Senior Director of Mergers at the CMA, said:

Millions of people throughout the UK shop at convenience stores and supermarkets, and it is vital that they continue to have enough choice to get the best value for them.

After careful consideration, we've found that there is sufficient competition in both the wholesale and retail sectors to ensure that shoppers are not worse off.

The merger will therefore not be referred for an in-depth investigation.

Information relating to this investigation can be found on the [case page](#).

Press release: March 2018 Transaction Data

The transaction data shows HM Land Registry completed 1,688,244 applications in March compared with 1,632,969 in February and 1,796,056 last March, of which:

1. Transaction Data is published on the 15th working day of each month. The April Transaction Data will be published at 11am on Tuesday 22 May 2018 at [HM Land Registry Monthly Property Transaction Data](#).
2. The monthly Transaction Data showing how many applications for new titles, leases, splitting titles, updating existing titles, official copies of the register and search and hold queries (official searches) were received, reflects the volume of applications lodged by customers using an HM Land Registry account number on their application form.
3. We are challenging ourselves to reassess our language to make our terms understandable to both our commercial and citizen customers. This is in line with our commitment set out in the [Business Strategy 2017-2022](#) under the 'simplicity' element of our ambition.
4. Completed applications in England and Wales shown by region and by local authority include postal applications as well as those sent electronically.
5. Transaction Data excludes: pending applications, bankruptcy applications, bulk applications, discharge applications (to remove a charge, for example a mortgage, from the register).
6. Transactions for value are applications lodged involving a transfer of ownership for value. For an explanation of other terms used, see [abbreviations used in the transaction data](#).
7. Most search and hold queries (official searches) carried out by a solicitor or conveyancer are to protect the purchase and/or mortgage. For example, a search and hold query will give the buyer priority for an application to HM Land Registry to register the purchase of the property. This can give an indication of market activity.
8. Reasonable skill and care is used in the provision of the data. We strive to

ensure that the data is as accurate as possible but cannot guarantee that it is free from error. We cannot guarantee our data is fit for your intended purpose or use.

9. Transaction Data is available free of charge for use and re-use under the [Open Government Licence](#) (OGL). The licence allows public bodies to make their data available for re-use.
10. If you use or publish the Transaction Data, you must add the following attribution statement: *Contains HM Land Registry data © Crown copyright and database right 2017. This data is licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.*
11. HM Land Registry's mission is to guarantee and protect property rights in England and Wales.
12. HM Land Registry is a government department created in 1862. It operates as an executive agency and a trading fund and its running costs are covered by the fees paid by the users of its services. Its ambition is to become the world's leading land registry for speed, simplicity and an open approach to data.
13. HM Land Registry safeguards land and property ownership worth in excess of £4 trillion, including around £1 trillion of mortgages. The Land Register contains more than 25 million titles showing evidence of ownership for some 85% of the land mass of England and Wales.
14. For further information about HM Land Registry visit www.gov.uk/land-registry
15. Follow us on Twitter [@HMLandRegistry](#), our [blog](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#)

[Press release: Wolverhampton man fined £1,000 for burying illegal waste](#)

Wolverhampton Crown Court fined Ivor David John Powell (aged 65) £1,000 and ordered him to pay £4,000 in costs, along with a £100 victim surcharge, in addition to being ordered to clear the site within 3 years.

The charges were brought by the Environment Agency contrary to Regulations 12(1)(a) and 38(1)(a) Environmental Permitting (England and Wales)

Regulations 2010.

As part of routine inspections Environment Officers visited the site on 11 November 2015, and observed a tractor operating on the land that appeared to be levelling the ground. The officers also saw large heaps of shredded mixed waste and noticed the land had been landscaped to incorporate the waste material, which Mr Powell confirmed had been coming onto the site for 4 months.

Environment Agency officers visited the site again in March 2016 and found buried compressed waste that had been imported on to the site.

The court heard that Mr Powell had avoided paying charges to dispose of the 5,335 tonnes of waste. If the landowner had taken the waste to an appropriate waste site or landfill, approximately £533, 500 of charges would have been incurred.

Speaking after the case, an Environment Agency officer in charge of the investigation said:

Waste crime is a serious offence with tough penalties as it can damage the environment, blight communities and undermine those operating legally. This case sends out a clear message that we will not hesitate to take action against anyone that fails to comply.

In mitigation on behalf of his client, Mr Powell's solicitor stated that Mr Powell had been naïve and doesn't have any previous convictions and acknowledged he had avoided paying disposal costs in relation to the waste.

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[Press release: MPs to debate new legislation to bring long-term empty homes back into use](#)

Measures to equip councils with powers to bring thousands of long-term empty homes back into use will be debated in Parliament today (23 April 2018).

The new legislation will allow councils to charge double the rate of Council Tax on homes left empty for years. Local authorities can currently levy a 50% premium.

Whilst the number of homes empty for 6 months or longer remains substantially lower than when records began in 2004, councils will be handed powers to levy additional charges on homes standing empty for 2 years or more.

The move is one of a range of measures introduced by the government to fix the country's broken housing market, and councils will be able to use funds from the premium to keep Council Tax levels down for working families.

Through an ambitious package of long-term reform and targeted investment, the government is ensuring communities have the homes they need.

Local Government Minister, Rishi Sunak, said:

While we should celebrate the number of long-term empty homes dropping by a third since 2010, there are still 200,000 vacant properties across the country.

This bill hands councils further tools to bring much-needed homes back into use and provide thousands of families with a place to call home.

There are currently just over 200,000 long-term empty dwellings in England, compared to 300,000 in 2010.

The number has reduced since 2013, when councils were given powers to charge a 50% premium on Council Tax bills. The vast majority of councils currently apply this premium on long-term empty homes.

The [Rating \(Property in Common Occupation\) and Council Tax \(Empty Dwellings\) Bill](#) was introduced on 28 March 2018.

The number of homes empty for 6 months or longer remains substantially lower than when records began in 2004, when the figure was 318,642. As of October 2017, the number had fallen to 205,293. The lowest number recorded was in October 2016, when there were 200,145. Councils already have powers and incentives to tackle empty homes.

Through the New Homes Bonus scheme introduced in 2011, councils earn the same financial reward for bringing an empty home back into use as for building a new one. And since 2013, councils have been able to charge a 50% premium on the Council Tax bills of owners of homes empty for 2 years or more. 291 out of 326 councils applied an empty homes premium in 2017 to 2018.

The government has published guidance that makes clear that the premium should not be used to penalise owners of homes that are genuinely on the market for rent or sale.

There are exemptions in place for homes that are empty due to the occupant living in armed forces accommodation for job-related purposes, or to annexes being used as part of a main property.

Also, the Council Tax system provides statutory exemptions for properties left empty for a specific purpose – for example, when a person goes into care. Councils also have powers to apply discounts in cases where homes are empty due to special circumstances – for example, hardship, fire or flooding.

There is a Council Tax exemption for homes which are empty due to probate.