



Guardians of the Arches Limited
Railway Arch 628, Cottage Grove
London, SW9 9NJ

contact@guardiansofthearches.org.uk
www.guardiansofthearches.org.uk
Twitter: @ArchesGuardians
FB: Guardians of the Arches
Instagram: GuardiansoftheArches
#SaveOurArches

Mr Chris Grayling MP
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

Dear Mr Grayling,

There are thousands of small businesses based in railway arches all over the country. We are committed and energetic businesspeople – motorcycle mechanics, café owners, furniture restorers, garage owners, textile manufacturers, bakers and much else besides – who work hard to make a living and provide a service. We are the beating heart of the places where we're based, powering local economies and giving life and energy to local communities.

But our future is in grave danger. By August this year, our landlord Network Rail wants to sell off all of the 5,500 railway arches in its possession to the highest bidder. Network Rail have valued the arches at around £1bn, and already the sharks are circling. Some of the biggest names in property and financial speculation are lining up bids, from Goldman Sachs to Terra Firma. Somehow we do not believe these companies have our interests at heart.

We are already under huge pressure from Network Rail. Many of us have faced in-year rent rises of up to 350%, as our landowner seeks to increase the long-term 'value' of the arches. Some of us have already been forced to close as a result. Others have had to move out of places they've been doing business in for decades, with terrible consequences for their own businesses and for the places and communities they have had to leave behind.

This has to stop.

It's easy to forget this, but Network Rail is publicly owned. And the land it owns is public too. That means they have a responsibility to serve the public good. They say the Government is forcing them to balance the books, so they have to sell off their assets – including the arches. But how many small businesses will go under as a result? How many entrepreneurs will lose the will to carry on when they're facing unpayable rent demands? And how many of the communities who rely on these businesspeople will suffer as a result? Is that really serving the public good?

We are at the sharp end of this sell-off. We are the human cost of this approach. We are:

- A garage owner whose 92-year-old dad ran the business for 60 years but couldn't carry on when faced with a 350% rent rise
- A nationally renowned bakery concerned that the neighbourhood which sustains the business will collapse because nearby firms are being driven out one by one
- A motorcycle repair shop facing a 300% in-year rent increase after Network Rail took away their security of tenure
- And many, many more.

We have a simple request. Stop this sale of the railway arches. Stop the unnecessary destruction of local businesses and local economies all over the country. Instead, meet us and talk to us about how we can reach a settlement for the future.

We are business people – we are reasonable and we know how to reach a deal. So before you let this damaging sale go through, talk to us about how the arches should be owned and managed.

We are the Guardians of the Arches. We won't quit until the future of the railway arches – and the businesses and communities which rely on them – is secure.

