



Guardians of the Arches, 25th March 2020

Our collective statement on COVID-19 and the Arch Company is as follows:

"On Friday the Arch Company, our primary landlord, [announced a package of support to tenants affected by the Covid-19 crisis](#). This offer was nowhere near good enough. For many small businesses, the prospect of taking on three months of debt in the form of deferred rent is simply unacceptable.

We agreed to enter into talks with the Arch Co to try to win the security and peace of mind which our members so desperately need. Since then, in a series of meetings with the Arch Co, we have managed to secure some minimum commitments:

- Arch Co will increase their offer of rent deferral from 1 month to 3 months on a case by case basis
- Arch Co will defer all lease event negotiations, rent reviews and lease renewals for 6 months for all tenants.
- All leases which have recently or are imminently due to expire will be provided with a Tenancy at Will Agreement for 6 months.
- All tenants with existing rental debt will be considered for a deferral in debt payments and extension of repayment terms.

However, these fall far short of what is needed to protect tenants. Arch Co are still insisting that rental payments in the coming period will be deferred rather than cancelled. The feebleness of this offer will almost certainly put thousands of SMEs directly out of business. Already fragile light industrial and manufacturing sectors are being put at immediate risk, with many already in debt due to massive existing rental demands.

At the same time TFL and Network Rail, both landlords to SMEs in railway property, have offered a blanket 3 month rent cancellation. Why can't Arch Co or its parent companies dip into their enormous resources and match this offer? Why are they prioritising the security of their revenue stream and not the health and wellbeing of their tenants? Instead they are pushing the burden back to SMEs to make impossible choices between taking on massive debt or going out of business. Small firms are being forced to jump through unnecessary bureaucratic hoops, filling forms, taking on huge risk in bank loans, and pleading for help case by case without any transparency or certainty. The human impact is being ignored.

The Arch Co is the largest landlord for small businesses in the country. Even in the best of times, it should bear some social responsibility to support those businesses and the local economies which rely on them.

At a time of national crisis, when so many businesses around the country are facing immediate bankruptcy, it's the perfect chance for Arch Co to put its money where its mouth is and prove that it is a genuinely responsible landlord.

For nearly two years we have been told by the new landlord that they would put tenants first. We had fears, yes, but hopes as well. Now, when it really matters, they are putting themselves first and seem prepared to allow thousands of their tenants to go to the wall.

We won't be divided, our members are united and we will support each other and take action as a collective. We will be working tirelessly with our members throughout this crisis to support them in every way we can. We ask only that the Arch Co do the same.

And we urge any Arch Co tenant who is uncertain of their rights or what to do in this moment of national crisis to get in touch with us. Together, we can get through this."