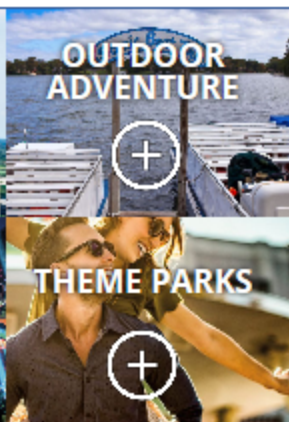




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Fears grow for thousands of pensioners as UK's second largest care home group Four Seasons refuses to pay millions in rent

- Four Seasons withheld payments from landlords to get them to slash its bills
- Parent company fell into administration last year under £625m of debt
- More than 320 of its UK care homes, with 16k residents, are privately rented

By LUCY WHITE CITY CORRESPONDENT FOR THE DAILY MAIL

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Fears are growing for the future of thousands of elderly care home residents after one of the country's top providers refused to pay millions of pounds in rent.

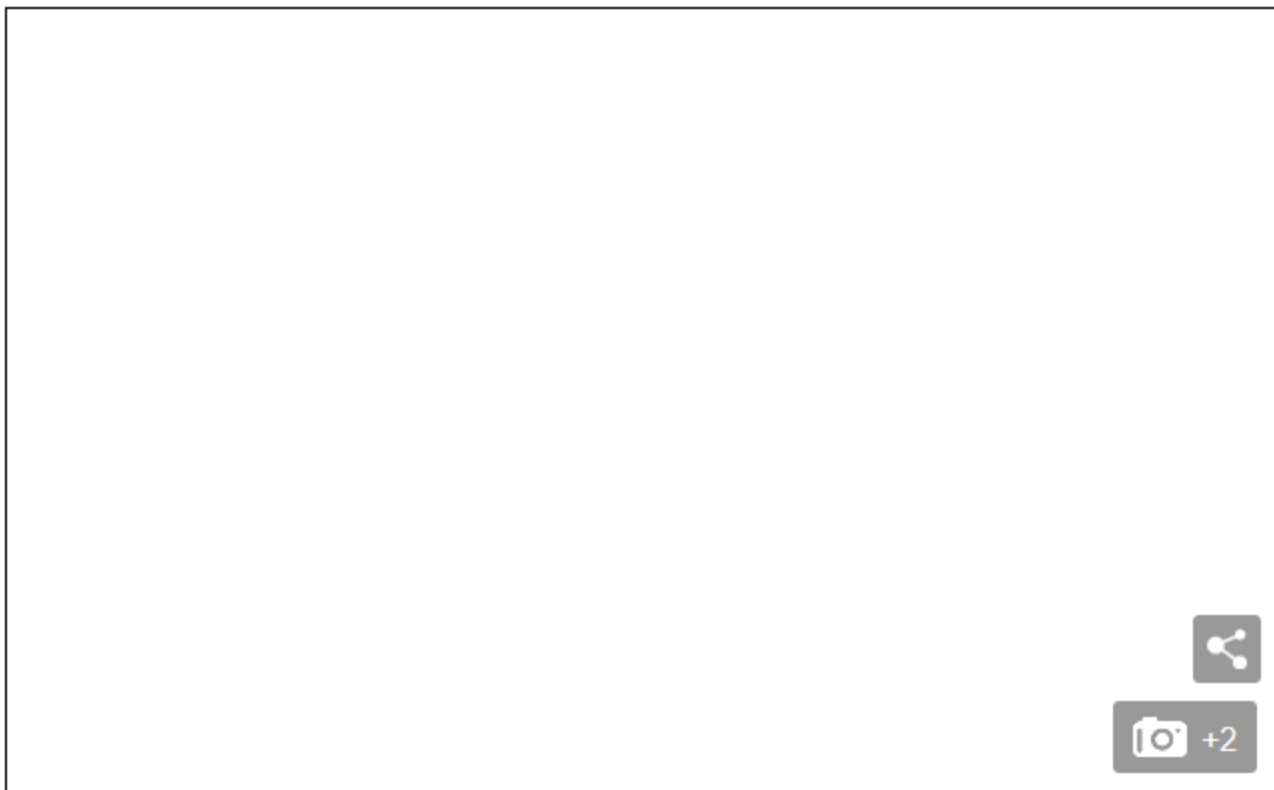
Four Seasons, which is the UK's second largest care home group, has withheld payments from private landlords as it attempts to persuade them to slash their bills,

which it claims are crippling the business.

Earlier this year Four Seasons' parent companies fell into administration under the weight of a £625million debt.

More than a third of its 320 care homes, which serve about 16,000 residents, are rented from landlords.

Under standard contractual terms, Four Seasons now has two weeks to pay the outstanding rent before the landlords can take legal action.



Four Seasons, which is the UK's second largest care home group, has withheld payments from private landlords as it attempts to persuade them to slash their bills, which it claims are crippling the business. File image used

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The company's board is hoping to come to an agreement with them which will shave rents down to more manageable levels.

Meanwhile, experts in the sector have urged the Government to do more to regulate

care homes.

Caroline Abrahams, of Age UK, said: 'We remain deeply concerned about the long-term sustainability of the care market. This is yet another example of why the system is broken and in need of urgent reform.'

Former work and pensions minister Baroness Ros Altmann added: 'It's really worrying. You've got games of financial pass-the-parcel being played with people's lives.'

A Four Seasons spokesman said last night: 'We are actively engaging with landlords and we are confident that we will reach an agreement that will put the group into a more sustainable financial position for the long term.'