# Unlicensed 420 Day gathering in Bristol's Castle Park sparks disruption and controversy



Bristol’s Castle Park became the centre of controversy over the weekend as a large unlicensed gathering took place on 20 April, coinciding with the internationally recognised “420 Day,” a date associated with the celebration of cannabis culture and protest against its prohibition. The event, which attracted thousands of people, triggered significant disruption in the city centre, particularly affecting local residents and businesses.

The gathering unfolded despite the city council’s earlier refusal to grant a sound system licence for the event, as reported by BristolLive. Residents described prolonged loud music, crowded conditions, and the pervasive smell of cannabis as key sources of disturbance. Photographs shared by local media depicted a litter-strewn park, left awaiting a clean-up after the conclusion of activities.

One long-term resident, Tom Corbett, who lives in the Horizon apartments immediately opposite Castle Park, spoke to BristolLive about his experience. Mr Corbett, a regular park visitor who often collects litter as he walks, expressed dismay over the event occurring on Easter Sunday, a religious holiday. He remarked, “Sunday (Easter Day) - a religious day - happened to coincide with 4/20 day, which I believe is about promoting cannabis and issues about legality.”

He detailed the scale of the event, noting the presence of multiple sound systems despite the earlier refusal of a licence. “I saw 10 to 15 stalls being set up, with six to eight speakers at each. The music started at around 10am and finished at 10.45pm - over 12 hours later. My flat was actually vibrating throughout,” he said. Mr Corbett also recounted interactions with attendees, some of whom were dismissive when questioned about the event. He described the atmosphere as resembling a rave, with many attendees appearing “high, wandering about in a daze.” Expressing concern over the scale and impact of the gathering, he said, “I don’t understand how this event was allowed to happen – cannabis is basically illegal, the sound systems I assume weren’t legal, and the event was far too big and disruptive on Easter Sunday of all days.” He suggested that such gatherings would be more suitable in rural areas, saying, “Why not have it in a field in Somerset? It won’t disturb thousands of residents for 12 hours.”

Avon and Somerset Police confirmed their attendance at the event, describing it as an unlicensed gathering with multiple sound systems. In a statement, the force said, “Thousands were there for the unofficial international ‘420 Day’, a public rejection of laws restricting cannabis use.” The police outlined their approach in the UK to such events as involving “engagement, explanation and education around drugs and drugs misuse; with appropriate interventions as and when necessary and proportionate.”

According to the police, officers received dozens of calls particularly complaining about the loud music impacting the wider community. They acted before the event by seizing a sound system from the park at 3am on Sunday. Despite the refusal of a licence and early seizure, the police noted that “powers to deal with the music during the daytime are limited,” but they ensured that the music was turned off by 11pm. The force also reported that police and ambulance crews attended “several incidents as the day wore on, including medical emergencies and assaults, and there were a handful of arrests.”

The disruption caused by the gathering has raised questions among residents about the management of public spaces during unauthorised events and the balance between freedom of expression and community impact. The scene at Castle Park after the event demonstrated the extent of disruption, with cleanup operations required to restore the public space. The experience has drawn attention to the challenges faced by city authorities and emergency services in handling large public gatherings that operate outside formal licensing frameworks.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/police-powerless-shut-down-all-day-party-castle-park/> - This article corroborates the occurrence of the unlicensed gathering in Castle Park on 20 April for the 420 Day, describing the large crowd, the presence of multiple sound systems, the smell of cannabis, and the police response including the seizure of a sound system at 3am and the eventual shutting down of music by 11pm.
* <https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/licensed-soundsystem-application-4-20-castle-park-rejected/> - This source supports the claim that the city council refused to grant a sound system licence for the 420 Day event in Castle Park and details the concerns about public nuisance and management of numbers at the event.
* <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/cannabis-420-day-bristol-police-8420560> - An article from Bristol Post confirms Avon and Somerset Police's attendance at the unlicensed event and their statement on engagement, education, and proportionate intervention related to cannabis law and the event disturbances.
* <https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/420-day-castle-park-disruption-residents-concerns/> - This article includes residents’ accounts, reflecting the disruption caused by the music and drug use, and features eyewitness reports from people living near Castle Park, supporting the description of residents' dismay and their perspectives on the event's impact.
* <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2025-04-21/thousands-attend-420-day-unlicensed-party-at-castle-park-bristol> - This ITV news coverage confirms the scale of the event, the challenges faced by emergency services due to medical emergencies and assaults during the gathering, and the subsequent cleanup efforts required in Castle Park.