# Tensions rise in Bristol as vehicle dwellers increase amid housing crisis



Tensions in Bristol have escalated between local residents and individuals living in vehicles, particularly near the popular green space of Clifton Down. A notable recent incident involved a local man named Danny, who interrupted a BBC interview to publicly express his frustration with neighbourhood campaigners calling for action against caravan dwellers. During the exchange, which was filmed and circulated online, Danny challenged the residents, asking, "What's it got to do with you?" before asserting that their actions bordered on "hate crime."

Danny, who has reportedly lived in a converted horsebox by the Downs for several years, stressed that the presence of vehicle dwellers in the area isn't a sudden issue but rather a reflection of the housing crisis affecting many in the city. "It's not like we've just sprung up overnight," he told the BBC, adding that the situation would not improve until the underlying housing problem is addressed.

The surge in vehicle dwellers in Bristol has been striking, with official figures indicating a 400 per cent increase in the last five years. Currently, around 680 caravans and camper vans are seen pitched on residential roads; however, some local residents believe the actual number could be almost double this estimate. A growing local group named Protect The Downs has emerged, comprising residents concerned about the impacts of vehicle encampments, including issues of littering and supposed anti-social behaviour.

One local man expressed his frustration to the BBC, stating, "Some of the van dwellers – I'm not saying all – empty their cess into the drains, into people's gardens." Another resident, while expressing sympathy for the homeless, identified a disconnect between those facing housing insecurity and the actions of some living in vehicles.

The situation has been under scrutiny by Bristol City Council, which has attempted to mitigate local concerns through the installation of street planters intended to deter encampments. Nonetheless, many vehicles remain parked around the city, prompting discussions about establishing a permanent site for residents living in vehicles. The Council has stated that legal action will only be considered in cases deemed to have a "high impact" on the community, citing issues such as anti-social behaviour and improper waste disposal. Since 2018, only six injunctions against encampments have been issued.

Recent developments have also raised safety concerns; a two-berth caravan parked on Saville Road caught fire in February, allegedly due to a faulty gas cylinder. Local residents attributed the fire to negligence, while others in the vehicle community suggested that it could have been an act of arson, highlighting ongoing fears about safety and security.

The rising tensions in Bristol mirror broader societal concerns exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Rental prices in Bristol have soared to an average of £1,756 per month, making it one of the most expensive cities for renters outside of London. As a consequence, many individuals are resorting to living in vehicles as a means of coping with financial difficulties.

Bristol City Council has also commissioned a Health Needs Analysis, which revealed that individuals living in vehicles often face serious health risks due to inadequate living conditions. Respiratory illnesses, such as asthma, were highlighted as common health issues linked to living in cold and damp environments.

As the situation develops, both residents and vehicle dwellers face escalating challenges, with local officials considering options to address the needs of both groups while attempting to foster a peaceful coexistence in the city's green spaces.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68512498> - This article reports that the number of vehicle dwellers in Bristol has quadrupled since 2020, increasing from 100-150 to 600-650 by 2024, highlighting the surge in vehicle dwellers in the city.
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68597681> - This report states that Bristol has the highest number of people living in vehicles across all council areas in Britain, with an estimated 800 people living in 600-650 vehicles, corroborating the claim about the significant increase in vehicle dwellers in Bristol.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2025-03-11/the-increase-of-van-dwellers-in-bristol-and-what-the-council-is-proposing> - This article discusses the rise in van dwellers in Bristol, noting that their numbers have quadrupled over the past five years to over 600, and details the council's considerations for managing this increase, including the installation of street planters to deter encampments.
4. <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-04-26/new-parking-charges-considered-to-drive-away-van-dwellers> - This piece covers the council's consideration of implementing new parking charges on the Downs to deter van dwellers, addressing safety concerns and the impact on local residents, which aligns with the council's efforts to mitigate local concerns through environmental design.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/20/i-feel-helpless-van-dwellers-stuck-in-tight-spot-on-bristols-historic-downs> - This article highlights the challenges faced by van dwellers on the Downs, including tensions with local residents and council actions, providing context to the situation described in the original article.
6. <https://www.bristolworld.com/news/traffic-and-travel/bristol-van-dwellers-complaints-planters-4856940> - This report details the council's response to increasing complaints about van dwellers by installing large planters near parks to prevent parking congestion, reflecting the council's efforts to address local concerns.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14679505/Moment-furious-Bristol-van-dweller-clashed-locals-BBC.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data