# Tensions rise in Clifton as van dwelling community near the Downs grows rapidly



In the leafy suburb of Clifton, Bristol, tensions have escalated between local residents and van dwellers amid complaints about the presence of more than 100 caravans near the historic Downs, a popular green space in the city. This situation has been noticeable over the past few months, with residents reporting issues ranging from littering and human waste to other forms of anti-social behaviour, sparking a heated public discourse.

Danny, a 55-year-old man who resides in a converted horsebox, has become a vocal figure in this discourse. He confronted local residents who voiced their discontent, suggesting that their complaints are unjustified. “I’m standing up for my rights,” he proclaimed, challenging accusations that he and others like him should not be on the Downs. His remarks exemplify the growing frustration among van dwellers who feel unwelcome in the area.

Residents have formed groups, such as "Protect the Downs," calling for the removal of the caravans, which they argue are affecting their quality of life. Tony Nelson, a former RAF serviceman and admin of the group, refuted claims of elitism, stating that while some van dwellers conduct themselves responsibly, there are ongoing issues such as an increase in drug use and allegations of prostitution tied to the community. He expressed concern over the changing nature of the Downs, which had been renowned for its beauty but is now viewed by some as a “sink.”

The demographic of those living in vans seems to be varied. While some individuals cite homelessness as a driving factor, others may simply choose this lifestyle. Anne Bragg, who has lived near the Downs for six years, articulated a common sentiment amongst residents, stating, “I have a great deal of sympathy for people who are homeless... but there are a lot of people up here who are not – they’re just living here because they can.” This discrepancy in perception highlights the complexities of the situation.

Local authorities are grappling with a significant rise in the number of caravans in the city. Estimates suggest around 680 vans and caravans are currently used as homes, a substantial increase from about 150 before the pandemic. Ian Bowen, who coordinates Bristol City Council's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service, has highlighted the challenges of accommodating this growing population, citing financial constraints and limited space for potential solutions. The council's proposal includes dedicated sites for van dwellers, but there remains a lack of available resources to implement these ideas effectively.

While the community of van dwellers is seen by some as a significant issue, there are calls among the residents to create a more humane approach to the crisis. Bowen emphasised the need for outreach services and proper support for individuals living in precarious conditions, suggesting that the aim should not merely be to move people along but to provide them with viable living alternatives.

Amid the ongoing disputes, there remains a divide within the van dwelling community itself. Some individuals assert their right to stay and resist any attempts to relocate them, reflecting the deep-seated complexities of this contemporary issue. The situation at the Downs underscores broader societal challenges concerning housing, affordability, and the evolving nature of urban communities in Bristol.

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

## References

* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68512498> - This article reports that the number of van dwellers in Bristol has increased from 100-150 in 2020 to 600-650 in 2024, corroborating the claim of a significant rise in van dwellers in the city.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68597681> - This report states that Bristol has the highest number of vehicle dwellers in the UK, with an estimated 800 people living in 600-650 vehicles, supporting the assertion of a substantial increase in van dwellers in the city.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68512498> - The article mentions that residents near the Downs in Clifton have called for 'tougher enforcement action' due to issues with van dwellers, aligning with the claim of escalating tensions between residents and van dwellers.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68512498> - The report includes a statement from a van dweller named Luke, who lives in a truck on the Downs and believes there is a 'stigma' around his lifestyle, supporting the claim of van dwellers feeling unwelcome in the area.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68512498> - The article discusses the council's proposal to provide more permanent sites for van dwellers, indicating efforts to address the housing crisis and support individuals living in vehicles.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68512498> - The report highlights the council's approach to balance the needs of residents and van dwellers, emphasizing the importance of outreach services and support for individuals in precarious living situations.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cddevj0jj16o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data