# Tensions rise in Bristol as vehicle dweller numbers quadruple amid housing crisis



Tensions have escalated in Bristol over the growing presence of vehicle dwellers, particularly near Clifton Down, a popular park in the area. A recent incident involved a heated confrontation during a live BBC report, where a van dweller named Danny interrupted local residents expressing concerns about people camping in the vicinity. In a moment captured on camera, he questioned the residents' motivations, asking, "What's it got to do with you?" before asserting that their criticism was unjust. Danny, who lives in a converted horsebox, described the sentiments shared by some residents as "bordering on hate crime," reflecting a deep frustration over what he perceives as unfounded hostility.

The situation stems from a significant increase in the number of people living in vehicles across Bristol, reported to have grown by 400 per cent over the past five years. Local estimates suggest that up to 1,360 caravans and camper vans may be occupying residential streets, double the official count of 680. This surge is linked to various socio-economic factors, including rising rent prices and a housing crisis that has impacted many residents in the city, now rated as the most expensive place to rent outside London.

In response to rising complaints, a group called Protect The Downs has emerged, voicing concern about the living conditions and behaviour of some vehicle dwellers. One resident commented during the BBC report that they had observed some individuals improperly disposing of waste, saying, "Some of the van dwellers - I'm not saying all - empty their cess into the drains, into people's gardens." This have not only compounded local frustrations but also posed public health concerns.

Bristol City Council, which has received over 1,500 complaints relating to these encampments, installed large planters along one of the affected roads last November, aiming to deter vehicle dwellers from setting up camp. Despite this, many motor homes and vans continue to occupy the streets. The council is now contemplating the establishment of a permanent site designated specifically for vehicle dwellers, provided they do not engage in antisocial behaviour.

Further aggravating concerns, a caravan fire in February 2023 raised alarms about safety in the area. Locals speculated that a faulty gas cylinder was responsible for the fire, while one member of the caravan community claimed it was an act of arson, stating, "I'm not afraid to use it on anyone lurking late at night."

Bristol's vehicle community intersects with similar dynamics seen across England's South Coast, especially near prominent locations like Glastonbury. Reports indicate that summer residents often travel across the country for music festivals, living "under the radar" and contributing to the transient nature of the homeless and vehicle-dwelling population.

Amid increasing scrutiny, Bristol City Council’s approach remains cautious. Currently, legal action against vehicle dwellers has only been pursued in cases deemed to have a significant negative impact, although council officials acknowledge the need for more supportive measures. Recommendations have been made for creating "meanwhile" spaces, facilities with running water and additional services, to assist those residing in vehicles with their transition to permanent homes.

Additionally, a Health Needs Analysis undertaken by the council’s Public Health Department pinpointed significant health risks faced by the vehicle-dwelling population, particularly concerning respiratory issues linked to inadequate living conditions. Many in this community struggle to access health services due to a lack of stable postal addresses, underscoring the complexities of their circumstances.

Overall, as Bristol grapples with housing shortages and rising living costs, the situation involving vehicle dwellers remains a contentious issue, reflecting broader socio-economic challenges faced by the city.

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

## References

* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68512498> - This BBC News article reports that the number of van dwellers in Bristol has quadrupled since 2020, increasing from 100-150 to 600-650 in 2024, highlighting the significant rise in vehicle dwellers in the area.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-68597681> - According to this BBC News report, Bristol now 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, underscoring the scale of the issue.
* <https://www.bristolworld.com/news/traffic-and-travel/bristol-van-dwellers-complaints-planters-4856940> - This article discusses Bristol's response to increasing complaints about van dwellers by installing large planters near parks to prevent parking congestion, illustrating the city's efforts to address local concerns.
* <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2025-02-14/caravan-deliberately-set-ablaze-as-council-tackles-rising-number-of-van-dwellers> - ITV News reports on a caravan fire in February 2025, thought to have been started deliberately, coinciding with council discussions on the rising number of van dwellers, highlighting safety concerns in the area.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jul/20/i-feel-helpless-van-dwellers-stuck-in-tight-spot-on-bristols-historic-downs> - This Guardian article provides insights into the challenges faced by van dwellers on Bristol's Downs, including tensions with residents and the need for more permanent housing solutions.
* <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2025-03-11/the-increase-of-van-dwellers-in-bristol-and-what-the-council-is-proposing> - ITV News discusses the increase in van dwellers in Bristol and the council's proposals, including the creation of permanent sites and service facilities, reflecting the city's approach to managing the situation.
* <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