# Tensions rise in Bristol as van dwelling community expands around the Downs



In Bristol, tensions are simmering between local residents and a growing community of van dwellers, especially around the historic green space known as the Downs. This confrontation reached a peak recently, as Danny, a 55-year-old man living in a converted horsebox, found himself at odds with local residents who have expressed increasing frustration over the presence of more than 100 caravans parked in the area.

The conflict has centred on complaints from some homeowners about issues such as litter, human waste, and reported anti-social behaviour. "You shouldn't be on the Downs," a local resident was heard saying, while Danny defiantly responded, "What's it got to do with you?" This exchange reflects a broader cultural clash amid rising house prices and rents in Bristol, pushing some individuals into van living as an alternative housing solution.

The "Protect the Downs" group, a local initiative on social media, has been established to advocate for the removal of these van dwellers. Danny claims these online discussions have escalated to what he characterises as bordering on hate crime. In response, Tony Nelson, a former RAF serviceman and leader of the group, defended the motivations of his community. He acknowledged that while "the few responsible van dwellers are fine," there have been concerning incidents which have fueled local anxieties, including allegations of drug use and even human trafficking.

The situation has not only affected daily life for residents but has also instilled fear among those living near the caravans. Anne Bragg, a resident for six years, expressed her concerns over safety and fairness, 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." Her remarks highlight a common sentiment among residents who feel burdened by the lack of council tax contributions from the van dwellers, despite the challenges that some individuals face.

The overall context of van living in Bristol has reached significant numbers, with estimates indicating around 680 Vans or caravans being used as homes in the city—up from around 150 before the pandemic. This sharp increase has caused strain on existing public services. Bristol City Council is reportedly considering solutions, which include dedicated sites for van dwellers, service areas for waste and water, and outreach services. However, Bromley admits that available resources fall short, and the current temporary sites have not met growing demands.

Ian Bowen, who coordinates Bristol's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Service, remarked on the complexities involved in addressing the situation. "We don't want to just move people from one place to the next. We need to provide people with a different opportunity," he stated, emphasising that these individuals deserve to be treated as citizens with rights.

Despite these tensions, voices within the van dwelling community are also divided on whether to transition to more permanent sites, with some expressing a desire to remain where they are. "They will never get rid of us," one resident declared, underscoring the challenge local authorities face in managing the situation.

Ultimately, the unfolding events in Bristol illustrate a complex intersection of economic hardship, community dynamics, and the need for cohesive solutions that address the needs of both residents and those living in caravans.

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

## Bibliography

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2. <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-04-26/new-parking-charges-considered-to-drive-away-van-dwellers> - This report covers the consideration of new parking charges on the Downs in Bristol as a strategy to deter van dwellers, addressing safety concerns and the need for alternative accommodation options.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-65388959> - This article details the proposal of new parking charges on the Downs in Bristol to discourage van dwellers, citing safety concerns and the need for maintenance funding.
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7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cddevj0jj16o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data