# Local defends vehicle dwellers amid surge in Bristol encampments and rising community tensions



Amid rising tensions surrounding the increasing number of people living in vehicles near Clifton Down in Bristol, a confrontation unfolded this week as a local man, identified as Danny, interrupted a BBC news report to voice his frustrations. The incident occurred while a group of concerned residents was being filmed, urging the authorities to take action against the encampments.

Danny, who lives in a converted horsebox, questioned the residents, asking, “What's it got to do with you?” in a display of defiance against the negative perceptions held by some locals. He expressed that their campaign against vehicle dwellers bordered on a "hate crime," asserting, “The stuff they’re posting is absolutely ludicrous.” He defended his right to live in the area, stating, “It’s not like we’ve just sprung up overnight,” and emphasised the need to address broader housing issues in the city.

The BBC reported that growing complaints about caravans and camping vehicles have been documented, with over 680 units allegedly occupying residential roads—a figure that residents claim may be twice as high. This increase is attributed to a notable 400 per cent rise in the number of vehicle dwellers in Bristol over the past five years, a trend exacerbated by rising rent prices and the economic fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Local residents have formed a group named Protect The Downs, seeking to voice their concerns and advocate for action. One local remarked, “Some of the van dwellers—I'm not saying all—empty their cess into the drains, into people's gardens,” highlighting the frustrations related to hygiene and waste management. Another resident expressed sympathy for the homeless, yet noted, “There are a lot of people up here who are not” in need.

In a notable incident earlier this year, a fire broke out in a caravan parked on Saville Road, believed to have been caused by a faulty gas cylinder. This raised fears within the caravan community, as one occupant stated, “I’m not afraid to use it on anyone lurking late at night,” referring to the growing concerns about safety among residents.

Bristol City Council has taken steps in response to these issues, such as installing large planters along affected roads to deter encampments. In November, the council received over 1,500 complaints concerning vehicle encampments, with prevalent issues including littering and perceived anti-social behaviour. Despite the escalating tensions, the council has stated that legal action will only be considered in instances deemed to have a "high impact" on the community.

The local authority is also considering the establishment of a permanent site for vehicle dwellers, following discussions on the need for “meanwhile” spaces that would offer facilities like access to running water. This consideration arises as Bristol grapples with a burgeoning vehicle-dwelling population amidst one of the UK’s most expensive rental markets, where average rents have soared to approximately £1,756 per month.

Moreover, a Public Health Department analysis highlighted health concerns among vehicle dwellers, noting that cold and damp living conditions have been linked to respiratory issues such as asthma. The lack of a permanent postal address also poses obstacles for important health notifications like cancer screenings.

As discussions continue between residents, local authorities, and the community of vehicle dwellers, the situation remains complex, reflecting deep-rooted challenges surrounding housing, social equity, and community relations in Bristol.

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

## Bibliography

* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68597681> - This BBC News article reports that Bristol has the highest number of vehicle dwellers in the UK, with an estimated 800 people living in 600 to 650 vehicles, a significant increase from 100-150 before the pandemic.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-68512498> - According to this BBC News report, the number of van dwellers in Bristol has quadrupled since 2020, rising from 100-150 to 600-650 in 2024.
* <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.
* <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2025-03-11/the-increase-of-van-dwellers-in-bristol-and-what-the-council-is-proposing> - ITV News reports on the rising number of van dwellers in Bristol, with numbers quadrupling over the past five years to over 600, and the council's proposals to manage this increase.
* <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2025-02-14/caravan-deliberately-set-ablaze-as-council-tackles-rising-number-of-van-dwellers> - This ITV News article reports on a caravan on Saville Road being destroyed by a fire thought to have been started deliberately, highlighting safety concerns among the van dwelling community.
* <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2023-04-26/new-parking-charges-considered-to-drive-away-van-dwellers> - ITV News discusses the consideration of new parking charges on the Downs in Bristol as a plan to deter van dwellers from living on the roads throughout the parkland.
* <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