

Community Pact for Vehicle Dwellers and Bristol City Council

Standards and values of living in a vehicle in Bristol.

Opportunities for Vehicle Dwellers

Bristol City Council (BCC) aims to be a fair and equitable place to live. We want to ensure that all our residents can live as a safe, harmonious, and hardworking community of one Bristol. We want all residents together to feel an ownership and a pride in their city be they homeowners, tenants, vehicle dwellers or boaters; regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion or sex.

The aim of this document is to provide a community pact so that we may have a common understanding, to foster ongoing good relations and to jointly agreed values and principles to living together in what is officially the Best City in Britain [[Sunday Times, 2017](#)].

It is created in good faith with the intension of fulfilling due diligence to the public sector equality duty - striving to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

It is intended to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

This document has come about through our continued aim to provide different site options for vehicle dwellers. When the first Covid lockdown came in March/April 2020, BCC set up 2 sites specifically for Bristol vehicle dwellers that allowed a place to park up with a safe distance between pitches that could not be guaranteed on the roadside. Over 90 people have moved through the sites since they started, and we have identified a much larger group of people living in vehicles than we previously estimated. We also found that there is considerable demand to live on some form of official site and as a result, we set up our first “meanwhile site” in Knowle West.

Within this document, you will find information relevant to both meanwhile site and roadside dwellers and hope that it can help to set a benchmark for Bristol as a lead in vehicle dwellers and Local Authorities working together.

Meanwhile Sites

Meanwhile sites are pieces of land, owned by BCC that are currently unused, but earmarked for future development into either housing or commercial use. It was suggested that, where suitable, some of these sites – ones that won't be built on for some time – could be used for vehicle dwellers in the meanwhile, hence the name. The first site in Knowle West quickly filled and we have a large waiting list already for any future meanwhile provision.

Meanwhile sites come with minimal services attached to them, but ones that were identified as necessary as a result of a community consultation in collaboration with Bristol Vehicles for Change. These are: Water, sewage and grey water disposal, rubbish collection and that is all. The biggest advantage that meanwhile sites offer is the security of knowing that your pitch is safe and you will not be asked to move on while the site is open.

City of Sanctuary

A 'City of Sanctuary' is a place where a broad range of local people, organisations, community groups, schools and faith communities, as well as local government, are publicly committed to welcoming and including people fleeing violence and persecution.

Valuing our Residents

Bristol has a relatively large vehicle dweller population when compared to other cities with similar demographics to ours and we recognise that the vehicle dwelling community is diverse and is made up of ethnic Gypsy, Roma and Travelling people as well as cultural travellers, migrant workers, show people, circus people, professionals, retired individuals and a host of others. Bristol is clear that all residents, regardless of where or how they live are important to our city's inclusive community.

We know that, in the past, some parts of Bristol have felt that vehicle dwelling has presented challenges to some communities, at BCC we aim to work together to recognise that vehicle dwellers can bring a richness and diversity to our municipal environment and are a part of making Bristol what it is.

Safety, Security and Action Against Hate Crime

Bristol City Council do not tolerate any crime or antisocial behaviour targeted towards any resident of, or visitor to, our city. BCC will ensure that the safety and security of vehicle dwellers remains as high a priority among various statutory services as any other sector of the city.

Through our partnership with other agencies, the GRT Service Coordinator can arrange advocacy for Travellers and vehicle dwellers affected by crime, if required, to ensure that their case is handled fairly and appropriately. Living in a vehicle may provide a greater degree of vulnerability, but it does not mean that access to services are any less than for any other householder.

It is the expectation of Bristol City Council that vehicle dwellers will park legally, safely and not carry out any anti-social behaviour that may lead to community tensions.

Communication

The City Council commits to keep talking with vehicle dwellers, through the range of different representative groups (as outlined in the section below on "Vehicle Dweller Representation"), on all aspects of policy, procedure, new and potential sites which may affect them. In addition, there is a commitment to maintain our close working relationship with all vehicle dweller groups to ensure an easy mutual flow of information to further develop trust and rapport between groups and the City Council.

Dealing with complaints

Should any incident of crime against a vehicle dweller occur, the complaint should in the first instance be reported to Avon and Somerset Police.

BCC will ensure that there is an equity of response to any complaints either made about or received from vehicle dwellers. BCC will ensure that all sides of any dispute are equally heard and respected.

Expectations of Bristol City Council and the Bristol community.

Please note that within the sections below, a difference is drawn between encampments on the highway and those on sites. "Sites" are defined as:

- Permanent sites: There are currently no permanent vehicle dweller sites in Bristol
- Temporary sites: There are currently two temporary sites in use – A site set up for Covid-19 safe distancing and tolerated unauthorised site
- Meanwhile sites: There is currently one meanwhile site in use

Vehicles

All vehicles, whether self-propelled or towed, should be safe, roadworthy and legal. This applies to all vehicles on the highway or on sites.

Parking on the highway

All vehicles parked on the public highway should be road legal and in the case of vehicles designed to be self-propelled be taxed, insured and have a valid MOT. All vehicles must be fitted with suitable reflectors in line with the Highway Code.

Vehicles should be parked on the road compliant with all traffic and road markings including maximum waiting limits, areas of permit parking, etc.

No part of any vehicle or vehicle dwellers encampment should be touching, overhanging or in any way encroaching on the pavement or kerb; this includes such items as awnings, planters, furnishings, storage, etc. Vehicle dwellers should be mindful of pedestrians when opening doors onto the pavement and should ensure that doors remain closed or tied back so as not to cause any obstruction.

Vehicle must be parked at least 5 metres in every direction from any road junction and dwellers should ensure that their vehicle does not cause any obstruction or blind spot for road users. Vehicles must not be parked in a way that restricts the width of any road in such a way as could impede the passing of an emergency vehicle.

Vehicles parked on the roadside should not be parked in any way that obstructs driveways, gateways or vehicular or pedestrian access to any property. This includes allowing a practical turning space for vehicles to enter a property and does not present any restriction in visibility that may affect the safety of other road users.

Wherever possible, vehicles should be parked with the flow of traffic and with their main access doors egress onto the pavement and not into an open road.

Health and Hygiene

The below sections apply to all vehicles whether on the highway or on sites.

All human waste should be disposed of correctly and in accordance with public health guidelines. Storm drains and gutters must not be used for the disposal of faeces, urine, grey water or anything other than pure water. Chemical, compost or any other type of toilet must be emptied appropriately at locations designed to accept them. Public urination and defecation are completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Vehicle dwellers must maintain an awareness of local rules about burning different fuel types within their vehicles and should have an awareness of the impact of smoke and other pollutants on neighbouring properties.

No open fires, fire pits, chimineas, barbecues or similar that produce an open flame, heat source or smoke are permitted either on the public highway or on City Council operated sites.

Behaviours

All highway and site vehicle dwellers to abide by the same standards of acceptable behaviour as are expected of any home dweller across the city. Further information on BCC Antisocial Behaviour policies can be found [here](#). Some of the specific BCC provision for vehicle dwellers (such as permanent, temporary and meanwhile sites) will have additional rules specific to location. All residents will be asked to sign up to these before joining any site.

Effects on neighbours and neighbourhoods

All vehicle dwellers whether parked on the highway or sites must always remain respectful to their neighbours, neighbourhoods, properties that overlook them and properties over whom they may overlook. Any nuisance behaviour will be addressed in the same manner as would happen with any other member of the Bristol community.

Enforcement

The city council has a policy and procedure for managing vehicle dwelling encampment on the highway. The council recognises that people live in vehicles for a range of reasons and the policy provides a measure of tolerance where the impact of vehicle dwelling is not high. Where an encampment is, however, considered to be having a high impact, enforcement action may be taken. Information on enforcement policy can be found [here](#).

Vehicle Dweller Representation

Organisations working with Bristol City Council who represent vehicle dwellers in the city (listed alphabetically)

BCC GRT Team

The GRT Team have a large number of vehicle dwellers with whom we have frequent regular contact and who belong to none of the other groups within this list. They provide a good cross section of vehicle dwellers and are well connected within the community. As a “group” they can be relied on to feedback honest and unbiased opinions for the GRT Team.

More information about Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in Bristol can be found [here](#).

To contact the GRT Team, email gypsy.travellers@bristol.gov.uk



Bristol Vehicles for Change

[Bristol Vehicles for Change](#) is a registered non-profit CIC and community group run by and for people living in vehicles. They exist to protect and advance the rights of vehicle dwellers in the Bristol area to live freely and creatively, while connecting with wider communities to encourage acceptance and understanding of each other. They aim to bring about practical solutions through building positive relationships between communities, local authorities and other stakeholders.

Contact Bristol Vehicles for Change at: hello@vehiclesforchange.co.uk or on 07395 327112



GR8T+ Bristol (Gypsy, Roma, Traveller plus anyone from an ethnic and cultural Traveller background) – formerly the Bristol GRT Voices Group.

To influence positive change and challenge negative perceptions relating to the GR8T+ community.

To provide an independent voice for the GR8T+ community - ran by the GR8T+ community, for the GR8T+ community.

To represent the needs of the GR8T+ community in various forums and events.

To empower and voice the opinions of the GR8T+ community to authorities and other relevant bodies.

To identify, promote and develop the skills, expertise within the GR8T+ community.

Golden Key

[Golden Key](#) is a partnership between statutory services, commissioners, the voluntary sector and people with lived experience across Bristol. They work together to improve services for Bristol citizens with the most complex needs.

Contact Golden Key at info@goldenkeybristol.org.uk or on +44 (0)117 909 6630



Kingswear Road site group

A non-organised group centred around the 11 households currently living at Kingswear Road.

[Parrys Lane Supporters Club](#)

To continue to maintain and improve the area known as Parrys Lane for the benefit of the Van dwellers and conventional residents in the local area; to encourage the goodwill and

involvement of the wider community; to work alongside Bristol City Council to find amicable solutions to issues related to van dwelling in the local area and Bristol area.

Contact the supporters club at davidturton@plsc.uk or on 07597 966816



SARI – Stand Against Racism and Inequality

The GRT Team commission a worker from [SARI](http://sari.org.uk) to work part time with the team, employed to tackle hate crime within the wider GRT community. The worker has a large number of contacts across different ethnic and cultural travellers, probably the largest database of contacts of any group.

Contact SARI at sari@sariweb.org.uk or on 0117 942 0060



Unnamed group

A loosely based, self-organised group without constitution made up of 15 to 20 vehicle dwelling households currently living on the same encampment, but still providing a strong representative voice for their community.

Appendix 1 – Case studies of why people live in vehicles

Below, please find some statements provided by vehicle dwellers explaining why they live in vehicles.

Laura (children's support worker) and partner Paul (factory worker):

So, there are a few reasons why I have been a van dweller for the last 4 years. The main reason being MONEY. I've lived in Bristol my entire life as has my partner Paul, neither of us enjoy living in shared houses and for most single people living in Bristol, a shared house is the only option. Personally, for my sanity, I need a lot of my own space and time. Working 50-70 hours a week to pay for a shared house that you spend very little time in due to working so much was making me unwell. I found it unsustainable for my mental and physical well-being. I was unable to do the things that made me happy due to being so over worked and exhausted from 14 hour shifts. Something had to change. There seemed no way out of the cycle, saving money is almost impossible on minimum wage and paying Bristol rent prices was a joke. 10 years ago, I was able to rent my own little one bed flat in Redland, that changed within 4 years of living there and I could no longer afford the cost of living alone.

Finally, I made the decision to learn to drive and borrowed money to buy my first van. I have never looked back.

Yes, I do miss living in a house, having running water, a washing machine and endless electricity is a wonderful thing. But nothing is more wonderful than having your own space and being able to save your money for your family's future and to know that what we want

for our lives is now looking more achievable. One day we hope to save enough to get on the property ladder. We would never be able to do this living in a rented house in Bristol.

Rachael, who has lived as a New Age traveller since the late 1980's:

Once they have you all in one place, you don't know what they will do. They could be forcing you into high-rise blocks before you know it. Better to stay out and stay free.

Jed (a young New Age Traveller in his mid to late 20s):

I was born in a horse drawn wagon and have lived in vehicles throughout my life.

Pat (Dental Nurse):

Most people living in vans are working professionals like myself. Being an NHS key worker, I want to be part of a safe community. I was embarrassed at first about moving out of a house and into my van [in March 2020]. I was worried about what others would think and what work would think. But I've done a complete 360 on everything – everyone knows, and my boss has been amazing. I've now decided to live in the van for longer, to save for a mortgage.

Pierre:

I was working 65 hours a week as a lorry driver. Living in the van means I now work 45 hours. It's lifted the financial pressure of having to find £1,000 a month for rent. I felt like I could breathe, like I was in control and could plan a nicer life with a brighter future.