

Van-Dwelling Residents in Glastonbury Push Back Against ‘Medieval Prejudice’ Amid Housing Dispute

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— Categories: Human Rights



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Long-standing tensions in Glastonbury, Somerset, have intensified as members of the town’s van-dwelling community raise concerns over alleged discrimination, lack of safe accommodation, and perceived inaction by local authorities. At a recent town council

meeting, residents living in vehicles accused councillors of fostering anti-traveller sentiment and failing to meet legal obligations under British equality and housing laws.

During the July session, DeeJay McCloud, a prominent advocate for vehicle dwellers, criticised statements made by a Glastonbury councillor on national television, claiming they violated both the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998. McCloud argued that such remarks, suggesting caravan dwellers are unwelcome, undermine the rights of people with Romani and Gypsy heritage, groups specifically protected under UK law. “This is about more than housing – it’s about basic rights,” he told the council, warning that repeated evictions contribute to a cycle of displacement and growing hostility.

Glastonbury currently faces one of the highest concentrations of roadside residents in the United Kingdom, with an estimated 300 people living in unauthorised encampments or parked vehicles, according to a Somerset Council report. This population includes individuals and families who, due to rising housing costs and limited social housing, have resorted to van-living as a means of shelter. Some residents reported facing threats and harassment following enforcement actions, with McCloud describing the local environment as increasingly unsafe.

A proposed solution has been included in the Glastonbury Town Deal, which outlines plans for a regulated site with permanent pitches for vehicle dwellers. However, implementation has been sluggish. An earlier planning application was withdrawn in early 2024 due to concerns over flooding. While a new site was acquired later that year, the development must now be completed by March 2026 to remain within funding timelines.

McCloud emphasised that roadside residents are not seeking handouts. “We would gladly pay for services if they were provided,” he said, noting that many are relying on legal provisions established during the 1970s housing crisis to self-accommodate. He acknowledged recent improvements in relations with Somerset Council and local law enforcement, but sharply criticised Glastonbury Town Council for what he described as “medieval prejudice” and a failure to comply with its planning responsibilities. He pointed specifically to Article 8 of the Human Rights Act, which protects the right to respect for one’s home and private life, asserting that this right extends to caravans and trailers used as primary residences.

McCloud also cited the Housing and Planning Act 2016, which places a duty on local authorities to assess and plan for the accommodation needs of travellers and mobile home

dwellers. According to him, that responsibility has yet to be fulfilled by the council.

In response, Councillor Steve Henderson acknowledged the complexity of the issue and the need for practical, long-term solutions. He suggested that Glastonbury may benefit from consulting with Bristol City Council, which is currently reviewing its traveller policy. “Deejay comes and talks to us nearly every month,” Henderson stated. “It’s something we’ve been dealing with forever – it’s not going away. Maybe there’s mileage in working with Bristol to see what can be done.”

As the deadline for delivering a permanent site approaches, pressure continues to mount on local leaders to reconcile legal obligations with practical solutions that respect both public order and the rights of those living on the roadside.