

(Appendix A)

Briefing note

Van Dwellers: Overview

January 2026

Key Information:

- Historically, van dwellers chose this life for cultural reasons and were often referred to as New Travellers. More recently, numbers have increased due to the unaffordability and lack of housing.
- Being a 'van dweller' can be a positive choice for some but more negative or born from necessity for others
- Living in a van is legal. 'Vans' that are mobile, like camper or converted vans must be roadworthy, MOT'd, taxed and insured. Caravans don't, which is why they are increasingly popular.
- Access to clean water, toilets, and waste disposal can be a challenge.
- In many areas, van-dwelling individuals and communities face resistance from residents due to concerns about parking, sanitation, and noise.
- Accurate data on the number of van dwellers there are in Cornwall is not available and will be difficult to obtain. Some data is available for those applying for support with their housing.
- A motion was made to Council in 2022, at which time the significant financial implications of providing sites for van dwellers was discussed but no actions implemented. Work has progressed in related fields such as Gypsies & Travellers, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping and unauthorised encampments.
- Should further work be sought, funding will need to be provided.
- Lessons can be learned from other authority areas with similar experiences.

Introduction

Van-dwelling, also known as 'van life', identifies individuals as living in a car, van, or other motor vehicle, either full-time or part-time. Vanlifers or van dwellers often choose this lifestyle for its freedom, mobility, and potentially lower living costs, especially in areas with high housing costs.

Van dwelling as a lifestyle choice has been around for many years with some crossover into New Travellers. Vehicle dwellers differ from Gypsy Roma Travellers, as they are not officially recognised as a specific ethnic minority group.

Van dwelling became more popular around 2018 following a lot of social media interest in the lifestyle as #vanlifers and then gained considerable momentum in the first Covid

pandemic lockdown in 2020. People chose vehicle dwelling as a safer way of socially distancing on their own terms than was available through shared housing, close-knit bedsits, and built-up areas.

Since 2020 the numbers of van dwellers has grown exponentially and is often no longer seen as a lifestyle choice, but more as a consequence of unaffordable housing costs and homelessness. Whilst some people are 'stepping up' into van dwelling from street homelessness and living in shelters, others are 'stepping down' from bricks and mortar accommodation as a result of rising housing costs, high rents and the lack of availability of affordable homes.

There are a number of reasons why people may choose a van life, including:

- **Freedom and Mobility:** the ability to travel and explore at their own pace. Many people are unable to cope with mainstream housing options. In Bristol, incidents of people experiencing mental ill health appears to be proportionately higher among people living in vehicles than in the non-vehicle dwelling population and may be a factor that further compounds some individual's ability to cope with mainstream housing options. Festival workers and festival travellers may choose an urban location to settle in their vans out of festival season.
- **Cost Savings:** living in a van can be a lot more affordable than traditional housing.
- **Ability to Work:** can work remotely, enabling travelling and living in a van while continuing to earn a living. In Bristol, travelling workers represent a relatively large proportion of people who live in vehicles as the best means of accessing work, estimated at 10 to 20%.
- **Ability to be Self-Sufficient:** Van dwellers often develop skills in water collection, food storage, and waste disposal.
- **Minimalism:** many want to embrace a minimalist lifestyle. There are now three generations of people who have lived in this way and been born into the lifestyle, establishing their own identity and cultural heritage.

Being a 'van dweller' can be a positive choice for some but more negative or born from necessity for others.

Legislation and Regulation

Van life, or living in a campervan or converted van, is a legal lifestyle choice in the UK. However, this 'van' must be fully road-legal, including being taxed, insured (including any modifications), and have a valid MOT.

Caravans, however, don't need to be taxed or insured and are increasingly being used by van dwellers instead of mobile vehicles. Ownership of a caravan can be difficult to prove; they are easily bought from anyone wanting to get rid of one or can be abandoned on the roadside and then used by anyone as a temporary home. They can often be used by a succession of people which can complicate any enforcement action as the occupation changes too often for the slower enforcement processes to serve notice on the right person.

Overnight parking and staying in a van can be restricted. Campsites offer the most secure and convenient option, with facilities like waste disposal, toilets, and sometimes laundry amenities. Some public car parks may allow overnight parking for vans. Wild camping is permitted in some areas but not all. With permission from the landowner, you can park on private land, but this may not be suitable for long-term stays.

Where vans or similar vehicles are stationed on land and the use amounts to a caravan site, the landowner may require a site licence from the local authority. It is a criminal offence to operate a caravan site without the appropriate licence. The licensing regime applies to both touring and residential caravan sites and is intended to regulate matters such as site management, amenities, site density, and health and safety. Touring site licences are based on short-term, transient occupation and generally prohibit use as a sole or main residence, while permanent or semi-permanent residential occupation is only permissible where the site is specifically authorised and licensed for that purpose. Consequently, long-term static occupation, even where overnight parking is otherwise permitted or landowner consent has been given, may result in an unlicensed caravan site and be subject to enforcement action. It should be noted that there are several statutory exemptions from the licensing regime set out in the legislation, and that a caravan site licence cannot be issued where the necessary planning permission is not in place.

You cannot legally live in a motorhome or any other movable structure on your own land without planning permission.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act 2010 requires UK public bodies, including local housing authorities, to proactively consider equality when making homelessness decisions, focusing on protected characteristics (like age, disability, race, sex) to eliminate discrimination, advance opportunity, and foster good relations, ensuring policies and decisions don't disadvantage vulnerable people and that appropriate support is offered, with officers needing to demonstrate this 'sharp focus' in their reasoning¹.

Practicalities & Risks

In terms of practicalities:

- Access to clean water, toilets, and waste disposal can be a challenge. If there is space, solar panels for electricity, a portable water filtration system, and a composting toilet can support off grid living.
- Living in a small, confined space can impact privacy if there is more than one person living in the van.
- Finding efficient storage solutions for personal belongings is crucial to maximise the amount of living space available.
- Regulations regarding overnight parking and vehicle maintenance can vary so it can be difficult to settle for any length of time, and it can be difficult to budget to cover these costs.

¹ [Shelter \(2023\) Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act 2010](#)

There are, however, a number of risks to living in a van, including:

- In many areas, van-dwelling individuals and communities face resistance from residents due to concerns about parking, sanitation, and noise. People living in vehicles have repeatedly reported² that they feel particularly vulnerable, most especially for those living kerbside. Reports of incidents of antisocial behaviour and hate speech directed at them are high and many report fears of being attacked. Women especially have stated that their living situation makes them feel at risk and exposed.
- In the past, most van dwellers used either production camper vans, or more commonly, home converted lorries, vans and minibuses as their living vehicle so that it could be easily moved and driven under its own power from one location to the next. Since the main Covid lockdown periods, a rapid change from driven vehicles to caravans has been noted with a huge range in the quality of caravans seen, with some being barely fit for habitation. With a rise in caravan use, so too has been noted a rise in vulnerability and exploitation of van dwellers. The caravans in use tend to be 1980's and 1990's models designed for family holiday use and not designed for British winters being poorly insulated. Caravans can be fitted with wood burning stoves which they are not designed to accommodate, leading to fire risk and dangers from carbon monoxide and smoke inhalation. They can be very damp and are often converted using unsuitable, 'found', materials that could contain toxins, be highly flammable and add additional weight that the caravan chassis is not built to take, causing the structure to be unsound and dangerous. They often lack sanitary equipment. They are vulnerable and can be destroyed by fire in minutes as they require no legal minimum level of care and maintenance. They also cannot be moved independently.
- While vanlifers often connect with other travellers, they may experience moments of loneliness and social isolation. This is exacerbated by those that are constantly on the move.
- Due to the nature of their type of home, a number, (perhaps the majority) of people living in vehicles are difficult to identify. They do not appear on the electoral register, are not listed against council tax records, may not have children and so are not listed with schools, or social care services and may not have any health records. Although some may have an address through which they can receive post, (such as a friend or family member) they are not able to receive direct post. This may place people living in vehicles at a disadvantage, as they may not be aware of health initiatives that are available to the rest of the population, such as bowel cancer screening, cervical cancer screening and vaccinations, etc. In addition to this, they may not be able to claim their full entitlement of benefits or have access to bank accounts.

Data

We are only able to estimate figures, due to the challenges of a physical count, which can lead to some variation in results. These challenges include:

- Not all vehicles remain stationary and so cannot always be consistently counted.
- Vehicles can often be used for work and may not be visible during the working day, only appearing later in the evening.

² [Bristol City Council \(2023\) Vehicle Dwellers: The Bristol Model: Report & Recommendations](#)

- Officers may not be aware of all vehicle locations.

Even if we were able to obtain better data, it is evident from work elsewhere that this would not mean that all occupants of 'mobile' accommodation would wish to live in standard housing or on an official site.

We do have some data from our Homechoice and Jigsaw systems which is useful as it is applicants³ registered with these two systems that are most likely to want to live in standard 'bricks & mortar' as they have applied for support with their housing. More data is available in Appendix 1 but in summary:

- 487 households in total described their accommodation as 'mobile'.
- The age of applicants ranged from 16 to 99 years of age.
- 9 out of 10 applicants require general needs housing and 1 out of 10 an adapted home.
- In terms of bed need, 4 out of 5 (88.9%) applicants required 1 bedroom.
- In terms of specific support needs, 2 out of 5 applicants (38.6%) have not stated any support needs. The remaining applicants have self-assessed themselves as having (and can choose more than one) mental health issues (64%), a health condition or illness (56%), a mobility or physical impairment (35%) with smaller proportions experiencing learning difficulties, impairments to hearing, speech or vision, or alcohol or drug dependencies.

TravellerSpace undertook a [survey of van dwellers](#) and received 55 responses, which are summarised below:

- 53% are men and 47% women.
- The youngest respondent is 21 and the oldest 74. 44% are over 50.
- A third want somewhere to meet others in the same situation.
- One in six want help with benefits and other information, and access to health services.
- The amount of time living roadside ranges from 2 weeks and 35 years. 10 of the respondents have been roadside for less than a year.

St Petroc's⁴ supported 74 people living in their vans or cars without amenities in 2024.

Previous Cornwall Council Considerations

A [motion](#) was put before Cornwall Council in November 2022 to support residents living in vans by providing them with sites. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12.3, the Chairman referred the motion to the Cabinet because of its significant financial; legal/constitutional implications; the need for further background information and/or detailed consideration and because subject matter is one which comes within the functions of the Cabinet.

In terms of:

³ Applicants current living situation ranges from car/van to mobile chalet

⁴ [St Petroc's \(2024\) More often than you think: hidden homelessness in Cornwall](#)

- Significant financial implications, the appendix to the motion notes that it would likely cost the Council, even when using its own land, at 2022 prices in the region of £85-90,000 for every pitch provided. To recoup these costs and factor in void periods, a rental of £35 per night plus utilities and service charges would need to be charged, which is likely too expensive for those living in vans out of necessity.
- Legal and constitutional implications are that any proposal would need to work within existing frameworks and governance processes. The identification and provision of sites will inevitably require significant consultation with neighbours, residents and communities, and lessons from other schemes are that to do this well requires considerable officer time.

It was stated at the time that if we were to progress the principle of providing pitches, we would need to undertake an initial piece of work that would mean the Council would be committing itself to the provision of sites which will have both a revenue and capital cost to the Council. For Officers to prioritise this work, either more resource will be required, or other housing projects will have to be paused or stopped. This work would include:

- Identifying the key parameters or specification for sites to enable selection criteria to be established.
- Identifying key areas of geographical focus (the tighter the geographical focus the more achievable a proposal might become).
- Undertaking an initial site sift.
- Agreeing a mechanism to prioritise between services/user groups if those sites have been already identified for other uses such as temporary accommodation, specialist or supported housing or gypsy and traveller requirements.
- Undertaking a planning assessment as part of the shortlisted sites.
- Resourcing an adequate consultation plan as potential sites started to become known in the public domain.

An alternative approach could be to consider existing sites which are open all year round. Landowners are already able to apply to the Council for permissions to use the land in this way – this is likely to require both planning and site licencing. Should new statutory planning policy be required revenue funding will be required to prepare and adopt this. It is likely that some sites could be brought forward under existing planning policy, however this is dependent on location and is likely to require considerable community engagement by the applicant. The Council offers a pre-application service and can provide support and advice to applicants and existing campsites who may want to extend their opening times. There will have to be safeguards against, and awareness of, the potential for misuse of any flexibility in planning policy by operators that could lead to exploitation of vulnerable groups. This all points to a significant level of resource required to provide proper management of any Council owned sites, or oversight of any private sites.

At [Council](#) on 25th July 2023, the Leader reminded Members of the Van Dwellers motion brought to a previous Council meeting, emphasising that housing continued to be an ongoing concern, including providing more temporary and affordable homes. She

concluded by informing Members that some additional work had been commissioned alongside the Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment (GTANA).

During the course of the fieldwork for the GTANA a total of 41 interviews were also completed with van dwellers, highlighted by TravellerSpace during the stakeholder interviews. They are aware of an increasing number of van dwellers on the side of the road, in laybys, and in industrial estates. These people are described as those who cannot afford accommodation and have had to resort to living in vehicles. It was felt that temporary stopping arrangements (i.e., transit site) were not a long-term solution to the accommodation problems faced by van dwellers and that negotiated stopping would be the preference over formal transit sites.

On the 24th July 2024, [Cabinet](#) approved the Council's first '[Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Strategy](#)', with the '[Preventing homelessness and rough sleeping strategy 2025-2030](#)' being approved at [Cabinet](#) on the 26th March 2025. Work is currently underway on developing an updated approach to unauthorised encampments.

Current Cornwall Council Activity to Support Some Van Dwellers

A visit is made to unauthorised encampments reported to be on Council Land by the Specialist Services Team (SST) of Cornwall Housing and/or the Unauthorised Encampment Coordinator (UEC)⁵ from the Safer Communities Team within the Council. This visit will seek to provide unauthorised occupiers of Cornwall Council land with a point of contact for advice, help and signposting for all related issues and to find out how long the encampment is likely to be there. Although primarily set up to support Gypsies and Travellers, Officers will visit all Council owned sites and will signpost and support any van dwellers and homeless individuals they come across through the appropriate channels. When trying to decide if an unauthorised encampment should be tolerated for a period of time or there are urgent concerns that require discussion, the Council will call the Unauthorised Encampment and Van Dwellers Board and any relevant stakeholders and/or service providers together for a discussion. Work is currently underway to clarify the process

Homechoice records details of those seeking support to access social housing and this will include households residing in vans and caravans – and will provide good data (see appendix 1) on how many people are registered for support and what kind of a home they are seeking.

A successful trial of allowing fully self-contained⁶ motorhomes to park overnight in Bude has been undertaken – and the ability to do this is now being considered for another ten car parks across Cornwall between the hours of 6pm and 9am at a charge of between £15 and £20 per night⁷ in the summer and between £10 and £17.40 (no charge at Seaton) per

⁵ Post currently vacant

⁶ A vehicle that can function without outside resources. Self-Contained motorhomes include a toilet and water container that holds greywater and septic waste.

⁷ For a maximum of two nights

night⁸ in the winter. These additional car parks are at Padstow, Watergate Bay, Trenwith St Ives, Wheal Leisure Perranporth, Fowey, Marazion, Gyllyngvase Coach Park Falmouth, Seaton Bridge, Cattle Market Launceston and Victoria Square Bodmin. However, it is unlikely that these measures will be attractive to many of the van dwellers we are concerned about due to the high cost and lack of facilities involved – and are aimed more at those on holiday as the cost is favourable when compared to holiday camp sites.

Learning from others

Locally, **Falmouth Town Council** has a dedicated Officer engaging with and supporting van dwellers in the town. Van dwellers started to appear in the town during the pandemic on a car park which quickly became an unauthorised ‘meanwhile’ site. The site grew as there was nowhere for van dwellers to move to, but once the car park was locked overnight van dwellers dispersed around Falmouth. The Falmouth Town Council Officer is known to regular van dwellers in the town and trusted and will support them as required. For example, one van dweller was hospitalised and when he returned to his van the Officer kept an eye on him and helped him liaise with a range of services.

Waste disposal is the main issue and generally only available on campsites, but the feeling is that most van dwellers are happy to pay for such a service. Only some van dwellers would be willing to pay for a meanwhile site, generally those that are struggling to afford traditional housing. The Officer is aware of students in this position and also that some van dwellers do live on local campsites. The Officer is also aware that dilapidated caravans and houseboats are ‘given’ to individuals with alcohol and drug dependencies as a way of getting rid of the caravan or boat no longer wanted. No liaison with other towns locally and only aware of one other town that may be doing something similar (Helston).

Takeaways:

- In most cases, a ‘meet and greet’ approach helps build mutual understanding and trust which can be helpful in terms of ensuring wellness checks can be undertaken and neighbourhood issues resolved.
- Friendly liaison with negotiation or persuasion to leave within a reasonable timeframe is the most cost-effective solution.
- Meanwhile sites would be well received by some van dwellers (could be a specific site for students).
- There may be opportunities for sharing experience and learning through Safer Towns.

[TravellerSpace](#) offer a safe space at their St Day centre for van dwellers 10-7pm every Tuesday, and currently around 10-12 people turn up every week. Most use the shower, washing machine and share a meal with everyone. Some bring their own food to cook, and keep to themselves, but many enjoy the informal atmosphere, have a cup of tea and a chat or participate in a group quiz or crossword. There's a strong element of peer support which has developed.

Takeaways:

⁸ For a maximum of two nights

- Almost all respondents struggled to find safe drinking water.
- A safe place to park was identified as an important consideration.
- Two thirds wanted access to showers and laundry facilities.

Regionally, **Bristol City Council** has long been an advocate for van dwellers, having an estimated 600-650 units across the city. Van dwellers are a developing community and the number of vehicle dwellers in Bristol has grown significantly in recent years, bringing new challenges.

Van dwellers tend to be located on Council operated meanwhile sites, the kerbside⁹, private sites¹⁰ and squatted encampments¹¹.

This positive policy response has not been without its challenges and the most recent policy approach approved (December 2025) will see the number of people living in vans across Bristol reduced. The new plans will come into effect from January 2026 but will not be fully implemented until April 2026.

Under the new policy, the Council will assess the impact of van dwellers in any given area and decide whether it is necessary to start enforcement immediately or begin a three-month period of support. Bristol City Council started taking steps to move one of the UK's biggest van dwelling communities on the Clifton Downs. It was recognised that the increase in people living in vehicles in this area created a range of social, public health, and environmental challenges for the city and people living this way.

During this time people would be offered help to help to find a home, or to move onto a 'meanwhile site'¹² - temporary sites where van dwellers can live with basic facilities. A new support team will be working their way around the city, offering advice and support to people living in vehicles. They will take time to listen, understand any health or welfare

⁹ Kerbside vehicle dwelling is often seen as the most vulnerable way to live. Whilst there are large numbers of individual kerbside dwellers who will, either stay in one place, or constantly move around the city, we also see small groups of two or three people who come together in clusters of friendship groups, most commonly in the more inner-city areas. These groups tend to stay fixed to one place. When a safe and undisturbed location is found, larger groups can form out of clusters who will gather in one area, although they will often be seen as different people in the same place as opposed to large whole communities. These 'collection of clusters' range in size from 10 to 30 vehicles depending on the space available at the kerbside.

¹⁰ There are a small number of private sites in the city where landowners have individual agreements to allow people living in vehicles to use their land.

¹¹ Bristol regularly has large, squatted sites, on both public and private land, accommodating a mix of New Travellers, Festival Travellers and other Vehicle Dwellers. Sites can have a range of six to a dozen vehicles on them. The largest site the city has seen, in 2023, claimed to have 100 occupants at Dovercourt Road depot. Squatted sites tend to contain likeminded groups of people who form into a set community, although one group may differ greatly in its ethos to another. Some groups are open and allow others to join, others are closed and resist outsiders, but all seem democratically run within themselves.

¹² A meanwhile site is an area of our land that is vacant and awaiting future development. Pitches on these sites are temporary and provide a safer alternative to living kerbside. These sites have limited facilities. Site provisions include: fresh water, chemical toilets and sewage waste disposal and waste bins but do not have electrical supply. Van dwellers must apply for a pitch on a meanwhile site and sign a site licence. Pitch fees are charged on a weekly basis to cover the cost of facilities and site management. Council tax will also be applied for pitches from 1 April 2026 (people may qualify for a discount or exemption).

needs, and work with individuals to create plans that make moving on from kerbside living easier and more achievable. Support could include:

- Access to health care.
- Advice on types of housing available.
- Help applying for benefits, or a meanwhile site pitch.

The council has started to create more pitches 'meanwhile sites' and has a target of having 250 pitches by April 2026. This new approach comes at a cost of £4.5m over the next five years.

Takeaways:

- There are both positive and negative impacts and outcomes in allowing van dweller communities to settle.
- Large sites result in a range of social, public health, and environmental challenges for neighbourhoods and communities and people living this way.
- Significant funding is required to establish a range of meanwhile sites.
- Funding is required to put in place Officer resource to support and work with van dwellers in terms of welfare checks, advice & guidance, signposting and assistance to move to a meanwhile site if that is the preferred outcome.

Research¹³ was commissioned by **Mendip District Council** in 2019-2020 on those living on the roadside to better understand why they were doing so and what support they would like to access, including housing. This took the form of focus groups, roadside interviews, interview from neighbouring homes and town centre interviews.

In terms of those interviewed on the roadside (could pick more than 1 option):

- 55 people indicated that living on the roadside was a 'lifestyle choice' and 54 due to 'unaffordable rent'.
- 52 for 'freedom' with 33 wanting to 'live outside the system' and 27 not wanting 'to pay rent'.
- 'Community' was important to 42 and 37 talked of 'friendship'.
- 24 had 'low income'. 19 individuals identified that they had 'no alternative option' whereas an equal number identified 'temporary or seasonal work' as the reason.
- In terms of support needs, 15 identified issues with 'mental health', 7 'substance misuse', 5 'debt', 4 'domestic abuse' and 2 'alcohol misuse'.
- 51 respondents felt safe and 28 didn't.

In terms of where individuals were living previously (could pick more than 1 option):

- 26 were on the roadside elsewhere, 6 on sites elsewhere, 4 on rented/private land and 3 in woodland.
- 16 were in a house, 11 in a flat, 3 in care, 2 in supported accommodation, 2 in a squat and 2 were sofa surfing.
- 8 were rough sleeping and 2 in a tent/car.

¹³ Smart Communities (2020) Mendip Roadside Living Report

In terms of work (could choose more than one option):

- 27 roadside respondents were self-employed, 10 were employed and 19 were employed on a seasonal or temporary basis.
- 23 respondents were unemployed.

In terms of support (could choose more than 1 option) top three's:

- 41 respondents currently accessed support through family and friends, 27 community support and 22 a local drop-in centre (only 1 respondent was getting support for housing).
- In terms of what support respondents would like to access, 55 would like access to water/utilities, 49 to washing facilities and 49 to waste disposal.
- The challenges respondents faced on a daily basis were waste disposal (47), water/utilities (46) and sewage disposal (32). (27 experienced discrimination, 19 had fears around crime or safety and 3 racism.)

When asked what kind of accommodation they would like (could choose more than one option):

- 36 respondents wanted sustainable living with owned or rented land to be self-sufficient.
- 31 a community land trust.
- 28 wanted to stay in their current situation.
- 25 a traveller site.
- 4 wanted private rental, 3 social housing and 3 supported housing.

In terms of whether they would pay for a site with facilities:

- 34 respondents said yes, 24 maybe and 20 no.
- In terms of those that responded with a sum they would be willing to pay for this, 11 would be prepared to pay £25 weekly, 6 £50 weekly and 6 £20 weekly.

In terms of residents (38) living near roadside dwellers:

- 22 were affected in terms of littering and dumping of rubbish, 13 worried for their personal safety and 11 had their dog walking affected.
- The majority felt the Council and the Police were not effectively addressing the issue.
- Although 14 respondents felt parking restrictions, 13 increased enforcement and 12 more police presence would be helpful – 12 also felt waste disposal would be helpful with 11 advocating for both washing facilities and toilet facilities.

Takeaways:

- A Lack of affordable housing is the reason for living in this way only applies to a proportion of van dwellers – for others it is a lifestyle choice – and therefore 'housing' interventions will only be welcomed by some.
- Many van dwellers work.
- Access to water/utilities, washing facilities and toilet facilities are the top three types of support that most van dwellers want. Neighbouring residents also wanted to see

better access to such facilities for van dwellers (but more wanted parking restrictions and increased enforcement).

- Only a few identified standard 'bricks & mortar' accommodation as their preferred choice of home – the majority wanted to continue to live a similar lifestyle but on a site that would meet their needs better (owned or rented land, community land trust, traveller site).
- Some would be willing to pay a nominal sum for a site with facilities.

Conclusion

The growth in van dwelling across Cornwall highlights a complex mix of lifestyle choice, economic pressures, and lack of affordable housing. While some individuals value the independence and community associated with vehicle living, a significant number are doing so out of necessity and face heightened risks relating to safety, health, sanitation and access to essential services.

Evidence from Cornwall and comparable authorities shows that supportive, well-resourced approaches grounded in good data, cross-service coordination, and meaningful engagement are essential if outcomes are to improve for both van dwellers and local communities. A clear understanding of the diversity within this population, and the pressures experienced by local neighbourhoods, remains essential to shaping effective and proportionate political decision-making.

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25 August 2026

Appendix 1 – Data Overview (as at January 2026)

Households:

- 487 households in total (accounting for 9 duplicates between systems) described their accommodation as 'mobile'. Those placed by the Council in 'mobile' emergency or temporary accommodation have been excluded from this analysis so that the data reflects the situation of those that need/been forced to choose to live in this type of accommodation (those that make the lifestyle choice to live in this type of accommodation are unlikely to be approaching the Council for support to live in 'bricks & mortar' homes).
- 459 applicants registered with Homechoice describing the type of property they lived in as car/van (172 applications, 37.5%), mobile chalet home (115 applications, 25.1%) or mobile touring caravan (172 applications, 37.5%).
- 37 applicants registered with Jigsaw describing their living circumstances as mobile home/caravan or caravan/houseboat (could answer both). 25 (67.6%) stated caravan/houseboat) and of the remaining mobile home/caravan occupants (12), 2 were with family/friends and 4 were privately renting.
- The full range of 'mobile' types of accommodation has been included as it was clear from the data that applicants described their accommodation in different ways. For example, when we looked at applicants on the New County Hall site in bunkabins they described this accommodation as car/van, mobile chalet homes and mobile touring caravans. This means the data should be treated with a degree of caution as there may be some applicants living in mobile type units that are in fact not mobile.
- Age of applicants ranged from 16 to 99 years of age. 27 applicants (5.5%) were aged 25 and under and 110 (22.6%) were aged 60 + (46 individuals were aged 70+, 15 individuals 80+ and 3 individuals were aged 90 or more).
- From information available¹⁴, 9 out of 10 require general needs housing and 1 out of 10 an adapted home.
- Where data¹⁵ is available there were:
 - 1 Band A applicant (Urgent Welfare).
 - 14 Band B applicants (9 Statutory Homeless, remainder Disrepair, High Welfare, Override).
 - 308 Band C applicants (291 Prevention of Homelessness, 14 Overcrowding, remainder Medium Welfare and Access to Support/Facilities).
 - 96 General Housing Need applicants
- Information is available on where some applicants are located (by full address or area) and listed below is the top 10 areas by number of applicants:
 - Camborne/Redruth
 - St Austell
 - Truro
 - Penzance

¹⁴ Information unavailable for 29 applicants

¹⁵ Information unavailable for 40 applicants

- Newquay
- Helston
- Bodmin
- Liskeard
- Launceston
- Falmouth/Penryn
- In terms of bed need, only the Homechoice data can be used on the data provided, and applicants require:
 - 1 bed – 362 (21 individuals in Jigsaw are single person households)
 - 2 bed – 74
 - 3 bed – 18
 - 4 bed - 5
- In terms of specific support needs, only the Homechoice data can be used on the information provided. 38.6% of applicants have not stated any support needs, other applicants have self-assessed themselves as having (and can choose more than one):
 - Mental Health Issues – 181
 - Health Condition or illness – 157
 - Mobility or Physical Impairment – 99
 - Learning Difficulties – 41
 - Hearing Impairment – 38
 - Visual Impairment - 16
 - Alcohol Dependency – 15
 - Speech Impairment – 9
 - Drug Dependency - 6