

Squatting Ethos and Motivation!

Squatting is legal because trespassing is not a crime in English and Welsh law. Trespassing is a civil issue, a dispute about who has the right to the land or property, to be settled between two individuals in a civil court. It has nothing to do with the criminal law.

Squatters also rely on section six of the Criminal Justice Act 1977, which makes it a criminal offence for anyone to break into a squat or any other home as long as someone is inside who is opposed to their entry. The police have no more power to enter a squat than any other home.

Squatters only occupy empty properties. If squatters ever attempted to move into a house which did, in fact, have an occupier, it would be a crime – not a civil matter – not to leave as soon as the occupier asked them to. The police would attend, and the squatter would risk arrest. This includes situations where the owner is on holiday, is away on business for several months at a stretch, or uses the building only as a second home. Occupied homes being squatted is almost exclusively a media fantasy: no squatter in their right mind would do it.

People are motivated to squat by a combination of simple need for space and shelter, and a desire to resist a system that allows property to lie empty while there is social need for it. The balance varies between people and from time to time.

Every squatter will have decided that living in a disused building that doesn't belong to them, with the insecurity, need for regular house moves and DIY work that entails, is the best option for them.

There are almost a million empty homes in the UK, according to the Empty Homes Agency.

Local authority powers to bring buildings back into use are very rarely used – since Empty Dwelling Management Orders came into use in 2006, they have only been applied to 17 buildings, according to the Empty Homes Agency.

At the same time, almost 2 million households are languishing on council waiting lists, and hundreds of thousands of people are among the “hidden homeless”, staying on friends floors and sofas, or in hostels or bed and breakfasts. And millions of people struggle to pay the rent or the mortgage on low wages.

Let us Introduce Ourselves!

Revived in 1984, Bristol Housing Action (BHAM) is a non-hierarchical collective of squatters and their supporters. We help provide housing and other support for homeless people.

We are committed to the opening of community spaces and to solidarity with existing social centres. We campaign against the privatisation of public land and housing and for the defence of public space.

As well as helping homeless people find a roof over their heads we also take part in 'social centre' type occupations which address the wider issue of the criminal sell-off of Council and Community space by Bristol City Council.

We meet every Monday 8pm

Please contact us for details

Phone: 07833100399

We operate a safe space policy at our meetings, this means we do not allow racist, sexist, homophobic or any type of discriminatory behaviour



Opening Doors For The Homeless Since 1984

housingaction@yahoo.co.uk

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Bristol, BS1 5BB

LEGAL WARNING

Section 6 Criminal Law Act 1977 As amended by Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

TAKE NOTICE

THAT we live in this property, it is our home and we intend to stay here.

THAT at all times there is at least one person in this property.

THAT any entry or attempt to enter into this property without our permission is a *criminal offence* as any one of us who is in physical possession is opposed to entry without our permission.

THAT if you attempt to enter by violence or by threatening violence *we will prosecute you*. You may receive a sentence of up to *six months imprisonment* and/or a *fine* of up to *£5,000*.

THAT if you want to get us out you will have to issue a claim in the County Court or in the High Court, or produce to us a written statement or certificate in terms of S.12A Criminal Law Act, 1977 (as inserted by Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994).

THAT it is an offence under S.12A (8) Criminal Law Act 1977 (as amended) to knowingly make a false statement to obtain a written statement for the purposes of S. 12A. A person guilty of such an offence may receive a sentence of up to *six months imprisonment* and/or a *fine* of up to *£5,000*.

Signed

The Occupiers

N.B. Signing this Legal warning is optional. It is equally valid whether or not it is signed.

The Present Political Squatting Scene

The Ministry of Justice intends to launch a consultation to “criminalise squatting” in England and Wales, squatting has a long history in the UK and is a common response to housing needs, especially in times of housing crisis.

At a time of government imposed cuts to frontline public services, cuts to charities, cuts to housing benefit, rising house, rent prices and rises in fuel and food prices and a corresponding rise in homelessness. The proposed criminalization will:

- Impact adversely upon some of the most vulnerable in our society
- Empower unscrupulous landlords and property speculators
- Burden the justice system, police force and the public purse

Paul Palmer, who has worked as an Empty Homes Practitioner for 20 years, and advised over 200 authorities, states that: *over the years I have visited over 1000 empty homes and spoken with 100's of owners...."I have been inside dozens of homes occupied by squatters...and they all had one thing in common, they had been improved...we are talking about long term abandoned buildings, vacant in some cases for ten years or more, in the heart of Mayfair, and the middle of sleepy old English towns. Buildings that are abandoned by their owners, where professional and ethical squatters have sought out an owner, and when one is not found, have taken up occupancy and stated to repair the building, is this to be classed a crime?" (Squatters Action for Secure Homes, A Parliamentary Briefing, May 2011)*

Whilst commercial property developers are continuing to evict squatters from buildings that have sometimes been left empty for 10 years or more in the Bristol area the rising tide of people being made homeless continues to increase.

Squatting is one of the solutions to the housing crisis



occupation: A DO-IT-YOURSELF GUIDE

Although squatting is hard work, by doing it many of us have learned a whole range of skills we probably wouldn't otherwise –everything from housing law to plumbing and fixing roofs – as well as finding a solution to our lack of decent, affordable housing.

Squatting demands self-reliance, recycling and the ability do useful things with little or no money. Squatters have to do this collectively and in collaboration with a wide range of other people. Many of us like these aspects of our lifestyles, and believe that these are important skills and approaches which, if more widely adopted, could help in the housing and economic crisis we currently face.

No one is saying all squatters are perfect, but neither are tenants or home owners. Anti-social owner-occupiers don't have to feel inhibited about irritating their neighbours as it won't affect their housing security. Squatters, on the other hand, have a greater incentive than anyone else to be nice to their neighbours, as a few complaints will soon get them evicted. The huge majority of squatters regard their temporary accommodation as “homes”, and treat them as such.

Neighbouring tenants or owner-occupiers often write letters and raise petitions against the eviction of squatters because they usually feel much safer living near an occupied house or flat than an empty and derelict one, which can make the whole neighbourhood seem blighted. Unfortunately, these petitions don't cut any ice in court cases to evict squatters, and are rarely acknowledged by the media. Horror stories are, after all, far more fun to write and read.