

# SQUASH

## Squatters' Action For Secure Homes

SQUASH Newsletter 2017

- 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017

It has **been five years now** since section 144 Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (s144 LASPOA 2012) became enforceable, which criminalises residential squatting in England and Wales. The new law continues to impact the vulnerably housed, making squatting more difficult and harder to remain in a property for long. SQUASH [research in 2016](#) found that there had been 738 arrests and 260 convictions for s144 offences between 2012 and 2015, and, despite no new study, we believe that the 'criminalisation' of the homeless using s144 is continuing. For example, the Ministry of Justice's statistics show that there were **59 convictions for an offence under s144 in 2016, with eight people imprisoned** for the 'crime' ('Evicting Squatters', Pg 18 – see below).



Fears that criminalising squatting in commercial properties may be next on the political agenda, have thankfully not materialised. Instead the UK government seems instead to be consolidating its position, with reports like The House of Commons Library's '[Evicting Squatters](#)' (2017) suggesting that the expansion of criminalisation is not a priority. Instead, the **LASPO Act is coming under criticism**, from organisations like [Amnesty International](#) (2016) and [The Law Society](#) (2017), for seriously curtailing 'access to justice' for the vulnerable, putting pressure on the court system and creating perverse situations. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) claimed that the Act would [save £350 million to the public purse](#) over five years, a major justification for the its introduction. To date, nothing has been produced to sustain this claim, even MoJ statistics on s144 convictions only becoming available in 2015.

Despite s144, squatters and activists continue to **use occupations** to highlight the massive inequalities in England and Wales, especially around housing, homelessness and wasted space. In September 2016, a group [squatted the ex-headquarters of Camelot](#), a property guardian company, renaming it **Camesquat**. The action was audacious, coming under intense pressure from the company, security and the police, but managed to hold out until December. During the cold winter of 2016/17, groups in **Oxford and London** squatted empty buildings to host temporary homeless shelters. In Oxford, the group squatted the [University's empties](#), while in London, [ANAL squatted the empty mansions](#) of Russian oligarchs. Both actions demonstrated how much empty space exists, surrounded by a growing street homeless crisis.





Squatting continues to be a point of **disinformation** for the mainstream media. During the **2017 UK National Election**, the right-wing press attempted to discredit the Labour Party leadership, Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, by claiming they had supported the ‘militant’ squatting group, SQUASH. By misquoting experts from the SQUASH website, the [Daily Mail](#), [Express and the Sun](#), claimed that we ‘issued a ‘how to’ guide advocating the occupation of family homes’. Similarly, in January 2017, the heavy-handed police response to a **squat benefit gig** in South London, was portrayed as a ‘riot’ by the [Evening Standard](#). Despite these negative assertions by the right-wing press, **positive commentary** by supporters continues to appear in the mainstream media, including the [Times](#), [Camden New Journal](#), [CityLab](#), and the [Guardian](#).

The **creative interventions of Our Media** are still alive and well, with a number of important publications coming out in the last 12 months. Perhaps the most important of these was the launch of the [14<sup>th</sup> Edition of the ‘Squatters Handbook’](#) in December 2016, the first updated version since s144 came into effect. The Handbook is a practical guide to squatting in England and Wales, and an essential companion for anyone considering squatting. **Squatters of London Action Paper (SLAP)** released the [Seventh Issue](#) of their DIY squat zine, homeless magazine **Nervemeter** did an issue on [‘Gentrification and Squatting’](#) in June 2016, and **Trespass Journal** published their [First Issue](#) in early 2017. Alexander Vasudevan’s [‘The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting’](#) was published by Verso Books in April 2017, prompting a [book review in the Guardian](#) and an interview on [BBC Radio Four](#). Finally, **Interference Archive** produced a podcast entitled [‘Squatting in London’](#) and **Dissident Island** conducted a [follow-up interview four years on](#) from the introduction of s144 LASPOA.

**Squatting survives** in England and Wales, but it is a shadow of its former self. Section 144 LASPOA is largely to blame, removing a large chunk of suitable accommodation, left to rot instead of being inhabited by those who need it. As the need for accommodation increases, so too does the pressure to ‘criminalise’ those who seek to independently occupy empty spaces. Instead of squatting, people are redirected into [exploitative property guardianships](#), or onto the streets. [New ideas, strategies and actions are needed](#), and soon...

## Sign SQUASH’s [‘Repeal section 144’ Petition](#)



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