



Squatters' Action For Secure Homes

SQUASH Newsletter - 1st September 2016

Four Years Since Residential Squatting Criminalised in England & Wales – Repeal section 144 LAPSOA!

Four years ago today, squatting in empty residential properties became a criminal offence in England and Wales, with the introduction of section 144 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012). Since then many young and homeless people have felt the effects of the new law, and squatting itself has become an ever more precarious housing option, with:

- Alex Haigh (21) becoming the first to be arrested and imprisoned for the new “crime” of squatting, and Daniel Gauntlett (35) the first known death caused by the new law. These [are just two known victims](#) of this unnecessary law;
- Over 700 people have been arrested, 300+ prosecuted, and at least 10 imprisoned for section 144, since it was introduced on 1st September 2012 [[Squatting Statistics 2015](#) (May 2016)]
- With the new law, there has been a lawless persecution of squatters, from private security firms undertaking illegal evictions, to a general misrepresentation of squatters as “criminals”.
- England & Wales have lost many important squats in the period, including land-squats, [Yorkley Court](#) & Runnymede, and social centres and venues (too many to mention).

While squatting has become tougher, all is not doom and gloom. There have been many successful squats and occupations, including residential buildings, and squatting continues in commercial properties, albeit on a much smaller scale and less visibly than before. Just a few months ago squatters [stopped the sale of a council house](#) in Avonmouth by squatting the residential building for six weeks, and in Loughborough Junction, [Mornington Crescent](#) and [Russell Square](#), squatters successfully resisted their evictions by High Court Bailiffs (no mean achievement). But the constant moving from one property to the next is wearing people thin.

The pressure on squatting, caused by the new law, means that many homeless people are no longer able to turn to 600,000+ empty houses in England & Wales for shelter. Instead, they have been forced onto the street, or into exploitative license agreements with property guardian companies. And even though section 144 is exacerbating the housing crisis, back-bench politicians from both major political parties have been calling for an extension of criminalisation to commercial buildings; in July this year, [Labour MP Dawn Butler](#) (Brent, London) asked the Secretary of State when he was planning on bringing forward such legislation.

Therefore Squatters Action for Secure Homes (SQUASH) is calling for a [repeal of section 144 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act \(2012\)](#), and an extension of rights for people squatting empty buildings, through frameworks like the [“Convention on the Use of Space”](#).

Squatters Action for Secure Homes (SQUASH) has been monitoring the situation since 2012, as well as trying to keep the issue in the public view. However, the current members will be taking a break, and we are looking for people who might want take up the mantle, especially if any new law, or extension, is proposed in Parliament. The SQUASH campaign has a number of useful tools for campaigning, including research, active email, facebook and twitter accounts, website and a small pot of money. If you are interested, email us at: [info\[at\]squashcampaign\[dot\]org](mailto:info@squashcampaign.org).

The SQUASH website has been **updated with some new resources**, from our vast store of material, including:

- [“Squatting Statistics 2015 \(May 2016\)”](#) – the latest figures on section 144 arrests, prosecutions and convictions, as well as the effect on street homelessness and house prices.
- [“Past Publications”](#) has been updated with more information about the 1990 SQUASH campaign, and a set of [70 squatting case studies](#).
- [“How Squatting in Residential Properties was Criminalised in England & Wales”](#) – a chronological account of the parliamentary process and media around section 144 since 2010.
- [“5 Reasons Why Squatting is Great”](#) – five key messages about why squatting should stay, with case studies
- [“Tips for Doing Media”](#) – tips for dealing with the Mainstream Media and using Social Media effectively for campaigning.

What You Can Do

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

Visit our webpage, [“10 Ways You Can Help”](#), for ideas

[Start Squatting](#), and/or support your local squats

Be Ready to Mobilise if new legislation is proposed – keep an eye out for announcements in the [squat media](#)



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