

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

LICENSING & APPEALS COMMITTEE

11 March 2010

Report of the Central Services Director

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 UPDATE ON AMENDMENTS TO HACKNEY CARRIAGE STANDS IN TONBRIDGE AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A KNOWLEDGE TEST FOR NEW APPLICANTS

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Members will recall giving approval to an increase in the number of taxi stands in the Tonbridge town area. In particular the increase in stand numbers centred around the Tonbridge rail station area and was in response to a high volume of complaints from residents in the Waterloo Road area and to complaints from the taxi trade of insufficient rank spaces in that area.
- 1.1.2 I can now report that the approved increase in spaces has been implemented and there has been a significant improvement particularly in the Waterloo Road area.
- 1.1.3 Complaints from residents in Old Wells Court have decreased dramatically and one resident has expressed his appreciation to the local police at the transformation and his improved life quality since the increase in rank capacity.
- 1.1.4 The double width of the Waterloo Road rank has also reduced the number of vehicles previously parked on the double yellow lines on the opposite side of the road to the rank.
- 1.1.5 Upon completion of the works Kent Highway Services (KHS) commissioned the Stage 3 (Post Implementation) Safety Audit to review the safety implementations of the scheme and highlight any required actions.
- 1.1.6 This audit makes four minor recommendations which KHS will implement within the next few weeks. They relate to some additional signage, the removal of some redundant markings and the removal of a short redundant steel post.
- 1.1.7 A shelter to accommodate waiting passengers will be ordered once approval for its installation has been agreed with Network Rail. This shelter will be paid for and installed by KHS, this Authority will be responsible for its maintenance. It is anticipated that consent from Network Rail will be received shortly.

- 1.1.8 One repeated area of concern at the Waterloo Road rank is the tendency of waiting drivers to alight from their vehicles and to socialise in the road. This leads to a reduction in road width with attendant problems for traffic passing in both directions. The taxi drivers appear oblivious to the danger created to other road users and to themselves.
- 1.1.9 Following the increase in size of the Waterloo rank drivers were advised that there would be an increase in enforcement activity. To date, with the assistance of our neighbouring partners, six enforcement operations have been carried out at Waterloo Road. Initially this low key enforcement centred around advice and education. We are now moving into the second phase of enforcement. This will involve the issuing of notices to drivers who transgress the Hackney Regulations and will be supported by parking attendants to issue penalty notices for breach of parking regulations.
- 1.1.10 The provision of a new taxi bay in Avebury Avenue has resulted in a small number of concerns being expressed by Blue Badge holders who felt that this bay impeded their ability to park near the library. The disabled bay provision in the vicinity of the library has not changed and the new taxi bay has been sited adjacent to the disabled bay. When the disabled bay is full, Blue Badge holders can legally park on the adjacent double yellow lines in the nearby resident's bays, the pay and display bays and the two car parks in River Lawn in accordance with the usual Blue Badge conditions.
- 1.1.11 The use of this bay continues to be monitored. It would appear that during the day it is not being used to its full extent. This can be attributed to taxi drivers preferring to rank in Waterloo Road and to the public not being aware that taxis are available at this location.
- 1.1.12 At night this rank, being close to the only night club in the town, provides the facility for patrons to be dispersed quickly away from the town centre without having to walk to the Waterloo Road rank. This has the effect of reducing the possibility of public nuisance and crime and disorder occurring in the town centre during late evening.
- 1.1.13 It is proposed to publish an article in the Here and Now newsletter to inform all residents of the new taxi bay facilities available. Taxi drivers will continue to be encouraged to make use of the new bays throughout the town centre rather than congregate at Waterloo Road.
- 1.1.14 The Taxi trade has in the past questioned the number of taxis licensed by this authority. Being a de-regulated area means that this Council places no upper limit on the number of taxis it can licence. This is in accordance with the Office of Fair Trading guidelines suggesting that regulation can be viewed as restrictive. Since December 2009, with the approval of this committee, new applicants have been advised of the introduction of a basic verbal geographical and knowledge test of the area prior to the grant of a Hackney Driver's badge. This verbal test also

enables the licensing officer to assess whether the applicant would be reasonably able to communicate with and to understand customers or may have difficulties because of, for instance, a poor understanding of English.

1.1.15 The result of the imposition of this test in order to obtain a licence has seen a large reduction in the number of applicants, particularly those living outside of the area, applying to be taxi drivers in this area.

1.1.16 A further report will be submitted in due course.

Background papers:

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Nil

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