

Taxi and Private Hire Newsletter – spring 2011

Important Updates and Information

1) Compliance and MOT Testing

From 1 April 2011 you will be able to take your vehicle for its 6 monthly MOT to any registered MOT testing centre located within the Borough of Tonbridge and Malling.

From 1 April 2011 you will be able to take your vehicle for its six monthly compliance testing to any of the garages on the enclosed list.

The frequency of both tests remains the same, every six months, but what has changed is the number of garages the tests can be carried out. Please continue to arrange testing with the garages direct; you will still be issued with a “pink slip” following your compliance test.

As we have increased the number of garages able to carry out compliance testing, compliance testing will now only be carried out by the Borough Councils Licensing Officers in extreme cases and will require 48 hours prior notice.

2) Annual Fees for Taxi and Private Hire

The Licensing and Appeals Committee at its March meeting took the decision to “hold” the current annual fees for taxi and private hire. The Borough Council have not increased the annual fees **you pay** to the Council since 2008. A full in depth review of all annual fees will be carried out later this year, but for 2011 they remain unchanged, no increase.

3) New Driver Application Packs

From 1 April 2011, all new driver applicants will be required to pay a £20 fee to receive an application pack. This fee will be refunded when a completed application is submitted. Only those application packs issued by the Council will be accepted - No photocopies or duplicates.

We are finding that we are sending out an increasing number of application packs, and only receiving a small number of completed applications back. As you will appreciate there is a cost in producing the application packs, printing, officer time and P&P. It is hoped that by introducing a £20 charge for a pack, this will cut down on the number of packs requested.

4) Tonbridge Station Taxi Rank

Works to the Rank

We are asked regularly about the agreed works to the rank and when these will be completed. Unfortunately to a certain degree the works are out of the Borough Councils hands. The land where the rank is situated is on land in the ownership and control of Kent County Council Highways. KCC have agreed to carry out the minor alterations and fund these, but have not produced a timetable as yet for carrying out these works. We the Borough Council, continue to keep in contact with KCC to see when the works are likely to happen, but are unable to progress this ourselves due to the land not being within our ownership. For further information on when these works are likely to be implemented please contact Darren Hickman KCC Highways 01622 671 411 or darren.hickman@kent.gov.uk

Misuse of the Rank

We are still receiving regular complaints about drivers not using the rank correctly, these include;

- Not pulling up to close spaces on the rank
- Abandoned vehicles on the rank / drivers getting out of their vehicles to chat to other drivers
- Not using the “double rank” facility
- Parking on double yellow lines at the end of the rank
- Parking outside Old Wells House and into the Bend
- Conduct of drivers e.g. dropping waste, unnecessary late night noise from engines left running, radios and general shouting – especially from taxis parked unlawfully outside Old Wells House.

The following vehicles were observed this week parked outside of Old Wells House and into the bend, hence not using the rank correctly: Plate numbers - 179, 37, 68, 186, 323.

Drivers, you have had enough warnings now regarding using the rank correctly. We have the penalty point policy in place and will with immediate effect start to now use this. If you are caught / reported, by one of our enforcement officers, parking attendants, cctv observations or via complaints from members of the public, you will be issued with penalty points and as such will risk losing your taxi licence.

5) Enforcement

The Licensing team at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council are now being assisted by Members of the Licensing Team from Gravesham Borough Council. This additional resource will allow us to increase enforcement. If you wish to file a formal complaint about another driver, or have some “enforcement” concerns, please contact Licensing Services 01732 876368 / 6026

6) Trade Meetings

The Borough Council have arranged two Taxi Trade meetings for later this year, Wednesday 13 July 2pm at the Angel Centre Tonbridge and Wednesday 27 July 2pm at the Council Offices Kings Hill.

Please try and attend one of these meetings, this is the opportunity we all have to communicate and discuss “trade matters”.

7) Trade Association

Message from Terry Hill of Castle Cars

Tonbridge and Malling Licensed Drivers and Operators Association

“Over the years the trade in this area has been very poorly represented in its dealings with TMBC. There have been several attempts to get a trade association started (a couple by myself), but due to the large area that this borough covers, this has proved to be extremely difficult to achieve.

When we have managed to get any kind of representative body together to talk to the Borough Council, we have shown that far better results can be achieved. A recent meeting between around half a dozen drivers and operators together with the Chief Executive, the Leader of the Council, and other top representatives of TMBC was very productive.

We also discussed a further review of fares at the earliest opportunity to take into account the spiralling increases in fuel costs. We have been promised that this will be done by September this year.

It was felt by all present that meetings such as this were essential for all of us in order to thrash out any current or potential problems in our trade.

The only way that this can be achieved is if we as individuals and companies alike can put aside our differences and form a group that can speak on behalf of the trade. It has been suggested that once we form a Local Association that we then affiliate to a National Association to give us far greater benefits, and if necessary, legal representation etc.

This would obviously involve some cost so there would need to be a membership fee. I would hope that this could be offset by discounts from other local businesses to all members.

However we are still a long way from that stage. Firstly I need to gauge how much interest there would be borough-wide, and also to find people that would be prepared to give up some of their time to assist with the different aspects of running such a group. If you feel that you could help in any way then please come forward.

I would also welcome any suggestions on how to put all of this together. Please contact me at cascars@btconnect.com, including contact details and the area that you work, so that I can get a database together. I will then contact everyone with a date and venue for our inaugural meeting. “

The Borough Council would welcome a Trade Association, with representatives from across the Borough. We feel that this would be a positive step forward in having a balanced opinion from the whole of the Borough, not just small localised groups as is

at present. We would urge you to make contact with Terry Hill and progress such a group.

For Licensing Enquiries please contact Licensing Services

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