

## **TAXI RANK PROVISION IN BARNSTAPLE**

**Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday November 15<sup>th</sup> 2005 at 2.00pm,  
Council Chambers, Civic Centre, Barnstaple.**

### **Present:**

Mr Mark Curgenvan (NDDC: Licensing Manager); Mr Phil Fitzsimons (NDDC: Licensing Officer); Mr Joe Deasy (DCC: Local Service Officer); Mr John Beardsley (DCC: Traffic Technician); PC Dick Rowland (Police: Crime Prevention Officer); Ms Donna Hawkins (Crime Prevention Officer); Mr John Knowles (Police: Architectural Liaison Officer); PC John Benson (Police: Road Safety Officer); PC Paul Daw (Police: Alcohol Related Crime Reduction Officer); Mr Craig Bulley (Barnstaple Town Centre Management: CCTV Town Centre Co-ordinator); Mr Bob Lethbridge (Taxi Representative); Miss Carol Wallis (Taxi Representative); Mr Keith Thompson (Taxi Representative); Mr Ian Adams (Barnstaple Against Nighttime Disorder: Chairman); Mr Mike Deakin (Barnstaple Against Nighttime Disorder: Vice-Chairman); Mr Daniel Crispin (NDDC: Minutes).

### **Apologies:**

Mr Mark Kerr (Taxi Representative).

Apologies were given, and everyone who was attending made brief introductions.

### **Objectives**

Mark Curgenvan then outlined the six main objectives that he had for the meeting:

- 1) Prevention of crime and disorder;
- 2) Prevention of public nuisance;
- 3) The protection of public health and safety;
- 4) The establishment of a professional and respected hackney carriage and private hire trade;
- 5) Access to an efficient and effective public transport service;
- 6) The protection of the environment.

Mark stated that the meeting was being held to explore options for taxi rank provision in Barnstaple.

### **DCC Transport Proposals**

Joe Deasy presented where Devon County Council is going with transportation in Barnstaple and suggestions for consideration.

Proposals: -

- 1) Taxis will be able to use bus lanes at Boutport Street and Pottington, providing they have additional marking, but will not be able to use bus gates, were there will be electronic bollards.
- 2) The Strand and the Square will be re-organised, with the Strand becoming one-way towards the Civic Centre, and the Square becoming a 2-way set-up, without the roundabout that currently exists.
- 3) **Access will be restricted on/around Taw Vale** for bus, taxi and local HGV use only.

- 4) The restrictions on the Town Centre streets will increase to longer hours and to include Sundays.
- 5) Possible developments will take place in Queen Street and Bear Street, and **also in Anchor Wood.**

### **Current Taxi Rank Capacity in Barnstaple**

The current capacity of the taxi ranks in Barnstaple was then discussed:

*Boutport Street:* Capacity of 6 cars

*Outside Shout!:* Capacity of 4 cars (part-time rank)

*Outside and to the side of Value-Cabs (Queen Street):* Capacity of 3 cars outside + 2 cars at the side

*Outside Marks&Spencer (Holland Street):* Capacity of 4 cars

*Outside the library:* Capacity of 2 cars

### **Boutport Street**

The discussion then moved specifically onto the rank at Boutport Street, and varying opinions were given regarding this:

PC Daw stated that we require taxi ranks to be positioned so as to promote quick release from the town centre, without being so close that they increase the problem which already exists.

Ian Adams supported this, and said that at the moment people all congregate at one place for food and taxis, whereas having some taxi ranks away from these food establishments could decrease the problems often seen on Boutport Street. He suggested that the Bus Station could be ideal for this.

Bob Lethbridge and Carol Wallis responded to this that it is sensible to have taxi ranks by takeaways, as a lot of people want to eat and then get a taxi home. They believe that the rank on Boutport Street is well positioned, but is not big enough.

PC Daw replied and reiterated the numbers of people that currently descend on Boutport Street at closing time and said that other ranks are needed to ease the pressure that this street is currently under.

PC Rowland then said that there is not going to be an easy, all-agreed upon opinion regarding this issue, because big problems occur when there is one central place where everybody congregates, however lots of small ranks are no good either, as taxis will not go to the quieter ranks, making them pointless.

Bob Lethbridge stated that the problem is often compounded on the ranks in Barnstaple, as there is no set minimum fares, therefore people can keep moving up the rank to try and find the cheapest possible fare.

PC Daw raised the point that soon, as well as Babylon, which is Barnstaple's biggest club, the Strand will have Funky Monkeys (formerly the Litten Tree), which will mean that there will be even more people around that area than

currently, thus making a taxi rank in that location a sensible idea. He then pointed out however, that any other ranks that are formed will have to be advertised properly, in order that people actually use them and do not just stick with what they know, which is Boutport Street.

John Knowles said that he has never found a problem getting a taxi on the Square and in Boutport Street when he has been out at night, and thus believed that it would not be beneficial to take away the taxi rank that is situated there. He then responded to Ian's earlier remark about using the Bus Station, and stated that this is currently the place with the biggest crime problem in Barnstaple, therefore it would not be ideal to use it as a large taxi rank. PC Daw replied to this that Boutport Street suffers the highest rate of violent crime in town, and so it would also not be ideal to increase the size of this rank.

In view of these discussions, Mark Curgenvan asked Joe Deasy to state what he thought about these different opinions. Joe answered that he would like to hear more from the Taxi Representatives as to their view of the current rank provision and placement.

Carol Wallis responded to this that the trade would like more space to ply for trade legally, as at the moment there is a much greater number of taxis than there are spaces for them to ply from. She said that because Boutport Street is such a popular location, all of the vehicles base themselves there at night, causing them to be parked in a long line all the way up Boutport Street, where it is, in fact, illegal for them pick up fares from. Mark added to this that as well as the legality issue, there are road and public safety issues about every taxi trying to get onto Boutport Street.

### **The Strand**

The discussion then focussed more on taxi rank provision along the Strand.

Ian Adams asked Joe Deasy and John Beardsley why the lay-by on the Strand could not be used as taxi rank. Joe responded to this that it would only be big enough for two taxis, and so there would be a potential for other taxis queuing behind this which would be dangerous, and also, once these two were in use, people may have to wait a while for another to come, as Boutport Street would still be the bigger and more popular rank.

Mark Curgenvan then asked Joe and John to clarify what, if any, provision there could be on the Strand. Joe stated that under the new roadway system, the Strand will become a three metre wide, one-way system, with a hard shoulder which could be used for loading/unloading, and emergency vehicles (who would be able to drive in both directions), therefore a rank along here would not really be possible.

Donna Hawkins then asked about the possibility of having a late-night rank along there, which was briefly discussed.

Joe Deasy then mentioned a potential evening-only rank at Taw Vale, and asked whether the group thought that this would be a success. Bob Lethbridge stated that he did not think it would be, as there is nothing really in that direction, and no one really walks that way. Also, Donna Hawkins said that from a personal point of view, she would not like to walk to Taw Vale to get a taxi because of personal safety concerns, as it is a little way from the town centre.

Craig Bulley said that everything that is being discussed should be thought of in the context of the new transport system, when the Square will be different, not the way it is now. Also, it will be very important to change the public's perception of where they need to go for a taxi. At the moment everybody descends on Boutport Street because this is where they know they can get a taxi, however, if they knew that there were other places to get taxis from, they may go there instead.

Following this, PC Rowland made the point that there are not currently any taxi ranks catering for those people who just want to go straight home and not get food. Presently, everyone has to go to Boutport Street or the rank by Barum Takeaway whether getting food or not. He said that the burden could be lifted off these ranks greatly if these people could be taken home soon after leaving places like Babylon and Shout!, rather than having to wait near the takeaways with everybody else.

Mike Deakin agreed with this, and said that he often has individuals or groups approach him when they leave Babylon asking where they can get a taxi from, and that they just want to go home without getting a takeaway. Mike then pointed out that he believed the issue of deliveries has not been thought through enough with regard to the Strand. He said that a 3 metre wide roadway with a hard shoulder would not give enough room for big lorries to stop there to unload. He believes that the businesses on the Strand have not been given enough consideration in general, and that it is simply being developed as a tourist site, despite there being big businesses along the street for almost 100 years.

Joe Deasy responded to this that a major problem with having a taxi rank on the Strand is that of having a number of potentially inebriated people over-spilling onto a busy highway, which is obviously very dangerous. PC Benson also noted that the good thing about the Square and Boutport Street is that they are easier to police than the Strand would be.

### **Other Options**

Craig Bulley then put the question to Joe Deasy and PC Daw of where they would/could put a taxi rank if one couldn't be placed along the Strand.

A number of different rank placements were then discussed:

*Cross Street:* Joe Deasy and John Beardsley both agreed that a rank here would be a possibility in the nighttime. Bob Lethbridge stated that in order for this to work, taxi drivers would need to be able to turn left at the top of Butcher's Row, which Joe and John also said would be a possibility. This location would also not cause CCTV problems, however it was noted that the public would still not be able to see the rank when they came out of the pubs/clubs, which can sometimes cause confusion!

*Queen's Theatre:* Part-time ranks were discussed for here and on the Post Office side of the road, with both a possibility.

*Butcher's Row:* This street does have the potential for a nighttime rank along the left hand side of the street where CCTV is in use. It would not be possible to use this in the daytime however, due to deliveries, loading and unloading for the Pannier Market, and the disabled parking which is along there. It was agreed however that this location could relieve some pressure from the Boutport Street and Queen Street ranks.

*High Street:* The High Street was discussed as a possible location for a taxi rank, however it was noted that in this area there is a large potential for damage, a higher number of residents than other places, and the lack of door stewards to supervise any unlawful/anti-social behaviour.

*Mermaid Cross:* John Beardsley and Joe Deasy did not consider this feasible due to the bus access and pedestrian use of this area.

*Back of Green Lanes:* This was considered a possibility, however it is Pay and Display parking all along here currently.

*North Walk:* There is a possibility of having a rank here when the Strand becomes one-way.

*Bus Station:* Ian Adams mentioned that this would be good as it would draw people away from Shout!, however Bob Lethbridge stated that some driver's may not feel entirely safe here, as it is a bit isolated, and away from doormen who could step in to help if there was trouble. Mark Curgenvin also mentioned that there is currently an Order in this location prohibiting the use of taxis here. The bylaw would need to be overhauled by Council. John Knowles said that if this plan did get approval, there should be a trial first, as the CCTV under the shelters is poor, therefore crime could not be taped.

Joe Deasy then told the group that any proposals for these discussed ranks would need to go before Councillors, residents and DCC and NDDC Committees. Therefore written proposals would be required.

John Knowles and PC Rowland reiterated the point that for any new ranks, there would need to be adequate signage and word of mouth used in order to get people to use them, and to break their habit of always going to Boutport Street.

PC Daw then detailed the problems currently suffered with having taxis operating directly outside of Shout!, such as taxis getting damaged, cars parking on the ranks that are not taxis, and the taxis generally being too close to the doors of Shout!

The meeting concluded with a small discussion about taxis using the bus lanes, with Joe Deasy mentioning the need for them to be clearly marked. This led to a small debate about additional bonnet signage.