HACKNEY CARRIAGE STANDS TASK GROUP – 12 AUGUST 2014

A meeting of the Hackney Carriage Stands Task Group will be held at 5.30pm on Tuesday 12 August 2014 in Committee Room 1 at the Town Hall, Rugby.

Adam Norburn
Executive Director

A G E N D A

PART 1 – PUBLIC BUSINESS

1. Appointment of Chairman – to appoint a Chairman of the Task Group for the 2014/15 municipal year.

2. Apologies – to receive apologies for absence from the meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive declarations of:

(a) non-pecuniary interests as defined by the Council’s Code of Conduct for Councillors;

(b) pecuniary interests as defined by the Council’s Code of Conduct for Councillors; and

(c) notice under Section 106 Local Government Finance Act 1992 – non-payment of Community Charge or Council Tax.

Note: Members are reminded that they should declare the existence and nature of their interests at the commencement of the meeting (or as soon as the interest becomes apparent). If that interest is a pecuniary interest the Member must withdraw from the room unless one of the exceptions applies.

Membership of Warwickshire County Council or any Parish Council is classed as a non-pecuniary interest under the Code of Conduct. A Member does not need to declare this interest unless the Member chooses to speak on a matter relating to their membership. If the Member does not wish to speak on the matter, the Member may still vote on the matter without making a declaration.
4. Setting the scene (see the enclosed briefing paper).
5. Is there a need? Finding the information (Section 10.2 of briefing paper).
6. Programme for future meetings (Section 12 of briefing paper).

PART 2 – EXEMPT INFORMATION

There is no business involving exempt information.

Membership of the Task Group:

Councillors Buckley, Butlin, Mrs Garcia, Mistry, Mrs Roodhouse and Sandison

*If you have any general queries with regard to this agenda please contact Linn Ashmore, Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer (01788 533522 or e-mail linn.ashmore@rugby.gov.uk). Any specific queries concerning reports should be directed to the listed contact officer.*

*If you wish to attend the meeting and have any special requirements for access please contact the Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer named above.*
1. One-page strategy

The one-page strategy that CUSP approved on 26 June is attached at Appendix 1.

2. What is a hackney carriage?

A hackney carriage is a taxi that plies for hire on the street, as distinct from a private hire vehicle that cannot ply for hire and needs to be hired by phone, or by going to a point arranged by the private hire company that is not on the public highway.

There are two ways of hiring a hackney carriage. One way is to hail the taxi in the street. The other method, which has become standard practice, is to go to a hackney carriage stand.

Many hackney carriages have the name and phone number of the operator displayed on them. It is possible to phone that number to book a taxi but, when responding to such a booking, it will be on the same basis as if it were a private hire booking, even though the operator in this case is not required to have a private hire operator's licence.

3. What is a hackney carriage stand?

A hackney carriage stand (hereafter referred to as a taxi rank) is a defined length of road on which the only vehicles allowed to park are hackney carriages while they are available for hire.

Taxi ranks may be limited to certain hours of the day and to certain days of the week. In addition to having defined dimensions, the orders creating taxi ranks specify the number of vehicles that may use the rank at any one time.

Taxi ranks are usually on the public highway but, with the owner’s permission, they can be on private land. All taxi ranks in the town centre are on the public highway and it will be assumed that this will continue to be the case unless an option to use private land arises.

4. What happens in Rugby town centre?

The position of the ranks is shown on the plan attached at Appendix 2.

The principal taxi rank is self-evidently the one by the clock tower. The other ranks are used primarily for dropping off, and also for picking up in the case of elderly or disabled passengers, but there is evidence of increasing use of the two small ranks opposite the clock tower rank (outside Peacocks). In practice, such picking up of passengers with disabilities may actually be in response to a phone call for a private
hire vehicle. Taxis do not routinely wait for trade at these other ranks, but do drop-off and pick-up passengers with disabilities due to the extra space available.

At certain times, more than the permitted 10 taxis wait at the clock tower rank, and they queue back towards (and sometimes past) Church Street’s junction with Regent Street. This can occasionally cause conflicts with funerals and weddings at St Andrew’s church (though these are probably amicably resolved), and also creates a traffic hazard where stationary taxis park on double yellow lines.

The one other significant taxi rank for hackney carriages in Rugby is the one outside the railway station. This is on private land and is managed by Virgin. The demand for taxis is determined by the train timetable. When the arrival of a large number of train passengers is imminent, taxis will tend to go to the station rank, so the clock tower rank may have no taxis waiting. During slack periods in the timetable, the taxis will tend to return to the clock tower to pick up shoppers. There is therefore a considerable amount of driving back and forth without passengers. Thus, although the railway station rank is outside the scope of this review, it does have an impact on taxi movement in the town centre.

When it is busy with taxis at the clock tower late at night (when there are no train passengers) taxis often queue on the other side of North Street, facing in the opposite (south-easterly) direction. The queue on the other side of the road happens to coincide partially with another taxi rank, but it often extends further back down North Street.

5. Deregulation

The subject of the reintroduction of regulation is outside the scope of this review. However, members need to understand the background to this issue.

In 2010, it was decided to “deregulate” hackney carriage vehicle licensing; in other words remove the limit on the number of hackney carriage licences in the borough. It was recognised at the time that this would result in an increase in the number of licences and consequently there would be pressure on the existing taxi ranks. It was assumed that sufficient taxi rank provision would be incorporated in the plans for town centre pedestrianisation.

However, now that the pedestrianisation plans have been shelved, no increase in rank capacity has been provided, despite the number of licences having increased to 98 compared with 51 before the process of phasing-in deregulation began in 2012.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are more licences than the market can support. In time there may be a reduction in the number of vehicles trading as the market finds its level.

The report to Licensing and Safety Committee on 19 January 2010 discusses the issues surrounding deregulation, but full deregulation has only been in place since 2013. Again, it must be stressed that reintroduction of regulation is outside the brief of this review.
The term “deregulation” only refers to the ending of a limit on the number of licences issued. The hackney carriage vehicles are rigorously regulated in other respects: for example specified livery, wheelchair compliance and mechanical inspection.

6. **What are the perceived problems that the task group is trying to solve?**

Traffic congestion  
Queues of waiting customers and possible disorder  
Inconvenience to customers  
Lack of information for customers about the hackney carriage service

7. **What are the benefits that the task group is trying to provide?**

Improved service for customers, giving them a choice of less-crowded taxi ranks.  
Reduction in highway obstruction, resulting in less congestion.  
Improved information for taxi users.

8. **What would make a good taxi rank?**

The choice of rank sites – if it is decided that more are needed – will partly be determined by factors such as street width, location of crossings, and on-street car parking provision. Any order made on the public highway must be approved by the county council, and any sites that fail to meet county council standards will be rejected.

Primarily, a successful taxi rank is one that customers can be relied upon to use and that, because of this, will attract hackney carriage drivers. There is a chicken and egg situation here. If a new rank is created but customers don’t use it, no taxi drivers will use it either. Conversely, if no drivers are seen to be using the rank, customers will have no faith in it and will not wait for a taxi there.

9. **What are the barriers to success?**

Rugby’s town centre is quite small. All town centre shops, clubs and pubs are within easy walking distance of the clock tower, so there would arguably be little incentive for drivers and customers to use a rank in another part of the town centre. A rank on the fringe of the town centre would be unlikely to attract enough trade to be viable and, in any case, customers in these areas would probably phone for a private hire car.

Most of the town centre’s streets have parking controls of some sort. This will limit the choice of locations. If a need for a new rank were to be identified, the challenge facing the task group would be to find a location that would be acceptable from a traffic management, safety and on-street parking point of view as well as being attractive to drivers and customers in supply and demand terms.

10. **What does the task group need to do?**

The programme of work for the review is in the hands of the task group but the following headings are suggested for the first stage of the review:
10.1 Find out whether there is a need

Are the perceived problems real?
If so, is the solution to the problem the creation of a new rank (or ranks)?

10.2 Options for finding this information from users, the trade and businesses

Issue a general call for evidence

Put a questionnaire online

Invite users to complete the questionnaire

Publicise using:
  - posters
  - press and broadcast media
  - website
  - social media
  - other methods?

Question taxi users face-to-face

Write to the businesses in the town and the organisations listed in the one-page strategy.

Write to Warwickshire County Council as key partners (as highway authority and also as owners of land that is – and could be – used as taxi ranks).

Write separately to the holders of hackney carriage vehicle licences and driver licences.

10.3 Evaluate the evidence

After receiving the evidence, decide whether to invite any of the respondents to a meeting to discuss their responses further.

At that point decide who else to involve.

On the basis of the evidence received, decide whether there is a need for additional rank provision.

**DISCUSSION AT THIS TASK GROUP MEETING**

Are the above the right methods?
What do we need to know and what questions should we ask?
Do we ask everyone the same questions? Drivers and operators might well be asked different questions from those aimed at customers.
10.4 Identify possible locations if there is a need

Detail of how this will be done to be discussed closer to the time, but see the note on procedure below.

11. Procedure

Section 63 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 stipulates the following stages before the "appointment" of hackney carriage stands can take place:

1. Inform the police
2. Put a public notice in a local newspaper – followed by 28 day consultation
3. Obtain consent of the highway authority

Additionally, two approvals will be required internally. Cabinet will need to approve the cost of implementing any new ranks and include it in next year's budget. Licensing and Safety Committee will make the order or orders creating the rank(s).

After the order is made, Warwickshire County Council is asked to implement it. The county council could reject it at this stage, so it will be advisable to involve a county council officer early on. The county council then carries out the road marking and signage work, together with any other modifications that might be necessary, and then invoices the borough council accordingly.

There is also a similar procedure that has to be followed to revoke any existing order that is no longer required.

12. A possible timetable

Meeting one (this one) – setting the scene, deciding the review’s information needs and how they will be met

Meeting two – agree questionnaire, finalise information-gathering campaign, discussion with county council officer on the criteria used for assessing hackney carriage stand orders.

Meeting three – analysis of responses; decide whether additional provision is necessary; if so, preliminary discussion of possible location(s).

Meeting four – identification of location(s) in conjunction with county council officer; improving information for the customer

Meeting five – any outstanding matters, agreement of review report.

Paul Ansell
Scrutiny and Policy Officer
5 August 2014
Appendix 1

ONE-PAGE STRATEGY

REVIEW OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE RANKS

What is the broad topic area?
Hackney carriage stands (hereafter referred to as taxi ranks)

What is the specific topic area?
The assessment of need for new taxi ranks in Rugby town centre and the identification of locations for new ranks. Publicity about the new ranks, and how to use the hackney carriage service in general.

What is the ambition of the review?
To provide a more convenient service through the provision of new taxi ranks, having regard to the diverse needs of the night-time economy, business, shoppers and visitors to the town, prompted partly by the expected influx of visitors during the Rugby World Cup in September and October 2015.

How well do we perform at the moment?
Rugby has a vibrant and thriving night-time economy, which the council wishes to maintain. The council has improved taxi availability through deregulation but taxi users are all still forced to gather at the town centre’s principal taxi rank by the clock tower. This causes crowding and, sometimes, extremely serious disorder problems.

Excessive queuing of taxis at the rank can be a problem at any time of day. This, combined with the practices of taxi drivers, results in traffic management conflicts beyond the designated length of the rank.

Who shall we consult about the current service and about how we can improve it?
Rugby Hackney Owners and Drivers Association (RHODA), Rugby First, the police, town centre businesses, Rugby Disability Forum, Stagecoach and the highway authority.

The website and social media will be used to publicise the progress of the review and to engage with users.

What other help do we need?
Indirect customer feedback gathered from popular taxi destinations such as hotels, HMP Onley and Virgin Trains.

How long should it take?
The task group will report to Customer and Partnerships Committee on 14 November 2014.

What will be the outcome?
Improved service for customers, giving them a choice of less crowded taxi ranks. Reduction in highway obstruction, resulting in less congestion. Improved information for taxi users.