

Questions from Taxi Drivers

Paul Johnson

There are a number of issues that I wish the Council to consider in the matter to the licensing of Private Hire and Taxis within the borough.

1.0 The use of the Taxi Ranks within the Spelthorne area.

1.1 Only two Taxi Ranks are ever used within the Borough. These are:-

Gresham Road by Staines railway station and Station Approach.

It is rare for Spelthorne licensed taxis to be found anywhere else!

The Taxi Rank based in Gresham Road is a serious health and safety risk. At rush hour times and especially when Thorpe Park is open.

Not only is the general public at risk dropping off and picking up people at the station but a number of local major employers provide mini coaches to pick and drop their staff. In addition to this regular congestion which blocks access to the railway car park in Gresham road there are pedestrians crossing the road to get to the Station as well.

2.0 Abuse of Byelaws by Spelthorne Licensed Taxis

2.1 On many occasions and especially when Thorpe Park is open or we are getting close to Christmas there are more than the official five taxis on the rank in Gresham road. I have personally counted as many as twenty regularly.

2.2 I have seen taxis blatantly touting for fares to Thorpe Park. In fact, I have stood on the pedestrian bridge at Staines station with David Watts (who has now retired from Spelthorne Council's Licensing department) and he refused to do anything.

2.3 Many of the passengers I pick up as a private hire driver tell me that the licensed taxis do not use their meters within the Spelthorne area and furthermore charge double or worse what we as private hire drivers charge.

2.4 In addition if these taxis do not like the fare they will refer the passenger to Staines Cars when in fact they are obliged to take the fare within the Spelthorne area.

2.5 I have also watched these taxis in Gresham Road operate a Marshall system which is totally wrong and denies other legitimate taxis from rightfully taking their place on the five car taxi rank.

3.0 Private Hire and Licensing Fees

3.1 In view of the above, I believe that a lot of the problems are caused by poor policing of the byelaws by Spelthorne Licensing Department. To solve this situation the Taxi Licensing fee should be much higher than Private Hire Licensing fee. This

would allow the Spelthorne Licensing Department to employ more people or outsource resources to enforce the byelaws.

3.2 Higher licensing fees for taxis and the current restriction on the age of vehicles to a maximum of seven years would also allow the Council to control the number of licensed taxis authorised to operate within the Borough of Spelthorne.

4.0 Licenced operators

4.1 There are a number of unlicensed operators providing public and private hire within Spelthorne and neighbouring boroughs, not least of which is UBER. This makes a total mockery of the local licensing system and allows PCO drivers an unfair advantage over locally licenced taxis and private hire. This obviously needs to be looked into and stopped.

Terry Lyden

Many thanks for inviting me to the above overview but unfortunately I will not be able to attend and so I give a historical view since Licensing, including new Hackney Carriages and existing Private Hire, began some 10 years ago and the way it has affected all the previous Private hire businesses such as Staines Cars, formerly Ronia Minicabs, who were based in offices and without cars blocking the streets as they do now. Uber Taxis and other Taxis not authorised to operate in Spelthorne are a particular problem leading to loss of income and blocking local streets creating dangers for other road users. The comments herein are common to all drivers and staff at Staines Cars Ltd

It is clear that the rank outside the station in Gresham Road is a source of major problems not least public safety. Since all the people going to and from the Station are Railway passengers the Railway have equal responsibility with the Local and County Councils for people travelling to and from the Station and its car parks. The Railways have a piece of car parking Land some 50 yards from the Station exit and towards Kingston Road. This would easily accommodate 5 parked taxis OFF ROAD and give them departure from this area to right or left on Gresham Road. The road at this area is also currently used for a Pick up point for mini buses from businesses on the causeway. It is noted that the railway has provided space for a few taxis on its roads on the main side of the Station.

Gaining use of this off road parking area of the Railways would free Gresham Road from Dangerous parking and provide greater safety for the travelling public. We must not face an accident situation that could have been foreseen and where public finances might be put at risk.

This would also provide a little better equality for the position of Hackney carriages and the Private Hire trade of Staines Cars Ltd whose premises are blocked by illegal parking for too many years causing loss of trade to Staines Cars. . Suitable annotation with phone access of the two taxi and private hire positions, to the left and right of the Station, could be made at the Station to give the traveling public alternative choices in service and cost.

The council has continuously failed to enforce its own laws and rules and failed to see that the street laws e.g double yellow lines are obeyed with the help of the police after normal office hours when difficulties occur.

The have also continually failed in their duty in ensuring equal opportunities . As such all or any of the benefits from licensing accrue to the Hackney Carriage trade and not the Private Hire Trade who pay high fees for NO benefits. These Private Hire fees should be reduced.

The rank in Gresham Road is all too often overloaded and drivers do not seek the next available rank. Many Hackney Carriages with licenses for Staines are lined up for hire in Thorpe Park instead of providing services by using Ranks in Spelthorne. There should be special car licenses for Thorpe Park and Thorpe Park only. Otherwise Cars who obey the rules and service the ranks in Spelthorne would suffer loss of income in an already poor income situation. These Hackney Carriages who trade at Thorpe Park tend to return en mass to Spelthorne when Thorpe Park Closes and over park in Gresham Road as many as 12 at a time

Our MP Mr. Kwarteng is on record of saying "I recognise that people will want to cross the street outside the Station in Gresham Road and it is dangerous for them to do so between parked vehicles however this is a matter for the local Council" Other Councillors have made similar comments on dangerous road conditions in the past and it seems that a risk assessment should have been made frequently on this point.

In the beginning the new Licensing Officer, Mr Watts, visited the office of Ronia Minicabs, now on this site for approximately 30 years, and said the proposal was for a rank for 3 Taxis on the opposite of the road near the Cherry Orchard junction with Gresham Road nearest Kingston Road. This seemed reasonable and we did not protest as we assumed we would have equal access to our usual Rail passenger trade.

The next we knew that the rank for three cars were placed right outside the station exit/entrance When the matter was raised with Mr Watts he said the trade asked him to do so and he claims he wrote to Ronia on the change. However the letter appears to have been lost and, not receiving a reply from Ronia, Mr Watts did not bother to seek a response from Ronia to a situation which would obviously materially damage their existing valuable trade.

Complaints to the council about lack of fair trade to an existing long established business were met with a response that ranks that were abused or not used would be removed. There was a suggestion by the Council that the Council would consider removing the new Gresham Road Station rank equidistant from the Station exit to that of the Ronia Office. None of these proposals in fact took place. Worse still the council has never signified the two differing businesses and people arriving at the Station assume all the taxis work for Staines Cars/ formerly Ronia minicabs. Worse any inappropriate action by the Hackney Carriage Taxis on the Station Rank are blamed on Staines Cars. Even when there are no Taxis on the rank people do not know that Staines Cars are an alternative source of travel and being Private Hire we

are not allowed to approach them to offer services. Hence the need for suitable notification by the Station Authorities.

The rank was then increased to 5 Cars and double yellow lines were painted to prevent excesses and also to prevent the Hackney Carriages blocking access even to the Ronia offices. This has some effect during the day but at night there are usually in excess of 10 Cars parked outside the station and into the Station Car Park and nothing is done. Car doors are opened and closed and other residents vehicles, some waiting for family to arrive home at the station, are parked on the opposite side of the road. Hence the danger increases and residents who support the Council with their tax are put at risk.

Rules to be met by the Hackney Carriage driver are not enforced and moving to the next available rank never seems to happen and they are often out of their cabs even standing in the road causing danger to themselves and other road users. The result is the Gresham Road rank is over-subscribed and others neglected.

Gary Stansby

Current taxi stands

1. Gresham Road, Staines is adequate but is used by all taxis due to the lack of high income spaces elsewhere.
2. Staines Railway Station, Station Approach - Thankfully we have these spaces put in by the railway free of charge, this does alleviate pressure.
3. Bus lay-by (east kerb) on Thames Street, Staines (adjacent to Debenhams Store) - This rank is rarely used and is pretty dismissive.
4. Unused bus lay-by (south kerb) on Mustard Mill Road, Staines (adjacent to Waitrose supermarket -This rank is used by the public, private hire and Uber who all refuse to move to allow usage.
5. On the public highway immediately outside Communication House, South Street, Staines -This would be a good, useable rank if there was a shelter and better signage indicating where it is.
6. On Clarence Street 50 metres west of Thames Street, Staines (against south kerb facing west in the lay-by adjacent to Market Square) -This rank could be 24 hours, it always has private vans/cars parked in it to use the shops etc.
7. North side of Clarence Street, Staines, on the east side of the pedestrian crossing zig-zags, outside 15-13a Clarence Street, Staines -This rank could also be 24 hours due to no other usage again except for private vans/cars parked there all day.
8. At Ashford Railway Station one space is not good enough due to safety of the drivers. There should be three spaces minimum.

Former taxi stands

1. The stand in Shepperton High Street was placed in a service road where it was not possible to park properly.
2. Two spaces in Ashford by the car park (MSCP) were never used as they were in the wrong place.

Other Places Considered

1. A stand at Staines Bus Station could be an advantage although communications along with a shelter and better signage would do.
2. The rank at Two Rivers can't be used due to the constant use by private hire cars etc...
3. A stand at Kempton would be useful.
4. I have no interest as private hire companies are used.
5. The rank needs to be three spaces and at the train station.
6. Ashford Station but three spaces.
7. Sunbury Station but three spaces.
8. Shepperton, three spaces.
9. I have no interest as private hire companies are used.

A final point I'd like to make, the taxi signage is not enough. The print in the road should state 'Taxis Only' and a double yellow line with the warning of a penalty charge.

My reason for stating three spaces is due to protecting the driver. I am unaware of any other borough where they have only one space.

As for the railways charging taxis to park, surely the answer is for these ranks to be in a road within the visual vicinity of the station.

Colin Vincent

I do think that all proposals for taxi stands should be supported. The public need to have good visual point of reference to allow licensed vehicles to collect members of the public and deter unofficial vehicles.

David Singleton

1. There are not enough taxi ranks in Staines which we can use during the day, the only ones are at Staines station and Waitrose which we cannot use because the public uses it as a carpark. The rank outside Communication House no one knows about, it will be handy if the public knew it was there by putting a sign up at the bus station.

2. We also need ranks in Shepperton and Sunbury stations as that will spread all the taxi drivers out, which at the moment they are all fighting to use Gresham Road and the main side of the Staines station. We need more spaces at Ashford station.

3. As for the rank outside Clarence street, we can't use in the day time but it's ok for the public to use them, why is this?

4. The drivers have got a system going on at Gresham Road which means that if you are not in the system, you have no chance in getting on the rank because when one driver moves off, they call another one around. They are parking up on the main side using it as a feeder rank waiting for the phone call to go to Gresham Road.

5. Uber are also parking up at the station and also all around the town and on the taxi ranks. They are taking a lot of work by stealing out our customers. Something has to be done about it.

6. As for the money we pay for the car plate and badge, I think that it is too much as we do not get any help with new taxi ranks or anything else. All we want is a fair system where we can all benefit from it.

Jason Rider

See separate hand written letter.