

DEPUTATION REFERRED FROM LICENSING COMMITTEE

One Deputation received:

Deputation to the Licensing Committee on 14 March 2013

By residents of Paston Place and members of the Responsible Licensing Initiative

Subject: Public Health, road safety & nuisance caused by Licensed taxis in Paston Place, Kemptown

Problem: Paston Place has two taxi ranks, in addition to other traffic, and is inundated by over-ranking taxis.

- 1. Health: This makes it a pollution hotspot where all Defra assessment factors are present and hence legal limits are very probably exceeded- unfortunately measuring has been refused. The city's Senior Technical Engineer states in the 2011 AQAP that air pollution is the biggest factor affecting our health. The city's latest health survey shows a difference in life expectancy between the city centre and the outside, e.g. along the no. 7 bus route life expectancy decreases by as much as 10 years. There is a clear and compelling link and we are very worried about our health and that of our children.**
- 2. Road safety: In addition the over-ranking taxis create road safety hazards for local residents and the wider public as the taxis do not adhere to any road traffic regulations but rather operate as if Paston Place were the Wild West.**
- 3. Nuisance: Drivers do not conduct themselves according to their code of conduct, instead they are abusive, anti-social and threatening to residents.**
- 4. Noise pollution: Taxis, especially London cabs and wheelchair accessible vans, make constant noise whilst engine is running during waiting on rank and over-ranking directly outside residential dwellings.**

Request:

- 1. Relating to rank location:**

Move rank 2 away from residential dwellings into a safe distance (back to original place or hospital) and

Reconsider location of rank 1 on a hill climb due to its detrimental effect on emissions (downhill better)

- 2. Relating to taxi management:**

Effective enforcement of the bye laws and elimination of the over-ranking problem and its consequences for road safety, health & the right to enjoyment of our properties

Capping taxi licences and operating a licensing strategy that is responsible to the residents, the taxi trade and the wider public. Capping would protect local residents' health and road safety, give drivers a realistic chance of making a living and protect other drivers and pedestrians using Paston Place.

- 3. Relating to air quality:**

Introduce a no idling policy as a major measure to improve the air in Paston Place and across town for the wider public by utilizing the legislative measures available to AQMA's and widely used in UK. Paston Place are happy to act as a pilot for this new policy.

Introduce RET to monitor taxi fleet, who are a big polluter, again by utilizing this extra legislative measure available to AQMA's. Paston Place is happy to also act as a pilot for this new policy.

Introduce instant fines for double yellow lines used by taxis in Paston Place

We are aware of budget constraints and have proposed mostly self-financing solutions based on research into other councils' approaches and are happy to facilitate further research, surveys or other help in order to make this affordable and cost-effective. We are also happy to collect data such as logs and photographic evidence so bye law contraventions can be followed up and prosecuted cost-effectively.

Problems: road safety, air & noise pollution and nuisance

Paston Place has to accommodate different types of traffic: it is used as a „car park“ for hospital patients, visitors and staff; three bus routes; visitors to church, church community centre and nursery, nursing home; a over-proportionate number of disabled car parking spaces (7) – there are 30 around hospital and area-, visitors to Sam's restaurant and in the evening to the Cabaret. This in addition to residential parking. Paston Place, btw. Eastern Rd and St. George's, is a narrow and short street. This already makes it a busy street.

In addition it has two taxi ranks. Rank 1 has 6 spaces, rank 2 has 2 spaces. Linking them is a little lane, the entrance of which is also filled up. So that both ranks have 9 taxis. Although Marine Parade has a taxi rank only two minutes away, it is always empty. Paston Place has taxis over-ranking, often the entire street between Eastern Rd and St George's St can become one big rank. Often in addition to 9 taxis on the ranks, up to a further 8 taxis are over-ranking on double yellow lines, disabled spaces, car pool spaces, car park spaces, in the middle of Paston Place or obstructing the adjacent street exits from Sudeley St, Sudeley Terrace and Church Street – usually with their motors running. Sometimes it is like a beehive, sometimes very long waiting times.

Road safety concerns: They obstruct other traffic, such as cars, disabled people, buses. Delivery vans for local residents cannot use dbl yellow lines. Rubbish cannot be collected as they do not make way for the vehicle (residents' complaints lodged with council). They do not have any consideration for any other traffic. They have established an unofficial 'over-ranking order' snaking uphill until they reach the official rank. They often reverse backwards in the one way street seriously endangering oncoming traffic. They are a danger for the road safety of the wider public and the local residents. A residents' little girl (no 6) was almost knocked over by a over-ranking taxi in front of her house. Taxis 'own' our street.

Nuisance: Disabled residents cannot have deliveries as all spaces and yellow lines are taken. Visitors and residents cannot park when taxis occupy normal parking spaces/disabled bay. Residents requesting the taxi drivers to switch off their motors are verbally abused. One taxi parked unlawfully on the disabled space outside no.13, calling me a 'bitch' in the presence of my daughter when I politely requested him to switch off his engine. Another resident has his visitors casually insulted by over-ranking drivers chatting in front of his house about them (no 6). Recently we were threatened that all Brighton taxis would come to Paston Place unless we drop the matter. A threat previously used on another resident (no 11). Over the years numerous complaints relating to drivers' rude, anti-social and threatening conduct have been placed by various residents and relating to various matters. Some drivers behave like the mafia.

Noise pollution: Hackney Carriage „London cabs“ and the now increasing number of wheelchair accessible big vans create a lot of noise pollution, vibration and further increased air pollution. The taxis also constantly honk to indicate other drivers to move up or other cars need to honk to make the obstructing taxis move.

Air pollution & Health concerns: Eastern St emissions are measured and exceed legal limits. Exceeding emissions there are mostly caused by mass & tally. The measurement is taken opposite the Barry building, adjacent to taxi rank 1. Taxi emissions would significantly contribute to the ambient pollution levels taken there. Most pollution in Brighton is not caused by mass & tally, but by other factors (Defra assessment factors). Paston Place has all these detrimental factors present and will therefore also exceed legal limits.

The taxis either **idle with running motors or stop/start**, both on the rank and whilst over-ranking – throughout the day, evening and night. They constantly move small distances uphill from space to space. This is the pattern of **ultra urban traffic**, producing very high emissions. Especially as the London cabs and the wheelchair accessible vans are very high emission due to their **weight**. At ultra urban traffic eco features, if existing, are not effective. Paston Place is a **narrow street** with less than 15m (8,60 kerb to kerb), has a **gradient**, so every taxi movement uphill requires extra propulsion which results in highest emissions. The taxis come from around corners, which results in higher emissions from **acceleration**. The council has no data on the eco-fitting or engine types of their fleet. Although vehicles are commercial and **high-mileage**, no commercial nuisance legislation seems to be applied to the pollution they cause and emission testing is limited to MOT. Taxi rank 2 is at a **distance of less than 5m** (3,60m) immediately outside **residential dwellings with basement flats** (no 9 and 10), who are being 'gassed', as there is no room for dispersion, especially in cold winter weather. Sometimes the rank is extended to no. 13 and taxis occupy both normal spaces and the disabled space behind the rank. This creates a funnel effect and causes the highest health impact on those residents. The same is constantly the case outside no 5 and 6, no 17 and the nursing home. Our health is constantly exposed to the highest emissions of sometimes 17 taxis' simultaneous running motors. In 2011 a log was handed in with a resident (no 6) counting 300 over-ranking taxis outside her house in one day. In February I handed in a log to the HCO with 69 ultra urban movements of over-ranking taxis within 3 h and waiting times of average 18 min. over-ranking and altogether almost an hour to get a fare per taxi – mostly with simultaneous running motors of the 15 plus taxis. Further logs and photos/videos in evidence of all of the above are available on request and a facebook page and youtube channel are under construction.

Enforcement:

When alerting the council to the problem, the Environmental Dept. ignored the aggravating factors and responded with a generic statement, rather than applying the Defra factors and assessing the problem. When we requested pollution monitoring in order to assess the extent of the problem, we were refused. No serious efforts have been made by HCO to enforce the problem, although over-ranking is against the bye laws and a criminal offence. NSL shy away from even enforcing enforcable offences (e.g. parking on disabled space) for fear of abuse from the taxi drivers. Since requesting proper enforcement, it has been noticed that officers target the street only when it is empty, but avoid the street when the problem is present and actively walk away when taxis start over-ranking. We fear misrepresenting data is being compiled to cover their inaction.

Cllr Mitchell has looked at the taxi problem in situ and has witnessed it at first hand.

Possible Solutions and some that other councils have applied:

1. **Utilize current legislation:** current legislation allows for max 500GBP fine for issues relating to drivers' conduct and bye law contravention is a serious conduct issue/criminal (self-financing enforcement)
2. Introduce a update for fining bye law contravention, i.e. update original fine of 1GBP in 1875 to equivalent amount today, e.g. 500GBP? (see Galway introduced an entire taxi bill to tackle problem)
3. Establish a **points system** until licence is withdrawn (points for running motor, offensive conduct, obstruction etc. see www.portsmouth.gov.uk/media/LIC_Conditions_of_Licence_and_Enforcement.pdf This needs to be adapted to the needs of Brighton and focus on over-ranking, conduct, road safety, idling motors, double yellow lines, eco measures such as optimum air in tyre etc. HCO would be able to utilize residents' complaints and photographic evidence– **this seems most promising and cost-effective**

4. If Taxi fleet keeps contravening bye laws and is not co-operating, then **Increase licence fee** to fund necessary enforcement (self-financing)
5. **Utilize AQAM legislation provision:** introduce **fixed fine for idling motors and RET** (self-financing); change TMR/TRO and make **double yellow lines in street an instant fine** (self-financing enforcement) then install **quick escalation scheme** to prosecution at court (1 warning, then final warning with hearing: if no aggravating factors then caution, if aggravating factors such as obstructing traffic, running motor, last warning in less than 6 months, no promise that bye laws will be followed, then **prosecution** of bye law contravention. **Three pronged enforcement** (police, parking, taxi office) over **extended periods of time** until resistance broken. (see www.plymouth.gov.uk/failing_to_proceed_guidance_note.pdf). Taxi office happy to inform about approach but requires really pro-active and astute enforcement staff)

If the council cannot protect the local residents and the wider public and effectively enforce, then the rank needs to be removed, especially considering that a rank should never be in a hill climb position due to its higher emissions and detrimental AQ and health effects.