

Watford Hackney Carriage Drivers Association Trade consultation report and concerns 2021.

Watford taxi drivers are vehemently struggling to make ends meet. Drivers are simply surviving and not making enough money, where even the modest taxi drivers are drowning in debt.

There is a sharp increase in number of drivers who have and are suffering from heart attacks and serious health issues purely as a direct result of struggling to survive. Their families are also suffering by the massive decline in their earnings.

Although this consultation is predominantly on the vehicle conditions, I want to make it a matter of your concern and inform you that our following assessment of the trade is all connected. When making decisions I request that councillors understand how the trade is suffering.

I want to make it a matter of your concern and ask the councillors why the council is doing next to nothing to help drivers when we are simply asking to be given an appropriate ranking which we know can improve our earnings.

The trade knows more than any other group how important it is to improve air quality as we are the ones sitting in fumes all day. But yet, it is utterly unacceptable that from 2021 and 2024 using older vehicles will be prohibited; but we have not been helped or informed of any plans to subsidise to buy the newer, cleaner models. We are asking the local council for a series of relief measures to help local taxi drivers who are struggling financially. Ultimately, as a result of the introduction of Uber working illegally in our town, who incidentally have no operator's license to work in Watford.

Uber, on a daily basis are breaking all plying for hire rules. The company is operating openly without any threat of prosecution from our council, this has cost us dearly in Watford.

To help us stay on a level playing field with Uber, we needed the support from the Council to allocate us visible ranks in the High Street area. A big shopping centre and INTU developments were made, yet no rank space was ever introduced to help taxi drivers so that we can compete with our outsider competitors.

I have personally sent endless proposals and requests to the Council which unfortunately are still being consistently ignored. By not having visible ranks in the High Street, our work has declined sharply as we are unable to entice the public into using us.

Taxis must be seen to be plying for hire as this is the only major difference between us, private hire and Uber. It is in this area where the Council has not been supportive for local taxi drivers. They replaced visible ranks by allocating ranks in secluded areas which is not convenient for the public, the disabled and the elderly.

Furthermore, a rank by the Barclays bank in the High Street was taken away in early 2018. This was after drivers had worked tirelessly to get it up and running for two years. Instead, this good business gaining rank was relocated in the Wellstones area where we are not visible. By doing this, our work has reduced 60%.

Unfortunately, despite many meetings and requests, rank spaces are still not given where we can have both business and earnings improved. Taxpayer's money was wasted on the Wellstones rank which had unnecessary works including lighting, shelter and a bench being

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put up. Time and time again WHCDA had informed the Council that this rank was not suitable as it wasn't visible and had clear health and safety breaches.

It is therefore that WHCDA requests all licensing fees must be reduced for the foreseeable future. We ask for no additional charges to be introduced on the vehicles condition apart from having the necessary emissions introduced by 2025. Financial difficulties and the ever changing future of this trade is a big factor that must be consulted in depth with WHCDA and considered when making future decisions.

I have previously had positive meetings with the Mayor, Peter Taylor and a competent officer in Jamie Mackenzie who are sympathetic towards our problems. Unfortunately despite meetings we are still awaiting the HSBC rank which was agreed in principle by the Mayor and his team.

I am humbly requesting that the taxi trade is supported and positive action is urgently required to our genuine and basic concerns. WHCDA as usual wants to work closely with officers and find compromising ways to get the trade up and running again.

Austerity is affecting everyone but it has already damaged our trade because it has for so long lacked sympathy, a gentle approach and a clear understanding on how to improve our business.

Thanking you all for any cooperation and understanding towards our deep concerns to resolve the crisis that our trade is facing.

Regards,

Shafiq Ahmed

Chair, WHCDA