



# **WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Taxi and Private Hire Strategy

2020-2035

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## Foreword

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## 1.0 Introduction

Licensing hackney carriage (taxi) and private hire vehicles (minicabs), drivers and operators is the role of the local authority.

A functional, efficient and economically sustainable transport network is critical to the well-being, security and prosperity of our communities.

Taxi and private hire services are an integral part of this transport network and a long term strategy to integrate these services in to all local decisions affecting transport, development and community safety plans is essential.

In the last eight years licensing, business and community has been 'disrupted' by new hailing and booking technology. Long standing principles, upheld in law, include the concept that licensing is fundamentally a local decision affecting local people. This local decision making process guides a two tier system of hackney carriages (taxis) and private hire vehicles (minicabs) with only hackney carriages permitted to 'ply for hire'.

To the uncertainty over the function and purpose of local transport services has been added serious concerns over safe-guarding, accessibility and criminality. Environmental and quality of life issues caused by congestion, parking, pollution and air quality have accelerated rapidly and there is an understanding that infrastructure must be improved if the wider challenges of protecting the planet are to be met.

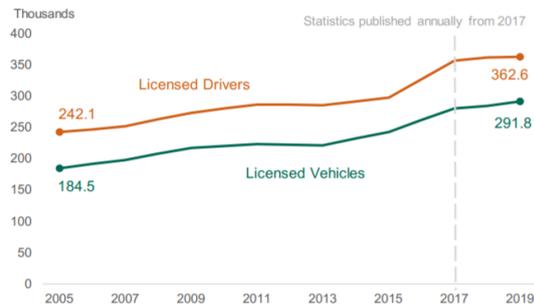
Mobility as a Service (Maas), the concept that there will be a shift from personally owned modes of transport, will naturally include the continued provision of taxi and private hire services. Department for Transport statistics show an increase in the number of journeys taken in a taxi or private hire vehicle and a heavy reliance on such transport for some residents. Alternative forms of public transport, such as bus or train, are not always suitable for all residents and it is likely that numbers of taxi and private hire vehicle services will increase in the medium to long term if we are to successfully reduce the use of privately owned vehicles. As an example, growth in private hire vehicle licences in London has remained despite the impact of COVID and yearly DfT statistics show an increase of numbers of vehicle licensed year on year.

## Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Statistics, England: 2019



The total number of licensed taxi and private hire vehicles and licensed drivers in England reached new record levels

Chart 1: Total licensed taxi and private hire vehicles and drivers: England, since 2005 (TAXI0102)



Whether or not these vehicles are driven by human drivers or are autonomous, they will require good access to the network and sufficient stopping/waiting places to ensure maximum efficiency. Broadly, the trend should be towards reducing journeys by individuals in private vehicles, and towards greater use of shared public or 'for hire' transport. In this, taxis and private hire vehicles will play a critical role.

The elected Mayor of Watford is championing more sustainable forms of transport locally. The aims, although independent of the concept, follow the principles of MaaS - to reduce the number of journeys in the borough taken in a privately owned car, to cut down on congestion, and to improve air quality and the overall health and wellbeing of the borough. Watford is a small, densely populated town with high residential, pedestrian and vehicle traffic density. Many roads and streets are narrow and laid out in an historic pattern. There is limited scope to change this in most parts of the town. Projected increases in the number of residents in Watford and Hertfordshire, and the resultant increase in housing, demonstrate the urgency of ensuring future transport provision is well planned and sustainable.

In many cities and larger towns the introduction of Clean Air Zones has aimed to reduce traffic density and pollution levels and this may be a consideration for Watford. However, taxis and minicabs are vital methods of transport for some\* and restrictions on where they can travel must be carefully considered and balanced against any negative impact on equality and accessibility.

\*[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/853446/vehicle-licensing-statistics-july-to-september-2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/853446/vehicle-licensing-statistics-july-to-september-2019.pdf)

At the date of this document, Watford has 260 hackney carriages and 124 private hire vehicles. Some drivers have not re-licensed at this time due to the pandemic and a temporary exemption to policy conditions is in place to allow them to return if they choose to do so. This would add around 30 vehicles to numbers given. There are 372 DUAL licensed drivers and 105 licensed only to drive a private hire vehicle.

However, added to this number must be an unknown quantity of drivers and vehicles licensed elsewhere, predominantly in London, who come to work in Watford on a daily basis. This unknown number present problems beyond reducing the level of work available for local drivers as the vehicles also add to congestion, parking issues and pollution.

## 2.0 Coronavirus and COVID-19

This strategy was initially prepared in February 2020. Since this date the world has faced an unprecedented upheaval following the emergence of the coronavirus and COVID-19.

How the local transport network emerges from the impact of coronavirus has become the pre-eminent question facing the taxi and private hire trade. There is now a significant opportunity to work with the trade to ensure that they emerge from the pandemic in a stronger position to support local communities and to ensure well-being.

Much of the content of this strategy was already focussed on achieving these objectives although, it must be said, without knowledge of any specific threat. There is certainly now a strong argument that specific training and equipment become standard requirements for local transport services. There is also a question to be answered over the extent of the role of the local authority, as responsible for ensuring public health, in ensuring these standards are not only met but actively promoted to ensure our communities are safe. To this end, the council has created the Travel With Confidence accreditation.

Nothing contained in the initial draft of this strategy is contradictory to the new reality, but it must be understood that some priorities will have shifted. All points raised in this strategy remain valid and important. Infection and the transmission of illness is a risk to the viability of all transport systems and must be addressed as a high priority.

### 3.0 Strategic Aims

The objectives of the strategy are to deliver a road-map for the creation of a long term, sustainable taxi and private hire service, including service specific guidance, where there is:

- The best possible value for all customers.
- A service which ensures the highest level of safety for passengers and drivers.
- A service that provides equal and fair access for all where operators, proprietors and drivers are aware of their obligations under all relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010 and where discriminatory practice is eradicated.
- The highest standards of customer focused professional service delivery. Expertise should be guided by the authority and driven by customer specific demand reinforcing understanding from both customers and business owners that driving is a professional vocation.
- Reasonable and sustainable balance in supply and demand
- The ability for professional drivers to grow and develop a business in just the same way as they might with any other business opportunity, including the use of appropriate technology
- A positive impact on the wider community and the environment through use of environmentally friendly vehicles and the use of new technology to support efficient access to these services
- Access to easy mechanisms for stakeholders to raise concerns, report issues and highlight opportunities through dedicated driver and operator support.

- Taxi and private hire services to be integrated, understood and fully considered in all transport, planning and infrastructure decisions.

### 3.1 Identified Trends and Topics Relevant to the Strategic Aims

Sections 4 to 11 of this strategy list identify service areas, topics and trends relevant to the strategic aims. Each service areas, topic or trend is relevant to a number of the strategic aims listed in section 2. Some trends or topics are relevant to all strategic aims.

The purpose of sections 4 to 11 is to offer background information to assist in understanding the importance of creating a connected transport network and the challenges faced in achieving the strategic aims.

Section 12 of this strategy lists service specific aims (SSA's). These SSA's should be given full consideration when developing policies or procedures, or when making decisions that are likely to impact upon the taxi and private hire trade. It is expected that any significant departure from these aims is explained and evidenced when relevant decisions are made.

#### 4.0 Taxi and Private Hire Services, the Environment and the Creation of a Sustainable Town

##### *Relevant Strategic Aims*

*All*

There are a number of environmental and sustainable benefits to an efficient, sustainable transport network. Some are associated benefits such as general health, well-being and pride in our communities. These are discussed in further detail in later sections and this section will focus primarily on the direct environmental impact of the taxi and private hire trade.

It is clear that at this time motor vehicles play a significant role in negatively contributing to the environmental sustainability of Watford. Exhaust emissions from vehicles contribute a significant volume of gases that are harmful to the environment and to health, and air quality complaints in Watford are increasingly linked to locations where taxis and private hire vehicles wait, often with engines running. Added to this are associated issues relating to parking, traffic congestion, community health and noise pollution.

Watford Borough Council are committed to ensuring the town becomes a leading sustainable and environmentally friendly town and on 9 July 2019 at a meeting of the full Council, elected members declared a climate emergency and committed to doing all they could to ensure Watford is carbon neutral by 2030.

Councillor Ian Stotesbury, elected member for Callowland Ward and member of the Hertfordshire Sustainability Forum, commented,

*"Climate change is a universal threat, and a threat of our own making. We must continue to be bold and truly lead on this crucial issue. By doing so we can help our residents reduce their bills, help clean our air, and improve access to healthier modes of transport.*

*"We can support local ecology, biodiversity and bring natural beauty to new areas. I'm really proud that we have been able to declare a climate emergency. It's important we act now, before it is too late."*

Nationally, in June 2019, the UK government became the first government of a major nation to pass legislation (by amendment of previous law) committing to a 'net-zero' carbon output by 2050, and globally, a November 2018 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that, in order to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees, emissions of harmful gases would have to be cut by around 45% by 2030, aiming for net-zero by 2050.

In December 2019, Watford Borough Council created the Sustainability Forum to develop a comprehensive plan of action to address environmental issues. The Sustainable Watford Strategy\* contains the following actions which will impact upon the taxi and private hire trade:

Undertake a comprehensive study to evaluate the most cost-effective and practical options to increase EV charging infrastructure across the borough. This will increase our understanding of future needs, management options, costings, and inform our policies on residential charging and appropriate requirements for new developments.
Develop a strategy, and associated incentives, to reduce emissions from authority-authorized taxis. This will include programmes to encourage electric vehicles
Begin implementation of the EV charging infrastructure program; applying for and utilising OLEV Funding as appropriate (e.g. WBC Car parks, leisure centres and key office sites). Include Rapid charging.
Explore options to convert parking spaces to secure cycle storage where there is a demand from 40% of households on the street.
Continue to develop and implement the measures of our Air Quality Management Plan to reduce emissions from road transport and improve air quality.
Participate and develop the HCC Sustainable travel town application as part of a wider ranging strategy to cover low carbon transportation in the borough;

Guidance issued in relation to the Air Quality (Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles Database) (England and Wales) Regulations 2019 lists minimum emission levels for petrol and diesel cars accessing designated Clean Air Zones, and from January 2020 the council has been required to send regular updates of licensed vehicle emission standards to the database.

\*<https://www.watford.gov.uk/sustainablewatford>

The single biggest factor in controlling the impact of licensed vehicles is to strictly control factors determining the licencing of those vehicles. In 2019 Watford Borough Council introduced a new Vehicle Licensing Policy which took full account of recent reports and available guidance, including recommendations in the Department for Transport guidance of 2010 that, in the interests of the environment, tougher emissions standards should be introduced for all licensed vehicles.

It is also true that emissions could be further reduced through education and raised awareness of environmental issues. Simple measures such as better and more frequent vehicle maintenance and servicing; or switching off engines when stationary or idling, particularly at hackney carriage ranks, can make a significant environmental impact considering the number of licensed vehicles. These are topics that can be discussed at regular driver training sessions.

An increased number of 'quick drop' pick up and drop off spaces could improve parking issues and ease congestion as consumers choose to move away from private car use. In-line with policy and the declaration of 2019, the council considers its responsibility in protecting the environment to be a predominant factor within licensing policy and a key element of this taxi strategy. There are a number of considerations as to how this protection may be achieved and these are discussed below.

### **Electric, Zero emission capable and Alternative Fuel Vehicles**

Electric vehicles seem to offer clear short term benefit for residents, visitors and businesses. They are exhaust emission free at point of use (generating the electricity to charge them is a different matter, as is particulate matter from tyre and brake wear), they are cheaper to run once purchased and they should remain on the road for significantly longer than their traditional counterparts due to reduced wear and tear. Zero emission capable vehicles include some electric and petrol/electric hybrid vehicles, and also those which run on other fuels such as hydrogen (and, theoretically at least, biofuels, depending on the source of the

fuel). Some other alternative fuels, such as Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG), offer improvements in emission levels that can bring older vehicles up to modern emission standards.

There are a number of general trends associated with assisting growth in the UK EV market:

rising fuel costs

climate change and air quality legislation

the rise of the ethical consumer, and

increasing choice of vehicle type.

There has been a general trend of increasing fuel costs in the UK. This has impacted on transport sector operating costs and profit margins. There are significant savings to be had with electric vehicles but key difficulties arise in determining who will pay for, or subsidise, or otherwise support, the transition from fossil fuel to EV when drivers are already feeling significant economic pressure and to purchase an EV can be very expensive in comparison with a traditional petrol or diesel vehicle. Many entrants to the trade will be seeking the lowest cost to starting up, even though this may be a false saving in the medium to long term. Increasing awareness, and better education in the operation of a successful long term business, are essential if we are to attract entrants who understand the relevance of policy requirements and the benefits these will bring to all. This education should be coupled with strong policy commitments to change as introduced in the most recent Vehicle Licensing Policy.

The UK, like other countries, is faced with a double challenge of meeting international climate change obligations and reducing the public health impact of poor air quality. It seems likely that a conversion to predominantly electric or petrol/electric hybrid vehicles would bring significant air quality benefit if this is coupled with a reduction in private car usage and a similar conversion of other forms of public transport (buses, for example).

It is often assumed that consumers are ever more engaged in the 'ethical' value of the products and services that they purchase. It is felt that this is driving a renewed focus for businesses on 'greening' their operations. This may be generally true, however, in opposition to these general beliefs, recent survey results in Watford showed that most respondents were predominantly interested in price and safety and that considerations of environmental impact were not strong enough to convince consumers to pay more for a taxi or minicab journey. It is probably true to say that, on average, consumers like the idea of using green and/or ethical products, but perhaps not where there may be a significant economic disadvantage to doing so. It is clearly important to encourage the switch to green travel and it would seem likely from these observations that the burden of cost in this change will be borne initially by businesses which will have higher operating costs but must charge the same competitive fare as others who remain operating older vehicles. It is therefore a more complicated challenge to encourage take up of 'green' vehicles at significant cost where there is no easy path to higher profitability and some significant support may be required from the local authority to ensure this change takes place.

**A slender majority of customers (51.72%) say they would not pay more to travel in an electric or zero emission vehicle. 20.69% said yes and the remainder were not sure.**

There are increasing options available for professional drivers when considering a new vehicle. Battery range is improving. New models of the most popular truly fully electric vehicles are capable of a wide range of claimed mileages. Official ranges now vary between 80 miles to around 320 miles on a single charge. It is unlikely that most taxi or private hire drivers travel more than this in one day. Recent survey results in Watford showed most drivers travelled between 250 – 500 miles per week. This tallies with data from charging companies who install tracking devices in taxis and report drivers averaging 70/80 miles a day.

A real world test by the only currently licensed fully electric vehicle in Watford (Hyundai Ionic) gives a real world (winter) range of 124 miles and a saving over 4 months, between December 2018 and March 2019 of 5 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. For comparison, the average saved per

year if insulating the cavity to a detached house is 1 tonne CO<sub>2</sub> per year (assuming an average gas heated 3 bed house).

However, consideration must be given to the fact that many of the most efficient (higher range) models are quite small. They are probably unsuited to a wide range of work as private hire or taxi vehicles but may be suitable for specialist work. It may well be that smaller vehicles become useful as short distance, urban transport, while larger saloons continue working medium to long distance. There are a number of luxury models available as hybrids but these will be expensive options for most businesses and there are still a number of uncertainties associated with this new technology:

Range anxiety - is the battery capacity sufficient

Charger anxiety - is there anywhere to charge and where it is will it be available

Service & maintenance & vehicle performance - is there support in place to keep the vehicles on the road

Regardless of the data on mileage and real world use, the fear over range remains. It is a valid fear for small, single operator companies. A self-employed driver may receive a lucrative booking for a long distance job only to have to turn it down as the battery is at 50% charge.

Contributing to this 'range anxiety', charging infrastructure is perceived to be poor. This may not be the case in reality with a report in May 2019 claiming that the number of charging points in the UK now outnumbers the number of petrol stations. However, this provision still varies widely across the country and in regions. It is arguable that this is a 'chicken and egg' situation with companies, local authorities and private land owners unwilling to invest in infrastructure while sales of battery electric vehicles (BEV) remain low (1.1% market share by sales in 2019). By comparison, 60% of all new vehicle sales in Norway in March 2019 were fully electric vehicles.

Of course, sales will remain low while infrastructure is lacking. It is worth noting that in Hertfordshire the largest proportion of new vehicle registrations of fully electric vehicles is in Watford with approximately 25% of the total for 2018. Watford currently has an imbalance in supply of chargers versus demand being the 73rd local authority in the country for number of chargers versus the 14th for the number of registered electric vehicles. Watford is already in the top 20 local authorities in the country with regards to the number of ULEV registrations - over double that to the next local authority in Hertfordshire.\*

Year to date					
	YTD 2020	YTD 2019	% change	Mkt share -20	Mkt share -19
Diesel	162,097	401,870	-59.7%	17.7%	26.5%
Petrol	543,376	981,476	-44.6%	59.3%	64.6%
BEV	44,708	17,393	157.0%	4.9%	1.1%
PHEV	29,877	17,818	67.7%	3.3%	1.2%
HEV	57,649	60,765	-5.1%	6.3%	4.0%
MHEV diesel	30,867	13,630	126.5%	3.4%	0.9%
MHEV petrol	47,041	26,064	80.5%	5.1%	1.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>915,615</b>	<b>1,519,016</b>	<b>-39.7%</b>		

BEV - Battery Electric Vehicle; PHEV - Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle; HEV - Hybrid Electric Vehicle; MHEV - Mild Hybrid Electric Vehicle

SOURCE: Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, September 2020.

A 2019 report concerning autonomous vehicles and the relative preparedness of a number of countries took account of infrastructure. This included 4G coverage (in the case of autonomous vehicles) and charging infrastructure. The UK scored seventh out of twenty five overall which may seem a good rating but was a slip of 2 places on the 2018 rating. The rating was boosted by the countries desire to engage financially and legislatively. In infrastructure, the UK scored 10<sup>th</sup>. The charging infrastructure was better than many others but so far behind the leaders, the Netherlands, as to make little overall difference to the score.

A recent EV taxi survey for London found:

*“evidence from the trial suggests that a far more robust charging infrastructure than currently exists -alongside expected improvements in battery range - is required to encourage significant uptake of pure electric vehicles within the industry”.*

Given the lack of charging infrastructure at this time it is likely that, in the short term at least, vehicles used for medium to long range journeys may predominantly be made up of hybrid types. This will make any policy definition of 'zero-emission' or 'fully electric' vehicle critical to the success of transition from total reliance on fossil fuels.

Some vehicles advertised as 'fully electric', such as the new London LEVC, supplement electric drive with a stand-alone 'range extender' generator. In this cases the generator does not move the drivetrain which remains at all times powered electrically. The generator charges the battery. This is in contrast with other hybrid electric vehicles which use a mechanical drivetrain when powered by the engine. It would seem prudent to allow for some form of range extension to offset drivers concerns and to drive change. The council's current policy is to allow for a discount for any newly licensed or re-licensed fully electric vehicle. Whilst financial incentives should also be used to encourage uptake it is worth noting that, in terms of the overall cost of operating a taxi or minicab business, the vehicle licence cost is a very small proportion of business costs. In Watford the current annual licence fee is £225. It may be better to work towards connecting those who have bought such vehicles with more work, thus helping to underwrite the significant investment.

Lastly, there are currently a number of unknown impacts of large scale adoption of electric vehicles and these include the disposal of used batteries and the manufacture of the batteries using already scarce resources.

Hybrid vehicles blend electric power with a traditional internal combustion engine, usually petrol. It is entirely feasible to have a hybrid that operates on electric and biofuel or LPG (liquid petroleum gas). LPG is a cleaner burning fuel providing it is operating correctly. Much depends on the quality of the system used but direct injection types available for modern engines are very efficient. LPG conversion is only realistically available for petrol engines and filling stations are fewer. We are well served in Watford with three within close driving distance. LPG is approximately half the cost of petrol or diesel offering considerable savings for drivers. Conversion costs vary but for a 4 cylinder engine will be approximately £1500 and there are companies offering a service to replace the engine in a London style taxi with a new LPG model. This conversion is claimed to reduce emissions to Euro 6 standard.

Hybrid vehicles may offer more pragmatic solutions to the issues discussed in the electric vehicle section but these come at a risk that a driver can choose to simply operate on a traditional internal combustion engine. Whilst hydrogen fuel cells are zero emission at all times (the waste product of these vehicles are water and heat), the filling infrastructure for hydrogen vehicles is even more limited than that of electric vehicles and the tanks required to hold the hydrogen take up significant space in the vehicle (and are highly pressurised).

On balance, even if we take petrol or diesel cars, newer models are undoubtedly cleaner than their predecessors. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders claim "It would take 50 new cars today to produce the same amount of pollutant emissions as one vehicle built in the 1970s."

Petrol and diesel engines are subject to different regulations and it has been noted that emission levels may not have fallen as much as expected because emissions in real world driving conditions vary significantly over those performed in test conditions. It is therefore questionable the degree to which new vehicles, even those rated at euro 6, will contribute to any further improvement in air quality. On the other hand, it could be argued that an overall reduction in private car use would be more effective in improving air quality, even if all remaining vehicles continued to use petrol and diesel. There is no clear picture at this stage.

In some areas there is already a strong financial incentive to change to vehicles with newer emission standards as drivers of more polluting vehicles are subject to a charge when driving through a Low Emission or Ultra-Low Emission Zone. Drivers who regularly enter the London Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in a non-compliant vehicle must pay this charge or pass it on to the customer, neither an attractive business proposition. As Watford is situated close to London, it seems likely that this charge is already having an impact on local drivers and operators who will be forced to change vehicles or refuse work.

Manufacturers are still adjusting to Euro 6 and no date has been set for the introduction of Euro 7. Germany are among a small group of countries to announce that as of a certain date (in Germany's case 2030) they will ban the manufacture of new petrol or diesel models anyway and so the introduction of euro 7 may eventually become a moot point. Some manufacturers such as Volvo have announced that they will not sell new diesel cars from

2019 and will concentrate instead on electric or petrol/electric hybrid engines. The UK has stated that it will ban the sale of new petrol and diesel engines by 2035, including hybrid engines. At this time local charging infrastructure will become even more vital.

The Council strongly encourages the use of cleaner, low emission vehicles as hackney carriages or private hire vehicles and will continue to offer a reduced licence fee for electric vehicles. However, electric vehicles are only one part of this complicated puzzle and a more efficient use of existing fleet vehicles could be just as important in reducing emissions and congestion and improving air quality in the town.

The broad issues of Climate Change and climate emergencies can only be addressed through a coherent and connected series of actions encompassing not just local vehicle licensing but also transport more generally. Likewise the local and county wide plans of transport impact directly on local licensing decisions.

The health and wellbeing of our communities must be at the centre of policy decisions and this, of course, includes the drivers as much as any other resident or visitor to the area. Striking the correct balance between what is currently permitted and what is right will not be an easy task. At this stage, the balance of licensing EV's and vehicles powered in part or whole by internal combustion engines is very much a decision driven by cost, relative ecological benefit (when weighed against the scrapping of an otherwise perfectly serviceable vehicle) and availability of charging infrastructure.

*This strategy will seek to balance the requirements of creating a sustainable town with the long term impact of choice, particularly in the type of vehicle to be licensed and the infrastructure available to support those vehicles.*

*This strategy will seek to encourage and ensure a range of vehicle types are available to use to ensure all local needs are met and that the town meets its targets of being carbon neutral by 2030 and of being a leading sustainable town.*

*In connection with new booking technology and cleaner vehicles, a larger number of pick up and drop off points strategically located may ensure less waiting time overall, a reduction in parking issues and an improvement in air quality and congestion.*

*This strategy will explore the concept of priority vehicle access and road use for services offering residents the best access to transport.*

## 5.0 Future transport planning and the economic and built development of the town

### *Relevant Strategic Aims*

*All*

The way people work and travel has changed dramatically in the past 20 years and even more so in the past few months. New technology has brought both freedom and closer connection and this change in lifestyle behaviours has accelerated following the COVID-19 pandemic. In relation to the specific aims of this strategy, the change has led to a significant increase in people working flexible hours (or working remotely) and consequently choosing not to travel, or to travel at times other than the traditional 'rush hour'. Higher costs of living and a reduction in parking spaces and road space in general has led to an increasing number of residents rejecting private car ownership in favour of public transport. For an increasing number the costs of owning a car just do not add up.

That said, pre-COVID, traditional hours were still the norm in many sectors that require some travel such as retail and schools, and peak travel hours in Hertfordshire remain broadly as they have been for many years. Watford has experienced rapid growth of the built environment, with residential development projected to increase by 20% from 40 000 dwellings to 48 000 in the next 16 years. A fast growing, urban area, the population is 95 000 and is projected to grow to 120000 by 2030. The population of the county is expected to grow by around 175 000 in the next 10 years. All of this will bring additional burden to our already full roads, particularly where people are travelling to Watford from more remote parts of the county which lack convenient public transport links. Such growth will bring with it huge opportunity but also an urgent requirement to ensure our transport

network, both within the town, and to connections beyond, is fit for purpose, particularly as new residential properties are more likely to be built without parking spaces for privately owned vehicles, and the number of people travelling to Watford to work may increase (this will depend, to some degree, on changes implemented post-pandemic).

There are three key Local Plans with strong cross-over to this strategy. This report will not seek to replicate information presented in the Plans and the documents are available via links provided. A brief summary of each follows.

The economic development of Watford is intrinsically linked to the success of the transport network. The latest Economic Development Plan, currently under review, will be published in 2020. Ensuring the recognition of the importance of mobility services in economic success will be an important element of this taxi strategy. Likewise, it will be important to explore the additional services that a professional taxi and private hire trade can offer the town, including businesses in the town, and work undertaken in other regions to create 'local ambassadors' to boost tourism and visitor satisfaction could be replicated in Watford.

The built development of Watford is led by the Watford Local Plan<sup>^</sup>, adopted in 2013. The New Watford Local Plan<sup>~</sup> is currently under consideration and this new plan will guide development until 2036. The Plan is scheduled for adoption, if agreed, in 2021. The way people live in Watford, the types of housing available and the connection of this housing to good mobility links must be a key strategic aim in order to support well-being and economic growth.

The Local Transport Plan, published in 2018\* guides transport planning policy until 2031.

<sup>^</sup> [https://www.watford.gov.uk/info/20168/planning\\_policy/861/watford\\_local\\_plan](https://www.watford.gov.uk/info/20168/planning_policy/861/watford_local_plan) and [https://www.watford.gov.uk/info/20168/planning\\_policy/861/watford\\_local\\_plan/4](https://www.watford.gov.uk/info/20168/planning_policy/861/watford_local_plan/4)

<sup>~</sup> <https://www.watfordlocalplan.co.uk/> and [https://www.watford.gov.uk/info/20168/planning\\_policy/861/watford\\_local\\_plan/6](https://www.watford.gov.uk/info/20168/planning_policy/861/watford_local_plan/6)

\*<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/media-library/documents/about-the-council/consultations/ltp4-local-transport-plan-4-complete.pdf>

The Local Transport Plan seeks to encourage a shift from privately owned vehicle use to more sustainable forms of transport. Recognition of the taxi and private hire trade as key industry providers can only increase the chance of success of the plan overall. There is a strong focus on the use of public transport. Historically, and legally, hackney carriages are public transport and should be recognised as such in the development of transport strategies. Section 6 discusses in more detail some of the possibilities in terms of transport development.

*This strategy will seek to ensure that the taxi and private hire trade are fully considered in the development of the economic plan.*

*This strategy will seek to ensure that building development and planning considerations take account of the need for convenient and rapid access to efficient taxi and private hire transport services in order to support those who live and work in Watford but do not own their own vehicle.*

*This strategy will seek to support the use of taxi and private hire services in reducing private vehicle ownership.*

## 6.0 First Mile/Last Mile, Connected Travel Options, Park and Ride

### *Relevant Strategic Aims*

*The best possible value for all customers*

*A positive impact on the wider community and the environment through use of environmentally friendly vehicles and the use of new technology to support efficient access to these services*

Encouraging consumers to make the shift from private vehicle ownership will require significant improvement in connectivity, access and flexibility. Taxi and private hire services are well placed to offer the local, flexible transport service required to connect customers with other forms of public transport.

There have been a number of trial schemes in the UK seeking to connect customers with bus and train services, picking up at homes or convenient local spots and integrating payment systems to ensure ease of travel, for example, the My First Mile scheme piloted in Bristol\*.

Such schemes, and the encouragement of 'overall convenience' is critical to the success of integrated models as people must see this way of travelling as more convenient than the comfort, warmth and privacy of their own vehicles.

As road space becomes further congested, options to deliver visitors to travel nodes for embarkation for onward travel is one way in which the overall level of vehicles on the busiest roads in Watford can be reduced.

In order to successfully integrate local taxi and private hire services in to this process, the industry must be given access to suitable technology which will allow individual drivers and small businesses to re-route vehicles at peak travel times in order to maximise vehicle capacity. Such technology is already available and would allow true flexibility of operation for individuals. Taxis and Private Hire vehicles should be able to operate as either single customer occupancy vehicles or as 'shared' mobility vehicles where customers unknown to one another share the journey.

There is a suggestion that the transport solution described above appears to suffer in the real world from a lack of customer desire to share vehicles in this way. This may be due to customers feeling uncomfortable with this type of travel and yet the same shared space is not an issue on a bus or train.

\*<https://esoterix.co.uk/mfm/>

Positive promotion of the trade, made possible by improvements in standards, training and convenience, would help significantly in changing consumer perception and the desirability of shared services and it should be possible, with imaginative marketing, to encourage a new era of shared travel which is socially beneficial (in terms of community well-being) as well as necessary.

Payment systems could be created but with the rise in 'contactless' and other proprietary payment systems, such as Apple Pay, the development of a travel card may be unnecessary unless somehow the system also brings with it a consumer benefit (discount for frequent use, for example).

*This strategy will seek to identify ways to encourage shared use of taxis and private hire vehicles, including, if possible, the provision of necessary booking and planning technology.*

*This strategy will seek to encourage greater connection between local business and transport service providers to ensure visitors, residents and people working in Watford have access to the safest, most professional and most cost effective taxi and private hire service*

## 7.0 Accessibility

### *Relevant Strategic Aims*

*The best possible value for all customers.*

*A service that provides equal and fair access for all where operators, proprietors and drivers are aware of their obligations under all relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010 and where discriminatory practice is eradicated.*

*A positive impact on the wider community and the environment through use of environmentally friendly vehicles and the use of new technology to support efficient access to these services.*

*Taxi and private hire services to be integrated, understood and fully considered in all transport, planning and infrastructure decisions.*

Easy and equal access to transport services is essential for any society if we are to improve equality of opportunity. Disabled, vulnerable and elderly passengers can often be disproportionately impacted by changes to transport policy and it is imperative that any new taxi and private hire strategy ensures improvements to the current provision of service.

A 2015 survey by Disability Watford reported that of a local population of approximately 10,000 people, 60% said they rarely travelled due to the stress or anxiety or general difficulty caused by doing so. This included bus travel, taxi and private hire. This trend has been further supported by various reports, including to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Equality Act 2010 and Disability (2016)\* and is further supported by regular media articles.

In July 2018 The Department for Transport published the 'Inclusive Transport Strategy'^, a document aimed at guiding transport provision in all sectors. It is important to note that attempts to improve accessibility in taxis and private hire vehicles go back at least as far as 1995 and the Disability Discrimination Act but that progress has been incredibly slow. The DfT's new standards (statutory guidance+), published July 2020, make no mention of accessibility or compulsory disability awareness training for drivers. This is in contrast to both the Inclusive Transport Strategy and the recent statement by DfT in May 2019 that accessibility should be at the heart of new transport technology~.

\* <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/equality-act-2010-and-disability/news-parliament-2015/equality-act-report-published/>

^<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-transport-strategy>

~(<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/accessibility-must-be-at-the-heart-of-new-transport-tech>)

+(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-licensing-recommendations-for-a-safer-and-more-robust-system>)

A statement by DPTAC (The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee) released 8 August 2020, outlines the committee's view on how taxi and private hire services should operate. The views expressed align with the aims of this strategy.

This lack of definitive action also appears to be in contradiction to the findings of the recent Task and Finish Group, the findings of which were published in Sept 2018, and which said of accessibility and any proposed standards:

*Evidence received by the Group highlighted that consideration of accessibility needs is essential in any reform of the sector. If the Government enacts national standards, accessibility considerations should be an integral part of their development, not a mere add-on. In the short term, it is important that licensing authorities use the powers they already have to improve access and passenger experience.*

It therefore seems likely that it will fall to local authorities to make these important decisions for some time to come.

### **Vehicle Type and Accessibility**

There is no specific vehicle type that could be introduced to resolve accessibility issues. This is because different disabilities or impairments require different types of solution. A customer may prefer to 'sit down' in to a saloon vehicle; another may require a waist height swivel chair (as found on many London style taxis).

Nationally, wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) provision is generally poor. Although there has been a recent increase in the numbers of private hire vehicles that are fully accessible, the number of WAVs as a total percentage of all licensed vehicles remains very low.

For example, according to the most recent DfT statistics<sup>^</sup> the total number of PHV's in London is 88,100. Only 600 of these are WAV's. Where there are a higher percentage of WAV's this tends to be due to a concentration in a few areas. For example, the total number of wheelchair accessible hackney carriages is raised significantly by the fact that all London taxis (currently approx. 17,000 vehicles) must be wheelchair accessible. In comparison, some licensing areas bordering London have total numbers of WAV's numbering in single digits for the entire district.

**Table 1: Summary of 2019 taxi and private hire vehicle licensing figures compared with 2018 (TAXI0102)**

	Thousands		
	London	England outside London	England
	March 2019 figure and percentage change compared to March 2018		
<b>Total licensed vehicles</b>	<b>108.2</b> ⬇️ <b>-0.6%</b>	<b>183.6</b> ⬆️ <b>4.5%</b>	<b>291.8</b> ⬆️ <b>2.5%</b>
Taxis	20.1 ⬇️ -4.2%	50.5 ⬇️ -2.5%	70.6 ⬇️ -3.0%
wheelchair accessible taxis	20.1 ⬇️ -4.2%	21.0 ⬇️ -2.6%	41.2 ⬇️ -3.4%
Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs)	88.1 ⬆️ 0.2%	133.1 ⬆️ 7.4%	221.2 ⬆️ 4.4%
wheelchair accessible PHVs	0.6 ⬆️ 12.2%	4.2 ⬆️ 7.7%	4.8 ⬆️ 8.2%
<b>Licensed PHV operators</b>	<b>2.2</b> ⬇️ <b>-7.0%</b>	<b>13.3</b> ⬆️ <b>4.6%</b>	<b>15.5</b> ⬆️ <b>2.8%</b>
<b>Total licensed drivers</b>	<b>129.9</b> ⬇️ <b>-5.5%</b>	<b>232.7</b> ⬆️ <b>4.0%</b>	<b>362.6</b> ⬆️ <b>0.4%</b>
Taxi only licences	23.2 ⬇️ -2.8%	30.3 ⬇️ -10.1%	53.5 ⬇️ -7.1%
PHV-only licences	106.8 ⬇️ -6.0%	120.0 ⬆️ 9.5%	226.8 ⬆️ 1.6%
Dual licences	0.0 ➡️ 0.0%	82.4 ⬆️ 2.5%	82.4 ⬆️ 2.5%

The number of licensed taxis is falling across the country and in each area the percentage loss of WAVs is equal to or greater than the overall percentage loss<sup>^</sup>.

Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Statistics: England 2019 - Page 3

SOURCE: DfT Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Statistics 2019

The disabled population of the UK is approximately 13 million or 20%. The number of

wheelchair users is approximately 1.2 million or 2%. Looking at these figures it could be argued that a local authority fleet comprising 2% WAVs across both hackney carriage and private hire services is broadly representative of customer need.

However, this simple comparison does not tell the whole story for a number of reasons:

disabled people, elderly people or vulnerable people may be proportionately more likely to need to use a taxi or minicab, thus the level of service provision at any given time is more critical

Some passengers will not be able to access a certain type of vehicle, thus choice is reduced as an overall percentage of available services

<sup>^</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/833569/taxi-and-phv-england-2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833569/taxi-and-phv-england-2019.pdf)

In most areas WAVs tend to be taxis. Taxis are usually more expensive to hire than minicabs. Passengers who need to use a WAV are therefore financially penalised through lack of provision

Increasing provision is not easy. Recent survey results conducted as part of the Watford Borough Council Vehicle Licensing Policy consultation resulted in members of the public saying the following:

There was a mixed response concerning wheelchair accessible vehicles. Many (46.43%) think there should be a fixed number of WAV's.

When asked how many taxis should be wheelchair accessible, the largest suggestions by far (each with 30.77%) were for over 10% but less than 50%.

In answering the same question for minicabs, the same percentages (30.77%) were split between 0 and 25%. There are currently very few WAV's on the minicab circuit.

Drivers asked the same questions said:

Most (53.85%) thought there should not be a fixed number of wheelchair accessible vehicles.

If there had to be a fixed number, the majority of those who answered (46.67%) said there should be between 10 and 25% of the taxi fleet.

The majority (38.46%) thought that 10% or less of minicabs should be WAVs

It can be seen that views appear to be reversed between members of the public and drivers in terms of whether there should be a fixed number. Even if a fixed number was introduced, the mechanism of doing so is likely to bring its own issues. For example, some authorities have introduced a policy whereby any newly licensed taxi must be a WAV. Existing saloon licensed vehicles can continue to be renewed. In licensing areas where taxi vehicle licences are restricted, it is not clear how this could work. One option may be to allow new licences

but only for certain vehicle types (WAV, fully electric) but this leads to further questions over unmet demand and/or over-supply at peak times. It seems a possible solution may be to incentivise drivers in other ways to take up these vehicles. Indeed, this idea of incentives is a theme to return to.

### **Hackney Carriage vs Private Hire Vehicle in Accessibility**

Across the country the bulk of provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles seems to have fallen to the taxi trade. It is not clear why this is. It may be that for many years there was no suitable vehicle that could be used as a private hire vehicle as the law broadly prohibits the licensing of a vehicle as a private hire vehicle that could be mistaken for a taxi. Depending on how this is interpreted, it could be that authorities were reluctant to licence vehicles with WAV capability.

Further complications occur in definition of what constitutes a fully wheelchair accessible vehicle. Most vehicles are constructed to carry a wheelchair built to 'reference' dimensions. The 'reference' wheelchair is a set of measurements devised some years ago. The reality is, these days, there are hundreds of different size and weight wheelchairs and many fall outside of the reference parameters. Customers are left with no clear idea of whether or not a particular service will be suitable often right up until the moment it arrives. If it is not, there is not much the driver can do and the customer is left to wait for another vehicle, or to cancel the service with limited right of complaint.

The general cost of journeys has typically been higher for wheelchair users in particular. Nationally, this was not helped by lack of training in disability awareness and a lack of understanding of the Equality Act 2010 although drivers in Watford have had such training since 2007. In April 2017 the provisions of the Equality Act concerning the carrying and charging of wheelchair users in WAVs were brought in to force and the driver now commits a criminal (rather than civil) offence if the meter is used before the passengers is on-board and secured.

Although this was a welcome improvement the sad reality is that it may further encourage drivers who have the choice of not using a WAV (London is compulsory WAV for any taxi, as is Plymouth) to buy a saloon or other vehicle type instead. This may lead to a reduction in the numbers of wheelchair accessible vehicles available in areas and it is certainly the case that the numbers in Watford have fallen over the past 10 years, with a steep reduction since 2017. In areas where no restrictions or quota is set on type the number of available vehicles can be astonishingly low. In one local authority area of 321 licensed vehicles, there are only 4 WAVs. An unmet demand survey in this area suggested no need to increase this number.

Advice received from one leading equalities barrister suggests that much more needs to be done to ensure private hire operators provide sufficient vehicles of each type in order that they are complying with obligations contained in the Equality Act 2010. It is not a council's duty to enforce local business compliance with the Equality Act but the council does have a general duty under section 149 of the Equality Act to promote equality in all it does and this must be a key consideration in any strategy.

As a last point, wheelchair accessible vehicles used for business purposes are not VAT exempt and the cost of such vehicles is usually approximately 20% over the cost of a similar vehicle that is not wheelchair accessible. Given the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the broader desire to ensure accessibility for all at a fair and equal price, there is currently little overall incentive for drivers to purchase these more expensive vehicles and this is likely a large reason for the decline in licensed WAV numbers between 2018 and 2019 as a percentage of the total number of licensed private hire vehicles, and an overall decline in terms of licensed hackney carriages – often seen as the benchmark vehicle for access due to the immediacy of hire and the requirement not to pre-book. This expense has been exacerbated, and will be further increased in the next few years, by a need to buy newer, cleaner vehicles in many licensed areas including Watford.

It is clear that striking the correct balance in availability of vehicle type will be difficult. Much more can be done to ensure adequate supply of all vehicle types by matching customer needs directly to service providers. This matching process will be, and already is being, enhanced by technology. However, technology must be accessible if it is to work for all, and this is not the case at the moment.

## Technology and Accessibility

It is evident that the shift to booking private hire vehicles and some taxis using an app on a smartphone has led to a significant number of issues alongside the obvious advantages. A 2018 review of the Future of Mobility, published by the Government Office for Science\*, summarises some of the positive impact of apps and also outline two possible negative outcomes resulting from the sudden appearance of smartphone booking technology\*. The following is an extract:

*“[Apps] are increasing the number of both potential customers and providers of taxi and PHV journeys, meaning that sparse and geographically spread demand is better served, at appropriate prices, and therefore mitigating the need for restrictions on the number of taxis and PHVs serving an area. Second, enhanced service monitoring in the form of high volumes of customer feedback is reducing the need for external checks. However, they also note that fierce competition between apps could lead to unstable demand and/or supply profiles, thus reducing demand for taxis and PHVs, while conversely, a single dominant app could result in a monopoly whereby both passengers and drivers could suffer from unfairly set prices. These considerations suggest that future regulation might instead focus on the possibility of future monopoly and collusion in a market led by smartphone apps.”*

Added to the potential negative impacts alluded to – unstable demand and supply, and a future monopoly – is the negative impact of restricted access that may result from apps becoming the dominant or only form of booking system.

\*[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/766753/Taxisprivate\\_hire.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766753/Taxisprivate_hire.pdf)

Technology has encouraged greater use of services for those who can use the technology to their advantage but there is a significant proportion of the community who will not have access to, or ever use, such technology. The challenge of the future transport service is to provide equal access to all customers regardless of the method of booking and the service of the future must retain sufficient traditional booking methods to ensure that all members of our communities can travel easily and at the same cost as those booking via app. Automated call centres and customer services may well reduce operating costs to companies but they invariably lead to confusion, delay and concern when customer complaints are not responded to correctly. They may also require intervention from the regulatory authority when, if correctly handled, the complaint may have been resolved quickly and without further escalation and cost.

*This strategy will seek to ensure the correct provision of all vehicle types to ensure fair and equal access to services. This may include incentives to encourage the purchase of wheelchair accessible vehicles.*

*This strategy will seek to ensure that services, however offered, are available equally to all, and that the price paid and level of service offered is as required by the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.*

*This strategy will seek to address this issue and to ensure that any future service allows for booking in a number of ways including by telephone or in person where that is preferable to the customer.*

*This strategy will seek to connect local businesses and services with local transport providers to make the most of new technology where it can provide increased access for all.*

*This strategy will seek to ensure that booking technology does not lead to negative impact on consumers by exploring all possible alternative methods for connecting customers directly with suppliers to ensure best value and continued competition.*

*This strategy will seek to explore ways in which customers who do not have access to online booking systems can easily and safely access transport services, i.e. by the use of 'call-back' systems.*

*This strategy will seek to encourage the development of technological solutions which include privacy by design and safeguarding by design, to ensure maximum benefit to the community of permitting the operation of a particular company in the town.*

## 8.0 Community Safety and the Value of the Taxi and Private Hire Industry

### *Relevant Strategic Aims*

*A positive impact on the wider community and the environment through use of environmentally friendly vehicles and the use of new technology to support efficient access to these services*

*Access to easy mechanisms for stakeholders to raise concerns, report issues and highlight opportunities through dedicated driver and operator support.*

*Taxi and private hire services to be integrated, understood and fully considered in all transport, planning and infrastructure decisions.*

Within the past five years taxi and private hire drivers have been subject to increasing levels of mandatory training in order that they are adequately prepared for the requirements of providing a safe and comfortable journey. They are also asked to report concerns over local safeguarding and community safety issues.

The requirement to look after passengers is as old as the legislation with drivers required to be 'fit and proper' before a licence is issued. The definition of fit and proper remains broad and is determined at a local level. It is sometimes defined as 'safe and suitable' and further as somebody of good character, an upstanding member of the community and somebody who would happily help others who need help.

The requirement for extensive training in some areas, including Watford, can cause a number of issues arising from 'cross border' hiring – the name given to the issue of drivers from other licensing areas (often not so trained) picking up in the local area – and it may be that the outcomes of this strategy can be applied to ensure consistency across a larger county or regional zone. However, this strategy is specifically concerned with Watford and the requirements placed upon local drivers to assist in the broad community safety aims.

Drivers are currently trained in a number of safeguarding trends as well as receiving detailed information concerning dementia and the assistance of disabled passengers. The systems in place to support drivers who wish to make complaints range from national government led organisations, such as the police, Crimestoppers and Prevent, to large and medium size charitable or non-governmental organisations such as the Modern Slavery Helpline and NSPCC. None of the organisations or methods of reporting currently available are specifically set up for taxi and private hire driver needs and yet the impact on community safety of a well organised and well supported network of drivers who are willing and able to report concerns, and who feel safe to do so, could be enormous. It is currently beyond the scope of this strategy to place a monetary value on this contribution but it seems clear that such assistance could be financially significant.

Nationally, there are a number of documented incidents where the quick thinking actions of drivers, trained in safe-guarding measures, have led to the prevention of serious crime and the apprehension of prolific offenders.

Despite this increasing reliance on drivers to provide assistance and to report concerns, where drivers are themselves victims of crime, support seems sporadic at best. Whether this is the result of a failure to report accurately, or a lack of investigative resources on the part of the authority responsible, is perhaps less significant than the perception among drivers and operators that this lack of support is a real and increasing issue.

If drivers and operators are to truly integrate safeguarding requirements in to every aspect of their businesses as required, desired and needed, then it is clear an improvement in this situation must be made.

*This strategy will seek to address concerns held by local drivers and operators over the support offered to those who can and do report safeguarding.*

*The strategy will seek to improve connection between drivers and local law enforcement services to reduce risk and anxiety, and to improve the impact of the network upon community safety.*

*The strategy will seek to develop a single point of contact for drivers to offer assistance in reporting concerns and staying safe.*

## 9.0 Taxi and Private Hire Services – Increasing Demand, Decreasing Satisfaction

### *Relevant Strategic Aims –*

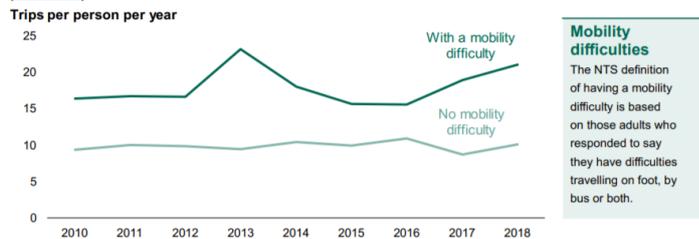
*The highest standards of customer focused professional service delivery. Expertise should be guided by the authority and driven by customer specific demand reinforcing understanding from both customers and business owners that driving is a professional vocation.*

*Reasonable and sustainable balance in supply and demand*

The following information is based upon the national statistics published each year by the Department for Transport.

The number of vehicles and drivers in England and Wales has reached record levels. This increase has been driven, in part, by new technologies which make booking a taxi or minicab very easy, and which track vehicles closely, thus increasing security and significantly reducing customer anxiety over the arrival time of booked transport. The average number of journeys taken by customers in 2019 was 10 journeys, an increase on the 2018 figure of 9. The average distance travelled per journey has also increased from 55 miles to 62 miles.

**Chart 14: Taxi or PHV trips per person per year, by mobility difficulty, England, 2018**  
(NTS0709)

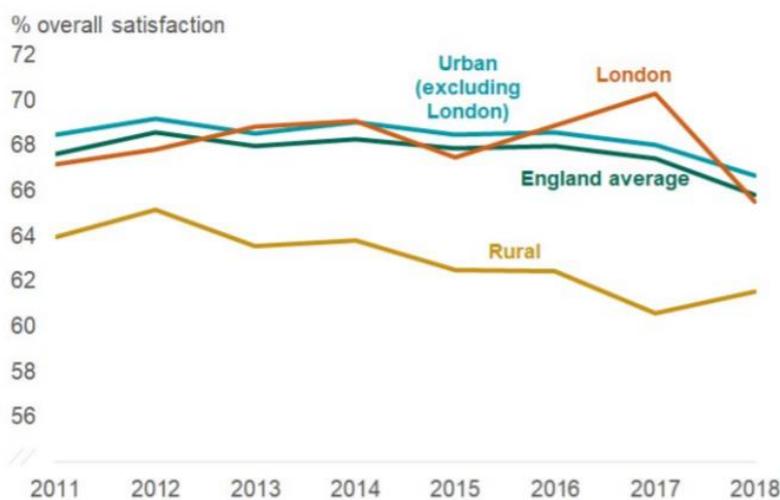


There has been a significant increase in the number of journeys taken by disabled people, up from an average of 16 journeys per year in 2018 to 21 journeys per year in 2019.

Likewise, women and older women made more trips than male counterparts, highlighting the safety and accessibility function of taxi and private hire provision.

Lastly, those without access to a car made 4 times as many journeys as those with access to a car. A statistic of significant importance when considering the Council’s aims to reduce the use of private cars for travel within the Borough.

**Chart 18: Overall taxi passenger satisfaction in rural and urban areas and London, England 2011 to 2018**



Unfortunately, nationally, the overall satisfaction with taxi and private hire services seems to have fallen since 2011. It may be that the proliferation of services, whilst initially seen as a good thing for customers, is leading to a drop in the standards provided by individual

drivers and operators. It is not currently known how satisfaction stands in Watford or Hertfordshire but it seems likely that there is room for improvement.

*This strategy will aim to ensure an increase in standards of provision and customer service. This must necessarily go together with a sustainable supply and demand and the ability of licensed drivers to earn a living and run a safe, successful business. This could involve an increase in support from authorities where drivers are victims of crime or witnesses to serious incidents. This could also include support from the local authority in terms of access to business for those businesses demonstrating consistently high standards of operation.*

#### 10.0 Supply and Demand in Uncapped Market – Service supply, Driver earnings and Driver well-being

##### *Relevant Strategic Aims*

*The best possible value for all customers.*

*The highest standards of customer focused professional service delivery. Expertise should be guided by the authority and driven by customer specific demand reinforcing understanding from both customers and business owners that driving is a professional vocation.*

*Reasonable and sustainable balance in supply and demand*

*The ability for professional drivers to grow and develop a business in just the same way as they might with any other business opportunity, including the use of appropriate technology*

There have been a number of key impacts of the recent, rapid app development and 'disruption' of the industry. The first has been a large increase in the number of private hire vehicle drivers and proprietors which has seen a connected rise in supply of services. This shift in the balance of supply and demand was sudden and dramatic and the industry is struggling to deal with the change. Customer expectation is now such that any delay on the provision of services (whichever services they may be – digitally streamed films, fast food delivery, taxi services) is seen as a significant negative attribute of any business. Previously, drivers and operators controlled supply and customers had little choice but to wait.

This increase in supply in private hire vehicle services seems to have caused an associated shift away from customers using hackney carriage services. The extent of this shift is not well known and any knowledge of the shift is based upon reports by hackney carriage drivers reporting to licensing teams and on social media. Smartphone apps which show the location of a nearby car service now somewhat negate the main traditional benefit of a hackney carriage rank – a vehicle for hire immediately at a known location. Drivers no longer have to wait in a single, known location in order to attract business. However, waiting in other areas by drivers using apps has negatively impacted on parking, congestion and air quality, and a number of complaints have arisen out of this trend. This trend has also been the cause of other anti-social activities such as noise pollution.

It is important to note, however, that traditional hackney carriage services are still required in some key locations, particularly in the town centre, and it is reported that customers will still often choose to use a visible vehicle rather than take the time to book a private hire vehicle, even one that is only the press of a smartphone screen away for those who have access to such services. For those who do not have access to smartphone booking technology the provision of ranks is still of significant importance. Some customers cannot walk far and even a local minicab office may be too far away. It is therefore important that provision of fixed rank space is not eroded by a misconception that all customers will or can book using app technology (see section on Accessibility). Added to this must be the understanding that whilst progress dictates a broad change in the means by which customers access services, this change is rapid and business owners must be given time and support to adapt. The removal of the existing traditional 'shop front' hackney carriage rank

infrastructure without serious consideration of the alternatives and likely outcomes would not be acceptable. The strategy must seek to retain existing rank space, explore the opportunity to expand this provision if feasible, and ensure that additional drop off/pick up spaces are available to encourage customers to switch to shared and public transport and away from privately owned vehicles.

The third major impact of the shift to over-supply is a reduction in costs to the consumer. This is traditionally considered a significant benefit and it is clear that this has been beneficial to many people who now choose to take a minicab to work instead of a bus as the cost of a privately hired vehicle is no longer prohibitive. In terms of mobility as a service, however, we do not wish to see bus services priced off the road and the reduction in cost not only impacts on other transport service providers, but it impacts severely on the drivers of vehicles. These earning implications have further negative impact on road safety (as vehicles may not be maintained to the correct standard) and community safety (as drivers are more concerned with earning enough to live than they are with being actively involved in the wider goings on in any particular area).

Driver well-being and the ability to earn a sustainable living are critical in planning for the future transport network. As it seems unlikely that autonomous services will be available to the mass market within less than 10 to 15 years, and even then, the level of service offered will be minimal in terms of passenger assistance, it is both prudent and right to plan for human drivers for the foreseeable future. This paper has discussed the additional skills, value and impact of a professional driving force and it is unreasonable to expect drivers to attain these levels of professionalism if the work does not offer satisfactory reward.

Determining market saturation in taxi and private hire services is exceptionally difficult. A period of deregulation of capped markets across the UK and over the past 10 plus years has shown that a standard approach which assumes the market will determine its own level is not an effective method of ensuring adequate supply or demand.

Supply in the taxi and private hire market is skewed by a number of factors including:

A need for people to find what has been considered, until recently, employment requiring few or relatively easy to obtain qualifications (with the probable exception of the London Cab trade)

A need for additional employment (second jobs) at various times and particularly in times of economic downturn

A flexible approach to working hours taken by drivers who can choose when to work. This is often cited as one of the most beneficial perks of the job.

A number of drivers who work part time as much for social reasons as economic.

A value in the 'plate' or vehicle which encourages proprietors to wait before changing jobs even when earnings are falling significantly.

A statistically older workforce, many of whom have been self-employed for years, who are not confident about changing employment or about becoming employees.

*This strategy will seek to guide the development of the driver workforce to support the creation of a professional driver qualification.*

*This strategy will seek to achieve realistic balance in supply and demand where customers can access services within a reasonable timeframe and drivers are able to operate sustainable, environmentally friendly businesses.*

*This strategy will explore the possibility of supporting those who wish to move out from the industry where it can be shown that such support is economically beneficial to the community as a whole.*

*This strategy will seek to offer support in mental health and well-being to drivers*

## 11.0 Driver and Operator Training

### *Relevant Strategic Aims*

*The highest standards of customer focused professional service delivery. Expertise should be guided by the authority and driven by customer specific demand reinforcing understanding from both customers and business owners that driving is a professional vocation.*

*A service that provides equal and fair access for all where operators, proprietors and drivers are aware of their obligations under all relevant legislation, including the Equality Act 2010 and where discriminatory practice is eradicated.*

*Reasonable and sustainable balance in supply and demand*

The ability for professional drivers to grow and develop a business in just the same way as they might with any other business opportunity, including the use of appropriate technology, is an essential part of ensuring that the future network is fit for purpose and remains so without significant burden being placed upon the public for the oversight of such.

Driver training strongly supports other suggested improvements to standards of licensing made by a number of national organisations including the House of Lords Select Committee Report on the Equality Act 2010: The Impact on Disabled People, The Department for Transport Inclusive Transport Strategy, the Task and Finish Group on Taxi and Private Hire Licensing and, most recently, the Department for Transport Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Standards.

Drivers and operators in Watford have been required to attend regular update training since 2012. This training includes Customer Service, Driver and Passenger Safety, Rules and Regulations, Disability and Equality Awareness and Safe-Guarding. Since April 2020 drivers have also been offered free Infection Control training.

It is clear from the scope of this strategy and the number of influencing factors included that training of drivers is essential in order to encourage a professional service standard. Not only in the currently offered topics but in broader topics such as business management and the future of the licensed trade.

It is unlikely that standards of operation will significantly improve unless drivers are supported in realising the full potential of their businesses and further supported in promoting their skills as professionals.

*This strategy will guide the development of a professional driver qualification.*

*This strategy will seek to improve methods of training and driver updates, collaboration and consultation to ensure the very best support for businesses operating to the required standards.*

DRAFT

## 12.0 Service Area Specific Objectives – Strategic Aims to be embedded

### **Transport and Parking**

#### Overview

Transport provisions are delivered by both the local authority and the Highway and Transport Authority Hertfordshire County Council working to national guidelines. The local authority aims are to introduce sustainable options to reduce congestion, improve air quality, lower carbon footprint and offer alternative modes of transport. The County Council support these measures and county-wide work to national and statutory guidelines to promote greener travel and encourage walking and cycling.

#### Current policies

Local Transport Plan 2018 – 2031

#### Taxi and Private Hire Challenges and Strategic Objectives

To be considered in relation to the objectives of the Local Transport Plan not only as a form of transport but in terms of the wider social and community impact that a professional taxi and private hire trade will bring, including the associated economic benefit.

Decisions relating to Private Hire vehicle services to recognise their role as an important part of the public transport system and to grant the same access rights to private hire vehicles as are sometimes given to hackney carriages (public transport).

To consider decisions concerning overall transport provision to all destinations including businesses, educational and social hubs that take account of the fact that a significant

proportion of the county's residents cannot or will not walk or use buses or cycles as these means of transport do not fit their needs.

To ensure continued relevant vehicle access to all parts of the town and to ensure that where access must be restricted, provision is made for allowing the continued access of local taxi and private hire services which reach the required training and vehicle standards.

To consider and promote the use of professionally trained and operated licensed taxi and private hire providers in any planned schemes such as First Mile, Last Mile (FMLM), Park and Ride and Shared Use/Demand Responsive Transport schemes.

In connection with new booking technology and cleaner vehicles, to consider creating a larger number of two car pick up/drop off/short term waiting points strategically located to ensure less waiting time overall, a reduction in parking issues and an improvement in air quality and congestion.

To consider connection with local transport apps when decisions on rank, pick up and drop off location is provided.

To consider the use of priority vehicle access and road use for services offering residents the best access to the highest standard of transport, such as use of bus lanes and priority traffic lanes.

To consider, where ANPR to be used to manage access to roads, that vehicles used as local taxi/private hire are not penalised for access to pick-up and drop off and that there is no requirement to pre-register for access or to prevent penalty ticket issue.

## **Planning, Development and Housing**

### Overview

Planning is the process of managing the development of land and buildings. The purposes of this process is to support sustainable development and protect the local environment and amenity.

The planning, development and housing sections are responsible for setting planning policies and deciding whether a development should go ahead. This could be anything from an extension on a house to a large urban development. The teams provide guidance and ensure enforcement of development that is not permitted.

The Housing Strategy for 2015-2020 has been developed with key partners and looks to improve Watford's housing offer in a planned and sustainable way. The Housing Section will engage with the community and build a solid foundation for Watford's future wellbeing.

The importance of encouraging sustainable new development, as well as improving the condition of new homes, means that the Housing Strategy will support the delivery of the Local Plan and play a big part in the Economic Development Strategy.

### Current policies

National Planning Policy Framework

Watford Borough Council Local Plan

Watford Local Development Scheme 2018-2021

The Housing Strategy 2015-2020

Watford 5 Year Housing Supply Statement - Oct 2019

Adopted Core Strategy

New Watford Local Plan

### Taxi and Private Hire Challenges and Strategic Objectives

To ensure consideration as to how the expected population of Watford will access efficient, value for money, transport services.

To consider the provision of sufficient and easily accessible pick-up/drop-off/waiting areas for taxi and private hire vehicles in both private and public developments

To consider a requirement for development purposes of provision to connect residents and business users/customers directly to transport services (electronic taxi booking, lobby booking, discounts, vouchers etc to encourage use over private car ownership)

To consider priority/charge free access to buildings/streets for the purposes of picking up and dropping off using sensor technology/anpr

To consider, where ANPR to be used to manage private car parks, that vehicles used as local taxi/private hire are not penalised for pick-up and drop off and that there is no requirement to register at reception.

To consider provision of access to taxi and private hire vehicle sharing schemes for local residents with assistance in how to access such services provided by developers/businesses as a necessary requirement of planning and development.

To ensure developers engage in positive advertising/promotion of such schemes to be included in development brochures

To ensure sufficient charging provision for visiting taxi and private hire EV's.

## Town Centre/BID

### Overview

Watford BID is a business led initiative supported by government legislation which gives local businesses the power to raise and spend funds locally with the aim of improving their own business environment. It is an investment scheme where local businesses agree how their money should be invested to benefit themselves, their employees, customers, clients and their town.

Watford BID covers the geographical area of the town centre. The BID was started in 2016.

### Current policies

Watford Business Plan 2016 - 2021

### Taxi and Private Hire Challenges and Strategic Objectives

To actively promote the benefit to business of offering a fully accessible customer service focussed transport service

To recognise and actively promote the economic benefit of a local, highly trained, quality transport service.

To assist in the development and promotion of a driver 'ambassador' training program where drivers are given the skills and information to promote Watford as a visitor destination. To include historic and tourist information.

To recognise and actively promote the importance of ease of access for all customers, particularly those who may have additional mobility needs, to support the continuation of community shops and precincts, and to encourage the development of new social hubs.

## **Economic Development and Business**

### Overview

The over-riding objective of the Economic Development Strategy is to maintain, develop and grow the town's economic development activity, to deliver a prosperous economy for Watford and to ensure that as a town we create sufficient opportunities for local people to maximise their economic prosperity and potential.

### Current policies

#### [Economic Development Strategy 2015-2020](#)

### Taxi and Private Hire Challenges and Strategic Objectives

To recognise the taxi and private hire trade as an important local industry

To actively promote the benefit to business of offering a customer service focussed transport service

To recognise and actively promote the economic benefit of a local, highly trained, quality transport service.

To assist in the development and promotion of a driver 'ambassador' training program where drivers are given the skills and information to promote Watford as a visitor destination. To include historic and tourist information.

To recognise and promote the importance of ease of access for all customers, particularly those who may have additional mobility needs, to support the continuation of community shops and precincts, and to encourage the development of new social hubs.

## Community Safety

### Overview

The Community Safety team work in partnership to protect and prevent harm to residents and staff. This is achieved in a number of ways including managing the multi-agency Community Protection Group (CPG) for the Borough and co-ordination of the Community Safety Partnership the team. The Community Safety team work to make safeguarding everybody's business, ensuring that we are fulfilling our duties and safeguarding our staff and residents. This includes delivering plans, policies and action for both children and vulnerable adults, and dealing with, and leading on initiatives to prevent, various safeguarding issues related to violent extremism, modern day slavery, domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation, youth crime and any other safeguarding matter.

### Current policies

Community Safety Plan

Sustainable Community Strategy 2026?

### Taxi and Private Hire Challenges and Strategic Objectives

To support the development of technological solutions to assist drivers and operators to report concerns directly to the authority. Solutions should ensure privacy by design and safeguarding by design to ensure maximum benefit is brought to the community by any company that is licensed to operate in the town.

To consider and implement effective ways to address concerns held by local drivers and operators over the support offered to those who can and do report safeguarding

To consider, support and assist in implementing a scheme to improve connection between drivers and local law enforcement services to reduce risk and anxiety, and to improve the positive impact of the network upon community safety.

To consider options for, and support the development of, a single point of contact for drivers to offer assistance in reporting concerns and staying safe.

To develop a scheme to recognise the achievements of local drivers and operators in providing community safety functions.

## **Licensing**

### Overview

In order to operate or drive a licensed vehicle, or to offer booking services for journeys, businesses are required to hold the correct licences issued by the local authority. The process of managing applications and grants, along with the enforcement of licence conditions, is undertaken by the licensing team. The team are responsible for developing policy in relation to taxi and private hire issues and are likely to have the most day-to day contact with licensed operators, proprietors and drivers.

### Current policies

Vehicle Licensing Policy

Guidance on the Grant, Refusal, Suspension and Revocation of Licences

Private Hire Operators Policy

## Taxi and Private Hire Challenges and Strategic Objectives

To ensure that development of policies concerning taxi and private hire are done so with full consideration of the taxi strategy.

To consider ways and support methods of increasing uptake of zero emission vehicles in vehicle licensing policies

To consider ways and support methods of increasing uptake of suitable number of wheelchair accessible vehicles

To deliver training to staff and members on taxi related issues in order that decisions are informed by the latest developments

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## Health

### Overview

Environmental Health has a wide ranging duty to ensure the health and safety of residents, businesses and visitors to Watford. In respect of the taxi and private hire trade there is most likely to be impact in terms of regulation and monitoring of air quality within the borough, the maintenance of quality of life and public health of residents including nuisance investigations for noise, services and projects to promote and improve energy efficiency and the reduction in carbon emissions from both businesses and residents, and wider strategic work including leading on delivery of the improvement of public health for Watford, supporting businesses through effective regulation through the Hertfordshire Better Business for All partnership and developing the Climate Change Policy and Strategy.

### Current policies

Environmental Health Compliance Policy

### Taxi and Private Hire Challenges and Strategic Objectives

To support work aiming to achieve the continued health and well-being of communities, including the mental and physical health of those engaged in the taxi and private hire trade and their families.

To ensure policy input to the Sustainability Strategy and Climate Change Policy considers the impact on the taxi and private hire trade as key stakeholders in the town's efforts to become carbon neutral by 2030.

To consider noise abatement solutions that support the uptake of electric vehicles if possible, including where representations may be made concerning planning and

development applications, or in terms of licensing applications where noise from customers arriving or leaving is a consideration.

To consider public health considerations in light of coronavirus and COVID-19 and how these risks can be mitigated in local transport provision, for example by use of accredited safety schemes.

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