

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR MACE TO COUNCILLOR DIXON

In view of the difficulties allegedly faced by Hackney Carriage operators while work is being carried out by United Utilities at the Lancaster bus station, will the Chairman of Licensing Committee take steps to initiate the revocation or suspension for a limited period of the byelaw requiring hackney carriages to return to specified ranks?"

Councillor Dixon replied:

Like many other councils throughout the country, this Council has byelaws which regulate many aspects of the operation of hackney carriages. These follow the government Model for such byelaws.

This particular byelaw means that if a vehicle is available for hire, it should proceed to a designated rank, and if that rank is fully occupied, the vehicle should proceed to another rank. Indeed the highway authority's approval of a rank is required on public highways.

If the byelaw were revoked, which would require the confirmation of the Secretary of State, there would be no control over where hackney carriages could ply for hire. This would create uncertainty for the public, and could also create traffic congestion and obstruction, as well as other road safety issues. As a result enforcement would become more difficult with unknown costs.

There would be absolutely no recourse open to licensing officers to deal with complaints from any member of the public who might be unfortunate to have a taxi rank forming outside of their home, or indeed a school, private land or any other premises. Passing the bucket to the police and civil enforcement would put a strain on the strong working relationship that this city council has with both bodies. The police and county council are facing their own budget restraints and they certainly do not need extra case work that this council is able to minimize.

Last year mass objections to the proposal to position a rank on Queen Street in Morecambe were received by committee. Any removal of the byelaw or non-enforcement would mean that the hackney carriage vehicles could rank on Queen Street, making a mockery of the consultation process. This argument could easily be extrapolated to other areas as the byelaws apply to the entire district.

Hackney carriages can rank on Dalton Square at any time and Wood Street car park after 7.00 pm. There are other ranks too such as North Road, Common Garden Street & Church Street. Therefore the issue has never been the number of rank spaces but their locations, notably Dalton Square. I am keeping the rank situation under constant review and have asked for the feasibility of various alternatives to be considered and have been in communication with the Cabinet member for Highways. A phone link to reconnect the bus station with Dalton Square is being installed shortly which has had the support of many traders. The final decision rests with Highways. However, it is not my intention to ask the Licensing Regulatory Committee to consider the suspension of the byelaw due to the uncertainty it will create.

By way of a supplementary question, Councillor Mace asked what proposals were being made to put an end to the issues that had arisen with the Taxi trade.

Councillor Dixon said that he hoped that both parties wanted to resolve the issues and he felt that things could be resolved although it might take some time.

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR WHITAKER TO COUNCILLOR HANSON

People who live within the area of Chatsworth Gardens are still waiting for the environment in which they live in to be given the attention it deserves because they are angry that the area in which they live in is continuing to be blighted by boarded up properties and properties that visibly require attention with urgency.

The work that was supposed to be commencing on Chatsworth Gardens is long overdue and people are frustrated. Is there a realistic date and timescale for this work to begin?

Councillor Hanson replied:

At this time we do not have an estimated start and finish date. With regard to timescale, the council issued an invitation to tender on the 07 June and has now received the tender submissions. Interviews will take place and we hope to make a selection by the 19 July.

Once the selection process is completed there is a two month period where we expect the developer to work up further details on both the scheme and the work with the council on setting out the Heads of Terms under which we will contract. Once agreement has been obtained in principle a report will be prepared for cabinet detailing this. It is aimed to take a further report to the 8 October Cabinet meeting which will initially brief members with a more detailed report to sign an agreement off.

The HCA need to modify the original funding agreement to take account of the altered scheme from what we originally contracted. It is hoped that this will be a swift and painless exercise, but it is not something in our control.

If the potential for a private developer to take on Chatsworth Gardens does not offer better value and outcomes than our original scheme then this will be reported to Cabinet, either immediately after the initial procurement process concludes in July or when development of the scheme and the Heads of Terms passes the two month period in mid-September without agreement. If this does occur then the council would need to rapidly progress the original scheme, as detailed in the Cabinet report.

We can't give an exact start and finish date for the tendered scheme as this will depend on the model / developer chosen. If the form and negotiations on a development agreement progress, we should be looking at a start on site in October/November. I would estimate a private sector led programme of refurbishment on this scale to take around 18 months to two years given the complexities of the site.

As his supplementary question, Councillor Whitaker asked if Councillor Hanson would keep Councillors informed and she replied that she would and as soon as she had any news she would send it round.

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR MACE TO COUNCILLOR HAMILTON-COX

Please provide statistics to indicate parking fees collected from Council-owned car parks in Morecambe and in Lancaster on a month by month basis for the past 36 months, and on the basis of this data, comment on the implications for the District of targeting car parking revenues as a source of increased net income for the Council.

Councillor Mace added that he understood that the information would take some time to collate and he would accept a written answer to the question, which Councillor Hamilton-Cox agreed to provide and to circulate to all other Members as soon as it was available.