

**CORPORATE, ADULT SERVICES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION SELECT COMMITTEE**

**15<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2008**

**REPORT OF HEAD OF TECHNICAL SERVICES**

**ACCESS TO HIGH STREET, STOCKTON ON TEES**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

At the last meeting of the Committee, Members noted, as part of consideration of progress made with regard to agreed recommendations arising from the Meeting Venues Review, the continuing difficulties experienced by people with mobility problems in gaining vehicular access to the High Street; and to the Town Hall in particular. This report outlines the current access restrictions on the High Street, and advises of proposals to amend the existing Traffic Regulation Order to include a permit scheme that will extend vehicular access to the High Street for hackney carriage vehicles that have been adapted to better assist passengers with mobility difficulties.

**DETAIL**

**Current position within that section adjacent to the town hall and being between the north and the south loops:-**

1. Southbound.  
Buses only are allowed access and then permitted to travel in either direction. Bus stops are in place for south bound buses but not for north bound.
  
2. Northbound.
  - Evenings, and night time (6pm to 6am). All traffic permitted north bound .
  - Transient arrangements are in place for goods vehicles to serve premises and the market between 4.30 and 6 in the afternoon and between 6 and 9.30 in the morning. Access and egress being by way of the north bound route.
  
3. A system of daily waivers caters for essential access such as shopfitting etc
  
4. Access to the Town Hall, for the final section, is on foot. Arrival or departure by a bus service involves walking from or to the nearest service specific bus stop. By car during the day use would need to be made of a parking facility. Public facilities by way of car parks or on-street are to be found around the town centre. The most convenient locations reserved for blue badge holders are to be found on the Castlegate Centre rooftop and in the Council's Bishop Street car park. After 6pm car travel north bound is permitted and use may be made of lay-bys close to the town hall for parking. One of the lay-bys (that immediately north of the town hall) is devoted to taxi use.

**Proposals**

5. Amendments to the High Street Traffic Regulation Order will shortly be made. These are to include a permit scheme whereby holders will have vehicular access rights not otherwise available. Hackney carriages that have been adapted to better assist passengers with mobility difficulties can be issued with permits and therefore will be allowed access at all times northbound. The south bound route remains as buses only at all times but the north

bound will be open to permit allocated vehicles during the day time in addition to the night time access enjoyed already.

### **The Permit Scheme.**

6. To qualify for a permit, which is likely to be vehicle specific rather than driver or proprietor, the following are to be the expected requirements:-
  - The vehicle shall have been adapted to enable use by passengers with a mobility problem, being wheelchair accessible or be fitted with a swivel seat.
  - The vehicle shall be known by and licensed by the Council's taxi licensing section. This initial provision may be updated to extend to hackney carriages licensed elsewhere should the need arise;
  - An administration fee of £10 for applications and their annual renewal will be payable. The permits will not be in the traditional paper format. "Virtual permits will be in place and amount to little more than an entry in a computer database. In view of the means of enforcement, by a remote camera, a permit would not be subject to inspection. A virtual permit will not add to the amount of displayed information (or clutter!) on and around the vehicle windscreen.  
The parking office within Gloucester House will undertake issue of, and management of, the permits.

### **Enforcement**

7. The intention is to enforce compliance of the permit scheme by CCTV camera. A bus lane enforcement camera is in place already near the junction of Silver Street with High Street and this would be used.
8. Vehicles not on the permit list and entering the section of High Street between south and north loops will be contravening a prohibition sign. Enforcement of this manoeuvre today is by the police. In conjunction with Cleveland Police the Council can assist by providing evidence of a traffic offence.
9. The Traffic Management Act 2004 allows the Government to make regulations enabling civil enforcement of traffic sign compliance. This is more commonly referred to as enforcement of 'moving contraventions'. Publication of draft regulations for consultation purposes is overdue so it will be into 2009 before the Council can itself enforce 'moving contraventions'.
10. Other provisions of the Traffic Management Act 2004 are in operation already, notably enforcement of parking regulations, and the ability of a Parking Attendant, now known as a Civil Enforcement Officer, to properly inspect a blue badge.
11. The intention of the permit scheme is to assist in delivery or collection of passengers along a length of public highway not presently open to taxis. It is not an intention that permits open up a short cut for taxi drivers such that they drive through without stopping. However this can be observed by CCTV monitoring with the ability for the Council to suspend, cancel, or resolve not to renew permits.
12. Taxis with a permit will be allowed to travel north-bound at all times for the purpose of delivering or collecting a disabled passenger. They shall remain at rest only for the purpose of passenger alighting and boarding. Alighting shall include assisting the disabled passenger reaching the actual destination if so needed; boarding will include any waiting time and assistance for the disabled passenger if so needed. Stationary vehicles will confine themselves to one of the four lay-byes within the section of High Street, unless, that is, there are compelling reasons to halt elsewhere for the general convenience of the

disabled passenger.

13. It is recognised that there are areas where compliance with the requirements will be extremely difficult to enforce. The severity of passenger disablement, even if any, cannot be ascertained. Whilst known abuse of the scheme can have a response by the Council there are some areas where compliance is beyond monitoring.

### **Implementation**

14. The background legal order comes into force on 18 July 2008. All administration arrangements for permit issue would then follow, which could then see permit issue taking place by the middle of August.
15. Publicity for the scheme would include an appropriate item in Stockton News, as well as contact being made with the Council's Disability Advisory Group.

### **Head of Technical Services**

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Background Papers

N/A

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Stockton Town Centre-Councillors Coleman & Kirton