

Private Hire (Taxi) Vehicles

INTRODUCTION

- 1 This Note is one of a series of Supplementary Planning Guidance Notes (SPGs), amplifying the development plan policies and other issues in a clear and concise format with the aim of improving the design and quality of new development. The Notes are intended to offer broad guidance which will assist members of the public and officers in discussions prior to the submission of planning applications and assist officers in handling and members in determining planning applications.

2 STATUS & STAGES IN PREPARATION

- 2.1 The Council's SPG Notes are not part of the adopted plan. However, they have been the subject of both a formal Council resolution and public consultation. The Welsh Assembly Government (The Assembly) has confirmed that following public consultation and subsequent Local Planning Authority (LPAs) approval, SPG can be treated as a material planning consideration when LPAs, Planning Inspectors and the Assembly determine planning applications and appeals. This Note was approved by Full Council on 25th July 2001 for use in development control. A statement of the consultation undertaken, the representations received and the Council's response to these representations is available on request.
- 2.2 These notes have been prepared in accordance with guidance contained in Planning Guidance (Wales), Planning Policy; Unitary Development Plans (Wales); Technical Advice Notes.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The demand for and number of taxis has increased significantly over the last decade. They provide an essential service particularly where bus services have declined in recent years and in encouraging town centre uses in the evening. However, their location and operation can lead to land use planning problems with regard to parking, access and servicing requirements. Some control centres are located in residential areas and this can have an effect on residential amenity from noise, particularly where there is 24hr activity. In shopping areas they can affect retail activity by creating a 'dead' frontage.
- 3.2 One of the problems in formulating policy for the location of private hire (taxi) centres lies in their diversity. Firms may vary in size from one car to a large fleet. They may operate from a house or commercial premises. Radio cars may only need to return to base for re-pairs (and even those may be carried out at an independent garage), whereas other operators may prefer their vehicles to return to base for new instructions, cashing-up, rest periods etc. Two main types of office may be identified: non-operational and operational offices.
- 3.3 **Non Operational Taxi Offices**
- Non-operational taxi offices are offices whose vehicles are directed by radio and do not operate from or visit the office. Only employing one or two persons, this minor office use would be acceptable in most areas, including ones which are predominantly residential, provided that the design of the radio mast and equipment is acceptable in visual and operating terms.
 - In locations where additional vehicle movements would be undesirable, a condition will normally be attached to any permission to ensure that vehicles do not operate from or visit the office.
- 3.4 **Operational Taxi Offices**
- Operational offices are offices from which vehicles operate and where a public waiting room and drivers' rest facilities are normally provided. The location of these offices should be determined by reference to three factors; the highway network, the site and the character of the area.

4 POLICY

4.1 Although there is no individual development plan policy for the County relating to the development of private hire premises, applications for development will be judged against policies relating to retail / commercial development. The broad thrust of these policies is to maintain and enhance the vitality and viability of Denbighshire's existing town and district shopping centres. Development that is viewed as potentially harming to the viability and vitality by, for example, reducing the number of A1 retail premises in identified streets or areas, or having a cumulative adverse effect of too many non-A1 retail uses in an identified area, or adversely affecting the character of an area will not be permitted.

4.2 It should be stressed that the need for planning consent or building regulations is quite separate from the need for an operator's licence.

4.3 Location Criteria

A) TOWN CENTRES

- In town centres, it will rarely be possible to find a site with sufficient car parking. However, a reliance on on-street parking will disadvantage shoppers and other town centre visitors who will expect a conveniently located taxi office.
- One of the main considerations in town centres is the effect the proposal has on the vitality and viability of these areas.
- Proposals will not be supported in principal/main shopping frontages or streets subject to traffic management proposals.
- Proposals will only be supported where there is unlikely to be an adverse effect upon vehicular movement (e.g. not on busy thoroughfares or near junctions) or upon car parking (e.g. site on single yellow lines may be favoured).
- Proposals for operational offices in upper floors of commercial premises will not be supported. However, non-operational offices with demand for parking or servicing may be well suited to upper floor usage.

B) DISTRICT SHOPPING CENTRES

- In district shopping centres, cars will not be allowed to operate from an office unless the full provision of off-street parking spaces can be made on or near the site to accommodate all vehicles likely to operate at any one time. This would avoid congestion or nuisance to residents in nearby streets, or the use of public or other parking spaces, which would disadvantage other users.

C) RESIDENTIAL AND OTHER AREAS

- Certain aspects of private hire operators may make them incompatible with residential uses. These problems can occur even when the scale of the operation is very small and can include.
 - frequent vehicle movements
 - noise
 - unsociable hours of operation
 - radio interference
- The Council therefore requires that an office which has more than one vehicle operating from it should not be located in a residential area.
- In areas of mixed use which include a residential element, the position will be more difficult to determine.

- Appropriate locations for private hire operators may include small employment areas, mixed commercial areas, or the fringes of town and district centres as well as the upper floors of commercial premises if used as non operational offices only and not operational uses. All of these locations will be subject to environmental, amenity and parking considerations.

THE HIGHWAY NETWORK

- The road on which the office is located and, where appropriate, any link to the nearest classified road should be of a standard (in terms of geometry and construction) adequate to cater for the number of vehicles trading from or visiting the site. This is to ensure that the operations do not interfere with the free flow of traffic or create unsafe conditions for vehicular and pedestrian movements in the area.

PARKING

- The site should have adequate off-street parking places available in the ownership of the applicant. This must be sufficient to accommodate the total numbers of vehicles likely to be visiting that address at any one time;
- Off-street parking sites should ideally be large enough to allow any manoeuvring to avoid situations where vehicles would reverse off the site into adjacent roads creating a potential hazard to other traffic and pedestrians;
- It may be appropriate to impose a condition on a planning permission restricting the number of vehicles visiting the site at any one time.

MAINTENANCE OF VEHICLES

- Where a private hire firm intends to carry out maintenance to its vehicles, this should be done off-street. In residential areas only routine maintenance of one vehicle should be permitted equivalent to that normally associated with residential areas.

ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- Where Building Regulation approval is required then it will be necessary to comply with part 'M' of the Building Regulations which deal with access for people with disabilities. In other cases, the Council would still encourage measures to ensure that office accommodation and waiting rooms are accessible to persons with disabilities, mothers with pushchairs, the elderly etc. Such measures may be beneficial in terms of increased business. Regard should also be had to the Disability Discrimination Act.

CONDITIONS ATTACHED TO PLANNING PERMISSION

- In granting planning permission the Council may seek to impose certain conditions in order to control the nature of the business in the interests of amenity and highway safety. Non operational centres will be restricted so that they are not used as an operational centre visited by the public. In certain circumstances, taxis may be restricted from returning to base during certain hours of the day. In the case of operational booking offices restrictions may be placed on the hours of operation. The use of intercom systems may also be restricted.

The Council may also grant temporary planning permission (eg for one year) to enable the effects of the operations to be monitored.



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