Welcome to the second winter edition of the Newsletter. A belated Happy New Year to you all. Your Committee met again on 28th January and a brief summary of matters discussed is included in this Newsletter. This was the last meeting of the present Committee which has served its two year term. I would like to thank all the individuals who served on the Committee and gave up their time on behalf of the trade. Their input is greatly appreciated. I am now making arrangements to elect a new Committee (see article below).

Tony Nicholls

Traffic Issues, Bideford

A further update on the Bideford Traffic Review –

Consultation on the proposed Traffic Order closed on 3rd December 2013. I understand that the Order is awaiting official sealing by the County Council and then work will be able to commence. I can confirm that the following works will be included in this first phase:

- Creation of part time taxi rank (16.00 – 09.00) in the pay and display spaces on Bideford Quay opposite Peter, Peter & Wright, Café Life.
- No waiting restrictions to be imposed at top of Clovelly Road from junction of Catshole Lane to Waterloo Terrace
- No waiting restrictions to be imposed in Barnstaple Street on the railway bridge to junction with Old Barnstaple Road.

It is disappointing that the County Council has not designated the new taxi rank as a permanent full-time rank. We know from experience that ‘shared’ ranks do not work well and I am concerned that there will be conflict between taxi drivers and members of the public, particularly at the changeover points. I still believe there is merit in having a rank in this location given the increased footfall from the Rose Salterne which is considerable at weekends. We will press the County Council to make this a full-time rank in Phase 2 of the review.

The above works are scheduled for completion by end February – weather permitting.

New BTEC Procedures

Over recent months, we have become dissatisfied with the performance of N-Gaged Training in the provision of the BTEC Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver. I am also aware that a number of applicants have had great difficulty communicating with N-Gaged. Consequently, this Council and North Devon District Council have decided to stop using N-Gaged. In future, the course will be provided by SkillsUK. Courses will continue to be provided in Barnstaple and, depending on applicants’ circumstances, may be fully funded. Please contact Dawn Pickering at SkillsUK (tel: 01623-499200 for course dates and details.

Late Item: There is a Private Member’s Bill going through Parliament at the moment which is seeking to make it compulsory for all licensed taxis and private hire vehicles to be fitted with a CCTV camera – in the interests of driver safety. As a Private Members’ Bill, it may never become law but I will keep you informed of developments on this initiative.
Bideford New Year’s Eve Event

Reports from the police indicate that the New Year’s Eve celebrations went off well with only a few arrests for drunk/disorderly behaviour. Tim Lowrie has reported that there were no problems with the operation of the temporary rank although it appears that the actual numbers of people in the town were not as great as last year. There was one item of concern – some taxi drivers were observed contravening the road closure order in order to access certain parts of the town. This is not just highly irresponsible, it is illegal and puts the public at risk of harm. The police are aware of these incidents and I have reviewed CCTV footage from the town CCTV system which clearly shows taxis/PHVs using streets which were officially closed. I will be taking this matter up with the proprietor/drivers concerned and the Council will take a serious view of any offences.

Licensing Policy/Licence Fees

The Council’s Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy is due for review this year. As usual, we will consult all taxi and private hire operators and drivers on any proposed changes to the policy. One of the key areas we will be looking at in this review is the provision of transport facilities for disabled persons. We have already consulted the trade on this and have received a number of responses. We are now consulting disabled users. The results of the consultation will help to inform the policy review.

The Council will be increasing its fees and charges from 1st April 2014. Given the ongoing reductions in central Government funding, Councils are under increasing pressure to make savings and increase income. For taxi licences, there will be a modest increase of around 2% which will add £5 to a vehicle licence fee and £1 to a driver’s licence fee. The fees were advertised in the North Devon Gazette on 29th January. Any objections must be made in writing to the Licensing Manager, Torridge District Council, Bridge Buildings, Bideford EX39 2HT and received no later than 26th February 2014.

Taxi Liaison Committee

As I said above, it is time to elect a new Committee. The election process will be run on the same lines as in previous years. There are 5 seats on the Committee. Nominations will be invited from persons who hold a current Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicle Licence. If more than 5 nominations are received, an election will be held. If you hold a current Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicle Licence, you will find a nomination paper enclosed with this newsletter. If you are interested in sitting on the Committee, please follow the instructions on the nomination paper and return this to my office by 28th February 2014.

Footnote: Many of you will probably be aware that Bob Hopkins’ wife, Sylvia, has been seriously ill for some time. I am sorry to tell you that Sylvia passed away in Bideford Hospital on 24th January. I am sure you will join me in offering your sincere condolences to Bob on his loss.