

Using Taxis safely.

Taxis can be a very convenient way to travel and are a sensible alternative to your own car if you intend to have a drink or two. They can also provide a safe way of getting home late at night or if you are travelling alone.

The Environmental Health Service at South Holland District Council have put together the following advice to help you decide which type of Taxi to use and help to make your journeys via taxi safe and hassle free.

There are differences between the types of vehicle that can be hired, either Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles, and the way in which they can operate.

Hackney Carriages (Taxis)

In large towns and cities these are often traditional 'black cabs', but in other areas including South Holland, most are normal saloons, estates, people carriers or mini-buses with up to 8 seats. They are licensed by the Council and carry a roof light and a yellow licence plate on the back of the vehicle. The licence plate shows how many passengers the vehicle is able to legally carry. Hackney carriages are allowed to pick up customers from taxi ranks and can also stop for customers who flag them down in the street.

As well as the roof box and external licence plate, these vehicles have a smaller yellow plate inside, a fare meter, a table of the current fares approved by the Council and a copy of the byelaws relating to hackney carriages.

All licensed hackney carriages have a compliance test twice a year and this includes the normal Department of Transport MOT as well as a check on the overall condition of the vehicle inside and out.

Private Hire Vehicles

In South Holland, these vehicles are normal saloon cars, estates, people carriers or mini-buses with up to 8 seats. They are licensed by the Council and carry a red licence plate on the back of the vehicle. The plate shows how many passengers the vehicle can legally carry and there should be a smaller red plate inside the vehicle.

Private hire vehicles do not have to carry a meter and operators can set their own scale of fares. It is important to agree the fare you will be charged with the driver, before beginning the journey.

These vehicles can not use the taxi ranks and are not allowed to stop if flagged down in the street. They can only pick up passengers if they have been pre-booked to do so. If they do pick up passengers without a booking they are in breach of their licence conditions, so if they are involved in an accident, most insurance companies will not pay out for the car or passengers as they are breaking the law.

All the licensed hackney carriage and private hire drivers are subject to a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. This makes sure they have not been convicted of certain offences such as dangerous driving, drink driving, repeated speeding, theft and dishonesty offences, or offences of a physical or sexual nature. In addition they have to have a regular medical to make sure they are medically fit to drive.

All licensed drivers are required to wear or display a licence badge showing their photograph and identity number.

Taxi Ranks

There are four taxi ranks in Spalding:

- Victoria Street by the library
- New Road by the corner of Red Lion Street
- In front of Spalding train station
- Spalding Bus Station

Hackney carriage drivers are only supposed to accept passengers if they are the first vehicle in the queue on the rank.

Unlicensed Vehicles and Drivers

In some areas, rogue unlicensed vehicles are common, particularly outside busy clubs or in busy town centres, usually late at night, when the effects of alcohol may make people less aware. Whilst this is not generally a problem in South Holland, it is still important to check that the vehicle you are getting into is licensed. An unlicensed vehicle will not be insured to carry paying passengers and it may not meet the strict safety standards that licensed vehicles have to comply with.

In addition, if the driver is not licensed, they will not have been subjected to the same rigorous Criminal Records Bureau check and medical that licensed drivers have undergone. Whilst the motive of some unlicensed drivers might simply be to make money, others may have other motives.

If you have any doubts about a vehicle or driver, check the licence plates and / or the drivers' badge. If you still have doubts, don't get into the vehicle.

If you ever think that you might have been picked up in an unlicensed vehicle, or by an unlicensed driver, please contact the Health & Safety and Licensing Team at South Holland District Council on tel: 01775 761161.

If you follow these simple rules, travel by taxi should prove to be a safe and hassle free experience:

- **Carry with you the telephone number of a company that you know is reliable.**
- **Check that any vehicle has licence plates before getting into it.**
- **Make sure you can see the driver's badge. If you are worried, ask to see it before getting into the vehicle.**
- **In a hackney carriage, check the meter has been reset by the driver before starting the journey.**
- **In a private hire vehicle, agree the fare before starting the journey.**
- **Never get in a vehicle if the number of passengers it can carry will be exceeded.**
- **Never get into a vehicle you suspect is unlicensed, or if you think the driver is unlicensed.**