

## **A bridge too far?**

For years I have been advised by friends to travel light; I've never mastered it!

Which is why, when I arrived back in Alnmouth at 9pm or 10pm, I had to get an extremely heavy suitcase over to platform 1.

My disability made it well nigh impossible to lift it myself and I worried about my wife or Laurie from JL Taxis carrying it, willing as they were.

The barrow crossing was an enormous help and it always seemed to me perfectly safe provided people obeyed the obvious and didn't cross when it was red. But the powers that be decided otherwise and the crossing was rendered unusable.

Now – at last – we have the new car park. People can be met on the northbound side and the gentle slope makes it possible for wheelchair users to leave the station even if they're on their own. This is in addition to dealing with the lack of spaces and making it unnecessary to turn nearby residential streets into an overflow car park.

It's been a long wait; our thanks to ARUG, Councils and Councillors, our MP and the Gazette and all involved in persevering with the campaign.

The need for the extra parking was a consequence of the increasing use of the station and the existence of it can only encourage yet more to use it in future. And increasing rail use as opposed to car use is good for all of us and the environment we pass on to our children.

In the strange ways that modern societies work, a quite separate discussion has been going on about providing a lift at Alnmouth! There's a natural tendency to say 'bring it on'; we all like being spoilt. But I think we ought just to stop and think. Before we rush in let's ask ourselves 'do we really need it?'

The lift would have brought its own solutions to the problems we've been discussing. But the new car park is now in place. I feel we should at least give time to see what happens and then see whether there outstanding difficulties which a lift, and perhaps only a lift, might address.

Let's think about people who might use it. People with mobility problems (by which I mean not just wheelchair users but also a parent with two children and a buggy, for example) travelling north and needing to buy a ticket. If arriving by car they would only need to allow a few extra minutes to drive to the booking office and then drive round to the other car park.

Their return journey will of course land them on the 'other' side and clearly a lift would help but would it be enough to justify the expense? It's easy to make assumptions about people's needs. For example a lift would help me take my case across but I am always met so I get picked up whichever side I'm coming into. I can 'do' stairs so if my heavy case is the right side for departure I can easily pop across the bridge to buy a ticket and perhaps have a cup of the very welcome coffee.

Someone arriving on foot can go to the ticket office and then walk round. The parent with children and buggy could walk round via the road bridge now that access is possible on the other side. Perhaps we could have a telephone on the northside able to talk to the ticket office.

The story at Alnmouth seems to be a case of feast or famine. The two constituents have, it seems, progressed without looking at the whole.

All I'm suggesting is that before we spend a lot of money installing a lift let's pause while we allow for the new car park to 'bed in' and then take stock of what a difference it has made. From that we can assess the problems that remain and see whether, with a bit of imagination, there's another way of resolving them – before we go to the expense of a lift.

**Paddy Conway**

**Warkworth**

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