

Notes of ARUG Meeting: Car Parking at Alnmouth station

Thursday 15th November 2018, 8 pm at St James' Church Hall in Alnwick

Thirty-seven rail users attended this meeting and 11 apologies were received. Some queries had been submitted via e-mail from some rail users who were unable to attend and these were interspersed during the meeting.

The main issues discussed were:

- Car Parking Amendments to Alnmouth Station Car Park and proposed dates of implementation
- Car Parking Amendments to Surrounding Roads and proposed dates of implementation
- Mechanisms for Review of above

The meeting was chaired by Peter Groves (PG) of ARUG. Robbie Moore (RM) , Councillor for Alnmouth, Lesbury and Alnwick was in attendance, accompanied by Paul Jones (PJ), Director of Local Services and the Environment for Northumberland County. Mr Moore's fellow Councillor for the local area, Gordon Castle (GC) was unable to attend.

RM and PJ summarised the current position at the Station.

The southbound car park is operated by Northern Rail. The northbound car park is owned and operated by Northumberland County Council. This car park opened with 67 spaces in 2011 and was extended to 100 spaces in 2015. The increasing popularity of the station over the years means that demand is outweighing car parking capacity, causing parking to spill out on to local roads. Additionally, this has caused problems for Arriva buses serving the bus stop at the top of the hill at Curly Lane.

Northumberland County Council tried to address these issues in stages, looking at short term measures with a view to making longer term plans. In the first instance, NCC consulted with local residents about Car Parking Charges; Traffic Management in South View and

Curly Lane; Parking Permits for Residents of Hipsburn. Some 193 residents had been consulted plus 30 statutory stock-holders

(Emergency Services etc). There was a drop-in Centre to view the plans and several residents visited the surgery..

At this point, PG asked why they had failed to consult with ARUG, despite the fact that NCC knew of its existence. NCC had noted PG's own objections and that of some other local rail users but had not allowed for the fact that these represented a significant number of rail users, who did not even know that there was a consultation because they had not been contacted by NCC.

Members present vehemently expressed their dissatisfaction and annoyance about the lack of consultation. There was a strong feeling that the NCC should have had two separate consultations – one for local residents and one for rail users before any action was taken on charges.

RM continued to explain NCC's actions following the initial consultation. They were in the process of introducing:

Parking charges at Alnmouth Station

Single Yellow Lines in South View and Curly Lane (now completed)

Restricted hours parking; 72 hour limit on station car parking.

Note: Station car parking charges of £1.50 a day will apply from 3rd December. Quarterly, Six monthly and Annual permits are also on offer, the annual permit to cost £225. Lesbury Parish council will receive £5,000 of the parking charge income – to be used as they see fit, in conjunction with their neighbourhood plan. RM and GC had been successful in arguing the point to have the proposed £3 daily car park charge reduced to £1.50. NCC intend to review the situation in a year's time.

A Question & Answer session followed at which members present voiced their concerns with the County County Council's plans:

- Rail users' car parking charges will be used to fund Lesbury Parish Council but not necessarily for LPC to use on additional car parking facilities

- Will any of the income go into improving our car park? (NCC: Additional car parking income over and above LPC's portion will not be ring-fenced to help parking issues at the station. It will go into the Northumberland "pot. NCC is facing increasing financial pressures and part of the savings will offset other parking charges elsewhere)
- What consultation have you gone into with Northumberland Estates about the Duke's Land? Is there any willingness on the part of the Duke to allow access to some land? (NCC: Northumberland Estates could hold a lot of the keys but access to this land would be difficult because of the topography. Constructing a new car park would cost a lot of money and is not guaranteed planning permission because it is greenbelt land)
- Ticket Machines will cause congestion. Three trains within 30 minutes of each other each morning and other busy services will result in a queue of people trying to use the machines, resulting in people missing trains or leaving without a parking ticket (NCC: PJ looking into the number of machines to be installed at the station. May be possibility of using Apps if connectivity not an issue. Again, PJ will look into this. Anyone parking without a ticket risks a fine)
- Purchasing a ticket is no guarantee of getting a parking space. Where do we go when it is full? (NCC: Charging is part of our policy to encourage people to car share)
- Car share not an option for most users because of different starting/finishing times etc.
- Introducing charges will push more people out of car park into surrounding areas (NCC: Charging should discourage those people who we believe garage their car in the station car parks)
- At least half of station was full at 6.45 this morning, most cars obviously having been there overnight. Can some pressure be applied? Perhaps set out separate bays for long-term parking?)
- Commuters being encouraged to take their car to work. Marginal difference of travelling by rail rather than road will be eroded and it will be cheaper to commute by car – increasing carbon footprint and also travel stress
- A drop in the number of rail users could have a serious on-going effect. Train Operating Companies could consider a reduction in much-fought-for rail services causing a downward spiral of declining services, drop in property prices locally (NCC: *Increasing capacity is our long term aim but we had to look at short term measures. Charges always unpopular but we did think about less well-off commuters, reducing them to £1.50 a day or 94p a day for annual permit holders travelling 5 days a week.*)
- Proposed yellow lines in South View are on side of the road no-one parks on anyway, seemingly encouraging them to park on same side as houses – not beneficial to residents or rail users

- Monitoring the 72-hour maximum stay could be difficult to prove/enforce. (NCC: Will be monitored using cameras, checking overall position of cars, including wheel positions etc)
- Proposed charges discriminate against those travelling 3 days or less a week (mainly women), who will not benefit from any season permit reductions (NCC: Reiterated £3 reduced to £1.50)
- Several members present said they were seriously considering moving from rail to car because of the additional charges, which would increase daily commute for some to over £15 a day).
- We need increased car parking spaces (NCC: We do not have ability to increase car parking facility. Costs associated with obtaining more land and making it viable for car parking. Surrounded by agricultural land. Working with LPC to look at their neighbourhood plan)
- Can LPC calculate passenger traffic and car parking capacity? (NCC: We will work with them on this)
- Has there been any interaction with Northern Rail over the south bound car park? Those parking over 72 hours will just park in southbound car park, avoiding northbound. (NCC: We have spoken to Northern Rail – they may consider introducing car parking charges too and expectations are that this will be decided soon)
- Is there any capacity in the Network Rail Yard which could be freed up to make additional spaces? (PG answered this: This could be costly as some of the cabins hold essential gear and are close to signaling equipment)

Mechanisms for Review:

PG: You have not done yourself any favours by your lack of consultation with rail user group. It is done now but there is a lot of resentment and we are very disappointed. Your wish to link to the Local Plan does not appear to have worked. In the past, before the car park was constructed, there was constructive dialogue between ARUG and NCC. This is no longer the case. (NCC: We do want to make a positive impact and imposing charges was the last thing we wanted to do. We must balance the needs of residents, funding and rail users. We feel that reducing the charge to £1.50 was helpful)

PG: How will you consult in a year's time, when you review the car parking situation? Will you consult with ARUG and what are the criteria? Annual usage at Alnmouth in 2001-2002 was £86k, increasing threefold to over 313k in 2016-2017. (NCC: We will gladly consult

with ARUG at our review and by that time we will have calculated the level of usage. We will consult with both ARUG and the local residents. We will have more data available and will be further down the line in capacity issues.)

Bus Meets Train:

Local transport is not reliable therefore not a suitable alternative to travelling to station by car. Bus meets Train operated for only one year. Concerns that more rural parts of Northumberland should not be overlooked. 72-hour restrictions may mean a taxi journey from outlying areas to Alnmouth, adding £50+ to travel cost. (NCC: Rural services are difficult to align. No funding for mini bus or other new bus services. Had meetings with Arriva re X18 routing and adding an additional service. Current X18 service is profitable and unsubsidised by NCC. An additional service would have to be subsidised – no money for this)

Any Other Business:

1. Is there any possibility of increasing number of secure cycle parking spaces? (NCC: This is something we can look at adding)
2. Have NCC had any discussions about Transpennine Express trains stopping at smaller local stations, this meaning that some of us would be able to travel from, say, Chathill?: (NCC: We understand that this is something which is being considered but there is no definite news)
3. It is possible to increase number of spaces in northbound carpark with little additional costs by taking out some kerbs and relining spaces. Minimum of 6 spaces possible. (NCC: We will look into and consider this)
4. Aln Valley Railway representative advised the meeting that AVR had obtained EARDF funding to extend rail line. Concurrently, NCC had EARDF funding to improve the Greenway (path for walkers, cyclists and horse riders which runs alongside the trackbed) as far as Edenhill Bridge at Greenrigg. Once this step is complete, it will be possible to cycle past Lionheart, onto the trackbed and at Greenrigg take the back road to Bilton in safety, albeit a bit roundabout. Next step to develop trackbed and Greenway beyond Greenrigg to Alnmouth Station. AVR need as much support as possible in order to raise the necessary funding.
5. RM and PJ were thanked for their attendance at the meeting

Date of Next Meeting:

No date was set for the next meeting, which may take place in Spring 2019. It is hoped that Richard Fairbairn will be back in the UK and able to take over as Chair of ARUG at that time. Notice of future meetings will be issued via e-mail and advertised on our website www.arug.org.uk.

Additional Information – Extract from email from NCC sent to Lesbury Parish Council earlier in the month of October(?)

Re Parking Season Parking Permits:

“I can confirm that the current countywide permit for NCC pay & display car parks would be valid for the northbound (NCC owned) railway car park at Alnmouth Railway Station. Due to the lead-in times for undertaking the Traffic Regulation Orders and purchase/installation of parking meters it is envisaged that the charges will come into effect mid December 2018, so there wouldn't be any merit in purchasing one just yet.

The current charge for the car park pass is £130 per annum and we do also offer 3 monthly and 6 monthly passes to make payment more affordable. It is envisaged that the charge for the pass will be reviewed for 2019/20, but no decisions have been made regarding the charge at this time. Any proposal to increase the charge would be subject to public consultation.