

File Note of Meeting

28th Sept 2018

Present

Chris Curtis: Arriva Commercial Manager

Gordon Castle: NCC

Robbie Moore: NCC

Susanne Gair: APC

Ed Williams: APC

Shaun Whyte: APC

SW gave an overview of Alnmouth village outlining the significance of the Tourist influence and the expansion of the holiday season. The weighting of the village's resident population towards the upper end of the age range was noted as was the fact that Alnmouth has one of the highest permanent residency weightings of all the coastal settlements. He summarised village's concerns as:

1. The reduction in the number of buses going around the village
2. The distance that elderly residents now have to walk from the bottom of the village to remaining bus stops
2. The removal of the Station/Village bus link
3. The dangers of buses forced to negotiate the War Memorial roundabout
4. Absence of adequate notification of changes and late posting of new timetables at bus stops.

CC gave the rational behind the recent changes:

1. Primarily to protect the timetable.
2. The one-way system has not improved timings.
3. Since the changes in April there has been no reduction in passenger numbers.
4. Station to Village service only added 3 to overall passenger numbers
5. Buses did occasionally experience delays in Alnmouth and these "irregular" delays could not be factored into the time table, unlike "regular" delays (ie frequent traffic holdups in Alnwick) which could.
6. Extending the timetable to over the current 4 hours (Newcastle to Berwick) is not a viable option. To do so would necessitate an additional bus which would make the route uneconomic.
7. To remove one of the two stops on Shepherds Hill would make little difference to timings.
8. CC also confirmed that it was only the Winter X18 service north of Alnwick that received a NCC subsidy

There was some scepticism about the extent of these irregular delays in the village as none of the attendees could recall any such instances. There was some discussion over how Arriva monitored delays by using GPS tracking. **CC agreed to send the Parish Council data from the GPS evidence, anecdotal (driver) reports, dashcam footage of delays in the village and the passenger usage data.** (Note: GPS will only identify delays between certain Timing Points ie b/t "Alnwick & Alnmouth" not "outside post office" for example)

SG pointed out that if residents had no alternative then they had to continue to use the bus despite the long walk to the War memorial which was difficult for older residents. Therefore, numbers would not be reduced, but inconvenience would be increased.

CC pointed out that the service which connected the Station to the village actually only added three people a day to the passenger numbers.

November Time Table Changes-Further reduction in Service Levels: -

As a result of Arriva's findings and continued timetable pressures, the new winter timetable to be introduced in November (which runs till April) will have no buses going around the Village loop. This decision had been notified to NCC with the required 70 days' notice. There was some disquiet as the community/Parish Council was only being made aware of this further reduction in service at this meeting. This was also the first GC & RM had heard of this change.

GC suggested that this issue will be escalated to Cabinet level within NCC. To reassure the village GC felt that it was important to tell people that this was an experiment, it would be monitored and subsequently reviewed in the spring. Nevertheless, SW felt this this would be seen as an inexorable move toward a permanent reduction in service. CC stressed that this was not Arriva's ultimate intention, but he had to consider the impact on the thousands of passengers using the route between Newcastle and Berwick.

SG was particularly concerned about the buses having to turn around at the War Memorial. The numbers having to do so will increase as a result of the November timetable changes. Buses have to overhang the footpaths to negotiate the roundabout with obvious danger to pedestrians and particularly so as winter approaches. The recent damage to the War Memorial railings is testament to the difficulty drivers have in attempting this manoeuvre.

It seemed illogical to many that - contrary to national and local government policies - the changes appeared to be almost designed to push people in to higher car usage, which is particularly a problem for Alnmouth which currently experiences significant demand for parking from visitors and residents alike.

CC agreed to distribute the data (see above) after the meeting. He felt it was unfortunate that the meeting was taking place now and not previously as the November changes could have been discussed before a final decision was taken. All were surprised to learn that an earlier meeting might have been beneficial, as we had not been aware that the November timetable changes were so far advanced or effectively now in place. It was suggested that APC would appreciate notification of planned changes to timetables in the future.

SW 4th October 2018