

Please reply to:

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Lord Adonis
Minister of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
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Dear Lord Adonis

RAILWAYS FOR ALL

At the meeting of Erith Town Forum on 24th September Terry Middleditch, a disabled member of the public reported on a meeting he had attended with Martin Holt, of the Department for Transport, to discuss the provision of disabled access to Erith Station using funding from the "Access for All" scheme.

There was unanimous support at the Forum meeting for continued pressure to be put on those who have the power to include this part of Bexley in plans for providing access to both platforms at Erith station for all who find two flights of stairs difficult or even impossible to use. As Chair of the Forum I was asked to write to you to make sure the matter is kept high on the agenda.

Mr Middleditch took the opportunity once again on 30th September to visit Erith Station to highlight the difficulties experienced by a person in a wheelchair wishing to travel by train. Arriving at the station at 16.50 he found only the person issuing tickets in the office was on duty. Therefore even to access a train to Dartford on the down platform was impossible. He was told that to do so he would need to wait until a staff member could be called from either Abbey Wood or Woolwich to assist with the ramp. The timing of this would depend on the availability of such staff. This situation arises because Erith Station is only staffed 06.00 to 13.30. Access to the up platform taking passengers to London is totally impossible because there is no lift and two flights of stairs.

Erith is part of the Thames Gateway development area and in the very near future is expected to provide at least a further 700 new dwellings as part of the Erith Western

Gateway development. One of the criteria attached to planning is that these dwellings will be “lifetime homes” and as such will encourage occupation from those with disabilities, thus increasing the need for disability access. The access needs for the station is based on footfall figures and obviously with the proposed new build this figure will increase. However if the station is not accessible for disabled users then footfall figures would probably not reflect the actual need because disabled users would make alternative arrangements. At the same time I feel we should remember those younger members of the community who are not disabled but use pushchairs or are carrying heavy luggage or too elderly to use stairs.

Although I acknowledge that the DFT is working towards all stations being DDA compliant, at the moment Erith station falls far short of this.

Bexley Access Group have been campaigning for full access at Erith Station for a number of years, all to no avail. Erith Town Forum have always supported this campaign but now feel it is important to actively make this known and to encourage the whole community to get behind this project. We will be working with local ward councillors, Bexley Council, DFT, Network Rail and South Eastern Trains. A meeting with Network Rail is being planned in the near future to discuss access issues.

It was a bitter blow to find that Erith Station was not included in the Access for All major or minor improvement programmes up to 2015. We would therefore urge you to reconsider this position and add Erith Station to the list of priority stations for disability access improvements based on your “Railways for All” brochure March 2006 and the fact that this area is due to see 700 more Lifetime Homes and businesses, in the very near future.

Finally I would like to quote from a Hansard entry dated 13th October which must clearly apply to our case.

“Public Transport: Disabled

Mr. Jim Cunningham:

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent steps the Government have taken to respond to concerns expressed by disabled public transport passengers.
[224283]

Paul Clark [junior Transport Minister]:

We are committed to providing an accessible transport system. We have regulated to ensure that all new trains, buses and coaches are accessible to disabled people. We made provision in the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 to extend the "right of access" disabled people already have to other services to transport and to introduce other measures to improve accessibility.

New regulations which came into force on 4 December 2006 gave disabled people a 'right of access' to goods, services and facilities with respect to transport services. **These duties make it unlawful for a transport operator to discriminate against a disabled person simply because they are disabled, treat disabled people less favourably or fail to make a reasonable adjustment to the way they provide their services.**

I look forward to your reply

Yours sincerely.

Doreen Ives
Chair

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