

Members of the Pokesdown Community Forum (PCF) met with local MP Tobias Ellwood on 28th February to discuss the campaign for Network Rail to make Pokesdown Railway Station accessible.

Tobias Ellwood MP joined members of the PCF, as well as Bournemouth Chamber of Trade & Commerce, and 'Leonard Cheshire' (a disability campaigning group) at Pokesdown Station and saw first-hand the access issues faced by many passengers at the station. Ironically he was late as he had to drop his wife at Bournemouth Station - because his wife had a child and with a pushchair, it's impossible to use the station.

Ben Smith of the Forum said: "It was great to have the opportunity to talk to Tobias Ellwood about this issue, see the derelict lifts, and with recent discussions with South West Trains we are confident we can achieve something here."

Tobias confirmed the issue was raised in Parliament. He also confirmed the response stated that SWT had not put Pokesdown forward for any funding, despite suggesting many others were viable. It was also clear that there is no requirement for 'match funding' as SWT have previously suggested.

The platform for the busy local station is below street level and can only be accessed by over 42 very steep steps which cause serious difficulties for people with mobility problems, those with young children in pushchairs and passengers with heavy luggage.

Pokesdown is the second busiest local station in the area, with 312,000 users in 2011-12 alone. It serves half of the town of Bournemouth and is the main station for visitors to Boscombe, Southbourne and AFC Bournemouth and is therefore crucial for the town's economy, yet there have been no lifts working on the station for around 30 years.

Government funds do exist to make railways stations accessible under a scheme called 'Access for All', a major programme improving accessibility at train stations nationwide by installing lifts and ramps. The fund has paid for 150 stations to be improved since 2006, benefitting the elderly, disabled and those with young families. A further £100m will be available from 2015 to 2019, but the Department for Transport is not currently considering Pokesdown for a share of this funding.

The Pokesdown Community Forum has decided to spearhead the campaign, following overwhelming pleas from station users, and is galvanising public support by launching an online '[change.org](http://www.change.org)' petition.

Since launching the campaign just over 2 weeks ago, over 700 people have signed the online petition with many others contacting the PCF through their website, Facebook and twitter pages to add their support. The PCF are joined in the campaign by a range of groups including Bournemouth Chamber of Commerce, AFC Bournemouth, Southbourne Business Association and Pokesdown Children's Centre.

The Pokesdown Community Forum represents the views of residents and local businesses in constantly seeking to improve the local area and make it an attractive place to live, work and visit. The Group is independent and is not aligned to any political party or organisation.

You can add your support by signing the petition here:

<https://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/south-west-trains-network-rail-make-pokesdown-station-accessible>

<http://www.pokesdowncommunityforum.btck.co.uk/>