

Bletchley & Fenny Stratford Town Council



26 July 2023

Transport Focus
PO Box 5594
Southend on Sea
SS1 9PZ

Dear Transport Focus

I write on behalf of Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council to strongly object to the proposal to close the ticket office at Bletchley station.

The town council objects on the grounds that the proposed closure will make the station and its services inaccessible to disabled passengers and more difficult to use for inexperienced or vulnerable travellers. The ticket office improves accessibility to a significant extent in terms of ease of buying tickets, receiving advice and assistance, navigating the station, planning routes, and feeling safe and confident in making journeys.

The town council does not accept that the mitigations proposed to address public concerns about loss of ticket offices are either well integrated across the rail network or sufficient for the needs of passengers in our area. Regardless of the mitigations the changes would represent a deterioration in the quality of service received by disabled people in particular. This may violate both the Equality Act (2010) and the Secretary of State for Transport's Ticketing and Settlement Agreement ticket office guidance.

The town council is sceptical that multifunctional roving staff moving around the station will be sufficiently accessible to all the public and particularly disabled people. This arrangement relies upon passengers being physically able to identify and find staff. To do this they may have to travel across the station site (potentially involving lifts and footbridges whilst managing luggage) rather than using a designated contact point ie ticket office which is accessible and feels safe. A Help Point is not an equivalent substitute for a ticket office since these are often inaccessible depending on the disabilities or health of individual passengers (especially for hearing impaired people) and do not provide a personal service tailored to the needs of the user.

Under the new arrangements, if the ticket office is closed the only way to buy tickets will be online or via ticket vending machines (TVMs). Many people already find online ticket booking confusing and disabled adults and the elderly are over-represented in the groups of people who do not use or have access to the internet so this is not a fully accessible alternative to ticket offices. TVMs themselves are also not fully accessible for everyone and not all ticket types and concessions are available from them in any event, plus cash cannot usually be used at a TVM. We

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believe many of our residents find the easiest way to get the cheapest and most suitable ticket is via a ticket office. The cost of disability is well known and any measures which reduce disabled people's 'widespread and easy access' to the purchase of tickets at the most cost-effective option is unfair and potentially violates the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement (2023).

The town council is deeply concerned about the climate emergency and wishes to encourage the use of public transport locally in line with central and local government aspirations and carbon neutrality targets. If passengers do not feel safe at Bletchley station they will not use our trains. We believe the new arrangements will, at the very least, affect perceptions of safety and in reality will actually limit access to emergency contacts and increase response times for emergency incidents.

Finally, Bletchley station will be located at the mid point of the East West Rail link (when complete). The anticipated growth in passenger numbers to be brought about by this major infrastructure development only strengthens the arguments that the station needs a staffed ticket office which caters for the needs of our whole community.

For these reasons and on behalf of our community the town council objects to the proposed closure of ticket offices nationally and specifically to the proposed closure in Bletchley.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Delia Shephard'.

Delia Shephard
Town Clerk