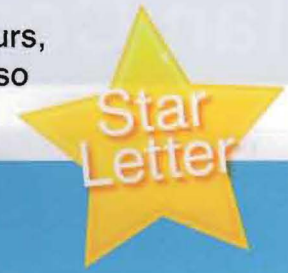




Every issue we have a bunch of carnations, courtesy of Le Tourneurs, to send to the writer of one letter, so send your letter now.



Ian Cook

Dear bulletin

Just a quick outline of my life so far, in 1952, at the 18 months old, I was in hospital with tuberculosis of the spine and was in a plaster cast, from head to waist, to keep my back straight, my at some point I couldn't move my limbs and it was thought that the plaster was too tight, so they cut it off, my limbs still didn't work, and I was eventually diagnosed with Poliomyelitis, it affected my legs, my right one most of all, as with all Polio victims of my era, I got on with my life, I had a wonderful Mum and Dad, who treated me as a normal boy, which is obviously what I was, I did wear callipers, but at the age of around 14, when I became fashion conscious, I decided to get rid of them and wear normal shoes.

I am now 68 and have coped very well for many years, I got married and have been for the past 36 years, had two great children, and now have three grandchildren, so life is great. In 2010 I was diagnosed with PPS, at St Thomas' Hospital, I attended The Post-Polio Syndrome Rehabilitation Programme, this was over two weeks and was very helpful, the course took in how to cope with fatigue, reasonable exercise levels and activities for daily living, I also met other Polio sufferers, which is not easy nowadays as we are becoming a rare breed, thank goodness.

Now I live in Flitwick, Bedfordshire, I need to get to London on a regular basis, to visit St Thomas', I used to drive as the parking at the Hospital is very good and there is no charge for people with an appointment, who have a blue badge, a rare thing nowadays, but now I use the train as it is easy to get to Blackfriars and then a taxi to the Hospital but our railway station has no lifts, I have to navigate stairs over a bridge and down, to get to the platform. I have to walk with a crutch these days and have a stair lift at home because steps are very difficult for me, I also have a mobility Scooter, my wife calls it a quadbike, if I want to use my scooter, I can't as no lift or ramp are available, I could drive 16

miles to Luton Airport Parkway, but why should I. I can also arrange help, but this will mean me having to give a time of travel and involve getting a taxi, paid for by the railway company, to the nearest accessible station, this will put at least an hour both ways on my journey time, I also feel that this is discrimination due to the fact that I can't travel as and when I want, as people without mobility issues can. Every train that passes through our local station, has space for two to three wheelchairs and numerous seats reserved for people with walking difficulties, but even if there were lifts and I could get onto the platform, I could not get onto the train without someone putting a ramp to the door of the train and as our local station, along with many more, do not have staff on 24 hours a day, so if you managed to get on a train, in London, you would not be able to get off at your chosen stop. The platforms need to be made a standard height and raised where the disabled carriages stop, to be able to get on the train, without asking anybody for help. Every station in London is wheelchair friendly, but if a disabled or elderly people can't get on the train in the first place, what is the point. Also the Government are willing to spend £55.7 Bn (which will rise) on HS2 and now a fast link to the North has been announced, but once again what is the point if I can't access the network. Also we are in the age of 5G, but the small out of town stations are still in the Victorian age, at least 40% of all stations are not accessible so. The Government does have a budget for improving accessibility but it is tiny compared to what is needed to ensure step free access on the network. There is generally good-will it requires a culture change in a number of areas as well as the funding to go with it. I do think that people without mobility problems are making decisions, which leads to misunderstanding and no knowledge of what is actually needed. I also feel that too much emphasis is paid on upgrading the main stations, in London and other cities, at the cost of our local stations. I have also contacted Thameslink and they say that the infrastructure is from the Victorian age, Queen Victoria died in 1901, so the

Ian Cook ... continued



Ian Cook.

railway network has had 118 years to be user friendly. I have contacted my Local MP Nadine Dorries, who has debated this in parliament already, this was only for Flitwick Station. Emails have also been sent to Department of Transport, Boris Johnson, Nadine Dorries, Ghani Nusrat and Robert Halfon MPs and Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson and many more MPs. The response I have had from the MPs, is not at all encouraging, at present the funding is given out, like the lottery, a station has to be nominated and then it is picked by a panel, if you are not successful then you will have to nominate the station again and hope it is picked next time. I think it is time that the funding is made for every station to be upgraded, in order that people with mobility problems can travel as and when they like. I have been on Look East (our local BBC News channel) and contacted Nicola Fox, the disability correspondent at the BBC, so I hope to raise the profile of this petition. Look East, Cambridge, ran this story on 27 August at 6.30 and also at 10.30, it may be a good idea to find

the clip and watch it, as it outlines not only my problems but problems for Mothers with pushchairs, people with cases etc, etc. Please see below the name of the petition and the link to get to it.

The petition: Provide funding to make all railway stations disabled accessible, access to all

The link: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/266721>

We also have a Facebook group: "Campaign For Step Free Access At All Railway Stations", please can you take a look at like it, so that we can get the message to as many people as possible.

PS: Update from Ian received as we were going to press:

Dear bulletin,

Thank you for your interest in my campaign; I have an update. Look East, Cambridge, ran this story on 27 August at 6.30 and also at 10.30, it outlines not only my problems for disabled in wheelchairs but problems for mothers with pushchairs, people with cases etc, etc.

Anglia TV also ran the story on 25 September 6.00 pm. I have also been on Three Counties Radio; Roberto Perrone on 5 September at 5.30 pm. The Times and Citizen, Bedford, have also run my story. Could I ask you to take a look or listen to these. I have been approached by Railwatch, which is a national magazine for commuters. I am also in talks with a law firm in London, regarding a discrimination/Equality and Human Rights action; they are seeing if they can get funding for this and make a strong case. Thank you for the help the BPF have given so far. **b**

IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL CHAIR

The strength of any member magazine such as ours is the quantity and quality of letters and Branch/Regional reports that are published. It is always interesting to read of your amazing and sometimes unusual activities, which in themselves give ideas to others. Please continue to send in your news and the always interesting photos. We realise that you are all volunteers, and thank you most sincerely for going that "extra mile." Your efforts are very much appreciated.

David Mitchell
National Chairman