

# Improving Access at Beeston Station

## Business Case



*Fig 1: Beeston Station 18 July 2017*

**Prepared by the Friends of Beeston Station (FOBS)**

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## Introduction

This report has been prepared by the Friends of Beeston Station (FOBS) to address some of the safety, access and disability issues associated with the station.

FOBS first met on 12 April 2017 and its aim is:

1. To help to make the station and its environs more attractive -
  - The station has had minimal attention to its buildings and platforms for the last 15 to 20 years and it is looking old and tired. It was last refurbished in 1988 after a period of neglect. The platforms were rebuilt in 2004. It is understood that Network Rail intends to spend between £0.5m and £1m upgrading the platform canopies in 2021.
  - The station is in a prime strategic location, half way between Nottingham city and Toton, to benefit from the knock-on effects of the development, building and eventual introduction of HS2. The East Midlands Route Study states that the impact of HS2 will still mean that, *‘loads between Nottingham and Beeston in 2043 are expected to be 8% higher than today’*<sup>1</sup>. Use of the station is therefore set to be sustained as part of the anticipated continuous passenger growth over the next thirty years.<sup>2</sup> The station has the potential to be a hub of strategic significance given its easy access by car, the proposed increase in car parking spaces and the boom in developments in Beeston.
2. To raise issues of concern specifically around disabled access and safety
  - Disabled access is a misnomer and there continues to be a pretence that access to the station is ‘step free’. Changing platforms is only possible if passengers who cannot climb the steps (see Fig 1) leave the station precincts and embark on a 500 metre journey, either walking or by wheelchair, out onto the local streets and across Station Bridge. One FOBS member took 13 minutes on a mobility scooter to complete this journey.

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<sup>1</sup> Network Rail – East Midlands Route Study ,March 2016, page 82

<sup>2</sup> Network Rail – Investment in Stations, June 2017, page 03

- There are a range of safety issues associated with the location of the steps on Platform 1 and their proximity to the platform edge; there is a 42cm space between the bottom of the steps and the yellow safety line on the platform. As most passengers enter or exit Platform 1 by walking under and around the steps, they walk over this line and close to the platform edge, which may be dangerous when high speed trains are passing and at peak times when there are lots of people.



*Fig 2: Walking close to the edge on Platform 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2018*

3. To apply pressure for appropriate disabled access; the station would meet the needs of all travellers if lifts are installed.
4. To improve information boards and signage. These could be improved to give more information about the local area, including directions to places like Nottingham University.
5. To ensure the future viability and development of the station by advocating for the platforms to be extended to accommodate the longer high speed electric trains.

The FOBS group does some work at the station to improve its appearance, but cosmetic work is not enough; investment to improve access both by upgrading the existing stairs and installing lifts is essential to bring this station into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Station characteristics

Beeston Station is a Grade 11 listed site on the Midland Mainline. The wooden seats and canopies were moved to Beeston from another site about 100 years ago; there is pictorial evidence of the canopies on the station in 1923<sup>3</sup>. Preserving them is a costly business! In 1923 passengers could change platforms by crossing the line. This changed when the Station Bridge was opened in 1969 and the resulting difficulties with access have therefore lasted for nearly 50 years. The station is currently managed by East Midland Trains.

The annual footfall for 2016/17 was 0.535 million passengers with 84,844 interchange passengers<sup>4</sup>. The annual rail usage has fallen slightly from a high during the period when Beeston was subject to transport disruption caused by the development of the tram. The number of passengers who use Beeston as an interchange station may be increasing because it is easier for able bodied passengers to change platforms there; changing at Nottingham can mean a long walk!

Beeston is the 14th highest station for passenger numbers on the East Midlands Trains network. Many of those with higher passenger numbers are also on the key Nottingham to London route, for example, Market Harborough and Kettering.

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<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia

<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia

The most popular destinations from Beeston are eastbound to Nottingham, 6 minutes journey time by train, and westbound to Derby, Leicester and London. It is understood that, in 2016, Derby was the most popular destination from Beeston, coming just above Leicester.

## Catchment area

Beeston Station is the ‘go to’ station for people living on the western side of Nottingham. The catchment area includes Wollaton and Nottingham University, located within the Nottingham City Council boundary, as well as Beeston, Chilwell, Bramcote, Attenborough, Toton and Stapleford located within the boundary of Broxtowe Borough Council.

**Table 1. Populations of towns in the Beeston Station Catchment Area**

Town	2011 Census figure	Estimated figures for 2021 inc 8%
Beeston	37,000	39,960
Chilwell	12,846	13,873
Bramcote	7,270	7,852
Stapleford	15,241	16,460
Wollaton	24,693	26,668
Toton	8,238	8,897
Attenborough	2,328	2,514
Total	107,616	118,739

The population of these towns is significant, and particularly so because of the large amount of business and housing developments underway or planned in these areas. Toton is the site of the proposed developments associated with HS2. Beeston Station therefore has access to a large potential travelling population that is likely to increase in the next ten years.

It is easier for new and existing passengers to use Beeston Station rather than travelling into Nottingham to catch their trains there. The journey time into Nottingham can add considerably to the overall journey, particularly at peak times. For example, the recent introduction of cycle lanes on one of the major routes into Nottingham from the western side of the city has increased traffic on major routes into Nottingham Station, making door-to-door journey times for prospective passengers even longer.

## Broxtowe’s skilled workforce

According to a regular commuter many commuters travelling from Beeston are season ticket holders. Regular commuters with season tickets are believed to be in well paid jobs that may encourage the use of public transport.<sup>5</sup> Beeston is a sought after residential area for those from professional and managerial classes with its close proximity to the University of Nottingham, the Nottingham University Hospitals, Boots pharmaceutical company and Chilwell Barracks<sup>6</sup>.

The highly skilled profile of Broxtowe’s workforce is reflected in data from the ONS<sup>7</sup>. The ONS estimates for 2013 were that over one third (36.6%) of Broxtowe’s residents aged 16-64 held degree level qualifications, considerably more than the equivalent proportions for Nottinghamshire (30.4%) and the East Midlands (30.1%). In the ward of Beeston Central the socio-economic classifications of occupations indicate that those from the higher managerial, administrative and professional classes are high at 14%, higher than the Broxtowe average of 12% or even the England average of 10%. As a

<sup>5</sup> For example the University of Leicester has a financial scheme supporting season ticket holders.

<sup>6</sup> There are plans to close Chilwell Barracks and develop the land for housing.

<sup>7</sup> ONS Office for National Statistics

result the proportion of Broxtowe's residents in employment is higher than regional or national levels. This means people have money to travel and commute, and they need to be attracted onto the trains!

*Mr P is 57 years old and lives in Beeston Rylands. He is a T5 Paraplegic, has full use of his body from his sternum up, but is paralysed from this point down and cannot walk. He uses a manual wheelchair. He works full time as a Regional Director - Building Services Consulting Engineer and he has to travel from Beeston to London by train once or twice a week to deal with staff and projects. As a professional engineer with an understanding of buildings, services and regulations, he scrutinises facilities closely. He has considered the feasibility of installing lifts at Beeston Station and feels it could be done by reclaiming land from the proposed car park adjacent to Platform 2 and the demolition of part of the building on Platform 1, which is not part of the original station. A new footbridge could run parallel to the road to access the lift doors. A lobby area could be installed between the Station Bridge pavement and the lift doors. The main challenge would be the staircases, which might have to change direction due to the number of stairs, the height and the limited space at platform level. He would welcome a full feasibility report so that the installation of lifts can be considered properly. He said, "The facilities at Beeston Station fall considerably short for disabled people and independent transfer between platforms is out of the question for someone like me without lifts".*

## Population Growth and Future Developments

There are significant new housing and light industrial developments in Beeston. Three major projects are planned and underway in and around the town bringing an extra 500 + houses to the area. These developments include 300 houses sponsored by a consortium of Bartons, a significant but unknown number of houses on Beeston Business Park, and 200 houses from Myfords. In addition, a significant housing development is planned for the land at Chilwell Depot once the barracks close. In addition to the expected population increase of 8% to 2021<sup>8</sup>, this additional housing could increase the population of the station's catchment area to well over 120,000. Further developments are planned across the Borough of Broxtowe.

Beeston Business Park is also in the process of developing offices and light industrial activities on land to the south of Beeston Station. This is expected to be completed in the next few years. It is postulated that the location of these activities is directly related to the proximity of Beeston Station, and the added transport and accessibility options that this provides for potential employees. It is expected that this will be along the lines of the Atos office complex on Technology Drive just off Platform 2.

## University of Nottingham

Beeston Station is the closest station for students and staff travelling to the Nottingham campus of Nottingham University; approximately one and a half miles away. The university has 33,435 students, although a number of these are based at the Triumph Road or Sutton Bonnington campuses. Nevertheless many live in either student accommodation in and around Beeston or on the Nottingham campus itself and a significant number of students assume that Beeston Station is the station for the university. Many are international students (27% of Nottingham University students are international students, the majority of whom are Chinese, and 10.3% of the population of Beeston is of Chinese ethnicity. (2011 Census))

The high student population of Beeston is reflected in the 2011 Census where the percentage of students or school children aged 18 and over for the ward of Beeston Central was 22% compared to a Broxtowe average of 4.9%.

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<sup>8</sup> ONS Estimate

Access from the station to the university is difficult without local knowledge, the distance for those who wish to walk is excessive, and locating the Beeston bus and tram Interchange is a challenge for those new to the town. Yet observational evidence indicates that many international and other students use Beeston Station.

## Access and safety issues at the station

### Car Parking

Beeston currently has two car parks adjacent to Platform 1, one administered by station staff and one by Broxtowe Borough Council. Between them they provide 32 car parking spaces with 2 designated for blue badge holders. The development of a new car park on land adjacent to Platform 2 will allow passengers to be dropped off and picked up safely. The Notice of Proposal by Broxtowe Borough Council suggests that the car park should be operational by 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018, although at the beginning of March 2018 the land remains a building site. When complete this new car park will provide an additional 60 spaces and 6 blue badge spaces, which can be used by passengers. It will improve access, especially for people travelling to London who wish to avoid the traffic congestion and extra journey times associated with Nottingham Station. It will not, however, solve the problems experienced by disabled drivers.

At the moment a disabled passenger travelling to London can park in the designated space in the car park adjacent to Platform 1 and then has to get across to Platform 2 to catch his/her train. When he/she returns on Platform 1 their car is close by. When the new car park opens the disabled passenger can park close to Platform 2 to catch his/her train, but then has to trek back to find it again after alighting on Platform 1. The designation of parking spaces for disabled people has to be part of an overall commitment to access if the blue badge scheme is going to meet its aim of helping disabled people with severe mobility problems to *‘access goods and services, by allowing them to park close to their destination.’*<sup>9</sup>

Network Rail also owns land to the north of Platform 1 which, with foresight and planning, could provide additional car parking spaces in the future. This would augment the increase in spaces mentioned above and come some way to match the proposed developments at stations further south, for example, the upgrade of Market Harborough Station with 500 extra car parking spaces planned.

### ‘Step Free’ Access

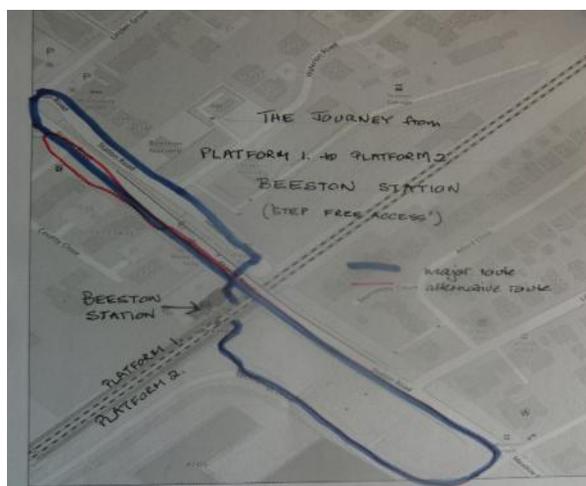
The National Rail Enquiries website for Beeston Station states that there is, *‘step free access to all areas of the station, however the step free route between the ticket office and Platform 2 is approximately 500 metres long’*. In reality the site is far less accessible to passengers than this suggests for the following reasons:

- There is a parking space for disabled people adjacent to the entrance to Platform 1. Next to it is a sign that tells passengers that Platform 2 is over “the footbridge”. There is no sign anywhere on the station to tell passengers how to change platforms if they cannot climb the steps.
- Passengers who decide to follow the unsigned 500 metre route to Platform 2 have two options: the first is to walk up to the main road, cross the road and walk over Station Bridge. This is fairly hazardous as the traffic on the bridge goes fast and is not visible until it is over the crown of the hill. The pavement disappears on the left hand side as passengers leave the station and the dropped kerbs on the right are not all lined up, meaning that passengers have to walk in the road before they can access the pavement
- The second route involves turning left under an underpass as the passenger leaves the station. This is a far safer route, but would not be obvious to interchange passengers who do not know the area.

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<sup>9</sup> The Blue Badge Scheme Local Authority Guidance (England), October 2014, page 1

There are directional signs at both ends of the underpass but they do not direct passengers to Platform 2 even though it would be easy to add a sign to the existing posts. The existing signs also do not indicate how far passengers might have to walk to find, for example, the university; quite a trek with a heavy suitcase! Network Rail has indicated that adding a directional sign to the existing posts is the responsibility of Broxtowe Borough Council. However, when FOBS contacted the Council they were told that there is currently no money to undertake this work.



**Fig 3: Map showing the journey between platforms for those unable to climb the steps. It does not show the steep gradient of Station Bridge between Linden Grove and Technology Drive.**

- The passengers who have to walk this 500 metre route are likely to be people with mobility problems. The walk up Station Bridge is challenging because the gradient is steep and there are no seats or rest points until the crown of the hill is reached, when there is at least a flat surface for a few yards. Anyone using a manual wheelchair would have to have very strong arms if travelling alone and a strong companion if not!
- The ownership of the path onto Platform 2 from Technology Drive is apparently unclear. The first part running parallel to the platform was recently upgraded by Broxtowe Borough Council and is now compliant with the regulations to allow safe use by people who use wheelchairs. The bottom part towards Technology Drive is still problematic because of: the slope at the bottom; the camber; the lack of handrails; and the lack of textured paving to denote a change of direction.



**Fig 4: The refurbished path to Platform 2. Note the lack of textured paving at the top.**

- An accessible toilet is located in the ticket office on Platform 1, but it is not accessible when the ticket office is closed or to passengers waiting on Platform 2 who cannot use the station steps (i.e. there is no toilet on Platform 2).
- A ramp for accessing the trains is stored in the ticket office on Platform 1, but a ramp is not available for use on Platform 2. Anyone needing the ramp on Platform 2 has to use the on-board ramp. The experience of one disabled traveller is that he has to wait for all passengers to clear the platform and at that point the train manager checks that the platform is clear. He then has to wave

his hands to suggest that he is getting on the train. This has delayed the train by between 2 and 6 minutes many times on departure whilst the on-board ramp is erected. Station staff are not allowed to walk over Station Bridge to Platform 2 with the station ramp.

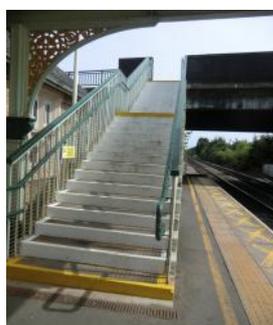
The following two accounts illustrate the difficulties for passengers using Beeston Station. It must be remembered that similar difficulties will also be experienced by people with heavy luggage and those with buggies and small children who may need help to climb the stairs.

- *Mrs H is 84 years old and lives in Attenborough. Although her general health is quite good, she has arthritis in her ankle which affects her balance and she becomes breathless if required to carry anything heavy. She has a senior rail card and “loves train journeys”. Unfortunately she is not able to climb the stairs at Beeston with or without luggage, so she cannot take advantage of trains that mean she would have to change platforms at Beeston. . She said, “It would be completely impractical and ridiculous for me to even think about walking from Platform 2 to Platform 1 via the bridge. On one occasion when I got stranded on Platform 2 I did walk across the bridge and when I finally got across I was completely exhausted; the thought of continuing my journey down Station Road to catch another train or get a station taxi was laughable.”*
- *Mr D is 47 years old and has a speech and physical impairment. He uses an electric wheelchair. He travels by train approximately once a month, but cannot use Beeston Station at all because “access to Platform 2 is dreadful, access to Platform 1 is not great, either via the ticket office or outside the entrance which has a small step”. He identifies assistance on and off trains at Beeston as problematic and would welcome all access improvements to Beeston Station, including lifts. He said, “I tram it to Nottingham Station and go from there as it works, even if the train stops at Beeston”.*

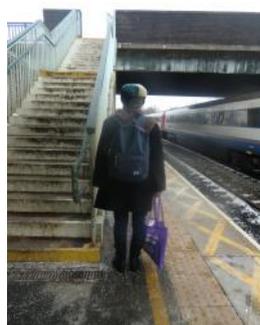
Beeston Station cannot be thought of as accessible in its current state. Some older passengers, passengers with heavy luggage or buggies and those with mobility problems, who have not formally booked travel assistance, would certainly struggle to use the station. Evidence suggests that even those that have formally booked assistance have problems boarding and alighting at Beeston. At best it needs lifts to ensure that everyone can use the station safely and at the very least it needs improvements to signage, steps and toilet facilities. To quote the London TravelWatch report, ‘If any area of an interchange is difficult for any passenger to use for any reason, it can’t be considered to be truly accessible’<sup>10</sup>.

### Safety on Platform 1 and the steps

There are two particular issues with the steps: their safety for all passengers and the maintenance, upkeep and condition of the steps to both Platform 1 and Platform 2.



**Fig 5: Steps to Platform 1, 18 July 2017**



**Fig 6: Respecting the line, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2018**

<sup>10</sup> Value for money on London’s transport services, London TravelWatch (2013), page 14

Access to Platform 1 is either via the ticket office or under the station steps. Direct observation of passengers alighting at Beeston suggests that most passengers exit the platform under the station steps.

The narrow passage around the steps can be seen clearly in Fig 2, Fig 5 and Fig 6 above. The hazardous nature of this is experienced regularly by passengers and must be particularly dangerous for those with sight or mobility issues, buggies and young children.

*Ms F is 24 years old and is able bodied. She commutes every week day from Beeston to Leicester and back. She observes people entering and exiting the station around the bottom of the steps on Platform 1. She said, "In the morning there are large numbers of people who are rushing to board the trains on time. There can be some congestion at the bottom of the stairs as people use that way to enter and exit the station, whilst other people are trying to climb the steps to change platforms. The steps are also slippery quite regularly and are not always gritted properly."*

It would be interesting to find out what train drivers think about this issue. One, responding to a query on an online blog, said that he is always wary when passengers at stations are too close to the platform edge. He wrote, "Yes, it's scary. Not so much if you are coming to a halt, but passing through a station non-stop at speed with people too close to the edge does scare the willies out of me, especially small children".<sup>11</sup>

There are 30 steep narrow steps up the stairs from the platforms to Station Bridge: from the bottom there are 16 steps, then a short landing and then 14 more steps. The steps are hazardous even for passengers who are able to climb them and they are lacking in general maintenance and some basic safety issues.

- The steps do not have a non-slip surface or well painted hazard markings even though, 'falls sustained when descending stairs are a leading cause of death in older adults'<sup>12</sup>. There is no tactile paving at the top of the steps to assist blind and partially sighted people.



**Fig 7: Steps to Platform 2, 18 July 2017**



**Fig 8: Steps to Platform 2, 26 January 2018**

- The handrails do not extend right to the entrance to the steps as can be seen in Fig 7 above. This may be because of the gates but these cannot be fastened back. (See Fig 7) This means that passengers have nothing stable to hold onto at the top of the steps. One of the gates leading to Platform 2 is missing, so the gates clearly have little purpose as it has not been replaced.
- There are no safety rails on the roadside at the top of the steps, meaning that passengers with children have to hope that the children do not run into the road before they can reach them. (See

<sup>11</sup> Accessed from RailUKforums on the Internet on 3.3.2018

<sup>12</sup> Safety on Stairs: Influence of tread edge highlighter and its position, Richard J Foster, John Hotchkiss, John G Buckley, David B Elliot, article accessed on Internet 21.1.2018

Fig 9). Installation of safety rails is presumably the responsibility of Via East Midlands Ltd as this organisation is responsible for Station Bridge.



**Fig 9: Approaching the top of the steps from Platform 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2018**

- Although re-painted in early 2017, the condition of the paint on the steps has deteriorated to such an extent that the safety paint at the front of the steps has all but disappeared in the wet and cold winter of 2017/18, leaving the steps dirty and even more hazardous than before (See Fig 8). While there have been no official reports of people falling on the steps, anecdotal evidence from regular passengers indicates this is an ever present danger.

*Ms M is 22 and able bodied. She lives in Beeston and is at university in Brighton. She travels there and back by train because she suffers from car sickness. On the morning of December 29<sup>th</sup> 2017 Ms M travelled to Beeston Station by taxi and was dropped off on the Platform 1 side. She needed to change platforms so she used the station stairs. As she got to the top of the stairs she slipped on the ice and, as she made her way down the stairs to Platform 2, she slipped again. She said, “The train does not make me sick, but the station might make me disabled.”*

On the 20th February 2018 a member of the FOBS, engaged in painting the station benches, observed several men from Network Rail inspecting the station steps and glass canopy. It is to be hoped that this will result in some of the issues identified above being addressed.

## Proximity to other step-free stations

The nearest stations to Beeston with step free access are Attenborough, Long Eaton and Nottingham. The National Rail Enquiries website suggests that passengers have time to travel up and down the line. With regard to getting to Beeston from Nottingham, in a way that avoids crossing Station Bridge to get into the town, it states, “if you are unable to use the bridge whilst travelling southbound (towards Derby or Leicester), please travel to Long Eaton and catch a train northbound (towards Nottingham) to Beeston”. This would involve changing platforms at Long Eaton Station, waiting for another train and might add anything up to 1 hour to your journey. All options for passengers who cannot cross Station Bridge at Beeston involve additional travelling time.

Passengers would rarely travel to Attenborough Station to change platforms because so few trains stop there.

Long Eaton Station also has its challenges and is not as viable option for many people. Whilst the lifts are from ground level to the platforms, there is no lift across the line to change platforms and to get from one platform to the other involves a hazardous journey under the railway bridge where the pavement is very narrow and the traffic heavy. Further, Long Eaton Station is very isolated and there is limited staff assistance for passengers who might need it.

Nottingham Station is obviously well staffed and has lifts, but again presents problems for people with mobility issues. For example, the Newark Castle train stops at the far end of the station on Platform 4, which is the maximum distance from connecting services, the ticket office and the stairs or lifts. This part of the station is not under cover.

Disabled and older people may be particularly vulnerable in cold weather and lonely places.

## Installing lifts

FOBS supports Mr P's view that it is possible to install lifts at Beeston Station by creating more space on Platform 1 with the removal of the modern extension to the station building and by relocating the existing stairs. The entrance to Platform 1 could be redirected through the part of the station building that currently houses the coffee shop; at the moment a coffee shop on Platform 1 is hardly viable as most passengers board on Platform 2. The double doors on the car park side of the building could form a corridor to Platform 1.

## Business case for improvements

Beeston Station has been overlooked for modernisation and investment for 50 years. The planned housing and business developments in and around Beeston and the huge developments around HS2 make this an ideal time to consider the development of the station as a transport hub for the western side of Nottingham. Network Rail clearly thinks that there is a business case for spending money at Beeston Station as they must be expecting a return on their investment in the station canopies. A concern about the appearance of the station must be matched by investment to provide access, in the shape of lifts, for all members of the community. The estimated cost of installing lifts is £2m, based on similar schemes elsewhere. It is possible that, if asked, passengers might give priority to access rather than appearance at a time when funding is hard to come by.

It will also be helpful if other improvements are made before 2021 to ensure that passengers are safer on the steps and platforms. Passengers using Beeston Station are currently at risk of slips, trips and falls, and poor signage also means that they are not taking the safest route to change platforms. Partnership working and co-ordinated decision making is required from all stakeholders in order to provide a safe and efficient train service for Beeston.

'Ease of use' is a very important, but overlooked, factor in the usage of stations often due to the priority given to journey times and passenger numbers. Beeston Station could become a showpiece for Network Rail and East Midlands Trains in terms of their commitment to attracting disabled passengers onto the trains. The station cannot be allowed to remain a museum piece most easily used by able-bodied passengers.