



Chair's Report/activity for May 2022

Meetings go on and on, this month with the Rail Heritage Board and executive, with Historic England, Durham and Darlington Councils, Network Rail, local MPs, and film makers. Most months being your chair feels like a circus act, keeping several plates spinning at once while riding a uni-cycle! Do all these meetings achieve anything? At heart I'm an optimist and I believe they do, gradually over the years our influence has grown and those supporting our cause continues to increase, our membership grows and our Facebook page recently gained it's 2000 follower. There are a lot of projects which we've encouraged and supported over several years which are finally coming to fruition and the next year or so should see some obvious developments. Our input to planning and development has seen several schemes improved for the better and the (slow) development of some great projects. In many ways it's probably similar to 200 years ago, we have a great vision, but obstacles and financial issues keep getting in the way and perseverance is what we need.

Ongoing comments and concerns from many members about the perceived lack of some aspects of local authority support and delivery on matters S&DR were followed up. In particular I briefed a meeting of Cllrs, MPs and chief officers at DCC on Heighington Station, the creation of the walking/cycling route and proposals around the Gaunless Bridge and on-going maintenance. Strong support was voiced and there seemed to be a clear understanding that action was needed quickly.

Myself and trustee Norman Hugill attended the first meeting of a working group on live steam for 2025. The contents/proposals of an initial feasibility report were discussed and a much wider membership from the UK Heritage Rail community identified as required. A really helpful input from Network Rail and others all suggest this is looking promising but still a long way to go.

As many of you will know Durham's bid for 2025 City of Culture bid failed at the last hurdle (congratulations Bradford). The county council still seem very motivated about investing in culture and we hope that the S&DR bicentenary can now be a major focus for this.

I continue to provide talks for various local and regional groups to spread the good word of our work and stimulate interest. This month I spoke to Bishop Auckland Civic Society and was pleased to be invited to the G5 Locomotive Company's annual dinner to provide the after dinner speech. Our Vice Chair Alan Townsend has also been out spreading the word and spoke at Darlington's Quaker meeting house as part of the Darlington Arts Festival. A very appropriate place to speak with the S&DRs Quaker heritage and our own current project (supported by Historic England) to investigate this.

As ever I'm hugely grateful to our wonderful trustees and other keen supporters and helpers without who we would have achieved very little. In particular to Peter Bainbridge for organising the excellent walk celebrating the 200th anniversary of laying the first rail at St John's Crossing on May 23rd, and to Barry Angela, JT, Martin et al for the First Rail film and celebratory beer at Stockton on the same day. As ever If you feel inspired to help out, don't feel shy and do come forward, we can always find something for volunteers to do be it little or small depending on your skills and available time.

All the best. Niall Hammond, Chair
Friends of the S&DR. 06/06/2022.

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