



Chair's Report/activity for November 2022

Dear Friends,

As Christmas approaches we are waiting for two very important decisions. Firstly, we await the imminent news from the National Heritage Lottery Fund regarding the major grant application we submitted with Darlington Council. Some of this will be used for interpretation at North Road, but the key element for ourselves and the S&DR is the appointment of three officers to support volunteer work and run an exciting activity programme along the 26 miles for five years from later in 2023. This will be run from the Lime Cells on Hopetown Lane, which will be refurbished as offices; the grant will also include a £200k community fund to support activity along the line. I'm hoping to have news by our December meeting on the 2nd about this. The second crucial report is the study by Tricolor Associates to identify how the line outside the three museums will be managed in future. This may include an enhanced and supported role for the Friends. Sadly, Ashley Bell who is writing the report (and has attended our meetings), has gone down with pneumonia and so it is delayed. We wish Ashley a quick and safe recovery and look forward to the report.

The first trustees meeting after the AGM was held on 24th November in a room provided by Darlington Railway Institute for which we are grateful. Amongst a long agenda, your trustees main topic was looking at capacity. We do an enormous amount from a volunteer base and to say many members, trustees and officials are overworked and tired is an understatement. We have however achieved a lot in the nearly nine years of our existence and so no one wants to ease off our commitments. Following the resignation at our AGM of our long standing secretary Alan McNab, we desperately need to find an efficient and organised person to take on this role. We will be advertising it but please if you are interested don't be shy, please call me to discuss and find out what it involves. As decided at our AGM we have also set our first annual budget. Much of our funding is 'reserved' for specific grant aided projects, but decisions have been made on how we spend our unrestricted monies. In light of our capacity issues a decision was made to produce a job description and advertise for a secretarial support officer. This will be a part time post and a job advert will appear in due course.

Trustees also discussed our work over the years on commenting on planning applications and development which might impact on the conservation of the S&DR. This has seen several positive results but more recently some disappointing setbacks including the conversion of the Fighting Cocks pub to a Sainsbury's convenience store and this month the approval of a large solar farm on land immediately adjacent to the S&DR between Darlington and Newton Aycliffe negatively impacting on the setting, even if the development will provide part of the walking/cycling route. A simple buffer zone would have allowed the solar farm (renewable energy we all need), with conservation of the S&DR. Sadly the millions being spent by local authorities on museums and 2025 is time again being negatively impacted upon by poor planning decisions. The stretch of line between Darlington and Newton Aycliffe is the last live section where visitors and train passengers can get a sense of what it was like in 1825. We are therefore engaging with other conservation bodies to protect this gap.

Our two new trustees John Raw and George Alderslade have kindly offered to take on the role of organising and promoting a coordinated events programme. We have for many years provided a wide range of guided walks, talks and events but often the advertising for these has been uncoordinated. We hope from 2023 to publish an annual events calendar early in year. If you are planning anything in 2023, do let John and George know.

**Chair, Friends of the S&DR CIO, Marian Cottage, Lartington, Barnard
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Lots of meetings continue to make progress on a number of fronts as usual including improvements to North Road station, a comms strategy for the whole project making it easier for people to know what's going on, discussions and agreements with landowners over access for walking/cycling; talks with Northern Rail/Community rail Partnership over signage and leaflet at stations; and a wide variety of ideas for events in 2025 are beginning to take more shape, but we are still concerned about the lack of time to achieve this. Our trustee Norman Hugill attended the Heritage Railway Association AGM on our behalf, briefly meeting Sir Peter Hendy of Network Rail who received one of our history booklets. Sir Peter also spoke about 'Rail 200', an ambition from Network Rail and partners to make sure in 2025 there are celebrations of the birth of the modern railway across the UK, not just in the north east. We understand a bid has been made to central government to fund this.

Two of our own Historic England supported projects have had successful meetings/workshops. The Quaker study group had an excellent meeting in Darlington, a second meeting will be held in February; while our 'Caring for the S&DR' project has had two training workshops and the reporting webpage is now live on our website at <https://www.sdr1825.org.uk/caring-for-the-sdr/>, so please do report any vandalism, antisocial behaviour, fly tipping etc.

I hope you all have an excellent festive season. After our December meeting we skip January and will meet again on Thursday 2nd of February.

All the best. Niall Hammond, Chair
Friends of the S&DR. 26/11/2022.

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