



Chair's Report/Activity for June 2024

Dear Friends,

Well June 2024 has been a lesson in how quickly time goes by. All those things I promised myself I would get done this month have whizzed by along with my 60th birthday! It hardly seems anytime since we began the Friends of the S&DR but it's over 10 years and we have come along way...but still with a way to go. Many of you will be rightly focussed on the bicentenary events for next year when we hope to host a wide audience and get the message across to the world that this is where railways started. Much of my work is however looking at what happens after 2025. All of the investment and effort of the last 10 years has to be put on a permanent, sound footing so that our young in education, our communities and our visitors can be inspired by, value and enjoy our international class heritage. In particular this month three continuing projects are key to achieving this.

Our future business planning project supported by the local authorities and being supported by Tricolor Associates is moving towards a lottery bid in July to provide funds for future development work. If successful this will provide funds for an 18 month project to appoint a full time project officer, supplement our secretary's time, write a conservation management plan for the line, produce a business plan and see how this can all be delivered sustainably for the future. This will have to involve lots of bright ideas such as using old S&DR and railway buildings for new uses such as holiday lets for visitors to make it all be financially sustainable. We hope to hear in September from National Lottery Heritage Fund if we have been successful in applying for this grant.

One key building which may help generate finances to help our work is of course Heighington Station where we continue our project to buy and restore the site, the world's earliest railway station. We have good news and bad news on our appeal this month. First the bad news, we have now confirmed that because the General Election was called early our major grant application for £400k to the Community Ownership Fund (COF), which was due by 26th June has had to be cancelled. Regardless of who wins the election we don't know if the COF will open again and so we need to make alternative plans. The good news is that we are still however receiving lots of support from Durham County Council and others and on July 18th we will be making an announcement and new press release on a significant grant from the Rail heritage Trust. Please do continue to circulate the webpage details (<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/save-heighington-station>) to everyone you know, encourage donations and spread the word. If you can't afford to donate then you can show your support by signing our petition at <https://forms.office.com/r/9sfYKNLbHr>

In Darlington we look forward to the imminent completion and opening of the revamped and extended North Road Railway Museum as 'Hopetown' on the 16th July. We have also had some very progressive meetings with the council regarding purchasing the site form which John Dobbin painted the famous picture of the opening day and landscaping it so that it becomes Dobbin View (a mini park) overlooking the Skerne Bridge and a valuable improvement to the Northgate street scene. With regard to the house of Edward Pease at 142 Northgate our discussions with Darlington Council and their architects are getting much closer to an agreement on its restoration and use by ourselves. I also understand

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(but haven't checked yet myself), that after several years of lobbying and much support from Peter Gibson MP, that Network Rail have now removed all the rubbish from the site of the 1827 Merchandise Station on the east side of North Road opposite the new entrance to Hopetown. This is the site of an exceptionally important early railway building and now the rubbish has gone we hope to explore options for archaeological investigations and hopefully access and interpretation.

2025 Planning.

Again, we are still waiting for September when the official 2025 Festival programme is announced. However, we now know that events for 2025 will be split into three areas. S&DR200 will be the official festival containing the major organised events over several months. S&DR Fringe will be an opportunity for everyone else to put on events large and small and which will then be advertised through an online database, financial support for some of the may be possible from the S&DR Community Grants; clearly this can and will cover a multitude of things from walks, talks, theatre, creative writing, poetry, murals, art and whatever anyone can dream up at venues all along the line. Finally, there will be S&DR1825, the installed permanent interpretation and way finding which will be intended to last long after 2025, we know the brand/design for this and have already included it in our new guided walk booklets. The interpretation boards and signage for this should be in place by Feb 2025. Thanks to our Vice Chair Alan and others who attended a first meeting to announce this at Darlington Dolphin Centre on 25th of June. I understand further dates are being arranged in Stockton and Shildon to explain the festival and encourage participation in the S&DR Fringe in particular.

And finally the reminder of contacts:

Cait Barratt the 'S&DR Heritage & Community Participation Manager' is the person to talk to regarding the S&DR community Fund which can provide grants of a few hundred to a few thousand pounds and which are available over the next 4 years to help people celebrate and conserve the S&DR, If you have an idea then get in touch with Cait and she will provide initial feedback on your idea and if it fits the community grant objectives encourage you to submit an application. Ideas can be submitted to Cait on the following email address s&drcommunitygrantsscheme@darlington.gov.uk. Cait also now has two officers supporting her in volunteer and education development and we hope to meet them at our March monthly meeting, contact details to follow.

The team of various officers in the local authorities including Niccy Hallifax the 2025 Festival Director, Richie Starrs the Project Officer, and Jill Read the Communications and Partnerships Officer can all now be contacted through one single email address which is info@sdr200.co.uk which people should use for any general enquiries.

As ever if you want to discuss anything S&DR related drop me a line at Chair@sdr1825.org.uk.

All the best.

Niall Hammond, Chair, Friends of the S&DR. 30/06/2024.

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