



Chair's Report/Activity for July/August 2024

Dear Friends,

I hope you've had an enjoyable summer despite mixed weather and a general election!

As mentioned in my last report, we've been putting considerable time and energy into an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), to ensure that post 2025 there is a lasting legacy and the S&DR remains a well maintained, conserved and promoted heritage attraction for visitors and communities. To achieve this the Friends have been financially supported by Stockton, Darlington and Durham councils and we submitted our bid to NLHF in mid-August and now hope to hear within 8 weeks if we have been successful for our 18-month project, so please everyone keep their fingers crossed. If we do get the grant then it will pay for the following:

- Appoint a full-time project officer,
- Supplement our secretary's time with additional days per week.,
- Write a conservation management plan for the line identifying condition/extent of all historic structures, management issues, access and interpretation future work.
- Produce a GIS (Geographical Information System) which will allow all the various historic maps we have researched and acquired over the years to be digitised, referenced to modern mapping and overlain. This is essential for our on-going work in research, conservation and commenting on new planning applications. We'll have opportunities for training volunteers in use of GIS
- 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. A major part of this will be agreeing with councils and other partners how land and buildings are maintained in future which may include asset transfer and long leases of buildings and property.

As members will know Heighington Station is a key building we want to acquire and restore, and while we have now raised well over £100,000 towards the project, the uncertainty of when or indeed if the Community Ownership Fund (COF), is continuing after the General Election, and from which we had hoped for £400,000 remains in doubt. We have spoken to the new MPs for Darlington, Sedgefield and Bishop Auckland about this and all have voiced support and have posed questions for us to the new government but as yet we have no answer. Thanks to funds already pledged we have now been able to appoint an architect, Owen Plummer of Purcell, to help us design and cost our full scheme for the site and engage Durham CC with a pre-app planning application to smoke out any issues regarding the site. We're also really grateful to Kittiwake Digital who have undertaken a full digital survey and scan of the building to help with design and promotion. 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>

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In Darlington I hope as many people as possible have now had a chance to visit the newly opened 'Hopetown'. General consensus is strongly positive to the new attraction. It shamelessly aims for the family visit market and in doing so provides something different to the more traditional museum experience at Locomotion. The two sites provide complimentary and different approaches to the railway story of the area. Well done to all at Darlington who have worked on Hopetown and we wish them every success. As ever a critical eye could suggest some things which could be improved and we hope to have a healthy 'critical friend' relationship in the future to everyone's benefit.

With regard to the house of Edward Pease at 142 Northgate our discussions with Darlington Council and their architects have reached a provisional agreement on its restoration and use by ourselves as our offices. We understand a planning application will be submitted very soon when we'll be able to share the more detailed plans which will hopefully see the building in part restored and accessible for 2025.

Our friends at Lonely Tower Films premiered their film on the story of the S&DR on July 24th at Hopetown and very good it is too and not too embarrassing for those of us who appear in it! There will be other screenings but why not buy a copy on DVD which is available from Amazon: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Iron-Steam-Stockton-Darlington-Railway/dp/B0D9YM19QK?source=ps-sl-shoppingads-lpcontext&ref=fplfs&psc=1&smid=A2AEV3GLTUBQVG>

Elsewhere we've had useful meetings with The Auckland Project/Weardale Railway, Rail200, Story Homes, Husqvarna, artists and producers and a number of other partners. Husqvarna (makers of robot lawnmowers and power tools in particular at their Newton Aycliffe plant), have been working with us on sponsoring a refresh of our self-guided walk booklet (Shildon to Heighington), and we look forward to some further exciting collaboration with them. In the same area we've worked with Durham CC and other local partners to support yet another bid to the National Lottery, this time for a 10 year project to explore and promote all sorts of local heritage.

2025 Planning.

The official launch date for the 2025 festival will be September 19th at a special event at Darlington Hippodrome Theatre. We now understand from Niccy Hallifax the Festival Director that this is to be an invited audience only event (we had hoped it might have been a larger public gathering), but for good reason this is to be a carefully coordinated event to interest national/international media, politicians and other influential people. Niccy has however kindly offered to come along to a future Friends meeting with her team and present the full festival programme with slides which can then be distributed afterwards.

As we already know, 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

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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. Jill Read the S&DR200 Comms manager has now run three sessions (Stockton, Darlington, Shildon), on how to contribute to the Fringe programme and is willing to hold more if there is sufficient interest.

On the wider S&DR, members of the Friends in Barnard Castle/Teesdale have formed a group with the intention of putting on events and displays for 2025 and we've been happy to support them in an application Durham County Council to add to support from GSK to make this happen.

In particular the Friends will be putting together a Walking Festival for 2025 with a variety of advertised guided walks and some illustrated talks. If you like to be a part of this either in organisation or by being a walk leader please do get in touch. We have a training session for walk leaders at Locomotion Museum on October 14th, places are still available so do get in touch if you'd like to participate. You'll need to be a member of the FSDR to ensure our public liability insurance covers you.

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. 28/08/2024.

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