



Chair's Report/Activity for December/January 2023

Dear Friends,

I hope you had a good festive season and a (belated) Happy New Year to all of you. 2024 is clearly a crucial year in getting things ready for the bicentenary in 2025 and most of what I have to report is on-going work rather than any dramatic new "news".

Members will recall we responded last year to the re-branding of Darlington Railway Museum as 'Hopetown'. This came from our perspective out of the blue and we were disappointed to have not been involved in the development of name and brand, as indeed were many local residents of Darlington who wrote to us, the Northern Echo and on many Facebook/social media pages to voice bewilderment. While the name itself may have historic resonance as the area around North Road, it post dates the S&DR by several years, the branding was what disappointed most people with the text and logo saying nothing about railways and the design itself being compared to a coffee house or a wild west saloon. I wrote on your behalf to Cllr Harker leader of Darlington Council expressing voiced concerns and pointing out that by not listening to or consulting local communities they were alienating the very people who were their core audience and supporters. Rather than abandon the new name and brand we instead suggested a gradual evolution and minor design tweaks. Sadly, I have to let you now that some two months later I have still received no reply from Darlington Council.

On a more positive note, interest in our work and the S&DR continues to grow and I have provided talks/lectures for a variety of groups including Middridge Local History Society and a very useful short presentation to the Aycliffe Business Park Breakfast Club at Hitachi's train plant attended by some 70-80 businesses, many of whom want to know how to get involved. I'm pleased to say we have a number of other requests for talks for later in the year including teacher groups, the Durham WI and the Saltburn Line User Group (a great acronym!). I've also had discussions with the authorised Blue Badge professional tourist guides in Durham to explore what they can offer tourists as a quality experience along the S&DR.

Work on the forthcoming Business Plan for the Friends continues and we hope to appoint Tricolor Associates very soon to take this forward with support from Durham, Darlington and Stockton councils.

We continue to work with Darlington Council on the restoration and possible acquisition of **Edward Pease's House** on Northgate in Darlington, both as an historic building fundamental to the S&DR story, and as an office/premises for the Friends. This would also help with the regeneration of Northgate.

Perhaps our biggest project this coming year will be taking forward the purchasing and restoration of **Heighington Station**. As I explained in my last newsletter, this has for various reasons been delayed for several years. We are now however ready to launch a fund-raising campaign and apply for various grants. There will be a separate members email about this and we ask everyone to help in whatever way they can by spreading the word, donating time, expertise or money, or just signing the public petition to help us demonstrate to people how many people care about the project. There will be a presentation at the members' meeting on 1st February and a press release shortly afterwards.

**Chair, Friends of the S&DR CIO, Marian Cottage, Lartington, Barnard
Castle, Co. Durham, DL12 9BP.**

Email: chair@sdr1825.org.uk

Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.

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As ever no month goes by without attending plenty of meetings to lobby for our cause. My thanks also to Vice Chair Alan Townsend for his valuable support in making sure we are represented at as many meetings as possible and in particular with his work alongside me representing the Friends on the committee of the Early Railways Conference which will be held in Darlington in September 2025. You can keep an eye on bookings for the conference and papers at this site as they become available: <https://rchs.org.uk/early-railways-conference-combined/>

2025 Planning.

Work continues on this led by the Festival Director Niccy Hallifax. While there is nothing definite and new to report now, it is clear Niccy is working really hard in developing ideas and funding to make 2025 as memorable as possible. I understand that the intention is to make a big announcement in September this year on events for 2025 once lots of sensitive negotiations have been firmed up. Until then Niccy has asked if everyone can as much as possible avoid publicising events and initiatives, they we may have advance knowledge of so that the announcement in September has as much impact as possible, and no on-going negotiations are prejudiced. If in doubt drop Niccy or myself a line.

Elsewhere along the line Durham have been given additional time by funders to complete their section of the Walking/Cycling route, which should now complete by September with bad weather having delayed things over winter. Interpretation boards are on the way to being manufactured and very shortly there should be consultations on a new landscaping scheme at the Masons Arms and the new design for the new decking across the Gaunless Bridge abutments. At the east end of the line where less funding is available for the walking/cycling route trustees have been meeting with Stockton Council to try and identify what the best options are.

As a reminder for 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 .

The team of various officers in the local authorities including Niccy Hallifax the 2025 Festival Director, 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. 29/01/2024.

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