



Chair's Report/Activity for April 2024

Dear Friends,

April has been exceptionally busy on a number of fronts, for myself the Heighington Station appeal has taken up much of my time. The majority of the funding to buy the site and undertake the first phase of works to allow the world's 'oldest railway station' to open in time for the 200th anniversary is turning into a full time job. We're hoping to get the lion's share of the £500,000 budget from the Community Ownership Fund, and we expect the next opportunity to apply will be in late May. For this we need a business plan and the identification of lots of costs to demonstrate we have a robust, planned future and the support of a wide variety of partners. This requires an awful lot of correspondence with everyone from MPs to electricians. Thanks of course to all our wonderful volunteers and helpers, but especially this month to Durham County Council for substantial support. Our crowdfunding appeal continues to go well, with over £10,000 pledged from people locally, nationally and internationally. Many other approaches for funding are going well, and without tempting fate I'm increasingly confident we'll reach our target of £100,000 to match the Community Ownership Fund application by September, our key date. Still lots to do, but things look positive and I've just received a report on asbestos risk in the building we've commissioned (it's a glamorous life!), which is reassuring that there are no big problems in this respect. Please keep spreading the word and encouraging people to donate. Please do circulate the webpage details (<https://www.justgiving.com/campaign/save-heighington-station>) to everyone you know 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>

With 50% funding from ourselves and 50% from the S&DR Community Grants Programme funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund, Lewis of Durham Spray Paints is as I write this completing the new mural at Fighting Cocks (thanks to Maz Holmes for use of her garage wall!). School groups have already been out for a look and I hope the community open day (advertised to members and on Facebook) on Saturday 27th goes well. In addition to the mural, the local FSDR group will also have a chance to show off all their hard work in conserving the old station site and tell people about forthcoming projects.

Press attention continues from various angles and thanks to Caroline Hardie (and Cleo the dog), for taking journalists from the national press (Mail/Express), along the line as part of a travel feature recently. We've also had a fantastic feature in Living North on Heighington Station.

Tim Hedley-Jones Director of the Rail Heritage Trust (RHT), came for a visit and we looked at sites in Darlington, Heighington and Shildon. Plenty to talk about and Tim was very positive about potential partnership projects over the next few years. One of these was our long running campaign to clean up and restore the site of the 1827 Merchandise Station on North Road, Darlington. Opposite the entrance to Hopetown, it deserves so much better. Finally (and fingers crossed), after the meeting with the RHT, and pressure

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from Peter Gibson MP, we now have correspondence with Lord Peter Hendy of Network Rail and fingers crossed something might now happen before 2025.

Our developing support from Husqvarna whose factory is close to the line at Aycliffe Business Park, continues to develop and I, together with several members of the Friends, were pleased to attend their factory for discussions and the presentation of a cheque for £2500 which will allow us to update and rewrite our guided walk booklet for Shildon to Heighington. Big thanks to Dan and Caraline at Husqvarna. We need to get all our walk booklets into the new updated format for 2025, so if you know of any companies who would like to discuss sponsorship to help with this please put them in touch (they'll get their name on the cover!).

Looking to the future our project supported by the Rail Heritage Board to look at post 2025 management has started; and we were also invited by Durham County Council to a workshop in Newton Aycliffe for the start of a National Lottery Heritage Fund Priority Places project which will look to provide at least £10 million pounds over 10 years to heritage in Shildon/Newton Aycliffe...clearly we'd love to help them spend their money wisely!

Beyond our usual 26 miles, I'm really pleased to see an emerging FSDR group in Barnard Castle who are keen to celebrate 2025 and the S&DR's later railways to Barnard Castle, Middleton in Teesdale and over the Pennines to Tebay.

Along with other Rail Heritage Board members we hosted Lord Neil Mendoza, Chair of Historic England on a visit to Darlington where he was extremely impressed in how much work has gone on through rail heritage to try and make a positive cultural and economic impact on the area. Lots of other meetings including helping with Caroline Hardie's 'Tales from the Rails' podcast, an excellent meeting on education along the S&DR convened by our good friend Felicity of the Community Rail Partnership together with museums and others to make sure we have coordinated education offer (and thanks to my Vice Chair Alan for attending the CRP meeting on our behalf). We've also been approached by interested parties in Darlington who are looking at producing an S&DR play, while this is something we have limited time for, we are keen as always to make sure people have their facts right. Finally I gave a talk to Spennymoor Probus club.

As every month my thanks goes out to all our volunteers and trustees without which none of our work would be possible. We can of course always do with more active workers so if you have time or skills you can spare to help with then please do get in touch.

2025 Planning.

Again we still wait for September when the official 2025 Festival programme is announced.

And finally 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

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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, 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. 26/04/2024.

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