

Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway

Minutes of 2023 AGM

Venue: The Georgian Theatre, Green Dragon Yard, Stockton-On-Tees TS18 1AT

Date: 28th October 2023

Time: 10:30am

Present:

Trustees:

Alan Townsend, Barry Thompson, Caroline Hardie, John Raw, Niall Hammond, Peter Bainbridge, Ross Chisholm

Vice Presidents:

Jane Hackworth-Young

Secretary:

Jonathan Ratcliffe

Members:

Bill Ramage, Bob Scott, David Thompson, Fiona Cooper, Francis Annett, Gerry Wilkinson, Ian Partington, John Fletcher, Keith Gregory, Keith Halifax, Leigh Taylor, Mary Smith, Neil Parker, Neil Pickersgill, Nick Brown, Paul Boden, Peter Cooper, Richie Starrs, Tim Taylor, Yvonne Richardson, Alastair Culff, Steve Sidgwick, Colin Percy, David Parker, Carole Parker, Dave Pennington, Catherine Yates, Jon Thompson, Mike Brown, John Carr

1. Welcome

The Chair, Niall Hammond welcomed those present and offered thanks to Barry Thompson for his lead in organizing the AGM and also Stockton BID for its sponsorship of the event.

2. Apologies for Absence

Richard Barber, Trevor Horner, Peter Spence, Ed Chicken, Jaqueline Nicholson, Jolyon Potter, Mary Smith, Chris Lloyd, Simon Teesdale, John Hustler, Peter Heslop, John Dinsdale, Alan Macnab, Sue Fleury, Richard Cowan, Graham Bucknall, Norman Hugill, Steven Dyke, George Morton, Trevor Fenwick, Margaret Fenwick, Angela Pickering, Ian Ross, Susan Boyle, John Hustler, Cllr. Jim Atkinson, Ken Bradshaw

3. Declarations of Interest

Niall Hammond & Caroline Hardie declared an interest in the Stockton and Darlington Railway Co. trading as the Railway Station shop.

4. Minutes of the previous AGM held on Saturday 22nd October 2022

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

5. Matters arising:

Niall Hammond spoke that the concerns raised at the previous AGM over the website management and IT issues had been in part relieved by the hiring of Jonathan Ratcliffe as a 1 day a week secretary bringing vital IT skills and charity management expertise.

6. Chair's Report

(full report circulated with the minutes)

Niall Hammond highlighted the following items from his report:

- The Friends are now landowners having recently been handed over the site of the Fighting Cocks coal drops in Middleton St. George. The ownership of key sites outside of the control of the museums along the route will allow for management of the sites without time consuming bureaucracy.
- The report by Tricolor commissioned by the 3 local authorities along the line has highlighted the need for a charitable body to manage the sites outside of the 3 museum sites and has recommended the Friends as the CIO to be developed into this organization.
- Highlighted that the role of the Friends is to do the right thing for the S&DR as per charitable aims and not to always make popular choices with the local authorities.
- Recognized key achievements from the last 12 months including:
 - The work to have key sites reassessed by Historic England e.g. the recognition of Heighington Station as the oldest extant station in the world and it's relisting to Grade 2* status. NH noted the importance of the work of our late member Brendon Boyle in this process.
 - The raising of national awareness through the Rail 200 initiative and in particular the recognition of the opening of the S&DR as the point from which the anniversary is measured.
 - That the Friends are now at the point where we are supporting other groups with learnings.
- The recent Hopetown Darlington rebranding was debated noting that the rebranding had been poorly received. The floor was opened for members to voice their comments on the rebranding:
 - The lack of consultation with groups was noted. While there has been consultation done, the Friends and other groups connected with railway heritage hadn't been consulted.
 - The new branding was felt to be bland and confusing and doesn't clearly show a connection with Railway Heritage. The font choice was felt to be messy and had a "Wild West" look.
 - There was support given for the name change with its local railway connection but that the "Darlington" strapline was insufficient to adequately sell the museum. Comparisons were drawn with Beamish's clear tagline.
 - It was resolved that the Friends will write to DBC to suggest improvements to the branding.

7. Officer Reports (Full Reports circulated before the meeting are attached)

a. Membership Secretary:

It was noted that there has been a loss of membership. This is not just restricted to the Friends but is a wider issue seen amongst other members of the Heritage Alliance. It was suggested to fix a post regarding the benefits of membership on the Facebook page.

b. Planning

It was noted that the planning system doesn't adequately protect heritage assets and favours profit over heritage conservation and doesn't recognize the economic benefit of heritage assets. E.g. Myer's Flatt embankment and DBC's planning team granting permission for the cheaper but more destructive option. The Friends are the only organization fighting for the protection of the S&DR.

c. Editor/Webmaster report

The next Globe is due out in December. Caroline Hardie put out a plea for papers for the issue to be sent to her by 24th November (Caroline@aenvironment.co.uk). She will also be releasing a new children's book in the next few weeks on the S&DR and that a coffee table book was in the process of development and contributions of photographs etc. are being sought. It was requested that news from the Facebook site to be duplicated onto the website for non-Facebook users.

d. Local group reports

WASH/EIG/BIG

John Raw gave a combined update on behalf of the 3 groups representing the first 5 miles of the line. He noted the celebrations by the St Helen's group to mark the anniversary and the identification of Thomas Storey's house. He also welcomed the support from Cait Barratt.

Darlington Group

The meeting welcomed Jon Thompson (JT) to talk about the recent launch of the Darlington Group which is plugging a big hole in the local management of the S&DR. Particular highlights of the first year were:

- Removal of dead trees and graffiti
- Improvement of frontage onto Tornado way
- Jon Thompson spoke of the world impact of the S&DR and the quote attributed to George Stephenson "What we've done today will change the world" and reminded the meeting of the importance of our work.

Ross Chisholm highlighted the Coal Depots on Haughton Road as an example opportunity to purchase a site and improve, tidy and improve signage.

- appeal for strong backs to support work parties was made. Niall Hammond urged all members to promote work parties as an opportunity to get the communities along the line involved.

e. Research and Archiving support

Jane Hackworth-Young made a correction to the report.

The documents currently being transcribed by Peter Bainbridge were the Raistrick notebook and not the Raisbeck papers. Peter Bainbridge has also been

transcribing Henry Pease's papers, mentioned elsewhere, and A. Kitching's diary of 1843/4.

8. Accounts

- a. A resolution was proposed that the Trustees would look into adjusting the AGM schedule to allow more time to adequately prepare final accounts and reports and present to the membership in a more complete state. Proposed Jane Hackworth-Young, seconded by Tim Taylor. Resolution was passed unanimously.
- b. Accounts are healthy and grant aid is being explored.

9. Election of Trustees

Alan Townsend took the chair at this point as Niall Hammond, Barry Thompson and Peter Bainbridge stood down as trustees as they were due for re-election. No new nominations for trustees had been received.

Jane Hackworth-Young nominated all 3 for re-election, Ross Chisholm seconded. Elected with strong majority.

10. Resolutions in Advance

No resolutions were proposed in advance of the AGM.

11. Close of the AGM:

Jane Hackworth-Young stood down as vice-president due to ill health and workload. The trustees gave their thanks for all her hard work with a card and gifts. She will continue to research and be involved with the Friends. Publications will be handed over to Jonathan Ratcliffe.