

Friends of the
Stockton and Darlington Railway

Minutes of Meeting held Thursday, 5th March 2026

Location Darlington Cricket Club, South Terrace,
 Darlington DL1 5JD

7.10 pm

Present: Niall Hammond (NHA Chair), Jonathan Ratcliffe (JAR), Alan Townsend (AT), John Raw (JDR) Barry Thompson (BT) Jim Rees (JRE), Peter Bainbridge (PB), Andy Lowes, Julia Armstrong, Colin Garthwaite, Nick Alderson-Rice, Keith Halifax, Simon Nicholson, Stephen Green, David Watt, Ray Glasper, Sam Glasper, Jim Atkinson, Gillian Bryant, Paul A Boden, Fred Pole, Neil Pickersgill, Michael Brownbridge, Catherine Yates, Sue McTague, Maurice Burns.

(Note: Actions highlighted in Red)

1.	<u>Welcomes & Apologies for absence.</u>	Responsibility
	<u>Apologies</u> Matthew Pease, Bob Scott, Bill Stuart, George Morton, Tim Taylor, Leigh Taylor, Kerrin Wilson, George Alderslade, Yvonne Richardson, Chris Lloyd, Norman Hugill, Alastair Culff, Francis Annett, Caroline Hardie, Jimmy Atkinson, Gerry Wilkinson, Richard Cowan,	
2.	<u>Declarations of Interest</u> <u>No new interests declared</u>	
3.	<u>Minutes of the Previous Meeting</u> Minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.	
4.	<u>Matters Arising</u>	
5.	<u>Survey of Passenger Traffic and Views on Today's Line</u> The Friends have become adopters of Heighington Station. Bishop Line have asked if we would like to undertake their station survey. There's a budget available of £5,000 for the Friends to undertake the survey.	

	<p>The Friends will be able to add in questions, educate them about the line and raise awareness. It will provide good data to support application bids.</p> <p>The proposal would be for the residue of the £5,000 will be added to the usual £1,000 community fund pot for applications from the membership.</p> <p>Alan Townsend briefed the meeting on what would be required of the Friends in terms of the survey. The target would be to undertake 600 interviews. The more volunteers available, the less onerous it will be on each volunteer.</p> <p>The main aim would be to interview members of the public on the trains between Darlington and Bishop Auckland. The survey would be taken on a digital form to allow data to reduce data entry. Data will have to be collected on</p> <p>Volunteers have very kindly begun to offer support. Any members who want to take part to email Alan Townsend by Monday 9th March.</p> <p>A pilot will take place before hand. Volunteers will be fully briefed on the route. Projected timescale would be 6 to 8 weeks in termtime. Sue McTague asked about whether volunteers would work in pairs for safety. There would be a risk assessment carried out and training provided on what to do in emergencies.</p> <p>John Raw commented that there could be a danger of adding in too many questions and making the survey too long, putting people off.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p><u>Chair's Report</u> (Report Attached)</p> <p>The Chair has had a meeting with Richie Starrs on 5th March. The Discovery Trail is not complete, but they had to launch early to satisfy grant requirements. There has been a snagging list created and the route will continue to be developed. There will be a full formal launch.</p> <p>Any faults with the route to be forwarded to the Chair and the Secretary to pass onto Richie. The Chair has asked where the ownership of the route and phone app lies. The local authorities are responsible for the Physical route assets. The app will be the responsibility of Teesside University until the end of 2026. There is a proposal for the Friends to take ownership of this.</p> <p>Ross Chisholm asked if that would require us to take responsibility for the delivery of the missing parts of the route. The Chair believes that the future development seems to be moving towards the Friends as the , but delivered and funded by local authorities.</p>	

	<p>Stockton Borough Council are keen to replace the temporary board on the Quayside with an additional Board. Barry Thompson to advise on the content.</p> <p>The Chair updated the meeting on the progress of the office. We are now looking likely to be taking offices in the former technical college. This was agreed in December but has dragged on. Cllr. Chris McEwan & Cllr Matt Roche have assisted the chair with accelerating the process and it's hoped that we should be able to</p> <p>The chair has been reassured that scaffolding will be going up at Pease House in early March. As of the time of the meeting this still hasn't occurred.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p><u>NLHF Project update</u></p> <p>The original timetable would have seen us finish at the end of March, due to early delays we are looking at extending the project to the end of the Financial Year to allow plenty of time to wrap the project up adequately.</p> <p>Tourism UK have begun consultations with key potential partners to feed into the business plan. KK is invited to our next monthly meeting to provide an update and for a Q&A. The Chair asked if the meeting would be willing to move the next meeting back a week. JR to check availability.</p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p><u>Heighington Station Update</u></p> <p>The chair thanked Ray Glasper and his team from Westholme for pumping out the cellar and clearing out metal waste from the kitchen. The skip kindly provided by Ashcourt has been filled and will be collected next week. A survey will take place to map the utilities and undertake a GPR survey to see what archaeology survives. There are other unknown historic buildings that we would like to identify</p> <p>We are still waiting for the work on the chimneys to begin after a period of poor weather.</p> <p>We have received the AHF Grant. Emma Watson of Tees Archaeology will undertake an archaeological investigation of the building.</p> <p>Owen Plummer of Purcell Architects has begun developing the site masterplan.</p> <p>Jim Rees is developing an AIA grant to conserve and restore the coal cells and restore the coal cell</p>	

	<p>walls and install way beams to carry a replicated chaldron waggon.</p> <p>Jim Rees asked if anyone has a Backhouse Daffodil plant to add to the planters to contact Jim Rees.</p> <p>John Raw suggested talking to Chris Lloyd to see if he can organise an appeal.</p>	
9.	<p><u>201st Anniversary Mini Festival</u></p> <p>A meeting has been convened with the 3 museums, Weardale Railway and others to discuss a 201st anniversary festival. The Chair asked if members can suggest ideas of what they want from the festival.</p>	
10.	<p><u>Reports from S&DR Area Groups/Research Group.</u></p> <p>John Raw said that the next BIG meeting was sent out on he</p> <p>DIG litter pick is on Thursday 19th which is on the same day as the Heighington Litter pick. He doesn't believe</p> <p>The Heighington group is officially to be known as Heighington and Aycliffe Interest Group (HAIG). They are also holding a litter pick on the 19th March. The new path is already in poor condition, the local councillor is coming to the litter pick and Margaret Fenwick will be discussing what can be done to dissuade litter. The chair asked if Margaret Fenwick can record the incidences of litter and pass to the chair to notify David Bambridge.</p> <p>RC and Neil Pickersgill asked for advice on how to deal with the ash substrate under the waiting shed floor at Fighting Cocks. The chair and Jim Rees advised that it should be ok to compact it and reuse it as a substrate.</p>	
11.	<p><u>Planning Officer Report</u></p> <p>(moved ahead of item 7)</p> <p>Permission has been granted on the development of a 10 bed HMO in Garden Street. The Friends are supportive of the council's plans to improve the Northgate area and the conservation area appraisal. The officer's report doesn't reference either plan and the proposal contravenes the recommendations</p>	

	<p>in a number of areas. RC feels that it's a missed opportunity to make a statement that the The Chair expressed his disappointment with the "bone idle laziness" of the planning officer's report and has raised his concerns as a private citizen and expects that there will be some changes as a result.. The conservation officer has confirmed that it is not part of her role to comment on plans despite her key role in developing the plans. This was felt that</p> <p>South Lodge Application has been resubmitted to Stockton Borough Council's planning department. Tees Archaeology has raised issues with the corten steel structure not representing the former lodge structure adequately and the track bed interpretation.</p> <p>An American company has bought the former MOD site in Urlay Nook which has potential to cause issues with the proposed route of the Discovery Trail path in the area. RC has written to officers from SBC requesting more details and a plan of what has been purchased.</p>	
<p>12.</p>	<p><u>Questions on other Circulated Officer Reports</u> No new memberships in the last month. Research group report was welcomed.</p>	
<p>13.</p>	<p><u>AoB</u></p> <p>Member and keen volunteer Jean Kirkland has been involved in an unpleasant road traffic accident around 4 weeks ago and has been hospitalised. The trustees have sent a card to Jean in hospital. Jean is recuperating in . The meeting sent their best wishes to Jean for a full recovery.</p> <p>A meeting has been held by DIG. John Raw will be organising walks on second Wednesday. Funding has been secured for 2,500 flyers and 250 A4 Posters.</p> <p>Bishop Auckland is applying for Town of Culture status. This will cover the wider Bishop Auckland area covering Shildon and West Auckland and the S&DR sites. AT is representing the Friends at the next meeting of the committee.</p> <p>Kittiwake Digital will be carrying out Surveys taking place on Tuesday 10th and Wednesday 11th March.</p>	
<p>14.</p>	<p><u>Date & Time of Next Meeting</u></p>	

	Thursday 2 nd April 2026, Darlington Cricket Club	
--	--	--