

Friends of the
Stockton and Darlington Railway

Minutes of Meeting held Thursday, 2nd April 2026

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

7.10 pm

Present: Niall Hammond (the Chair/NHA), Jonathan Ratcliffe (the Secretary/JAR), Alan Townsend (AT), John Raw (JDR), Yvonne Richardson (YR) Barry Thompson (BT) Jim Rees (BDO), 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. Margaret Fenwick, Trevor Fenwick, Kevin Kaley (KK)

(Note: Actions highlighted in Red)

1.	<p><u>Welcomes & Apologies for absence.</u> Apologies Matthew Pease, Chris Lloyd, Tim Taylor, Leigh Taylor, Gerry Wilkinson, Francis Annett, Steve Sidgwick, Mike Norman, Andy Simmons, Jane Hackworth-Young, Maurice Burns, Jim Rees, David Watt, Kerrin Wilson, Michael Poole, Richard Jackson, Chris Aiken, Nicola Aiken, Alastair Culff, Caraline Robinson, Richard Barber, Richard Cowan, Norman Hugill, Angela Pickering, Colin Garthwaite, George Alderslade.</p>	Responsibility
2.	<p><u>Declarations of Interest</u> <u>No new interests declared</u></p>	
3.	<p><u>Minutes of the Previous Meeting</u> Item 10 & 11 Hanging sentences. Re-check</p>	
4.	<p><u>Matters Arising</u> Item 5 The Chair has had a meeting with Northern Rail and the Bishop Line this morning about Heighington Station kicking off our adoption of the working station. We have been given a grant of £1,000 towards projects relating to the station. A student from South Durham UTC is working on projects for new platform furniture. The Friends of the S&DR have been issued five Northern Rail passes for use on their network as</p>	

	<p>part of the Station adoption program. They will be held centrally by the secretary and will be available to borrow for use on FSDR business.</p> <p>Marie Addison has let us know that Northern Rail are open to looking at rebranding the former S&DR line and stations to better reflect the heritage.</p> <p>The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership has approved the passenger survey contract. AT has sent an email to survey volunteers asking for feedback on proposed S&DR questions by Tuesday 7th. AT will be organising a briefing meeting for volunteers over the coming weeks.</p> <p>Richie Starrs has sent the Chair a document showing the Discovery Trail marker posts. If you want a copy of the locations please email the chair (chair@sdr1825.org.uk). If there are any issues or comments about the posts please email the chair and the secretary with the location and information about any issues and we will feed it back to be rectified.</p> <p>Bishop Auckland, Shildon and Stockton have all made an application to the town of culture program. Bishop Auckland & Shildon applicants have both asked the Friends for statements of support.</p>	<p>AT</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p><u>Kevin Kaley – Update on NLHF project</u> <i>(Presentation Slides Attached)</i></p> <p>Tourism UK, led by Kevin Kaley were appointed as the consultants to carry out the Business Planning, Marketing Planning, Governance and Fundraising Planning contracts as part of our National Lottery Heritage Fund grant work looking at the future development direction of the Friends. Kevin presented the progress so far.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He began by emphasising that the business plan is not a straight forward business plan due to the need to establish what the organisation should be. • Along with the trustees 3 aims have been developed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Heritage Preservation & Conservation ○ Destination Development, Marketing and Management ○ Foster pride, ownership and participation across diverse communities. • Tourism UK have completed consultations with partner and potential partner organisations about what they see our role as being. The 	

	<p>response has been varied, with a mix of views as to where they see the role of the Friends.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The business plan is exploring whether the Friends should be taking a “passive” or “active” role in each of our areas of activity or a mixture of both. (refer to presentation for further information) • KK proceeded to break down the aims into individual objectives. (refer to attached slides for details) On the 3rd objective of aim 1 regarding the narrative Jimmy Atkinson asked about issues of copyright and ownership of material. KK said that the aim was more about creating a centralised source for accurate information about the S&DR. • There is a need to develop where and how the Friends sit alongside the LVEPs (Local Visitor Economy Partnerships in developing the S&DR as a destination. • the Chair noted that part of the work is to look at the brands we should be using to resonate with target audiences. • RC raised the question of how we market the S&DR to balance needs over the different target audiences. We are competing not with other railway attractions, but with other form of entertainment for the attention of the wider public. 	
<p>6.</p>	<p><u>NLHF Project update</u> The project has been formally extended to December 31st with agreement from NLHF.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p><u>Chair’s Report</u> (Report Attached) At the last Rail Heritage Board there was universal agreement that the RHB should continue with FSDR as convenors and secretariat. AT noted that some of the attendances at the last meeting was by more junior officers than previously and we should be aware of who we are inviting when we next convene the meetings to ensure that decisions could be made at the meeting without delays caused by needs to escalate to more senior officers. YR asked if we hadn’t have been willing to lead would it have continued? The meeting felt that it was positive that there is willingness to keep it going and that we have been given the lead.</p> <p>YR asked about progress on Pease House, Dobbin’s Views and the Office. the Chair updated the meeting that yesterday evening we’d received an email saying that</p>	

	<p>after review DBC cannot house us in central house but will look at potential space in an annex building.</p> <p>Scaffolding should have been erected at Pease's house to carry out roof repairs, but so far there has been no sign of any progress. No progress has been reported on Dobbin's View.</p> <p>The Chair to write to NLHF to say inform them that DBC are still dragging their feet in their contractual obligation to provide an office.</p>	NHA
8.	<p><u>Heighington Station Update</u></p> <p>Additional works have needed to be commissioned on the other chimney stacks due to poor condition. Funded by RHT.</p> <p>A geophysical survey is to be carried out to locate utilities and any surviving below surface remains under the car park area. If anyone is interested in coming down on Tuesday 7th April there will be an opportunity to learn about the process.</p> <p>There is some funding potentially available through heritage places that could help progress the Station project.</p> <p>The Chair/BDO to approach Heritage Places for funding.</p>	NHA/BDO
9.	<p><u>201st Anniversary Mini Festival</u></p> <p>Walks program is coming along well and there are a couple of potential sponsors for marketing.</p> <p>The working group from stakeholder groups has met and made progress.</p> <p>Hugh Jackson asked if any thought from the meeting was for an August or September date. the Chair said that it hasn't been set yet but needs to be established.</p> <p>Caroline asked if anyone wanted some live music for any S&DR events to let her know and she will look for funding.</p>	
10.	<p><u>Reports from S&DR Area Groups/Research Group.</u> Reports attached.</p>	

<p>11.</p>	<p><u>Planning Officer Report</u></p> <p>Report attached.</p> <p>RC asked where Darlington Borough Council planning officers are taking their conservation advice from, also what should our role be in future and should we be offering ourselves as a source of specialist advice and charging for it. In Darlington the planning officers only call in conservation advice if they need it from an external specialist.</p> <p>RC noted that developers could be getting permission where it harms the setting line and suggested that we lobby to be more active in being consulted. Chair agreed that we should be more actively involved in future to help keep inappropriate development at bay.</p>	
<p>12.</p>	<p><u>Darlington Local Plan Consultation</u></p> <p>RC feels that the proposed local plan is generally good and there's not anything he feels that needs substantial amendment, but has made suggestions about corrections and detail amendments.</p> <p>RC noted that the document is only worthwhile if adhered to and followed by planning officers and developers.</p> <p>The Friends recommend that there should be continuation of through running from Bishop Auckland to Saltburn. There are suggestions within plans for additional stations at St. Andrew Auckland, Burtree Garden Village and Teesside Airport. There are also proposals to help facilitate steam specials from Darlington onto the Weardale Railway.</p> <p>RC noted that there are historic assets highlighted in the Historic Environment Audit that have still not been added the digital Historic Environment record in County Durham. The assets will be logged on our GIS system and will be available for consultation at our future office once the CMP is complete.</p> <p>The meeting expressed frustration that the logging of these additional historic assets by Durham</p>	

	County Council onto the HER has still not occurred a decade after the production of the Historic Environment audit by Archaeoenvironment in 2016.	
13.	<p><u>Questions on other Circulated Officer Reports</u></p> <p>The Research Group has had a productive meeting with the National Archives about the potential for a digitisation project for the S&DR records held at Kew. This will facilitate greater and more efficient use of the records by historians and would be an invaluable asset to research into early railway history.</p>	
14.	<p><u>AoB</u></p> <p>AT reminded Trustees to fill out the evaluation survey by April 10th.</p>	
15.	<p><u>Date & Time of Next Meeting</u></p> <p>Thursday 7th May 2026, Darlington Cricket Club</p>	