

## **COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 22 OCTOBER 2020**

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### **STOCKTON & DARLINGTON RAILWAY HERITAGE ACTION ZONE**

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#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide a briefing note to update Members on the projects and activities within the Stockton & Darlington Heritage Action Zone (HAZ).

#### **Summary**

2. This briefing note sets out the key HAZ projects in the context of both Darlington and cross boundary projects across the HAZ area. It does not cover the celebration elements of the wider Rail Heritage Programme.

#### **S&DR HAZ Background**

3. The Historic England's Heritage Action Zone initiative was created to help unleash the power in England's historic environment to create economic growth and improve quality of life in villages, towns and cities. The Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone (S&DR HAZ) was established in April 2018 to help rejuvenate and restore the S&DR in the build up to its bicentenary in 2025.

#### **Darlington Projects**

4. There are a number of key projects within the HAZ which have a specific focus within Darlington, these are set out below.

#### **Northgate at Risk**

5. The Northgate Conservation area is currently deemed as 'at risk' by Historic England. When conservation areas become at risk, through neglect or inappropriate development, this can signify or contribute to an area's social or economic decline. The Northgate Conservation Area sits within the HAZ boundary with Northgate itself the key strategic link between the town centre and the Rail Heritage Quarter.
6. Improving connectivity from the Town Centre to the Rail Heritage Quarter utilising key heritage assets and improving the surrounding area is a key focus for this project. It is also recognised that there are significant opportunities in terms of the Rail Heritage Quarter Project and Darlington's Towns Fund priorities. In partnership with Historic England, a commission to develop a masterplan for the area is currently being procured. The successful consultants will be appointed in November with the Masterplan agreed and finalised in May 2021. Engagement and consultation with all key stakeholders are fundamental to this process.

## **Historic Building Investigations**

7. A programme of research is currently ongoing which will help improve our understanding of the S&DR and the places and buildings within it. The research includes, aerial surveys, historic area assessments for key sites, archaeological excavations and building investigations. Within Darlington Historic Building Investigations are nearing completion at the Goods Shed Building, Carriage Works Building and the Lime Cells. Further research work through a Historic Building Investigation is to commence next year at Edward Pease's House on Northgate.

## **Repair works to at risk assets**

8. The Grade II\* Goods Shed building is the key priority for this project with a £100K grant from Historic England identified to undertake the necessary repair works (in particular to the clock tower) to link in with the wider improvements to this building through the Rail Heritage Quarter project. Works are currently scheduled for the summer of 2022.

## **Projects spanning across all three local authority areas**

9. In addition to the Darlington specific projects there are a number of projects that span across all three local authority areas, these are outlined below.

## **Community Engagement and Heritage Crime**

10. The HAZ PM was recently successful in securing a £45K grant from Historic England to deliver Community Engagement and Educational activities in partnership with the Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway. These projects include:

### **(a) Heritage Schools**

This project will engage up to 20 schools across the three local authority areas. The project will:

- (i) Working alongside Historic England, develop a suite of teaching aids for use by teachers at key stage 1,2 and 3;
- (ii) Production of a short, evocative and historically accurate S&DR booklet to form a solid foundation for audiences to build their own stories along the line;
- (iii) Develop intergenerational activities through stories and oral history sessions;
- (iv) Deliver CPD training sessions for teaching staff.

### **(b) S&DR Events and Activities**

- (i) Deliver Heritage Festivals and Heritage open day activities to coincide with S&DR anniversary each year (a programme for this years Heritage Festival is attached);
- (ii) Deliver a series of guided walks and talks and develop online video lectures;
- (iii) Hold workshop sessions in local communities to stimulate further interest in S&DR;

- (iv) Work with local community in Shildon in the development of Historic Area Assessment and Archaeological works at Hackworth Cottages.

**(c) Walking the Line**

- (i) Volunteers will be trained in basic map work and partake in further research in mapping currently un-surveyed branch lines. A key aim within this project is to ensure that local communities are fully engaged with their history and that the findings are utilised to inform the development of further (easily accessible) educational resources.

**(d) Photo Memory Project**

- (i) A photo memory project will see a photography competition to engage the community in the S&DR and create a digital platform to host this. The project is inspired by the Darlington Unseen/beautiful idea. This would see people posting new or old photos or drawings of S&DR/rail heritage each of which would be geographically located onto Google Earth/maps and accompanied by a story/text relating an individuals or community's relation to the railway. Available to all on the web, at the end of the project this will also be used to produce an exhibition. Ideally this will remain open into the future and become an amazing source of information and inspiration for 2025 and beyond.

**(e) Quaker Research**

- (i) Undertake research around the Quaker Banking Families and their role in the S&DR.

**(f) S&DR Archives and Community Museum**

- (i) This project will bring together the FSDR, the Friends of North Road Museum, North East Rail Archive (NERA) and NRM to assess and audit both physical and digital archives relating to the S&DR. Three workshop / study group sessions will be undertaken (with provision to expand if more interest is shown). An accessible audit report with the findings from research and workshops will be developed with the aim to make the previously difficult to obtain information much more accessible to the wider public. We will also be running and developing a Community Museum project building on and working in partnership with the Bishop Auckland HAZ, this will see a call out for images of S&DR memorabilia, items, images and stories for digital display through FSDR social media channels.

**(g) Heritage Crime**

- (i) This project aims to support the long-term sustainability of the S&DR by reducing instances of heritage crime through a wide range of engagement and educational activities.

## **Walking and Cycling**

11. The first phase of work was an audit of the existing walking and cycling routes on or as near to the alignment as possible. In some locations the original alignment is still live railway line and therefore the walking and cycling route needs to be as near as possible. This major piece of work across the three local authority areas was undertaken by WSP consultants.
12. The next stage was to undertake feasibility work to identify what the preferred options would be to deliver the continuous route. This was split into short term options i.e. by September 2025 for the bicentenary and longer term, post 2025 on the basis that some of the sections need significant work and resources due to challenges associated with deliverability - land ownership, legal processes to create Public Rights Of Way, planning permissions, technical issues, heritage constraints, ecological constraints and so on. These reports were completed in February 2020.
13. The reports also include a specification for the type of infrastructure that will be appropriate in different settings – urban or rural. TVCA are leading on two further pieces of work – an Interpretation Strategy that will create an identity for the S&DR line. This will include waymarking so that people will be able to join the route at many points along its length and not only find their way but also navigate the history of the line. An Economic Case is also being developed so that potential funders can better understand how the walking and cycling route can bring in economic value to the HAZ area through both local people and visitors using the route.

## **Branding, Interpretation and Wayfinding**

14. With the support of the FSDR, project partners have secured further funding from TVCA to develop S&DR branding and how we will take forward site specific interpretation and wayfinding across the 26 miles. A procurement exercise will commence in November 2020 to establish the following:
  - (a) WHERE wayfinding and interpretation needs to be present including assessment of the full 26-mile route and recommendations for how to achieve a cohesive walking and cycling route through wayfinding and interpretation;
  - (b) WHAT form this wayfinding and interpretation will take (physically and digitally);
  - (c) WHAT it should look – developing a strong, accessible and unique identity for the programme and giving suggestions of how this can be used for different audiences, initiatives and projects (such as walking and cycling, bicentenary, education/learning). We also require a branding and style guide for the use of those who will be developing interpretation and wayfinding in line with the walking and cycling project;
  - (d) HOW this strategy can be delivered including costs, potential funding opportunities and the identification of any key barriers to implementation with suggestions of how to overcome these.
15. The final report is expected to be completed by the end of April 2021. The process will include engagement with all key stakeholders across the 26 miles.

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