

**CABINET
10 NOVEMBER 2020**

STOCKTON AND DARLINGTON RAILWAY WALKING AND CYCLING ROUTE

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Andy Keir, Local Services Portfolio**

**Responsible Director –
Ian Williams, Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Members' approval for the proposed alignment of the Stockton and Darlington Railway Walking and Cycling route as a continuous public right of way through the Borough; that funding is sought from as many sources as possible so that it can be delivered for the bicentenary in September 2025; and that the Council works with the other partners on the Rail Heritage Board to jointly promote the route as part of the tourism strategy.

Summary

2. The Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone was established in 2018 and covers the 26 mile route of the railway from Witton Park in Durham to Stockton via Darlington. It links together heritage assets along its length including key tourism sites at Locomotion in Shildon, Head of Steam Museum in Darlington and Preston Park in Stockton. The aim is to create a 26 mile route as close to the original alignment as possible so that people can walk and cycle its full length.
3. Some sections already exist but there are significant gaps that need completing so that there is a temporary or permanent continuous route in place for the bicentenary celebrations in 2025. A steering group with representatives from the three local authorities and other organisations including the Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway have already commissioned an audit and feasibility study for the route and presented this to the Railway Heritage Board.
4. The major redevelopment of the Head of Steam site as the Rail Heritage Quarter provides an opportunity to integrate the route into this site and kickstart the work to build the rest of the route.
5. The next stage is to design up sections of the route and identify the most appropriate ways of delivering them, including the creation of Public Rights of Way, negotiating with landowners and developers and securing funding.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) The work completed on the audit and feasibility is noted and the proposed alignment is agreed;
 - (b) The work to create the Public Rights of Way and design each section is started;
 - (c) Funding is sought as opportunities become available including through development and section 106 monies, third parties including public and private sector organisations, Government funding and Tees Valley Combined Authority, and subsequently released;
 - (d) A joint branding strategy is developed with the other partners so that the route can be waymarked consistently.
 - (e) The Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Portfolio holder be authorised to negotiate and agree terms for the acquisition or compensation of third-party interests relating to the route in line with the report.

Reasons

7. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:-
 - (a) To enable discussion with land owners and other interested parties so that the route is designed into ongoing land use and planning decisions;
 - (b) To ensure that a publicly accessible route which is inspected, maintained and managed is in place for the bicentenary celebrations in 2025;
 - (c) To fund the work to provide the physical infrastructure so that the route is accessible to as many people as possible;
 - (d) To provide a recognisable route that can be promoted as part of the Tees Valley tourism strategy to walkers and cyclists as well as those interested in railways and history.
 - (e) To ensure third party interests can be acquired or compensated where appropriate to achieve the proposed route.

Ian Williams
Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services

Background Papers

Stockton & Darlington Railway Access Audit and Delivery Plan; February 2020; WSP

S17 Crime and Disorder	The route will be designed so that people feel safe using it and illegal use by motor vehicles will be deterred through appropriate measures.
Health and Wellbeing	The creation of the 26 mile route and associated local links will provide opportunities for people to walk and cycle across Darlington. This will have positive impacts on physical health and mental wellbeing.
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	The creation of the route will seek to provide a zero carbon option for people to access heritage along its length, including the Rail Heritage Quarter site. It will also provide a transport route that people can use to travel across all or part of the borough on foot or by bike. The route will connect with many bus stops and all 4 rail stations in Darlington, as well as with stations in County Durham and Stockton-on-Tees boroughs making access to the route by public transport a realistic option. Construction materials and methods will be reviewed to minimise their carbon impact and recycled materials will be considered.
Diversity	Whilst the route is determined by the alignment of the railway, the path will be designed to enable as many people as possible to use it. The physical design specification will minimise the use of barriers so that people using wheelchairs, bikes and pushchairs are able to easily access the track. A separate interpretation and branding strategy will ensure that people are able to navigate the route. The Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway and other partners will engage with the different communities along the route so that they can be involved in its development, use and conservation.
Wards Affected	Sadberge and Middleton St George Red Hall & Lingfield Stephenson Northgate North Road Brinkburn & Faverdale Harrowgate Hill Heighington & Coniscliffe
Groups Affected	There are no groups affected.
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework
Key Decision	This report is not a Key Decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an Urgent Decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The creation of the route will contribute to meeting a number of the outcomes in the Sustainable Community Strategy: More people active and involved – provides an opportunity for people to walk and cycle across a large part of the borough; there will be community based activities focused

	<p>on the history of the S&DR line which people can be involved in at a local level; More people healthy and independent – provides an opportunity for people to be active with a positive impact on physical and mental health; More businesses and jobs – the route is part of a wider tourism strategy to attract more people to the area; there will be opportunities to develop ‘trackside’ businesses such as cafes, bike repairs/hire, retail outlets; A place designed to thrive – the route is part of a wider strategy to regenerate parts of the borough, particularly around the Rail Heritage Quarter and the wider Northgate area, as well as the town centre.</p>
Efficiency	<p>The project will be delivered over 5 years in time for the bicentenary in September 2025. There will be a requirement for officer time for engineering design, Public Rights Of Way and legal processes, Estates land owner negotiation, funding bid development and coordination with the wider project team in Tees Valley Combined Authority, Durham County Council and Stockton Borough Council.</p>
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	No impact

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Background

8. The Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone (S&DR HAZ) was established to help rejuvenate and restore the historic railway in the build up to its bicentenary in 2025, and realise its potential to become a major heritage attraction, international visitor destination and driver of long term economic growth and regeneration in the area.
9. The S&DR HAZ covers the 26 miles of the original railway alignment from Witton Park in County Durham, through Shildon, Darlington and Stockton. It spans three local authority boundaries and encompasses an extensive section of operational railway. A map is included at **Appendix 1**.
10. A Railway Heritage Board has been established to drive forward an ambitious programme and partners include: the A1 Steam Locomotive Trust; the Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership; Darlington Borough Council; Durham County Council; Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway (FSDR); Historic England; Hitachi; LNER; Network Rail; Northern Rail; Science Museum Group (Locomotion); Stockton Borough Council; and Tees Valley Combined Authority.
11. The Board has identified four key aims for its Railway Heritage Programme:
 - (a) To improve the management and conservation of the heritage of the S&DR;

- (b) To encourage economic growth through the development of a world-class visitor attraction, including the physical regeneration of key sites and infrastructure along the 26-mile route;
 - (c) To deliver in 2025 a world-renowned festival, to celebrate the bicentenary of the first journey on the S&DR; and
 - (d) To increase knowledge and awareness of the S&DR and its significance, and provide opportunities for volunteering, skills development, employment and health improvements.
12. A key project within this programme is the development of a 26 mile walking and cycling route along the alignment of the S&DR from Witton Park in County Durham to Preston Park in Stockton. The project would ensure that more people will be able to enjoy this special landscape and become actively involved in its conservation and its future management. The project has several outcomes:-
- (a) Establishing a long distance walking and cycling route for local people and visitors that can be accessed at various points along its length for shorter walks and rides;
 - (b) Connecting settlements along the S&DR with key employment locations and therefore improving access by active travel modes for commuters;
 - (c) Utilising rail stations and bus stops as opportunities to access the route for sustainable tourism;
 - (d) Linking together the heritage assets so that more people can learn about the history of the S&DR by walking/cycling along its route; and
 - (e) Connecting the key tourism destinations of Locomotion, Railway Heritage Quarter (Head of Steam) and Preston Park.
13. The route would also have wider benefits as it would provide a local function within Darlington Borough itself, as a transport route to travel to work, school or college and as a leisure route for people to be active, access green spaces and countryside. It has the potential to reduce emissions and noise pollution by reducing vehicle traffic levels and so improve air quality. There may also be business opportunities as has been seen alongside other long distance walking and cycling routes such as cafes, farm shops, bike hire and bike repairs.

Audit and Feasibility

14. 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 3 local authority areas was undertaken by WSP consultants.
15. 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.

16. The feasibility report recognises that it is unlikely that the 'ideal' route can be completed by 2025 but alternative options have been identified to ensure that a continuous route can be provided by the bicentenary. In some locations this means that the route will need to detour away from the alignment until the delivery challenges can be overcome.
17. 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.

The Darlington Section of the route

18. The Darlington section of the route starts at the Durham Darlington boundary north of Coatham Lane and follows the Bishop Line, i.e. live railway line at this point. The route continues as the Bishop Line to North Road station immediately adjacent to the railway museum. At this point both the Bishop Line and S&DR routes continue over Skerne Bridge but then the Bishop Line heads southwards towards Darlington Station alongside the East Coast Main Line whilst the S&DR route continues eastwards crossing what is now the roundabout at the B6279 Haughton Road/Tornado Way/Barton Street. Tornado Way/B6279 (Darlington Eastern Transport Corridor) then follows the S&DR alignment. At the A66 the route continues over the walking/cycling bridge and the S&DR alignment curves south eastwards towards Middleton St George. To the south of the A67/Mill Lane roundabout the S&DR alignment merges with the live railway line again, this time the Tees Valley Line which connects Darlington, Dinsdale and Teesside Airport rail stations to Allens West, Eaglescliffe and stations to Middlesbrough, Redcar and Saltburn. From here the S&DR route crosses the Darlington/Stockton borough boundary approximately 250m east of the Teesside Airport Rail Station.
19. In order to explain the rationale for the route it is easier to split the Darlington route into smaller sections.
20. **Durham boundary to Coatham Lane**
As the S&DR route crosses the Durham/Darlington administrative borough boundary it is the operational rail line (Bishop Line) and therefore the aim is to create a continuous route as near to the rail line as possible.
There is an existing level crossing on Coatham Lane which could be incorporated into the route if required as a means of crossing from one side of the line to the other. The exact alignment will need to be agreed with land owners and Durham County Council and is dependent in part on major developments coming forward in Newton Aycliffe.

21. Coatham Lane to Burtree Lane

From Coatham Lane the route will continue southwards on the east side of the Bishop Line until it can cross to the west side utilising an existing under bridge. It will then continue southwards to Burtree Lane. The exact alignment has not yet been determined and will be subject to agreement with land owners.

22. Burtree Lane to Elmtree Street

A crossing point is required to enable walkers and cyclists to cross Burtree Lane safely. This will require a reduction in the speed limit and a road safety audit to determine an appropriate type and design of crossing facility. The route will then continue southwards to Elmtree Street on the west side of the Bishop Line and as near to the line as possible. The route goes across the area identified as Burtree Garden Village and the developer has been asked to include the alignment in their development proposals. The route also traverses the former St Modwens rolling mills site which is now in Council ownership and an alignment alongside the railway will be safe guarded as part of any future development proposals.

23. Elmtree Street to North Road Station/Head of Steam/Skerne Bridge (Rail Heritage Quarter)

The route will continue under the railway to the eastern side utilising the existing road (Elmtree Street). The next section is under development as part of the Rail Heritage Quarter masterplan which will incorporate the route through the site and onto the existing cycle route on the north side of Bonomi Way. This existing route continues across North Road onto Albert Road and then down to the River Skerne providing direct access for walkers and cyclists to travel under the historic Skerne Bridge. From here visitors can access the Rail Heritage Quarter or continue on the S&DR route.

24. Rail Heritage Quarter to Haughton Road

The original alignment went across what is now the East Coast Main Line and so the route will need to deviate from the alignment slightly and continue along John Street and then on to East Mount Road. This is a busy road and options will need to be explored to ensure that it is a safe and pleasant route. Once on Haughton Road the route can safely cross the railway using the existing footbridge/cycle bridge adjacent to Darlington College.

25. Haughton Road to A66

The next section of route already exists passing in front of Darlington College, around the new roundabout at Tornado Way/Haughton Road and along the northern side of Tornado Way to the A66. It forms part of Sustrans National Cycle Network (Route NCN14).

26. A66 to Mill Lane, Middleton St George

The route crosses over the A66 using the existing footbridge/cycle bridge and then continues all the way to Mill Lane in Middleton St George. Work has just been completed on this section, improving the drainage and providing a new whinstone dust surface, funded from the Rural Payments Agency. This section is already very well used by local people and forms part of NCN14.

27. Mill Lane, Middleton St George to Darlington/Stockton borough boundary

The final stretch of the route continues from Mill Lane to Yarm Road, to the south of the A67 and north of the Tees Valley Rail Line, passing through the Whinnies. The live rail line once again becomes the alignment of the S&DR. From Yarm Road

agreement needs to be reached with Stockton Council as to which side of the A67 the route should continue, which like the crossing of the borough boundary with Durham will depend on how the route can be delivered on each side of the boundary.

28. In addition a number of circular routes and local links have been identified providing opportunities for people to access the route at different locations and walk or cycle smaller sections of the route. For instance utilising the existing bridleway along Patches Lane.

Next steps

29. In order to have a route in place for the 2025 bicentenary celebrations work needs to continue to create the Public Rights Of Way in negotiation with land owners and other interested parties; to design sections of the route to the standards set out in the Feasibility Report; submit planning applications if required; and secure funding to improve or create the routes.
30. Initial work has started on developing the scheme in Middleton St George. There has been early engagement with Network Rail and Durham Wildlife Trust and once a scheme is designed this will be shared with local people as part of the planning process. Some funding has already been secured but further funding will be required to construct the route.
31. The section of route from Elmtree Street to the River Skerne and North Road Station is being designed into the plans for the Rail Heritage Quarter. The masterplan for the site will be submitted for planning shortly.
32. The other two key priorities are to develop a programme to create the Public Rights of Way and to develop a funding strategy.

Financial Implications

33. The sections of route that have been created or improved to date have been funded in a number of ways. For instance the Rural Payments Agency has provided £212,933 to fund the improvement works on the section between A66 and Mill Lane, Middleton St George; and the route under the Skerne Bridge was funded from the £310,500 from the Local Transport Plan and £219,645 from the Local Growth Fund, Sustainable Access to Employment funding (TVCA). Some sections have been built as part of development such as the route alongside Tornado Way.
34. A small amount of funding has been secured from Network Rail and Section 106 agreements to progress the route in Middleton St George.
35. In order to deliver the full route a funding strategy will need to be developed. This will include identifying opportunities to make potential funding bids, secure additional developer contributions and allocate local and regional transport funding where it is appropriate to do so. This work will be ongoing as the sections are designed and costed.

Legal Implications

36. A statutory process will be followed to create the required Public Rights of Way. In some cases this may involve a creation order or a diversion, and decisions will need to be taken on a section by section basis as to whether the route will be a footpath, cycle track or bridleway. However, the aim is to complete a 26 mile walking and cycling route.
37. In addition there may be a requirement to enter into a lease arrangement for instance with Network Rail. Advice will be taken from Estates and Legal teams as required.

Estates & Property Advice

38. The Estates Team are already actively engaged in the development of the S&DR route and will continue to be involved. This has included the development of the Rail Heritage Quarter project including land assembly and leases; the purchase of land between Elmtree Street and Centurion Way; and advice on existing leases along the route. Going forward there may be requirements for further land acquisitions or leases or compensatory events and these will be identified at an early stage on each section.
39. In addition further sections of the route may be secured as part of planning applications on land in the vicinity of the alignment. The route is already included as a constraint in the Planning Development Control process.

Procurement Advice

40. The route will be constructed as part of the transport capital programme and therefore the Transport Planning, Highways Design and Asset Management Teams will follow the Capital Project process, Contract Procedure Rules and financial procedure rules.
41. All procurement activity will be carried out in line with the Public Contracts Regulation's 2015, Contract Procedure Rules and added to the Annual Plan where the value is over £100k.

Consultation

42. The Rail Heritage Board is the overarching partnership group with a broad membership from public and private sector and has overseen the developments to date. They have approved the audit and feasibility report and a working group has been established to deliver the 26 mile S&DR route across the Heritage Action Zone area.
43. The next stage is to consult on a section by section basis as the design work is done. This may include local residents; land owners and developers; third parties including Durham Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Forestry England, Tees Valley Access Forum, Darlington Association on Disability and Sustrans; and highways related organisations such Durham Constabulary and Highways England.

44. As well as the formal process for the Public Rights of Way, some individual sections will require planning permission, providing another opportunity for people to be consulted.

Outcome of Consultation

45. Throughout the development of the audit and feasibility the main feedback has been that it is important to keep to the alignment as closely as practically possible.

Equalities considerations

46. A key part of the Heritage Action Zone work is engagement with communities along the 26 mile S&DR route. The aim is to make history as accessible as possible to as many people as possible. This will include capturing the memories of older people who may remember what life was like along the line last century or engaging with younger people through schools. The Bishop Line Community Rail Partnership has already been active in encouraging specific groups to use the railway including the Women Who Wander project which engages women and girls to experience and influence rail use and industry. The Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway also continue to engage with community groups along the line to increase understanding of and involvement with the history, conservation and use of the route. As the 26 mile route develops there will be more opportunities to encourage people to use the route for their physical and mental wellbeing as well as to access history.
47. A key consideration in the development of the route is to ensure that the design and construction enables as many people as possible to be able to physically access the route. This will be achieved through careful consideration of surface materials, lighting, gradients and minimising the use of barriers. Interpretation and waymarking need to be clear and accessible for everyone to understand. Many Public Rights of Way are across fields and are unmade paths and so some sections may remain inaccessible in the short term for those using pushchairs or wheelchairs or who struggle on uneven ground. Over time loose or sealed surfaces will be constructed along the majority of the route. Darlington Association on Disability will be consulted on each section of route in Darlington for advice.
48. An Equalities Matrix has been developed and will be reviewed throughout the delivery of the project.

Map of Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone

