

Darlington's Railway Heritage Quarter plans to go before council

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Plans for the proposed Railway Heritage Quarter which will be at the heart of the bicentennial anniversary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway in 2025 are set to go before Darlington Borough Council.

The Darlington Rail Heritage Quarter is a major project that will invest in the town's rail heritage ahead of the 2025 celebrations to create a national visitor destination in Darlington. Heritage and cultural regeneration are now recognised as a key ingredient in economic growth and the Railway Heritage Quarter will complement the economic growth ambition of the borough.

The development will transform the Railway Heritage Quarter into a major visitor attraction by 2024 so that it can play a central part of the bicentenary events of the Stockton & Darlington Railway in 2025.

Essential improvements will be carried out on several significantly historic buildings on the site, linking them together to create a cluster of attractions including the Skerne Bridge, the oldest working railway bridge in the world.

Digital and technological investment will bring history to life and plans include a new immersive ride

experience the likes of which are only seen at theme parks. The Railway Heritage Quarter will have a café and shop, themed play area, show field, a new live engineering building, temporary exhibition space, archive and extended car parking, which will attract all generations to visit for years to come.

The project is being supported by £20million of funding from the Tees Valley Mayor and Combined Authority.

Councillor Heather Scott, leader of Darlington Borough Council, said: “The Railway Heritage Quarter is a key project in our plans to celebrate Darlington’s unique rail heritage and will give present and future generations the opportunity to use new technology to explore the history of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.

“This is urban regeneration and heritage celebration at its very best. Darlington has long been known for its engineering excellence both past and present and this fabulous project will help showcase our proud history.”

Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen said: “The Stockton & Darlington Railway was just one way our region had a massive impact on the world, that can still be felt to this day. Local people are rightly proud of this heritage and it’s only right we help tell its story.

“We’ve backed the Rail Heritage Quarter with £20million to make sure it does justice to our history and becomes a major part of the region’s S&DR 200th anniversary celebrations. These exciting plans show the scale of ambition to make it a top-quality attraction, which will be a huge draw for rail enthusiasts, history buffs and families alike and help provide a boost for our brilliant businesses.”

Councillor Andy Keir, Darlington Borough Council’s cabinet member for local services, added: “I am delighted to share these plans for what is an ambitious and exciting project for the town, the borough and the whole of the Tees Valley.

“Alongside celebrating our fantastic and unique place in the history of rail travel, the Railway Heritage Quarter will breathe fresh life into an area that was once at the forefront of world rail engineering.”

Niall Hammond, Chair of The Friends of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, said: “This is fantastic news and a landmark moment recognising the considerable work and efforts of all those working towards 2025. In the S&DR and our railways, we’ve inherited an internationally important legacy from the past, one on which to build a better future for our economic prosperity, the education and inspiration of our children, and the community pride in a better built environment in which to live, work and play.”

The plans will be considered by councillors at Full Council on 17 February.

Photo credit: Darlington Borough Council