

Historic railway is still here for culture

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The Kent and East Sussex Railway is set to receive a further financial boost from the Government thanks to the latest awards under the £1.57bn Culture Recovery Fund.

The grant will help the organisation to recover from its prolonged closure and prepare for re-opening to visitors on Saturday 22nd May, subject to the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions.

The railway will receive up to £250,700 from the Second Round of awards from the UK Government's Culture Recovery Fund. Together with other measures it is taking, including a 60th Anniversary Appeal, this grant will safeguard the popular heritage railway's future and ensure that its people, most of whom are volunteers, will continue to be able to run its steam trains for the enjoyment and education of visitors young and old.

Nearly £400 million has been awarded to over 2,700 cultural organisations across the country in the latest round of support from the Culture Recovery Fund, the Culture Secretary announced.

Over £800 million in grants and loans has already been awarded to support almost 3,800 cinemas, performance venues, museums, heritage sites and other cultural organisations dealing with the immediate challenges of the coronavirus pandemic.

The Kent & East Sussex Railway's award will underpin the final stages of its COVID recovery plan, providing vital funding which will enable the Railway to continue to employ the staff necessary to sustain its operations and cover other vital expenses until the scheduled end of COVID-19 restrictions in June.

The railway has been significantly impacted by the pandemic which resulted in the cancellation of many of its services, including the hugely popular Santa Special trains last December.

The railway launched a 'Keep Us on Track' appeal to mark the 60th Anniversary of the line's preservation society, aiming to raise £100,000 to support its ongoing investment in the preservation of its historic locomotives, rolling stock and over 10 miles of track and other infrastructure.

The appeal has been supported by Rt Hon Damian Green, MP for Ashford & Huw Merriman MP for Bexhill and Battle. In just five weeks, half of the £100,000 target has been raised.

Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden, said: "Our record breaking Culture Recovery Fund has already helped thousands of culture and heritage organisations across the country survive the biggest crisis they have ever faced. Now we are staying by their side as they prepare to welcome the public back through their doors - helping our cultural gems plan for reopening and thrive in the better times ahead."

Kent and East Sussex Railway Chairman Simon Marsh said: "This grant provides vital support as we weather what we hope to be the final stages of the coronavirus pandemic. In normal times we welcome 90,000 visitors a year to enjoy a ride with us along the scenic Rother Valley and experience the trip of a bygone era. In 2020, visitor numbers were down by over 80 per cent and we were devastated that we had to disappoint many families who had booked to enjoy a festive trip on our Santa Specials.

"The Culture Recovery Fund has played a major part in ensuring that the Railway will be here for everyone to enjoy as restrictions are lifted. We know that this award, combined with a successful 60th Anniversary Appeal, will set us on a firm footing for the future.

"Everyone at the Railway is looking forward to welcoming passengers back on board from 22nd May. Please come and visit us when you can - we've missed you."

Online bookings are now open for public services from 22nd May at [Kesr.org.uk/reopening](https://kesr.org.uk/reopening)

The Railway has many opportunities for people to get involved in preserving the Railway as living history. Those interested should visit our website at kesr.org.uk/volunteering or email our Volunteer Recruitment Manager at vrm@kesr.or.uk.

Photo credit: Donald Wilson