

Rail Heritage Quarter for Stockton & Darlington Railway on track

January 11, 2022



Plans to create a Rail Heritage Quarter centring around the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR) have moved forward.

A bid to secure over £2.8 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund has passed the first stage – meaning that initial support of £52,000 has been granted.

The money will mean the project can move to the development phase in readiness for a second-round application.

Driven by a collaboration of public and voluntary sector partners across Darlington, Durham and Stockton, the Heritage Fund project will focus on the 26-miles of the original route, known as a Heritage Action Zone.

The project will form an essential part of £30 million plans to create an attraction ready for the celebrations to mark the 200th anniversary of the S&DR in 2025, with £20million of funding from the Tees Valley Mayor and Combined Authority.

The project will include the restoration of the Head of Steam museum, the 1861 shed, the goods shed, carriage works and lime cells, as well as the creation of a new car park, access route and, in partnership with Network Rail, the restoration and creation of improved access to Skerne Bridge – the world’s oldest operating railway bridge.

It aims to restore and interpret three listed buildings as part of the visitor attraction with exhibitions and activities.

Dedicated staff will deliver activities and work with communities along the route, building on the work already carried out by Friends of the S&DR and supporting the group’s aim of becoming the line’s custodians.

Councillor Andy Keir, Darlington Borough Council’s cabinet member for local services, said: “This 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 quarter will breathe fresh life into an area that was once at the forefront of world rail engineering. It will be a celebration of our heritage and another key attraction in the Tees Valley, bringing people in to experience the area.

“The National Lottery Heritage Fund project forms an important part of our plans and is very much a collaboration that will enable us to work with communities and others along the whole 26 miles stretch of the S&DR route. We’re delighted that our bid has secured initial support, and we are now looking to develop it further for the next stage of the process.”

Niall Hamond, chair of Friends of the S&DR, said: “Building on several years’ work, this marks a real step-change in not only providing a fantastic rail attraction in Darlington, but bringing together and supporting the work of communities, and volunteers old and new along the 26 miles of the S&DR to care for and celebrate our internationally significant railway heritage for 2025. It will provide lasting legacy of continued innovation and ingenuity from the railway that got the world on track.”

Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen said: “Our region is rightfully proud of the fact that the world’s first passenger railway ran from Stockton to Darlington, and it is only right that we celebrate this landmark anniversary. For hundreds of years, our region has shaped the globe, whether through the steel we made building the world or revolutionising transport with the Stockton & Darlington Railway – a legacy that is still shaping global transport today.

“We’ve supported this project from the get-go, with £20million of funding to ensure that we create a first-class attraction that tells our story right on our doorstep, attracting more visitors and helping our brilliant local businesses bounce back.”