

Steam railway celebrates 60 years of preservation

February 26, 2021



One of the country's best-loved steam railways is launching a 'Keep Us On Track' appeal in its diamond jubilee year.

The Kent & East Sussex Railway aims to raise £100,000 by July, an amount calculated as what is required to help it recover from the devastating effects of the pandemic and to ensure that running costs and investment can continue to be funded.

Railway Commercial Manager André Freeman said: "It's amazing to think that the K&ESR has been a preserved line for as many years as it was originally in operation, having opened in 1901 and closed in 1961. The fight by volunteers to reopen the line took 13 years to achieve so we are determined it will continue to operate for another 60 years yet -which is why we are appealing for your help today.

"Tens of thousands of families enjoy a visit to the K&ESR each year and we want to ensure it'll still be here for future generations to enjoy. If each visitor were able to give us just £2, less than the price of a cup of coffee, our target would be met and our future secured."

The railway, which runs from Tenterden to Bodiam, through 10.5 miles of beautiful countryside on the Kent-Sussex border, was delighted when in the autumn it was awarded £300,000 from the Culture Recovery Fund.

However, the celebrations were short-lived. The grant was to support the loss of income that the Railway had suffered in the spring and summer. The Railway had taken pains to prepare a robust and COVID-secure Santa Special programme for December as well as trains post-Christmas trains to maximise their income for the year. Tier 4 restrictions followed by national lockdown meant these were cancelled with an unexpected and significant effect on the railways finances which will continue into this spring.

André said: "We were, quite simply, devastated when lockdown restrictions forced the cancellation of our entire Santa Special programme -we know that many families have come to regard an annual visit to the K&ESR as an essential part of their Christmas experience. For our team, we hugely enjoy bringing Christmas to life for our young -and young at heart -visitors, whilst the contribution it normally provides helps to ensure our charity can sustain the demands of our expensive winter maintenance programme."

The railway attracts 90,000 visitors a year and is estimated to add more than half a million pounds annually to the local economy.

Kevin Boorman, manager of 1066 Country Marketing, the private/public sector partnership responsible for promoting the East Sussex area, said: "Tourism is vitally important to this area. In normal times it supports over 16 000 jobs locally, and contributes over £700m to the local economy.

"The Kent & East Sussex Railway is one of our most popular attractions, and one of the 'must do' days out that many of our visitors enjoy. It is vital that attractions such as these continue, and I am pleased to support the railway's 'keep us on track' campaign."

Supporters can donate in a number of ways:

Online via kesr.org.uk/help-keep-us-on-track-2021/

By text message Text KESR and the amount¹ you wish to donate to 70085

E.g. to donate £2 text KESR 2 to 70085; to donate £5 text KESR 5 to 70085; to donate £10 text KESR 10 to 70085

By Post Send a cheque payable to K&ESR to: Keep Us on Track, K&ESR, Tenterden Town Station, Tenterden, Kent TN30 6HE

To find out more about becoming a regular contributor, visit <https://kesr.org.uk/donate>

¹Texts cost your donation amount plus one standard rate message and you'll be opting in to hear more about the work and fundraising of the Kent & East Sussex Railway via telephone and SMS. If you'd like to donate but do not wish to receive marketing communications, text KESRNOINFO followed by a space and the donation amount e.g. to donate £5 send KESRNOINFO 5 to 70085.

Photo credit: Kent & East Sussex Railway