

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

DATE

**REPORT OF SENIOR
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET INFORMATION ITEM

Health, Leisure & Culture - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Jim Beall

Stockton & Darlington Railway Bicentenary 2025

SUMMARY

The 200th anniversary of the world's first steam locomotive-propelled passenger rail journey, on the Stockton & Darlington Railway (S&DR), occurs in September 2025. The bicentenary is expected to attract worldwide interest and generate a significant number of international visitors. The collaborating Local Authorities secured Heritage Action Zone status for the 26-mile corridor in 2018 and work is already underway to assess and preserve the remnants of the original line and its related buildings and artefacts. In addition, work is being done to develop a clear narrative for the S&DR story, making it clear what the unique event was and what the visitor opportunities are now.

The priority now is to develop plans for the events that will be staged in 2025 to celebrate this major historical occasion. The Council and its partners intend to use the 195th anniversary, in September 2020, as a launch and 'countdown' for the bicentenary.

REASONS FOR PRODUCING THIS REPORT

This report provides an update in a significant body of work over a wide geographic area. Much of the early work falls outside Stockton Borough but is essential to the creation of the overall attraction. The report also allows Cabinet to comment and provide guidance or endorsement for the approach to planning for 2025 events.

There is not enough information at this stage to determine the potential cost of events in 2025 and existing budgets are sufficient to cover initial planning and exploration. However, this provides a context for the consideration of resource allocations in future, which are expected to be incorporated in relevant Medium-Term Financial Plan reports. Most of the expenditure on Bicentenary events is expected to occur in 2024/25 and 2025/26 financial years.

DETAIL

1. The significance of the S&DR Bicentenary in 2025 has been highlighted in previous reports and is well understood. The first priority for the partners involved in preparations for the anniversary has been to secure the physical asset, protecting and preserving the remaining sections of the line and its related architecture. The second area of work already underway

relates to the telling of the S&DR story, the narrative that forms the basis of interpretation and educational material. This work includes the development of a brand and style for the promotion of the attraction and events associated with the S&DR, helping the visitor read it as a coherent story.

2. The Stockton and Darlington Railway Heritage Action Zone (S&DR HAZ) was established in May 2018 to help rejuvenate and restore this historic railway and realise its potential to become a major heritage attraction, an international visitor destination, and a driver of long-term economic growth and regeneration.
3. The S&DR Heritage projects include new and enhanced listing; research (incorporating aerial surveys, archaeology and building investigations); tackling heritage at risk and urgent repairs to historic structures; addressing heritage crime; the development of heritage skills, and community engagement and events.
4. This work is overseen by a broad partnership including Durham, Darlington and Stockton Councils, Tees Valley Combined Authority, Historic England, The Science Museum (National Railway Museum and Locomotion Museum), Network Rail, Northern Rail, LNER, Hitachi, The A1 Locomotive Trust, and the Friends of Stockton & Darlington Railway.
5. Historic England have committed resources for Historic Building Investigations to the key buildings including each of the original railway taverns and proto stations (The Fighting Cocks, The Cleveland Bay and St John's Crossing ticket office). In addition, Durham County Council have committed resources to investigate Heighington Station (Former Locomotion 1 Inn). Historic England have also committed a significant amount of staff time to undertake Historic Area Assessments and archeological investigations.
6. Removing heritage assets from the National 'At Risk' Register is key priority for the HAZ, Historic England have committed £100,000 to undertake urgent repairs to the Grade II* Goods Shed in Darlington. Darlington Borough Council will be match funding this commitment with works scheduled to commence in early spring 2020.
7. Durham County Council and the Science Museum Group have committed up to £500,000 for repairs to the coal drops at the site of the Locomotion Museum in Shildon. A partnership project also being progressed at the site of the Gaunless Bridge in St Helen Auckland, this area forms part of the scheduled S&DR scheduled monument and is currently on the National 'At Risk' Register.
8. The Bridge Road properties in Stockton, including the so-called ticket office, are in the scope of the HAZ programme, as is Stockton Town Hall as the location of the celebratory banquet that took place at the end of that first passenger rail journey.
9. Although the Bridge Road properties are not currently suitable for development as part of the S&DR visitor attraction because of the location, in the long term the original railway tavern, one of the first 3 railway taverns ever created, has the potential for commercial development. The building remains largely intact in its 1825 state.
10. The river frontage adjacent to the Grosvenor Casino, downstream of Victoria Bridge, has the potential to play a more active role in revealing the S&DR story as it is the dockside to which the coal and other materials were being conveyed by the railway and as such it provided the primary economic justification for the creation of the line. Some investment in this site in preservation and interpretation of the few remaining sections of timber staithes, will be considered within the overall project.
11. The HAZ programme also includes school and community engagement projects. Historic England recently awarded the Friends of S&DR £3000 to work along the line in delivering CPD sessions to schools with the aim of them going on to achieve Heritage School status.

Historic England have also identified a further £41,000 to deliver capacity building projects and education projects to tackle heritage crime within the HAZ area.

Bicentenary event concepts

12. Many people recall the celebrations of the 150th anniversary in September 1975 when an impressive collection of steam engines was gathered at Shildon and processed slowly along a section of line overlooked by temporary grand-stand seating. This was an attempt to mirror the hugely popular centenary cavalcade of 1925 in which the original Locomotion 1 was presented as a functioning engine (though in reality it was pushed along and a small fire was lit in the chimney to give the impression of steam).
13. Recent outings by iconic steam engines like the Flying Scotsman or the Mallard on mainlines have attracted massive crowds, often in dangerous line-side locations, demonstrating the public appetite for live steam. However, the restrictions and demand pressures on network rail lines now make it impossible to recreate the cavalcades of 1925 or 1975.
14. The Locomotion Museum, Shildon (part of the National Railway Museum), is likely to be the main focus of activities involving steam engines and rolling stock on rails in 2025. The Rail Heritage Quarter (RHQ) in Darlington, centred on the Head of Steam Museum, will provide visitors with an opportunity to see significant S&DR architecture and artefacts, including the original Locomotion No 1. The RHQ is also the location for the A1 Trust whose work to build new steam engines is also expected to be a major attraction.
15. Stockton retains an inevitable prominence in the mind of the would-be visitor to the bicentenary; the line is the Stockton and Darlington line. People will want to visit Stockton. However, our S&DR buildings and artefacts are either not significant or not suited to large numbers of visitors. It is our intention therefore to create a range of time limited events during 2025 that can attract the many local, regional, national and international visitors.
16. Plans are emerging and subject to a great deal of further work. However, the main elements are likely to be;
 - a recreation of the race that occurred between the first train and a horse drawn carriage,
 - a recreation of the marching band and accompanying crowd who processed from the end of that first journey to a banquet at Stockton Town Hall,
 - a S&DR or 'Kynren-like' outdoor theatre and projection show,
 - a young inventors event concluding in some sort of conference or symposium looking at future transport possibilities.
17. The race between a replica Locomotion and a horse drawn carriage would be staged within Preston Park, on a purpose-built, temporary section of line parallel with the original S&DR line. 'The Race' would be run a number of times a week and perhaps run throughout August of 2025.
18. The marching band and accompanying crowd would involve hundreds of volunteers in period costume recreating that atmosphere of that first arrival in September 1825. Spectators would be invited to follow the procession to the area around the Town Hall where a series of speeches would tell of the momentous nature of the event. The crowds would then be invited to join the official party for a massive outdoor picnic tea.
19. The street theatre show would be specially commissioned to tell a story based on the actual events of 1825 but in a dramatized form. The intention would be to create entertainment

inspired by the beginnings of the public railways and steam passenger travel, not to create an authentic re-enactment. If possible the event would incorporate lights and projection to achieve a scale and spectacle sufficient to be enjoyed by large audiences. It is expected that the show would run nightly for a period of days or weeks up to and including the 27th September.

20. The young inventors idea is least well developed at this stage but it is likely to complement history focussed conferences and engineering sector symposia at other locations along the 26 mile corridor. The focus on young people's participation in the invention of future forms of transport is intended to ensure that bicentenary is forward looking, emulating the inventiveness and entrepreneurialism that gave rise to the world's first public railway.
21. A project team is being established to explore these ideas and develop connections with the many groups interested in the S&DR bicentenary. We are working with the Friends of Stockton & Darlington Railway in particular, as they bring together a number of informal groups across a wide geography.

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