# Back on Track: Bowes Railway gets much-needed boost

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The project, led by the Bowes Railway Company, will transform the Bowes Railway in Sunderland into a top visitor attraction and training hub for the area. Focussing on the Springwell Colliery complex of the Bowes Railway, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, a series of vital improvements will be made to the site alongside the introduction of much-needed learning and training opportunities for local people.

Ivor Crowther, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: “The Bowes Railway played a central role in the industrial history of the area creating jobs and economic prosperity at the time. The Heritage Lottery Fund is delighted to support this project as it will bring people together to record, share and conserve this important part of the North East railway heritage. Creating a heritage training hub on-site will help local people and visitors alike gain valuable new skills and ensure everyone can play a part in the railway’s future.”

Graham Hall, Vice Chairman of the Bowes Railway Company, commented: “This HLF grant is pivotal in maximising the use of the site and making it an even more attractive venue for visitors. Our proposed new museum activities along with outreach and educational work will be a priority. This grant leads the way in setting the bench mark for our other projects with our partners, Sunderland Council, Gateshead Council, TWBPT, NECT, and English Heritage. These projects include the renovation of the Wagon Shop and the Blackfell Hauler House. We are looking forward to starting the HLF funded project that will have far-reaching benefits for all.”

Sharon Hodgson MP, said: “I am thrilled that the Heritage Lottery Fund has decided to invest in Sunderland by awarding a grant to Bowes Railway in Springwell Village. This is an enormous opportunity to bring tourism to our area, as well as giving important skills and learning experiences to all those interested in promoting the railway’s past and in the development of its future”.

A full-time Engineering Training Manager will be brought on board to implement a wide-ranging heritage training programme and a Learning Officer will deliver a learning and events programme which will include an oral history project, industrial heritage trail and a touring exhibition.

Important restoration works can now also get underway such as repairs to the 1904 Brakeman’s Cabin and Bait hut, returning them to key features of the site and creating a viewing platform for visitors. A small length of spur rail track will also be restored and will return this integral piece of track to working condition for passenger rides.

The site is kept alive by a group of passionate and dedicated volunteers and HLF’s grant will help to maintain and grow that base. A new volunteer strategy will ensure that volunteers are trained to support the railway’s activities including, engineering maintenance, event management and guided tours.

Attributed to a design by acclaimed engineer, Robert Stephenson, Bowes Railway was constructed in 1825 to transport coal from the North Durham Coalfield to ships moored on the Tyne. The Springwell Colliery complex comprises 18th and 19th-century buildings that date back to the sinking of the pit and the development of the railway. It was turned into a museum in 1975.

If you are an interested organisation or volunteer who would like to be involved with these exciting projects, contact Graham Hall on 07711 184 444.

**Further information**

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