Broad horizons for the narrow gauge

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The Alston, Cumbria based South Tynedale Railway has received initial support for a £3m Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid, including £93,600 development funding, towards a new three-year development and education programme.

Working with long-term partners Blackett-Ord Conservation, Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency and North Pennine AONB Partnership, over its lifetime the project will:

- complete the authorised extension by building the final one and a half miles of railway and fully accessible trackside path connecting the Cumbrian market town of Alston with Slaggyford in Northumberland;
- establish a heritage education and environmental training facility on the railway and develop it into a sustainable business in its own right;
- develop new green initiatives to support a sustainable cost base, including solar PV on a restored station canopy and elsewhere on the railway's existing structures, rain water harvesting for use in steam locomotives and in customer facilities, solar PV electric locomotives and solar heating for newly insulated workshops and other buildings.

In addition the project will repair damaged heritage assets along the route including bridges and stone-built viaducts built in 1850 and the original NER wooden, Slaggyford station building, restore and bring into use historic railway coaches, and rebuild the derelict Hunslet 1859 of 1937 as the UK's first carbon-neutral steam locomotive.

The project will create permanent jobs in the local community and establish a springboard for recruiting a new generation of trained, enthusiastic heritage volunteers. These initiatives will help ensure the railway's long-term prosperity and enhance the society's contribution to a remote North Pennine economy in and surrounding Alston Moor.

Brian Craven, the Project co-ordinator, said: "It is a terrific boost to the South Tynedale Railway and to the local area that the Heritage Lottery Fund supports our aims and ambitions. This major investment project will ensure that the railway survives, prospers and continues to build on success over the last 30 years. As a result, the voluntary-led and run society will play an even greater role in sustaining the delicate local economy and fragile environment in one of the most beautiful parts of the Northern Pennines. Our enthusiastic volunteer team is itching to get started with the next, but definitely not last phase of the South Tynedale Railway's development."

Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: "South Tynedale Railway is an important part of our transport heritage and reminds us of the bygone and glorious age of steam trains. We were impressed with the dedication and passion that the South Tynedale Preservation Society demonstrated towards this conservation project and also its genuine commitment towards nurturing volunteers and passing on knowledge and skills. The Heritage Lottery Fund has given its initial support – a first and very positive step towards securing a full grant – and we look forward to seeing how plans develop in the coming months."

Notes to editors

A first-round pass means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and HLF believes the project has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so

a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award. On occasion, an applicant with a first-round pass will also be awarded development funding towards the development of their scheme.

The South Tynedale Railway Preservation Society has run and developed the railway as an incorporated society since 1983, developing the work of an unincorporated group started in 1973. The railway follows the former route of British Rail's Haltwhistle to Alston branch line. Opened in stages in 1851 and 1852, the line survived for over a century until its closure was announced in 1973 and carried out in 1976. A voluntary society was formed to take over the entire route but its first efforts failed. However, a reformed group successfully opened the first stage of a narrow gauge railway in 1983. Since then the railway has grown and prospered.

Further information

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