

**BOWES RAILWAY MUSEUM**

**LINK TO WORK PROGRAMME:**

**REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CITY SERVICES**

**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:**

SP1: Prosperous City

SP5: Attractive and Inclusive City

**CORPORATE PRIORITIES:**

CIO1: Delivering Customer Focused Services

CIO4: Improving Partnership Working To Deliver 'One City'

**1.0 WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO COMMITTEE?**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the current position with regard to Bowes Railway Museum, as requested by Members of the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee.

**2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Bowes Railway is a unique part of the heritage of the North East and is in part a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The monument is owned by both Sunderland City and Gateshead Councils but is managed by the Bowes Railway Company Ltd on behalf of both councils.
- 2.2 The current operation relies heavily on the commitment and enthusiasm of staff and volunteers to maintain limited public and visitor accessibility.
- 2.3 As part of the Council's commitment to the site a feasibility study was commissioned in 2007 with funding of £8,000 from Washington's Strategic Initiatives Budget and £4,000 from Gateshead Council.
- 2.4 The purpose of the study was to provide:
- '...clear, concise and costed recommendations to ensure that Bowes Railway Museum is a relevant, appropriate and sustainable visitor attraction (with due regard to the preservation of any historical significance), from a local, regional and national perspective.'
- 2.5 PLB Consulting Ltd were appointed to deliver the feasibility study which was carried out during the period of June – December 2007. A number of recommendations were made which included:
- Carry out a health and safety and access audit of the site and agree an action plan to address any issues identified

- Address the existing issues in relation to the governance and management (including financial management) of the railway, ensuring that governance is robust, that the relationship between stakeholders is clear and mutually supportive and that stakeholder organisations have the staff and skills appropriate for effective governance, management and future development
- Ensure that the Conservation Management Plan is completed and is available to guide and inform all future decisions and requirements in relation to caring for the historic fabric and developing the site appropriately

### **3.0 CURRENT POSITION**

#### **3.1 Existing Arrangements**

3.1.1 The current Board of Directors of Bowes Railway Company (BRC) is responsible for the overall management of the Railway through regular contact and through decisions made at board meetings. The Board also take decisions on the employment arrangements in respect of all staffing.

3.1.2 The BRC leases the monument and its component parts from the two councils for a peppercorn rent:

- The lease held with Sunderland City Council was signed on 6 November 1998 for a period of 40 years (expires November 2038)
- The lease held with Gateshead Council was signed on 11 April 1994 for a period of 25 years (expires April 2019)

3.1.3 BRC operates on a budget agreed by the Board each year. This budget is prepared and administered with the assistance of Sunderland City Council and reflects the contributions to be made by both local authorities (currently £18,888 per annum from Sunderland City Council).

3.1.4 Sunderland City Council also provides a wide range of 'in kind' support facilities for BRC and operation of the railway as a whole.

3.1.5 These contributions include:

- Financial administration, advice and support for the BRC and the railway as a whole (including producing the company accounts, administering all finances and advice and guidance as required)
- Administrative support for company business from the council's Democratic Support Services (including helping to organise and administer board meetings)
- Promotion and marketing of the Railway through Council-produced publications
- General council officer time to support and provide advice to the BRC and the railway as a whole

The railway has also received and continues to receive curatorial advice from a member of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums' curatorial team.

3.1.6 In 2008, Gateshead Council reduced their contribution with the intention to withdraw from the partnership, which was confirmed in 2009. However, they will continue to undertake their statutory duties in relation to the Ancient Monument which sits within their boundary.

3.1.7 The Railway does continue to secure additional funding to support its operation including:

- essential repairs to the Hauler House in 2009 (supported through Sunderland City Council and English Heritage)
- the conservation management plan to be delivered (funded through Sunderland City Council, Gateshead Council and English Heritage)
- the replacement of wooden sleepers and support towards educational activity
- the recent feasibility study to be carried out (SCC and Gateshead funded)

Other payments include various SIB support for individual projects, in-kind support through outside agencies including Network Rail, Thompson's Builders and other agencies as and when necessary/available.

## **3.2 Recent Progress**

3.2.1 Following on from the Feasibility Study and the recommendations made, work has been ongoing to address all of the immediate priorities including:

- Conservation Management Plan - funding has been confirmed and work completed and submitted to the Board in September 2009.
- Access and Health and Safety Audit - carried out by Sunderland City Council with recommendations presented to the Board in 2008.

3.2.2 Officers from Sunderland City Council have been working with the Board of the Railway to agree the management and governance arrangements for the site.

3.2.3 At a recent meeting held on the 30 November 2009 with the Board, a number of actions were agreed, including:

- Review of Current Board of Directors (Sunderland City Council to work with the Board to take forward)
- To carry out a skills audit of current Members to ensure that the Board has the necessary skills to take the Railway forward including, finance, management, marketing, conservation and other necessary skills needed.

3.2.4 English Heritage have also pledged their commitment to the site on the basis that robust management and governance arrangements are in place and they will then consider their funding commitment to the site.

3.2.5 Bowes Railway Company with the support of Sunderland City Council has agreed that there are a number of business priorities they need to identify, agree and

progress. It is envisaged that with the support of the City Council and stakeholders the security and success of the Railway will be achieved, following the development of a robust and deliverable business plan for the site.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDATION**

4.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report and to receive further updates in the future with regard to the progress of the Railway.

#### **5.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Bowes Railway Feasibility Study 2007