

## Save Our Stute Monthly Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022

**Attendees:- (DR) Dave Reynolds (Chair), (CW) Colin White, (MA) Michelle Armstrong, (ST) Samantha Townsend, (JR) John Raw, (TH) Trevor Horner, (JRo) John Rottgardt, (PH) Paul Harle, (GA) George Alderslade**

**Apologies:- Anthony Knight, Lisa Knight, Jane Hackworth Young, Sue Clarke, Dene Clarke, Kelly Ambrosini, Lisa Turnbull**

### Welcome and Introductions

- After the meeting opened and apologies had been received the group were introduced to George Alderslade, attending for the first time, who was welcomed. A round of introductions followed from all present and a brief discussion was held concerning the purpose of the group.

### Minutes review

- Minutes were reviewed and agreed as an accurate representation of the proceedings of the July 2022 meeting, the August 2022 having been cancelled on account of lack of availability of members.

### Financial Update and update on filing of annual accounts

- As Sue Clarke was not in attendance there was no financial update available and no update on filing of the annual SHA accounts.

### Volunteer Hours Update

- There was no volunteer hours report available, though volunteer hours were anticipated to be reduced on account of the reduction in SHA led events and activities over the summer.

### Events updates

- It was noted that the live band night with The Revamps had been postponed on account of the passing of Queen Elizabeth II - and a perceived consequent reduction in the national mood and appetite to socialise. Though this was not a universal sentiment ticket sales were already low and with a further reduced audience potential it was unlikely to pay for itself.
- **Action** - **DR** to liaise with the band to set a new date in 2023.
- It was similarly noted that the Quingo that had been due to take place on Friday 16th had been cancelled for the same reason.
- It was noted that the community singing group had also suspended singing sessions at the request of many singing group members.
- **CW** explained his rationale to proceed with the Ska Sunday event on 18th Sept despite the perception of a low national mood - which was understood by the group.
- **CW** also gave an update on committee driven Live Lounge events which he has been very proactive in organising for the committee.
- **DR** explained that the Poppy Appeal evening was in planning - though this is an RBL led evening so not directly of consequence to the SHA CIC.
- **DR** also explained that the Darlington Big Band evening for Fri 28th Oct was confirmed, and requested assistance to publicise.
- On the November Quingo **DR** explained that he and Kelly Ambrosini were considering ending the run of these events as in the colder months ahead with spiralling energy prices and no clear indication of support available from HM Government such sparsely attended events were no longer viable for the Institute's main hall. The Quingo, though reportedly enjoyed by those who do participate, barely breaks even. A new format of quiz held in the Lounge would reduce the need for extra staff and keep use of energy lower.
- **Action** - **DR** to work with **KA** on a new quiz night idea to be held in the Lounge
- Discussions on the Christmas Fayre (26 Nov), Members Party, (9 Dec) and Shamrocks (17 Dec) were deferred until closer to the time.

- **CW** mentioned the intention to have a Motown and Soul event which **DR** and **KA** would support on and had secured a DJ.

#### **Heritage Compass update**

- **DR** and **MA** gave a brief update on the first session with Heritage Compass mentor Cath Hume where the SHA had been going about the process of redefining the purpose of the organisation with a view to creating a definition document to keep the group focused but also to aid in future fund raising.
- He also advised those present that the Symposium networking event which had been due to be held at Coventry Cathedral the next day (15th Sept) had been deferred to January 2023.

#### **Update re possible grants from DCC**

- Discussion was had on the frustrating situation concerning the availability of funding from Durham County Council (DCC) and the Institute's ineligibility to apply for it in its current state.
- **DR** explained that following the visit of Mitchell Kent where he and Selwyn Jenkin had showed Mr Kent the problems with the building, Mr Kent had subsequently suggested that as DCC had money committed to spend in the area they might help to replace the main building roof (leaking) and/or (subject to cost) a more sustainable heating solution.
- Two types of grant were available - a business grant which the Institute would currently be eligible for but which was too small for either task and would require the Institute, as a business, to contribute 30% which it does not have. Otherwise, a Community Regeneration grant - which would cover the cost of improvement in full, but for which the Institute would need to have a recognised modern format of non-profit constitution - which it does not have.
- **DR** explained the history leading to the Institute not having a non-profit constitution despite being a non-profit organisation.
- **MA** gave an update on progress of an initiative to link in with Durham Community Action to explore what kind of non-profit organisation would be the correct one to become - and follow that course.
- There was a general discussion on the general attitude and level of initiative of the wider Institute committee in this regard.
- **DR** felt that there was a high risk that the Institute might not transform in time to get the money and that the resolution might not come in time to save the Institute which was also at risk of failing as an organisation due to the energy crisis.
- **Action** - **DR** to contact Mitchell Kent to find out if there is a deadline and whether a draft constitution created in the process of transforming might be sufficient to place an application for funding.
- **GA** queried whether it mattered if the Institute failed as a social club, and asked whether the future of the building might be better served by attracting the interest of private businesses.
- **DR** on this expressed that he felt it important to understand that it was the Railway Institute as an almost 190 year old organisation and its purpose within the community, with every secretary stepping into the shoes of first secretary from 1833, Thomas MacNay, that was the 'world first' and therefore our best case for attracting protection and interest, and that a building from 1913 would not hold the same historic significance. Also that the building in private hands removed it from community ownership and community value.
- **ST** expressed that she did not personally agree with this view and if the Institute failed organisationally it would not necessarily spell disaster for the cause of saving the building.
- It was resolved to see how the transformation process evolved in the medium term.

#### **Energy cost crisis**

- A discussion was held on the impending energy cost crisis and its threat to the Railway Institute's survival.
- A number of the energy saving measures that has already been taken such as replacement of lighting with LED, were explained.

- There were no currently affordable suggestions for additional measures that could be taken - though heating options were discussed and a suggestion was made that going forward a solar panel solution on the rear roof might bring benefit. The roof in its current state, however would not make a good foundation upon which to place it. But such might be viable if it were replaced.
- Overall it was acknowledged as a worrying situation and further thoughts, as and when, were invited.

#### **Update re Library**

- **DR** gave an update on the progress of discussions between **AK** for the SHA and John Laurie of the Friends of the Darlington Railway Museum regarding their having been asked to vacate the museum for refurbishment and consequent disposal of their collection of rail centric books. **AK** had approached them to see if they might be interested in donating them as a contribution to our plan to have the upstairs middle room, potentially the “MacNay Library” as a nod to our heritage as a library and reading room - and they were receptive to this.
- **DR** explained briefly that a meeting had been held at Darlington, followed by a visit to the Institute by two representatives of one of the founders of the collection - and that they were happy to donate the books plus some cabinets and other items for our collection.
- A date was to be set for transfer of the books.
- **Action AK** (*in absentio*) to liaise with John Laurie regarding a date to transfer the books.
- **DR** demonstrated that he had now boxed all of the Railway Magazines contributed by Jane Hackworth Young.

**Next meeting Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2022 7.15pm at the Stute**