

FRIENDS OF —
ASHBURTON
— STATION

CHULEY ROAD, ASHBURTON

Appendices AP1
Potential Benefits

March 2015



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Introduction

This document identifies some of the potential benefits that a heritage railway can provide for its local community. There are many far reaching benefits, some are easier to quantify than others, we have tried to indicate what these benefits could be for Ashburton using other heritage railways as an example. The South Devon Railway Trust is looking to commission a report to identify the value it brings to the local economy. Discussions are still taking place at the moment, although a start may be made in the near future, it is unfortunately un-available to us at this point in time.

An all party parliamentary report was published in July 2013, it was commissioned to;

'establish the current and future value of heritage railways to the local and national economy; to identify the contributions they make to their local community including education and training, employment, sustainable tourism and health and wellbeing as well as the Big Society; to establish best practice amongst heritage railways; and to identify and advise on current and future Government policy affecting the heritage railway industry on the value of heritage railways'.

This report provides support for some of the benefits that are set out in this document and is included in the appendices (AP2 value of heritage railways report). The Heritage Railway Association also have a wealth of information supporting the import role heritage railways play in our country today.

Heritage Benefits

The heritage benefits of our proposal are probably the most apparent and easiest ones to see, but this does not make them any less important.

The first and most obvious heritage benefit will be the station itself, restored to its former glory it will provide a gateway to see how life once was at a branch line terminus station. We feel that it is often very easy just to think of steam trains as a lovely day out for the children, and not see how important they once were to our country and how they changed the face of society forever. We aim to provide an experience that can teach both younger and older visitors what the railways were really about, why they were built where they were and the impact they had on local industries and the local population.

Ashburton for example had been looking to connect itself to other towns by way of a railway since 1832, but all schemes failed to get further than discussed. When the original South Devon Railway incorporated their company in 1844 to build a line from Exeter to Plymouth the residents of Ashburton began again to make plans to connect their town to the railway network. The first scheme was to go from Ashburton to Newton Abbot which even after a few adaptations still fell through. Eventually Ashburton did get its railway but it went via Buckfastleigh and on to Totnes instead, opened 1st May 1872.

The reasons for Ashburton wanting a railway were mirrored up and down the country, before the railways the only real way of getting around was by horse and stagecoaches. The stagecoaches ran on set routes, generally with set stopping places, Ashburton was one of these places, and it was a large source of revenue for the town and helped it to prosper. The railways led to a decline in stagecoach services, which led to towns such as Ashburton losing out on a good income, this is one of the reasons why they wanted to be on the railway map. When the railway arrived it played an important role at Ashburton's cattle fairs bring cattle in and taking them away again, as well as transporting the traders themselves. The station also handled goods from Edwin Tucker's malt house and seed business, timber from the various local timber mines as well as bringing in coal for the towns people, the gas works and Tucker's malthouse. The early morning passenger train was also used by children of Ashburton who went to school in Totnes, the guard was entrusted with their care to the Station at Totnes.

This gives just an basic idea of the bigger picture that the railways played in both the industrial and social history of the area, with work from of dedicated team we could make this information available in an interesting an easy to understand way, which will be a valuable resource for educational institutes and historical societies. We would also hope that teaming up with other local groups we would be able to offer a comprehensive resource for local heritage.



Economic Benefits

Overview

The value of heritage railways to their local economies has often been overlooked by local authorities, particularly in smaller rural locations, where often they provide a larger proportion of the local economy than they would in a larger town or city.

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It has helped to highlight the economic value of heritage railways to their locality. The report states that the ratio of the estimated economic value to the organisation's turnover figure ranges from 0.84 (Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways) to 6 (North York Moors Railway). Using these figures and those of a few other railways the report estimates the mean ratio to be 2.71, if this figure is applied to the South Devon Railways' turnover for last year then it would put the economic value to the area at approximately £6.35 million. (Calculated from the turnover of the South Devon Railway Trust £2,343,260 for 2013 multiplied by 2.71).

One other interesting thing to come out of the parliamentary report is the following;

The Severn Valley Railway was closed for much of the 2007 season as a result of severe damage to the infrastructure caused by flooding. This not only had a devastating effect on the railway, but also severely affected many other catering and retail establishments in the valley where it is the principal tourist attraction, particularly in the town of Bridgnorth.

"Several years ago the Severn Valley Railway was closed for a period of 8 months as a result of flooding, and I'm reliably told that during that time 12 local businesses closed and W H Smith, who used to be open 7 days a week, closed their shop on the Sundays. And I went to the European Commission and they said, "You don't have to say anything, we have already agreed €750,000 for you". Therefore it is not just theories and academic studies, we have seen for real what happens when the local rail track dies, and it impressed the people in Brussels enough to realise quite a significant amount of money without having to go through all the normal procedures." David Morgan (HRA Chairman).

We feel that this report helps to support the economic forecasts we are putting forward in this proposal and shows how important heritage railways have become to the economy of this country as well as being guardians of an important part of our history.

The economic benefits of our proposal can be divided into two parts;

- Short to medium term – operating as Ashburton Station Heritage Centre; and
- Long term – operating as Ashburton Station Heritage Centre with a heritage train service connecting to Buckfastleigh, Staverton and Totnes, run by the South Devon Railway.



Short Term Economic Benefits

Friends of Ashburton Station intend to work very closely with the South Devon Railway, working together we can offer visitors a much improved experience and it almost immediately gives Ashburton Heritage Centre access to a potential 110,000 visitors.

Working closely with local businesses and the town councils of Ashburton and Buckfastleigh we could promote the virtues of the area and attract tourists and holiday makers to stay locally, visit the many attractions we have and spend their money with us.

Ashburton Station has always been a very popular station with railway enthusiasts, it has been used as the subject of a great many model railways too, this is because it was the quintessential branchline terminus, and was so nearly rescued. Thus there is a potential attraction almost as soon as we acquire the old station, a good tidy up and railway enthusiasts from around the country would be very interested to come and see the old station before we even begin restoration.

The restoration would itself would attract new volunteers from all age groups to come and turn their hands to new skills, whilst providing us with valuable volunteer labour they would also be spending their money in the town, buying lunch, materials and other supplies. The visitors who can be brought to the site from Buckfastleigh by a heritage bus will help us raise money to continue our project and will also visit the town, spending their money on the various merchandise Ashburton has available.

We would look to have a policy to source materials, where possible, from local businesses as we feel that it is important to look after the local economy, working together we can all be stronger.

The short to medium term retention of the current businesses / units in Chuley Road will continue to keep economic activity in the area, until such a time as the larger benefits of the reconnected railway can be realised. This prevents the land from lying dormant for any long period of time which would have a negative impact on the town.



Long Term Economic Benefits

The potential long term economic benefits of our proposal would be much greater than for the short term. Heritage railways have played an important role in supporting the economies of their locality, having heritage train services running to and from Ashburton will be a huge boost for the town. A train delivering potentially 200 people right into the town centre, without adding any additional traffic to the already over utilised roads and car parks.

Ashburton has a lot to offer potential visitors, it has a lot of shops which cater for the tourist which would make the job of encouraging people into the town far easier, with the added bonus of it being just a 2 minute very easy walk away.

We believe that for the first 2 to 3 years of Ashburton Station being reconnected to the South Devon Railway would see a large increase in the visitor numbers on the line, a lot of them would make an effort to visit because we had something new to offer. After this period numbers would most likely reduce gradually to a steady level, which we would expect to be higher than before Ashburton was reconnected. The added attractions that Ashburton could 'unlock' for the railway would help encourage tourists to come and spend their holiday locally. The operation of the heritage and learning facilities at the site will help to encourage additional visitors, from educational institutes and people with an interest in the heritage of the area.

Working with local businesses to offer a great package we could tap into a larger proportion of the £6.35 million benefits to the local economy, and improve upon that figure. The expansion of the railway also offers potential benefits to the local economy, running more services and with a larger turnover, the railway will require additional paid staff for roles that cannot realistically be performed by volunteers. These additional staff will most likely be from the local area and which again helps keep the money the railway earns in the local economy.

As mentioned in the parliamentary report, heritage railways are, at least when up and running, self-sufficient and do not require additional government funding to provide their valuable services. They form a sustainable method of transporting tourists and stimulating the local economy, on top of that because of the nature of railways they are unable to move out of the area as possible with other attractions. The large numbers of volunteers from all walks of life make the sustainability of heritage lines possible, without their valued labour it would be a very difficult task to run such an undertaking. This will help keep other businesses in the town centre because that is where their customers will be 'delivered' to.

The additional money brought into the town by the presence of the railway will help other local businesses to plan for the future with a better reassurance that they will have visitors, this will in turn allow them to employ additional staff, creating more local jobs for local people.

As part of our longer term proposal, long stay parking for Ashburton would be provided. This will allow local residents and workers to park just outside the town, leaving more space in the town centre carpark for visitors and shoppers. The parking spaces can be constructed using sustainable, porous materials which could help alleviate flood risks at the lower end of Chuley Road.



Social Benefits

The social benefits of volunteering are widely recognised across the many forms it can take. It can help to give volunteers a sense of belonging and can provide a great deal of satisfaction which they may not get from elsewhere.

Although the volunteer work force of heritage attractions tends to be from the higher age demographic, there is a wide range of people from all ages and walks of life involved with the running of the South Devon Railway. The common interest in heritage railways brings everyone together and has produced a community of its' own based around the railway, where everyone works towards the same common goal as an integrated micro-society.

We would be expecting a similar mix to be involved at Ashburton Station Heritage Centre, although it is predominantly the younger generation who are beginning this journey and want to save their heritage before it is too late. We feel it is essential that this heritage is saved for the community and future generations. The social benefits of having all ages integrating together is usually quite difficult to achieve, it often seems that sadly, in today's society the older and younger generations don't integrate very well, but with the South Devon Railway as proof, a common interest can help all members of a community interact with each other and help each other out. The benefits reach further than the boundaries of the railway, with new friendships struck together and volunteers often offer assistance to other members and the community that they would otherwise not have.

With the station back at the heart of the Ashburton community, we believe there would be a lot of interest from the residents to help and become involved, which would then transfer outside the railway bringing a better sense of community to everyone. Being able to learn more about their town and the importance it has had for many centuries will add to a sense of 'ownership' helping the community feel proud of where they have come from and take more pride in their town. Working closely with other social and heritage groups in the town, we would hope to become a strong member of the community and plan our part in its' social and economic prosperity.

The additional money brought into Ashburton from the heritage / educational centre and railway would strengthen the local economy, provide better job security and deliver new job opportunities, meaning younger members of the community will not always need to move away from the town to find work, keeping more money in the local economy.

Our intension to run an educational centre will provide access for local education institutes to valuable resources, working with them we would aim to offer facilities to teach both young and old about the heritage of the area, the social and industrial impact of railways, science i.e. engineering and physics, and potentially open up a whole new range of practical activities to assist with their education. We could offer workshops for learning crafts such as woodwork, metalwork, building maintenance and more, we would be looking to make the same facilities available for any other interested groups.

Alongside the educational centre we intend to run a 'Young Volunteers' group within Friends of Ashburton Station to encourage younger members of the community to get involved, learn new skills, both practical and social, which will be helpful to them later in life and offer them constructive additional leisure activities. We hope this would offer them a practical outlet for their youthful energy and enthusiasm. We would also like to run a few community events at the station site, open days etc. which we would hope help the community to get involved and feel like they are a part of the 'family'.

There is also potential for the railway to be a method of public transport for local residents, travel cards will be available for local residents and there are other opportunities to develop this provision further if the interest is there.



Summary of Social Benefits

- Potential job creation – longer term (also economic).
- Strengthen sense of community by providing a project and roles they can all get involved with and be proud of.
- Promotion and teaching of heritage – social and cultural.
- Offers new opportunities for voluntary participation.
- New opportunities to learn about Ashburton and the local area and their place in history and the future.
- Work in partnership with local community groups to improve community participation in local events.
- Working with younger members of the community to teach them new skills and offer additional constructive leisure activities for them.

Educational Benefits

A key part of providing a sustainable future for the Ashburton station project is to encourage active participation and ownership within the local community. This is particularly imperative for the younger generation who will not only be the benefactors, but will also be the people who will keep the project alive in the future. We would like to work with local schools, colleges and other educational institutes during the project and encourage them to play an active part in the restoration and upkeep of the station.

Ashburton Primary school is very close to the site of the current station and it would be very easy to arrange regular visits to the site in order to see the progress being made by the group. With this regular exposure, the children will be encouraged to take an active interest, and the project will develop with them. This we hope will attract the children to take part themselves during their own time during and join our 'Young Volunteers' working parties. Working parties will help teach them new skills and give them a sense of ownership for the station and Ashburton.

We would also be looking to create a package that we can send out to local schools, colleges and other educational institutes to explain the value of the project and what resources we can offer them. Sitting in the classroom reading historical books, looking at old photographs or watching documentaries are important ways of learning about our nation's rich heritage. However, there is nothing quite like getting 'hands on' and seeing, touching and experiencing heritage first hand. We are aiming to create a flexible resource that can be adapted to meet the requirements of the curriculum at various stages, ages and subjects.

Although heritage would form the core of our education centre we have identified additional educational opportunities that could be developed to create a truly useful resource. The opportunities we believe we could offer are;

- Railway heritage and history – why the railways were built, what they moved, how they changed the face of the world both economically and socially.
- Ashburton heritage - recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086 as Essebretone and has played an important role in the local area ever since including becoming a stannary town in 1305.
- Science – Mechanical and civil engineering, physics.
- Technology – Wood and metal work.
- Business Studies - Staff management, accounts, budgets, customer relations etc.



Other Benefits

Tangible Public Transport Benefits

The re-instatement of a railway to Ashburton will create a heritage railway transport link between the main line railway system at Totnes, operating as a public leisure transport corridor serving Staverton, Buckfastleigh, Ashburton and with potential additional links Dartmoor.

Completion of the railway line between Ashburton and Totnes Station, a short walk from the mainline railway will enable visitors to use the country's public transport system to access Ashburton and its' attractions. At present access is largely by private car or coach, and so the railway would help reduce traffic movements on local rural roads.

Wider Benefits

In time if interest was there it would be possible to create benefits for a larger area of Dartmoor, using heritage bus services to various destinations on the moors for example. Such a service could further increase the appeal for tourists to visit and stay in the area. Working with DNPA and other parties it would be possible for this scheme to help promote the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of Dartmoor National Park and could offer a real alternative to visitors travelling in private vehicles, helping alleviate the busy roads during the tourist season.

A service such as this could help to increase and spread the economic benefits of this proposal to a wider area, and potentially be used during the holiday season by local residents as a supplementary method of public transport.

