



Station Renovation Finally Starts

Ian Leech (Inside Wansbeck) reports...

Work has started on giving Morpeth Railway Station, widely regarded as one of the finest surviving examples of Victorian railway architecture on the East Coast main line between London and Edinburgh, a new lease of life and making it fit-for-purpose for 21st Century train travellers.

Led by Greater Morpeth Development Trust (GMDT), a partnership of the National Lottery's Heritage Lottery Fund, Northumberland County Council, North East Rural Growth Network, the Railway Heritage Trust, and track and train operators Network Rail and Arriva Rail North, is funding the £2.2 million scheme to repair, restore and redevelop the station that was designed and opened in 1846 by Benjamin Green, one of the pioneering railway architects of his day.

For the past six years GMDT has been working to bring the partners together to support the scheme, which will also convert empty rooms in the main station trackside building into a unique enterprise centre providing bespoke accommodation for up to seven small businesses. The work will be completed in just under 12 months' time at the station which was originally designed and built for the Newcastle & Berwick Railway Company.



As part of the improvements a cafeteria and modern toilets will be provided while the ornate portico will be restored as a feature entrance to the station. A number of large chimney stacks, which helped give the station its unique character, will also be restored.

David Lodge, GMDT Chief Executive, added: "Morpeth Railway Station is the gateway not just to the town but for many visitors to Northumberland and the redevelopment will bring aesthetic and well as economic benefits through the provision of quality business workspace in a unique setting.

"The work we will be doing will not only preserve what is such an historic link with the development of the railway network across Britain in the Victorian era but will significantly improve travel conditions for today's passengers as well as giving the station a viable future through the creation of a business enterprise centre in such a unique location."

Andy Savage, Executive Director of the Railway Heritage Trust, commented: "The Trust is delighted that Greater Morpeth Development Trust has managed despite all the challenges along the way, to get to the stage of starting work at the station and we thank them along with all the funders, for their hard work, efforts and support. This is the first major project that we have worked on with HLF funding and we are looking forward to seeing the restored building back in use again in the not-too-distant future."

Latest News

The era of free parking at Morpeth Station could be coming to an end.



Northern already charge for their section of the car park, and the County Council is now consulting on introducing an identical charge for their

section too. The County Council are also planning to introduce around 30 extra station parking spaces which is most welcome but, in SENRUG's view, not sufficiently ambitious. The number of trains calling at Morpeth will almost double from December 2019, and SENRUG believes the Council should be talking to Network Rail with a view to converting the waste land to the north of the station into 150 – 200 extra parking spaces.

The Council has also told SENRUG they have an annual parking pass system in place which brings the cost of parking down to less than £1 per day. Northern similarly have a discounted price structure for period parking, and SENRUG wants both the County Council and Northern to agree to accept each other's tickets in their car parks, so rail passengers won't risk having to pay twice if the only space available is in the other organisation's area.

A significant development in the Guards dispute?

There are many rumours about what is actually happening in the on-off negotiations between Northern and the RMT. Exactly what is happening we may never know but it may have been a significant moment when Transport for the North issued this statement on Tuesday 27th November.

“Transport for the North is concerned that the ongoing industrial dispute between Northern and the RMT, with further industrial action planned in the run up to Christmas, will add to the significant disruption that rail passengers across the North of England continue to experience.

Transport for the North does not support removing the second person from trains, particularly when a significant proportion of rail stations in the North of England are classed as inaccessible for disabled passengers.

Transport for the North notes that the normal course of events would be for Northern to reach agreement with the RMT, as has been the case in



Photo by John Brierley

other parts of the country, and to then seek approval for such an agreement through the Rail North Partnership if any amendments were required to contract terms. Transport for the North wishes to clarify that it would be willing to consider all options that would facilitate such an agreement.

Transport for the North hopes that this clarification will enable Northern and the RMT to have further discussions about staffing arrangements and would urge the RMT to suspend all planned industrial action.

The move reflects the sentiment from Transport for the North's members: that passenger confidence in the North's railways must be restored and that the North's economy cannot suffer as a result of continued disruption.”

Let's hope that the negotiations are successful, and we can get back to a regular and certain service.

What would you like to see in the next SENRUG Newsletter? Let us know or, even better, start researching and writing an article for us.

News Roundup

Timetable News

The December 2018 timetable change sees minor alterations to the times of some services, along with a brand new Monday – Friday southbound service from CrossCountry. A Glasgow to Penzance train will call at Morpeth at **13:21**. This brings us to a total of 5 northbound and 6 southbound CrossCountry services per day.



Include the LNER services and Morpeth now has 11 services each way per weekday to Edinburgh (12 on Fridays). More is to come when the new Liverpool – Edinburgh service from TPE starts in December 2019.

SENBUG is pressing Northern to resolve the anomaly of Morpeth services arriving into Newcastle a minute after the Carlisle service leaves, which has added an extra hour to journey times of passengers travelling west of Hexham. Our suggestion is that the services be joined up and run as a through train. We are also asking for an earlier morning service from Morpeth calling at Cramlington whose current first train south is at 08:00.

SENBUG also continues to lobby hard for the re-introduction of passenger services to Ashington and Woodhorn, which the County Council are now progressing, and for the extension of Northern's local service from Morpeth to Berwick, with Belford and Beal eventually re-opened. We also want a 30 minute service at Cramlington and are still waiting to hear if the new TPE service will call at Cramlington in addition to Morpeth. Finally SENBUG continues to press for decent, regular bus services to both Morpeth and Cramlington bus turning circles, and for increased parking provision at both stations.

Watch Out For Art

Whilst the building redevelopment work at Morpeth's southbound platform is now underway watch out, in 2019, for the northbound platform being brightened up by artwork from Newminster school after the school was awarded funding from Northern via SENBUG.

Stay Dry – Thanks to Northern

We are grateful to Northern for installing an additional waiting shelter on at the northern end of Morpeth's northbound platform. The installation followed several requests from SENBUG.

Berwick Meeting

Northumberland Councillor Georgina Hill has organised a further public meeting in Berwick to discuss improving rail services at Berwick Station. The meeting will be on 31st January at 19:00 at Berwick Town Hall. SENBUG will again be speaking along with other contributors.

Our Chair is Dennis Fancett. Contact him at chair@senrug.co.uk

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Didn't we have a lovely time ...

Dave Shaw takes a day trip, by rail, to Whitby.

Whitby has always been a favourite destination for the North East. Saturdays in the early 1970s would see long line of United and Venture buses attempting, and not always successfully, the challenges of the road over the moors from Tyneside to Whitby. Today's traveller has but two choices. The car or, for the discerning, the Esk Valley railway. We climb through Middlesbrough suburbia before stopping briefly at Battersby. Until 1954 we could have continued on to Rosedale, but now the driver changes ends and we



Arriving at Kildale. Photo Dave Shaw

motor on into the Esk valley. The line crosses, and re-crosses, the river running through isolated villages before reaching an ever-widening river for the last few miles. It is beautiful journey, and particularly so as the trees change colour in Autumn. On the day I travelled the train was busy, with people joining and leaving at every station. Dog walkers abound and amongst the more exotic passengers was a group of Bulgarians who spent much of the time discussing the finer points of sheepdogs with a local farmer. To make the train truly international a visiting Irishman joins the conversation. We pass under the viaduct that used to carry a railway from Teesside to Scarborough, before arriving at Whitby. The viaduct is

now accessible as a walk and cycleway. The views are amazing. The steam enthusiast may well have chosen to stop at Grosmont for a trip on the North York Moors railway and the scenic run down to Pickering. On the return run it is often possible to continue into Whitby by steam. Others of our number, the more reflective and energetic, may well have left the train even earlier and followed one of the well signed walks on the Eskdale Way to the next station or, possibly, all the way to Whitby. They will just have to catch us up later. Once we've arrived, what next?

The history of Whitby includes Captain Cook, Whaling expeditions, Count Dracula and St. Hilda. You can find traces of them all in the town today. The easily accessible museums will give you the basic history, but to fully appreciate the stories of Dracula and St. Hilda requires a little effort on your part. To be precise 199 steps of effort up to the Abbey and St. Mary's Church. More modern delights include fish and chips: I ate in the Magpie, other establishments are available - but might not supply you with an umbrella if you have to queue at busy times in inclement weather.

There's real pleasure in just walking through the huddle of streets that make up the old town. Shop for jade, candles, or traditional sweeties. Oh, and don't panic if the town appears to be populated mainly by folk dressed in black with a sprinkling of top hats and black veils. It's just that you've hit on one of the two Goth weekends of the year when the town takes on a completely new life. Never fear. Goths are nice people and they part funded the restoration of the 199 steps you visited earlier.

Time to go home and this is where the problem starts. Trains only run every two hours or so, and the timetable won't improve until the Friends of the Esk Valley persuade someone to install the dynamic passing loop that will allow both Northern and the North York Moor Railway a sufficient number of paths on the congested lower end of the line. The problems continue, for this Tynesider at least, once we get to Middlesbrough. The prospect of day out in Whitby will be a lot more attractive once the Stillington line is reopened for passenger services and we can have a much faster journey back to Durham and points north.

For further information:

<https://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/visiting/enjoy-outdoors/walking/esk-valley-walk>

<https://www.visitwhitby.com/esk-valley-railway-development-company-whitby>