

Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust

Press Release

Further to our previous press release of 22nd February, we have received no reply from the West Somerset Railway's representatives on the various questions we have regarding their Notice to Quit – issued just two years after signing an agreement for us to stay at Washford for a further 50 years.

Accordingly, we have appointed solicitors to handle this situation.

We are disappointed by the attitude of the WSR plc towards an organisation that has invested so much time and money at Washford on both track and buildings on what was a brown-field site. In particular, contrary to popular belief, there have been few formal meetings between the two organisations and at none of them was discussed any thought, or justification for, the summary action by the WSR plc. It was certainly a 'bolt from the blue' as we have said before.

Also, during the last season, our shop and museum were open on all days that the WSR was running. It is not true that we had to be asked to open more frequently.

The WSR plc has put part of the reason for the Notice to Quit down to our lack of contribution towards their financial difficulties. However, the Trust's charitable objectives would make such donations unlawful and it would be unlikely that any changes away from our S&D specialism would be approved by the members at an AGM. Nonetheless, we have assisted the WSR in other ways such as by providing most of the proceeds from 2019 Beer Festival and purchasing items from them.

It has been said that we refused to assist with fund-raising for a new tender top for our S&D 7F No. 53808 which has been hired to the WSR since 1987. This is not so. Although, under the agreement, this is the responsibility of the WSR plc we had indicated that we were prepared to help with this by fundraising.

There are apparently concerns over safety on site, but we comply with the WSR's requirements as laid down in their SMS for Washford. On the Light Railway Order that the WSR mention, we had only looked at that in outline. There were no definite plans.

It was also claimed in Steam Railway magazine by someone who refused to be named that we wouldn't accept our volunteers having WSR ID cards; however, we already have them.

The WSR also stated that we wish to pursue our own agenda. Our agenda is simply to preserve and promote the memory of the old S&D through our museum exhibits, locomotives and carriages, just as we have done since the forming of our original organisation, the S&D Circle, in January 1966.

The refusal of the WSR plc to engage with the Trust on these serious issues means that we have no alternative but to step up our efforts to challenge this eviction order.

The Trust will also be setting up an appeal for fundraising. This will be used to ensure that the Trust can secure its future and safeguard the heritage entrusted to us over the last fifty years. Already, we have had unsolicited donations and a significant increase in members. This will be developed over the coming weeks.

Ian Young, Chairman, S&DRT Ltd.

Email: ian.young9@ntlworld.com

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