

Press Statement

We are able to confirm rumours that the SDRT has received a formal letter from the West Somerset Railway PLC, via their solicitors dated 7th February 2020, to terminate our 50-year agreement for our site at Washford. This is despite the WSR signing an extension agreement for our new 50 year tenancy at Washford in 2018. This is without warning or prior discussion with the Trust. The stated reason is that they wish to use the site for their own purposes.

This is very disappointing news for the Trust who have been great supporters of the West Somerset Railway to date and ignores the remarkable achievements the Trust have made over the last 40 years at Washford.

The Trust's attention has also been drawn to a document published on the WSR's website, titled "News from the Board" and dated 16th February. The comments about the SDRT contained therein are inaccurate and untruthful as they imply that:-

- (a) The Trust does not support the WSR and
- (b) The SDRT has, itself, given notice to leave.

The Trust has done everything within its power to fully support the WSR whilst continuing to work within its financial and charitable restrictions. This is primarily through rent and the hosting of special events. The document also says "They wish to pursue their own agenda." Our only agenda has always been to promote the memory of the old S&D through our museum at Washford Station and our exhibits which include a fully restored S&D carriage, Coach No. 4, and numerous wagons with an S&D history. The intention has always been to enhance the heritage offering to visitors who travel on the West Somerset Railway.

It is regrettable that the WSR have embarked on this confrontational and negative approach. The WSR have made no contact with us prior to their letter of 7th February which was opened as a complete 'bolt of the blue'. We were surprised that no formal discussions had been offered prior to this process.

We have assisted the WSR in recent years with their great financial crisis, even to the extent of giving them most of the proceeds from the 2019 Real Ale Festival held on our site at Washford and furthermore have purchased items from them to help satisfy their urgent cash requirement. We are unable to 'give' actual cash to a PLC in any other way due to the charity restrictions we have to work within.

We are currently seeking legal advice and will consider when this has been received. The site at Washford has been transformed by the Trust since it moved into the derelict location in the mid-1970s and we have expended huge amounts on creating the works areas and covered accommodation, as well as the extensive track layout where our stock is sited and restoring the station.

Our locomotive S&D 7F No. 53808 is under a separate agreement with the WSR and we have no further comment to make at the present time.

Ian Young, chairman of the SDRT, commented, "whatever the outcome might be, it will put the Trust under severe stress and cause a great deal of concern to our dedicated membership, if not the heritage movement generally."

Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust

22nd February 2020