

# Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust

Press Statement

15<sup>th</sup> May 2020

The Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust came to the Washford site in 1975, not long after the West Somerset Railway took possession, via a lease from Somerset County Council, of the trackbed and stations. They were challenging times for both the Trust and the WSR plc and there was a great deal of dialogue between the two entities. A spirit of cooperation and determination prevailed. As time progressed the WSR plc encountered some financial difficulties. Although there was no direct financial contribution either way, problems of funding were openly discussed and, in particular, a Trustee of the S&DRT transferred to the management of the WSR plc by mutual agreement because of his skills.

In the meantime, the Trust set about developing the Washford site. The WSR was only too pleased that we took over Washford station, carried out maintenance and decoration, provided an attractive museum and laid track in the yard. Further investment has been made over the years and a small band of volunteers restored rolling stock of which an 1886 six-wheel coach is the jewel in the crown and has been recognised at the highest level in the UK heritage rail fraternity.

When our ex-S&D 7F locomotive 53808 was restored, and ran on the WSR in 1987, it gave the WSR a huge boost, not least in confidence and credibility. Until then, the railway was essentially dependent upon small tank locomotives. Suddenly, the WSR had a loco that could haul trains of significant length and generally attract railway enthusiasts as well as the general public.

Fast forward forty-five years and the atmosphere has changed dramatically, particularly over the last three years. Previous achievements are swept aside and derided. Discussion and cooperation are dismissed. Communication is limited to posturing and intemperate language in press releases and blogs. The relevance of debate is reduced to the raising of hard cash without challenge or appropriate scrutiny, and the magnification, or embellishment, of alleged incidents in history which, if true, were not followed up at the time. They are aired freely in the public domain instead of the proper channels. The inclusion of these alleged events adds nothing of relevance to the Notice to Quit even if they are substantiated. They are mischievous and a distraction. There are four accusations in the WSR plc's Position Statement which the Trust, not for the first time, must particularly refute:

1. It is not true that the Trust have consistently refused to engage in discussions about the rent paid. It has never been invited to do so.
2. It is not true that the Trust have not made efforts to raise money for the WSR plc. There could have been more in the way of events at Washford but there was a lack of goodwill and mutual understanding on how these events were to be managed.

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Registered Address: The Railway Station, Washford, Watchet, Somerset TA23 0PP

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However, it is always been the case that changing the Articles of Association, to allow direct transfer of funds, would not be appropriate.

3. It is not true that the Trust have declined to fund a replacement tank in the tender of the 7F locomotive. As recently as January, at a meeting with Mark Smith, the Trust confirmed that it would be happy to fundraise for this at the appropriate time.
4. Regarding alleged complaints to the ORR the Trust have not been made aware of any issues affecting the sidings at Washford. The Trust have sought guidance from the ORR and they confirm that, regarding the sidings at Washford, there are no reported issues and ROGS do not apply.

The mention of the Agreements concerning the engine 53808 is even more audacious and the declaration by the WSR plc, in public, of their intention to breach the locomotive operating agreement with us is breath-taking. The message it sends to other would-be locomotive hirers is clear and salutary. The Trust, for its part, is not going to engage with this matter in public

Agreements have been made with the West Somerset Railway plc over the years and always with a measure of good faith. That faith has been thrown onto the volcano in Mordor where reasonableness and common sense have already suffered a demise. The letter of the law becomes the blunt instrument of choice. Individuals who raise their concerns are, allegedly, being goaded and encouraged by the Trust to spread falsehoods and this is simply not true. The WSR plc judges any criticism as treachery which must be put down in Orwellian fashion.

The Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust Ltd has tried, at all times, to conduct their affairs in a civilised, honourable and constructive manner. It will continue so to do. It is proud of its achievements. It is also confident of its reputation. It will continue to carry out its charitable aims of promoting the history and importance of the Somerset & Dorset Railway through the preservation, custodianship, display and interpretation of material evidence. Also, to promote and facilitate public understanding of the significance of the Somerset & Dorset Railway as a major cross-country rail route. In 1975 that did not hinder the Trust from being a respected, and active, participator in the well-being and future of the West Somerset Railway and it isn't the Trust that has changed its position on that.

In the meantime, the Trust looks forward to engaging in the proposed talks with the WSR plc and other stakeholders on the line, moderated by the Heritage Railway Association.

Ian Young

Chairman, Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust Ltd.