**West Somerset Railway Railway secures significant Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage support from Government**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.01, FRIDAY 9 OCTOBER**

 8 October 2020

The West Somerset Railway (WSR) has announced today Friday 9 October that its recent application to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport’s (DCMS) ***‘Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage’*** support has been successful. The Plc will now receive a grant of £865,000, all of which will help the 23-mile former GWR branch line recover from the enforced closure of the railway since March during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The ‘***Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage’*** fund was created by DCMS to help heritage organisations survive and recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The success of this application is fundamental to the immediate future of the WSR as it enables the Plc, along with the support of WSR ‘family’ support organisations, to bring people back to work and prepare for Christmas 2020 running and the planned reopening of the railway in full in March 2021.

The ***‘Culture Recovery For Heritage’*** grant will fund a wide range of projects covering infrastructure renewal; Covid 19 precautions and protection; operations; plus locomotives and rolling stock. It will provide immediate help with the costs of re-opening the line by covering certain items, such as the wages of essential staff brought back from furlough to prepare for trains returning. More follows

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Importantly, the grant bid – which was reviewed and delivered jointly by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and Historic England - will also assist with the process of re-training staff and reinstating competencies, policies and procedures.

The NLHF grant will also enable the Plc to either fund or undertake a number of small schemes put forward by the WSR’s Stations and Friends Groups, Station Masters and WSR family organisations, including the West Somerset Railway Association, West Somerset Steam Railway Trust and the Diesel and Electric Preservation Group.

The grant is broken down as follows:

* Infrastructure (to be inserted)
* Covid 19
* Operations and Commercial
* Mechanical Engineering

Although the application was submitted by the West Somerset Railway Plc as the sole grant beneficiary, it was prepared in partnership with the West Somerset Railway Association and the West Somerset Steam Railway Trust, plus important contributions from other groups on the railway. The Plc would also like to thank all of the external stakeholders who provided letters and statements in support of the bid, including local MPs, Rebecca Pow and Iain Liddell-Grainger, both main local authorities and councils, plus partners in the local tourism and leisure sector. M/F

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Everybody’s help and support for the DCMS bid was much appreciated and this now provides a firm foundation on which the WSR Plc can move forward with its plans.

As the funds have to be spent by 31 March 2021, the Plc has been working hard on putting together the project infrastructure and processes in anticipation that the bid would be successful. This work is being finalised and this major programme of investment will now start in earnest.

**WSR Background Information**

The 23-mile-long West Somerset Railway is the UK’s longest standard -gauge heritage railway, comprising the whole of the branch line from Minehead to the connection with the West of England main line near Taunton. The railway normally welcomes up to 200,000 visitors a year. Its 10 stations now reflect much of the railway heritage of West Country railways lost following the Beeching rationalisations of the 1960’s. Collectively, WSR organisations own, manage and care for a collection of 22 heritage locomotives (steam and diesel), 48 passenger and 75 freight vehicles from the 19 and 20th centuries as well as the infrastructure, buildings and equipment.

Together, this constitutes a “living museum” of railways from the 1860’s to the 1960’s, including three free-to-enter museums on stations along the line, displaying a wide range of railway artifacts. Regular steam and heritage diesel services offer the opportunity to experience the “golden age” of rail travel, and all stations are free to visit and discover. More follows

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Commenting on the grant award, WSR Plc Chairman Jonathan Jones-Pratt said: ***“Naturally, we are all thrilled to have received this fantastic grant support thanks to the Department of Culture Media and Sport, the National Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic England.***

***“It will provide us the vital financial lifeline needed for the railway’s survival, and we are confident that all of the projects to gain support will help get the much-loved West Somerset Railway running normally again soon.***

***“From all sources, we have now raised or received a wonderful total of financial help all told of an amazing £1,177,271.08 so far, and we are still raising money to try and get to our next target of £1.5 million!***

***“This has been achieved via our own emergency appeal via donations and smaller grants to the WSR plc, WSSRT and WSRA, plus limited site openings income of £283,571.08; an earlier NLHF Heritage Emergency Fund grant of £28,700 to the WSSRT, and now this latest DCMS Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage grant to the WSR plc of £865,000.***

***“The WSR is so very grateful to everyone who has helped us raise this money in whatever way they could – now we can move forward!”***

More follows

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**Notes to News Editor:**

152 heritage sites across the South of England are set to receive a lifesaving financial boost from the Government thanks to the £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund to help them through the coronavirus pandemic.

These venues are a number of the 445 organisations will share £103 million to help restart vital repair and maintenance work on cherished heritage sites, to keep venues open and to save jobs and livelihoods.

**West Somerset Railway** in **Somerset** which has been awarded £865,000 to help secure the railway’s longer-term viability as a popular tourist attraction, educational offering, and preserver of heritage locomotives from the £103 million pot being allocated by Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund on behalf of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

This vital funding is from the £88 million *Culture Recovery Fund for Heritage* and the £50 million *Heritage Stimulus Fund* - managed by Historic England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Both are part of the Government’s £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund which is designed to secure the future of Britain’s museums, galleries, theatres, independent cinemas, heritage sites and music venues with emergency grants and loans.

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