

Report to Scrutiny Commission

Heritage, Culture, Leisure and Sport

Date of Commission meeting: 24 September 2015

Main Line – Bridging the Nation

The Great Central Railway Heritage Museum at Leicester



GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY
LOUGHBOROUGH, LEICESTERSHIRE

Report by Lili Tabiner, Great Central Railway

Background

The Great Central Railway is the only preserved mainline heritage railway in the UK. It currently operates from Loughborough to Leicester over 8.5 miles of largely double track line with stations serving Quorn and Woodhouse, Rothley and Leicester North. Rescued from closure in 1976, it is now one of the leading tourist attractions in Leicestershire attracting over 130,000 visitors per year. With an annual turnover of £3m, it employs 60 people (full time equivalent) and is supported by over 600 active volunteers. Restored steam and diesel trains operate every weekend throughout the year, with additional mid-week running during school holidays. A calendar of special events – Peppa Pig, Heroes and Villains, Easter Bunny Eggstravaganza and Santa Specials attract large numbers of families with young children, whilst Steam and Diesel Galas enable GCR to showcase its fleet of iconic locomotives and carriages – often enhanced by visiting locos. The GCR also operates a thriving on-train catering business as well as cafes at each of its stations along the route. Commercially, the GCR offers testing facilities for the rail industry (where diesel locos can operate at up to 70 mph) and is used as a location for numerous films and TV programmes.

Introduction

Over the past 3 years, the GCR has begun a programme of expansion, focusing on 2 major infrastructure projects. The first project, Bridging the Gap will reinstate a missing 500 mtr section of track in Loughborough to reconnect two sections of the line and create an 18 mile heritage railway from Leicester to Ruddington (Nottingham).

The second project will see a new heritage railway museum built at GCR's terminus, Leicester North which is situated close to the Red Hill Roundabout and adjacent to the City Council owned Greenacres community facility (which GCR currently leases). The museum is a partnership between the GCR, Leicester City Council and the National Railway Museum (NRM) in York. Once built, the museum will house items from the National Collection relevant to the GCR, focusing on the story of railways and the significant part they played in shaping Leicester's economy and social and cultural heritage.

In May 2015, the museum – currently named Main Line – Bridging the Nation, was awarded a Round 1 pass from the Heritage Lottery Fund with a total of £10m to be allocated following the successful completion of the Development Stage which is now underway. This is the first time a project from Leicester has been awarded a HLF grant from its national major grant scheme and the success demonstrates the merits of a strong, mutually supportive partnership and a powerful narrative.

For the City of Leicester, this award represents another major accolade and recognition that the City is now regarded as a culturally rich tourist destination. The museum's location forms a natural 'Tourism Gateway' between the City and the County. Close to the many other attractions within the City, there are many opportunities to develop links with the National Space Centre, Abbey Pumping Station, the King Richard III centre and the Transport Museum.

The vision for the Main Line Museum is:

To create a new world class working heritage museum which showcases the Great Central Railway's rich heritage and brings part of the UK's national railway collection out of the cold, making it accessible to all. Through the working railway we will educate, entertain and engage people of all ages, backgrounds and interests whilst preserving one of the Country's most iconic feats of railway engineering to ensure future generations are able to experience and learn from the past.

In total, the museum project will cost £17.7m and once opened it is estimated it will almost double the number of visitors to the GCR from 130,000 to 250,000, create an additional 10 full time jobs within the railway, support a further 700 jobs across Leicestershire, contribute £44m to the local economy and provide 100 new volunteering opportunities.

The development of the museum at Leicester North is therefore a hugely exciting opportunity for GCR to add a new dimension to its existing offer and bring about a step change in its ability to engage wider audiences.

The aims of the museum project are:

- To create a nationally significant museum which operates alongside an operating mainline heritage railway
- To conserve and increase access to GCR/NRM artefacts which are currently at risk
- To conserve and increase access to the National Railway collection
- To educate the public on the history of the Great Central Railway and the wider development of the railway network – emphasising their contribution to the economic and social heritage of the City of Leicester, Leicestershire and beyond
- To preserve and increase access to the UK's only Mainline Heritage Railway
- To increase visitors and frequency of visits
- To increase engagement of underrepresented groups in the community through an inclusive interpretation programme of events and activities
- To promote Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths (STEAM) amongst young people

- To increase access to skills and training in rail engineering, construction, operations, rail testing and rail management
- To increase the cultural offer in the city through creating a tourism gateway between the County and the City
- To develop strong partnerships and working relationships with other local attractions, social and community groups, educational establishments and special interest organisations
- To reinforce the City and the region as a centre for engineering excellence
- To increase the numbers of volunteers and improve their skills and development.

The Building and Exhibition Space

The museum, on a prominent, elevated site, will be visible from the A6 outbound and from the A6 inbound approach via Birstall. This provides an opportunity to construct an innovative, exciting, modern building utilising the best materials to create both a powerful landmark and in turn, offering visitors within spectacular views across the city sky scape. Uniquely, the Museum will have an operating heritage railway running alongside the museum's floor-to-ceiling glass walls to truly demonstrate how railways work.

The new exhibition space will use the best interactive digital technology to tell the story of railways in Leicester and Leicestershire past, present and future for the first time in the region. Famous vehicles and other items from the National Railway Collection will form the core of the new displays and will be woven together by the threads of a narrative, allowing visitors to establish their own connections to the story of the industry and railways of the region.

Emerging stories, drawn from preliminary consultations with local community groups and individuals, range from day trips to the seaside, the movement of coal from Leicestershire extensive mines to the construction of railways in India and East Africa – part of the journey to Leicester for many of the City's migrant community.

Strategic partnerships with the University of Leicester, DMU, community groups and schools will ensure that exhibits not only celebrate the past but also showcase new technological developments which the rail industry is developing to revolutionise train operation in the future.

The Greenacres complex which includes a restaurant, training rooms and offices, will be incorporated into the museum's facilities –offering opportunities for educational activities, outreach community engagement, temporary exhibitions and digital archiving. The University of Leicester is working with GCR to explore ways of drawing in EU funding to support these activities.

Partnership

A Memorandum of Understanding underpins the current partnership between the GCR, Leicester City Council and the NRM. From the start, Leicester City Council has assisted GCR in a number of important areas. Financially, the Council has provided £95,000 towards the cost of the developing and submitting bids to the HLF (the first submission in Nov 2013 was unsuccessful but received encouraging feedback) and also by agreeing to fund approximately £180,000 improvements on the Red Hill allotments which are adjacent to the museum site (releasing 7 plots for the museum development). This is agreed in principle with the allotment society but is subject to statutory approvals, which are currently being sought. In addition, officers from the City Council are assisting GCR (which has limited internal capacity) in its management of the HLF project as well as providing strategic direction in terms of developing the new museum.

Meanwhile, the NRM is providing museum mentors, sourcing artefacts, exhibits and archive materials and will administer the loan agreements and conservation requirements.

Funding

The HLF process consists of 2 stages; a Development Stage lasting up to 2 years during which the early concept designs are developed to a point where a developer can be appointed and a Delivery Stage during which the museum will be built and opened to the public.

The total Development Stage costs are £1,097,338. GCR has been granted £494,500 from the HLF and has matched this with £323,000 from its own funds. The remaining £279,888 consists of in-kind/non-cash contributions and volunteer time.

The total cost of the Delivery Stage is £16,680,859.

The HLF has earmarked £9,504,900 leaving £5,370,084 cash match funding to be secured and a further £1,805,875 in non-cash/in-kind and volunteer time contribution. The LLEP has received an Expression of Interest to provide LGF funding towards the £2.5m public funding contribution.

The total project cost is £17,778,137

Key dates

Notification of Round 1 Pass	May 2015
Permission to Start	September 2015
Recruit Project Managers, Architect, Design Team, Exhibition Design team	December 15 – March 2016
End of Development Stage (RIBA 3)	April 2017
Submit Round 2 Application	April 2017
Round 2 Approval	July 2017

Construction
Opening

April 2018 – July 2019
Oct – Dec 2019

Conclusion

The new museum will form an important part of Leicester City's tourism offer and the project is a key priority within the Leicester City Tourism Action Plan. The economic benefits will contribute to the LLEP's Strategic Economic Plan and its recently commissioned Tourism and Hospitality Sector Growth Plan.