

WHITEHEAD DEVELOPMENT - PROGRESS REPORT

Following a comprehensive and exhaustive selection process, as required by several of our major funders, the 2020 Committee has now appointed RPS as the Project Manager and Designer for the entire Whitehead development project, including the new station building.

This embraces the previously separate items funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, GROW South Antrim, Ulster Garden Villages, and Carrickfergus Council, which will now be developed as a single project. A number of other major funding applications are also in progress, or are awaiting the start date for such bids.

A detailed site topographical survey has now been completed, so that we now have precise mapping of exactly where every building and item of fixed equipment is, both in plan view and in height. This is essential to ensure that all our proposed buildings and facilities will fit together properly in the very tight spaces available, with adequate clearances, acceptable gradients and all necessary access routes.

Detailed design of the buildings, equipment and other facilities is now in progress, to a level at which firm construction cost estimates or quotations can be obtained. At that stage, we will be able to formally apply for HLF Stage 2 Funding, to finance the actual construction works.

A vital element of the HLF Funding, however, is the design and development of our interpretative, display and educational facilities at Whitehead and on our trains. To this end we have selected and appointed Griff Boyle Design Management (GBDM) to advise on the visitor display and information facilities and equipment, and on the planning of safe site tour routes to maximise interest and information, without hindering our train operations and engineering work.

It is also an HLF requirement that the Society makes a major contribution in kind, and the restoration of two of our most historic “artefacts” has been proposed for this purpose.

The items selected are Locomotive No.171 “Slieve Gullion” - for which a major appeal to our members and others has already been launched - and one of our two GNR(I) bogie grain vans - which were amongst the very first bogie-mounted goods vehicles introduced in Britain and Ireland. They were used mainly for the transport of grain from GNR(I) stations to the Guinness Brewery in Dublin. Members' contributions to our “171 Appeal” are thus even more important, as they will count as part of our “match-funding” towards our HLF Stage 2 Grant.

Provided our HLF Stage 2 application is successful, the major site construction can then be formally tendered and the works commenced.

Whilst confirmed funding is already in place for the majority of our proposed works at Whitehead, we are still actively negotiating with other bodies to secure sufficient further finance to enable the full package of new facilities to be provided. It may therefore be necessary to defer a minor proportion of the construction works for a year or so, although all design work will still be undertaken at the initial stage.

As a reminder, the total development includes:

- Refurbishment and extension of the Locomotive Shed
- Extension to the Locomotive Workshop
- Extension to the Carriage Shed
- Provision of a separate Carriage Workshop
- Provision of a separate Paint Shop
- Relocation and extension of the Foundry
- Provision of a Stores Building and other Storage Facilities
- Installation of a 60ft Locomotive Turntable
- New Station Building, based on the former Whiteabbey Station (incorporating visitor reception area, shop, café, toilets, etc.)
- New NCC-style Signal Box and operational signalling
- New and upgraded roadways and walkways
- Additional siding accommodation
- Secure fencing to the entire site
- New external lighting and signage
- Staff Facilities for volunteers and employees
- Car Parking for volunteers and employees

It is not all about building work, however. Our funding organisations are not primarily interested in buildings or workshops - their objective is to ensure that the whole story of railway development and its impact on industry, agriculture, tourism and development - and most importantly on people, whether passengers or staff - is interpreted and explained. Thus their aims are education and tourism related to our railway history, and enhanced by the continued operation of our trains for the benefit of new and future generations.

Our long-term aim is to have a top-class operational base, secure covered storage for our entire operational and historic fleets, enhanced engineering, display and interpretative facilities, and thus an interesting, educational and enjoyable experience for (hopefully) a lot more visitors to Whitehead Excursion Station and to our trains.

In the slightly longer term we also plan to develop a similar base in the Dublin area for our southern operations, and a suitable site is actively being sought.

*Denis Grimshaw
Chairman, 2020 Committee
September 2011*