

Work starts on £2m Morpeth Railway Station improvements

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Work has started on giving Morpeth Railway Station which is widely regarded as one of the finest surviving examples of Victorian railway architecture on the East Coast main line between London and Edinburgh, a new lease of life and making it fit-for-purpose for 21st Century train travellers.

Led by Greater Morpeth Development Trust (GMDT) a partnership of the National Lottery, Northumberland County Council, North East Rural Growth Network, the Railway Heritage Trust, and track and train operators Network Rail and Arriva Rail North, is funding the £2.2 million scheme to repair, restore and redevelop the station that was designed and opened in 1846 by Benjamin Green, one of the great pioneering railway architects of his day.

For the past six years GMDT has been diligently working to bring the partners together to support the scheme which will also convert empty rooms in the main station trackside building into a bespoke enterprise centre providing accommodation for up to seven small businesses.

It is expected the work will be completed in just under 12 months' time at the station which was originally designed and built for the Newcastle & Berwick Railway Company.

Contractors from STP Construction from Rowlands Gill have moved onto the site to work with the Trust and architects Curtis Architecture and Napper Architects who have designed the station improvements.

"We are thrilled to be bringing new life to this Grade II listed building which is the last working railway station designed by Benjamin Green, and we are delighted to be working with both Napper Architects and Greater Morpeth Development Trust to revitalise this heritage asset," said John Curtis.

The front of the building where there were a handful of car parking spaces, has now been closed off and access to the platforms will be from the drop-off and pick-up points. The ticket office – which is the only space in the main building still in use - will remain open until the turn of the year when it will be moved into a temporary building until the new one is ready.

As part of the improvements a cafeteria and modern toilets will be provided while the ornate portico will be restored as a feature entrance to the station. A number of large chimney stacks which helped give the station its unique character, will also be restored.

The Trust says construction work will be carried out with as little disruption as possible for travellers.

Its chairman Doug Phillips described Morpeth as one of the 'stand-out' Victorian stations along the East Coast main line. "However, the station has been in need of some serious restoration, repair and improvement for some considerable time," he said.

"The work we will be doing will not only preserve what is such a historic link with the development of the railway network across Britain in the Victorian era but will significantly improve travel conditions for today's passengers as well as giving the station a viable future through the creation of a business enterprise centre in such a unique location."

Mr Phillips said there had been times over the past two or years when it seemed the scheme might never reach fruition.

“At the outset we had to convince the owners and operators of the station that a small community development trust such as ours could bring the necessary funding partners together to make the scheme happen,” he said. “However, our track record of achievements which includes project managing the sympathetic transformation of the 300 year old Morpeth Town Hall into a modern civic building, gave our funding partners the confidence that we are capable of successfully delivering a multi-million pound project such as this.

“Our partners all bought into our vision to restore the station to its former glory as well as making it fit-for-purpose for 21st Century travellers, and they continued to back the scheme even when it sometimes looked as if it might be derailed.”

David Lodge, GMDT Chief Executive, added: “Morpeth Railway Station is the gateway not just to the town but for many visitors to Northumberland and the redevelopment will bring aesthetic and well as economic benefits through the provision of quality business workspace in a unique setting.

“These are exciting times for a small community development trust such as ours and it has taken a huge amount of team effort and partnership working to reach the point we are now at.

“This project will be our biggest to date and will take the level of funding GMDT has brought into Morpeth to more than £10 million over the past decade which is an enormously creditable achievement that we are tremendously proud of.”

In parallel with the work now underway at Morpeth Railway Station GMDT along with the Cresswell Pele Tower Charitable Trust and also with National Lottery funding, will be restoring and repairing the 15th Pele Tower in the coastal village to remove the Grade II* listed building from Historic England’s ‘At Risk’ register and open it to the public as a visitor attraction.

- This is what some of the funder partners had to say about work starting on the redevelopment of Morpeth Railway Station:-

Ivor Crowther, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund North East which has put nearly £800,000 of lottery funding into the project, said: “Thanks to National Lottery players Morpeth Railway Station is set to become a vastly improved gateway into Northumberland. As well as securing the future of the building’s heritage, currently unused space will be brought back into use for visitors, business start-ups and the community. This is an exciting project and it is fantastic to see work begin there.”

Andy Savage, Executive Director of the Railway Heritage Trust, commented: “The Trust is delighted that Greater Morpeth Development Trust has managed despite all the problems along the way, to get to the stage of starting work at the station and we thank them along with all the funders for their hard work, efforts and support. This is the first major project that we have worked on with National Lottery funding and we are looking forward to seeing the restored building back in use again in the not-too-distant future.”

Councillor Peter Jackson, Leader of Northumberland County Council, said: “We are delighted that work on this flagship project is now getting underway. Morpeth Railway Station is one of the gateways into the county and is of strategic importance both for rail users and businesses, and we are confident it will also become a thriving space for small businesses to flourish.”

As chair of Arch Richard Wearmouth commented: “The redevelopment of Morpeth Railway Station is a landmark project that will transform a somewhat shabby gateway to the town and I am pleased that Rural Growth Network has been able to assist to make the scheme a reality.”

Anna Weeks, Commercial Manager at Northern, added: “We are delighted to be supporting Greater Morpeth Development Trust in the redevelopment of Morpeth station. The station development along with upgrades to our trains in 2019 will greatly improve the station environment and travelling facilities for residents and visitors journeying into Newcastle and beyond.”

**FOR FURTHER PRESS INFORMATION CALL:- Ian Leech
GMDT Press Contact on 079 681 02547**