

Campaign group forms to save city's historic railway bridge



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By KELLY TYLER

CAMPAIGNERS are on track to see the city's dilapidated Friar Gate bridge restored to its former glory.

Around 20 enthusiastic people from across the city joined forces at a meeting held last night to share their memories of the historic bridge and discuss an action plan for its future.



The campaigners gathered by Friar Gate bridge are, back, from left, Lynn Marley, Mick Shaw, Michelle Rawson, Nathan Coons, Jack Boyd and Mandy Coons. Front, Jill Brownsword, Sylvia Hyde, Joanne Lawton and Lesley Boyd.

The 135-year-old bridge housed a railway station, which closed more than 45 years ago.

Now residents have come forward to form a committee – named the Friends of Friar Gate Bridge.

Maurice Swift, 76, of Chellaston, said he remembers walking under the bridge four times a day while he was a pupil at Mill Street School. "The sound of a train going over the bridge was like an orchestra playing loud drums," he said.

"It was fantastic. Now, I think the bridge is awful. It is deteriorating by the minute."

The bridge was built in 1876 by Andrew Handyside & Co Ltd, which, among other things, built the London King's Cross railway footbridge which featured in the Harry Potter films.

Protest groups had previously lobbied councillors who, in 1973, said the bridge must be replaced. In 1982, British Rail considered demolishing the grade-two listed structure if the city council would not buy it.

Three years later, it was sold to Derby City Council by British Rail for £1.

David McGuinness, 78, of Spondon, said: "I moved to Derby in 1966 and worked at Pelapone electrical factory, in Slack Lane. When my **car** was broken, I used to walk under the bridge each day to work.

"It's such a fascinating site. When I had visitors from London I used to show them the bridge and tell them they had nothing like this. Now I don't show them the bridge because it's an embarrassment.

"I feel strongly that the bridge should be preserved properly."

Lynn Marley, 56, of Morley Street, said she hoped the bridge would be restored so her 13-year-old grandson could see it.

She added: "I cannot understand why Andrew Handyside's work at St Pancras is honoured and polished so you can see your face in it, yet he did one of his best bits of work in Derby and it has been left to rot."

Mandy Coons, chairman of the New Zealand Community Association and organiser of the meeting at the Lonny Wilsoncroft Community Centre, Stepping Lane, said: "We want to form a committee that will approach the council to see what its plans are and whether it needs help to move things on."

She said the group would hold their next meeting in October and, in the meantime, campaigners would approach the council about the bridge.

Previously, Councillor Paul Bayliss said the city council was "looking into the possible uses for the bridge".

For more details about the campaign group e-mail mandy@coonscom.co.uk

Read more: <http://www.thisisderbyshire.co.uk/Campaign-group-forms-save-city-s-historic-railway/story-19827691-detail/story.html#ixzz2fkYDGXhO>