



JOINT MESSAGE ISSUED BY BLUEBELL RAILWAY PLC AND BLUEBELL RAILWAY

PRESERVATION SOCIETY

27 March 2020

1. BLUEBELL NEWS

Message from Paul Bromley, Bluebell Railway Plc communications director

The Spring edition of Bluebell News is being produced electronically and is being made available as a document to be downloaded.

The board decided to cancel the print run for this issue for both practical and financial reasons at a time when all businesses had to reassess very quickly their staffing, workload and priorities in response to the global coronavirus pandemic. Society representatives were consulted and informed about this decision.

The situation with all businesses is changing on a daily basis and even if we were able to find a printer able to print copies of the magazine, there is no guarantee we would be able to distribute them through a mailing house at the present time. Many other magazines have also moved to a digital format for their current or planned issues.

Please be assured that this decision is entirely due to the extenuating financial and logistical circumstances caused by the current Covid-19 crisis. The standard magazine format will be resumed at the earliest opportunity.

We are aware that Society members are used to receiving a printed copy of Bluebell News and this is an unprecedented step. It does mean that the Spring edition can be distributed earlier than would otherwise have been the case.

The Spring issue, with the full 36 colour pages and all the content which would have been distributed in the post, is available as a pdf which can be downloaded from the Bluebell Railway's website <https://www.bluebell-railway.com/bluebell-news/>

**PAUL BROMLEY, Plc Communications Director**

## 2. RESIGNATION OF BRPS CHAIRMAN

Message from Graham Aitken

Having reached the age of 70, I have over the past months been reflecting on the ever-increasing amount of time I am spending on Preservation Society business, and that I am finding that it is becoming increasingly challenging to achieve the personal goals I have set for myself.

I have therefore decided that it is time for a change of Chairman and have reluctantly made the decision to resign, which has nothing to do whatsoever with the Covid-19 pandemic.

In my almost four years in office, I would like to think that I have made a positive contribution to the continuing success of the railway, whilst carrying out my duties to the best of my ability. I intend to remain as a volunteer, in the roles that I enjoy, which are: Senior Station Master at Sheffield Park, a Guard and the (unofficial) timetable assistant to the Operations Manager, Chris Knibbs.

I would like to thank all of you who have provided me with so much support over the almost four years of my period of office and I know that I can rely on you to do what is necessary to ensure that our railway not only survives the unprecedented situation we find ourselves in at present, but for it to prosper in the future.

**GRAHAM AITKEN**

Note: BRPS vice chairman Steve Bigg will be acting chairman for now.

## 3. MESSAGE SENT TO SOCIETY COMMITTEE BY ACTING CHAIRMAN STEVE BIGG

By now you will have had the opportunity to reflect upon Graham's resignation as Society Chairman last Friday. I would like to thank him for his leadership and hard work in the role, and from a personal perspective for always fostering a friendly and open working relationship over the almost four years we have worked together. I was sad to learn of his decision, but can understand his reasoning and respect his decision, as I trust you will also. I know he has spent much time reaching it, and that it was made before the full extent of the Covid-19 implications had become clear.

I can confirm that I am willing to assume the role of Acting Chairman with immediate effect to ensure we maintain the continuity that is so important in these difficult times. I sincerely trust that you will lend me your support in this endeavour, and if so, it will be genuinely appreciated.

Looking to the more immediate future I am very clear that we must now focus on the forthcoming months, which as we all know will be a period of immense challenges facing all of us as individuals, as well as all organisations both large and small. The scale and pace of these challenges is, as we are being made aware on a daily basis, quite unprecedented, and

you've been made aware that our Plc Board colleagues have already had to make some difficult decisions at a pace dictated by rapidly escalating developments. My deeply held view is that the number one priority for the Society at this time is to provide total support to our Plc colleagues in any way we can with their endeavours in guiding the Bluebell Railway through the challenges of the months ahead. I am certain I can count on your total support with this aim.

In the light of current events, we must also ensure that routine Society business is reviewed and reprioritised so as to permit full focus on the major issues referred to above. As you know, the decision has already been made to postpone the Society EGM/AGM until further notice, and that the Diamond Jubilee fundraising campaign has also been postponed until the current crisis is over. There can be no doubt that other important Railway-wide decisions will need to be made in the weeks and months ahead. In this connection I have asked BRPS General Secretary Gavin Bennett to investigate the utilisation of telephone conferencing to provide a facility for the Committee to hold remote meetings to deal with our future priority business agendas.

Going forward, and with Gavin's assistance, I will ensure that you are all kept informed of further developments and necessary decisions in what will be a fast-changing scene in the coming weeks and months. In the meanwhile, I send my sincere good wishes to you and your families for your good health in these worrying and challenging times.

With all best wishes,

Steve

**STEVE BIGG, ACTING CHAIRMAN, BRPS**

#### 4. EGM/AGM POSTPONEMENT

Message from Gavin Bennett

In the light of the current Covid-19 crisis, it should not come as any surprise to members that the Trustees have decided to postpone, to a date to be decided, the Extraordinary and Annual General Meetings which were due to be held on Saturday 23 May.

It is an unprecedented decision and certainly not one that is provided for in the rules.

Having carefully considered the options, we have concluded that it would be irresponsible to ask members to assemble at a time when the infection rates are currently predicted to be at their peak.

Moreover, in common with other schools, the Burgess Hill Academy has closed its doors for the foreseeable future so we would be without a venue. We will advise members of a revised date as soon as practicable.

**GAVIN BENNETT General Secretary, BRPS**