



## **CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 1<sup>st</sup> JULY 2023**

I am writing this sitting in the gorgeous heat of Majorca with Mrs C. It is our wedding anniversary on Monday so we have snatched a few days away from the hectic lives that we lead, although I have still managed to read and action both Bluebell and my day job emails whilst out here, but only short spells, I am relaxing and enjoying the time with Mrs C.

### **Saturday**

It was Day 1 of Model Railway Weekend and I was Operating Supervisor. I also had my regular meeting with the Loco owners group discussing updates and aspirations followed by a meeting with Chris Barber and Neil Glaskin which had to be done in the brake van of Neil's train as he was the afternoon guard on the vintage set. This was a bigger train than we would usually run as a vintage, but it looked fabulous. It had the Obo, 100 seater, 3 of the four wheelers and 7598.

The day was busy and we were selling a lot of pie and as per usual I enjoyed a good portion of Steak and Ale pie with veg. All the trains were well loaded and lots of people around enjoying the layouts.

I have to say that we didn't get it right, there was no where near enough layouts at SP and I don't think we communicated enough that the admission ticket (if you weren't travelling) was for SP and HK. The issue we had was we were trying to use the loco works again and although Simon and the team did a great job we are taking valuable work time away from them and the shed isn't big enough – we actually turned away layouts this year. So next year we will probably use the running shed behind Steam Works as in previous years. This is a bigger space and easier for the public to navigate, and we won't disrupt the engineering operations.

Credit to everyone who helped organise it though as it was still a good event, and we did take a good amount of revenue. At this stage of rebuilding the railway the Commercial team are focussed on about learning, improving and developing our events to ensure that we increase visitor numbers year on year. It is part of the overall plan to increase visitor numbers to 250,000 per year. We currently have approximately 160,000 each year, so I'm sure you can see that this is a huge task, but one I feel is achievable with the hard work and enthusiasm of both paid staff and volunteers that I see improving each time I come to the railway.

### **Sunday**

According to feedback, today again was busy, maybe a little quieter than yesterday but still positive and a lovely atmosphere around the place.

The vintage train was being admired and talked about by lots of our visitors which is great and is why we do this.



### **Monday**

It was my youngest daughter's birthday – 15! Don't ask me where that time has gone and as much as I love her she is in those mid teen years now and we all know what that means!

No trains running today but the usual stuff that gets done on a Monday and the analysis of the weekends revenue as well as all the planning for the coming week and weekend.

### **Tuesday**

Trains running again and this Tuesday was better than past Tuesdays. I actually don't have a single Bluebell evening meeting this week, which is almost unheard of, but that was just as well as the day job is keeping me on my toes.

### **Wednesday**

Hump Day Wednesday – I said this last week and I will say it again as it makes me laugh. I am counting down going away on Friday for 4 days to Majorca.

At the Railway there's the final contractual stuff going on for Flying Scotsman's arrival. This is now only 6 weeks away! Time is flying on this and the amount of work involved is huge. Thank you to everyone that is part of the organising team. I know that writing things like evacuation plans and all the protocols and procedures for such a big event isn't very exciting but we have to do it. Thankfully we did it all when it was last here so this is just updating them to current day.

### **Thursday**

I was at the Railway and had my usual morning with C&W then off to SP for a short while as I had to get back to the day job.

All is progressing well in C&W, we are making good progress on Fingall's painting and we are pushing on with the Bicester Mk1, which will be ready for Steamlights and Christmas, this may well be a push and will require a lot of hard work and dedication from those involved, but we will do it. Anyone reading this who is good at metal work or even knows how to overhaul commonwealth bogies then please contact me as we could do with some extra help.

Neil Glaskin was in charge of the shunting today and was rearranging SP. He and Chris Knibbs had come up with a plan for the running shed to show off more of our engines. So 75027, 178 and the Dukedog have come out of OP3 and gone in the shed and there are some other reorganisation of locos happening to appeal to a bigger audience on a regular basis.

### **Friday**

It was a lovely day and I was excited because at 6pm we would be taking off for Majorca!

The railway was busy and there was also a supper train. The weekend ahead also is looking busy with the GA 80% sold and the Wealden Rambler virtually full.



**And finally...**

Can I remind everyone that when working involving height we must be so careful. Before you can work at height you **must** have done the module on HOPS. Then please only use authorised equipment and make sure you have been trained by your departmental manager before doing anything. The HOPS training takes approximately 20 minutes to complete and if you don't have access to a computer, or if you are finding it difficult to navigate HOPS, just ask your departmental manager and they will give you all the support you need, including access to a computer.

It can so easily become an issue and we don't want anyone getting hurt. We must run a safe railway and we must ensure we are all working in a safe manner. If you see something that doesn't look safe; stop and challenge those working and seek advice from a departmental manager.

I don't want to sound like a strict Head Teacher, but this is something we must take so seriously, the consequences from the ORR if we don't are very simple – they can take drastic action which could instantly close our railway if we don't operate in a safe manner.

We have had two incidents in the last year and we don't want anymore. We have made massive strides in ensuring that we are above compliant and we have invested in new equipment, so please everyone, think before you work at height.

Paul Churchman  
Chairman  
9<sup>th</sup> July 2023