



### **CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 5<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2023**

I must start by thanking Neil for doing the update last week, which was really good. I had a lovely holiday but spent some of it selling carriages via phone calls and emails!

We have had a tremendous response to the carriages we advertised for sale, and we have already sold the two Mk1's and we have people viewing the Pullmans this week. All these vehicles will now be going to new homes, where they are needed and where they will be looked after; for us it liberates much needed space and of course the additional cash is very helpful too.

I also need to appeal for some help. As you know, volunteers staff the RMB's, the Kingscote Well-house and the Buffet car at East Grinstead. We really need some more help as these catering outlets are not only vital for our visitor experience but also generate very useful additional income. If you feel like becoming one of the smiling faces serving our visitors in one or more of these venues, then please do contact me.

#### **Saturday**

I flew back to the UK from holiday - and immediately wanted to get back on a plane and go away again (the weather!).

At the railway, it was Peter Rabbit and The Teddy Bears' Picnic today - and the weather was awful. We were actually quite busy (thank goodness for advance sales!) and I would like to say a big thank you to the staff who worked on the event, for managing it all in the rain and for doing everything they could to keep everyone dry and entertained.

#### **Sunday**

Another dreary day, but again the numbers were quite good, and the kids seemed to be enjoying Peter Rabbit and Teddy Bears' Picnic – although I am not totally convinced that the staff were!

I was at the Railway so I could meet the chairman of the Swindon & Cricklade Railway and a colleague of his, as they were coming to view 4824 which we have up for sale... and I'm pleased to say they have bought it.

Obviously, I took the opportunity of enjoying a Bessemer lunch, where of course I had the pie. Delicious, as always; I missed the pie whilst away!

#### **Monday**

It was my birthday and I had chartered the Wealden Rambler for the day and had invited friends on board to enjoy some food and the ride. However, the day started in a somewhat unplanned way, with me having to jump in the car and go to Horsted Keynes, where a problem had been discovered with Car 64 which could have resulted in its being withdrawn. I was supposed to be coming down on the coach I had organised with family and friends!



Luckily our new Professional Advisor to Rolling Stock was attending my birthday event, so we made an unscheduled stop at Horsted on the first trip, and he jumped off to go and have a look and discuss with the team. Thankfully, it was decided we could still operate the vehicle, but with a speed restriction; meanwhile we will plan and undertake some work to resolve the problem.

The rest of the day was very enjoyable and thank you to everyone who was working on the train we chartered.

The railway was busy and we had a day of lovely weather.

### **Tuesday**

Back to more unsettled weather again, but the railway was busy. It was one of those good days where everything just ticked along nicely.

### **Wednesday**

Again a busy day and people were out spending their money in the shop and in Catering which was of course very welcome.

The finishing touches were being put together for Peppa Pig at the weekend (I had suggested we did breakfast with Peppa or bacon rolls with Peppa but was told by the Commercial Team this was inappropriate!)

### **Thursday**

I did not attend the Railway today as I would usually do on a Thursday. Instead, I was meeting our President at his residence in Surrey together with someone he knows very well and who may be able to assist the Railway by supporting us as we start to look at our long-term structure. It is evident that what we currently have doesn't work: there are too many 'walls' and we also can't fill all the various positions we have with all the separate Boards.

So, we need to start the process of looking at what will best suit our business needs. A better structure would be simple, efficient, productive, and safe, doing what we need it to, as well as reducing the number of different roles we currently have. This process will likely take some time; of course, we will consult everyone as we work through the options and, ultimately, it will be down to the membership to vote on the final proposal when we arrive at one.

Back at the Railway, shunting was underway at Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes. The Pullmans had had their six-monthly maintenance and safety checks and were being put back together ready for the weekend.

Passenger numbers were again good and there was a fair loading on the Wealden Rambler.



### **Friday**

Another busy day at the Railway both passenger-wise and with plenty of workers around the place too, with departments gearing-up for Peppa Pig this weekend.

We are also very nearly ready to sign-off and inaugurate the new sleeping car accommodation at Sheffield Park. Thank you to everyone that has worked on this project and especially John Hutchins who has been leading things. Once again, we shall have vital accommodation for people who travel some distance to work on the railway. We would love to rebuild the Saturday night social element too, which sadly declined and was lost while the full amount of sleeping accommodation wasn't available.

(What will happen to the cottage we are currently using for overnight accommodation I hear you all ask! Well, we will be refurbishing it and trying it out as an AirBnB rental to see if this is worth doing.)

### **And finally...**

As I have already mentioned, we have made some more disposals, and many of you may have seen the article in *Trackside* quoting me. This work is not yet done and there is more we will need to dispose of. As I have said previously, we simply don't have the capacity and resources – neither people nor the finance - to restore everything we currently have. As well as the purely practical consideration, it is not morally right we keep items for them to rot into oblivion if there are other railways or organisations who are able to resource restoration. We must be realistic about what we can look after, and we also need the space. So, we must focus on caring for what we need for our operation, so that it may continue to have a useful life with us and isn't again consigned to a back road to rot.

Paul Churchman  
Chairman  
14<sup>th</sup> August 2023