



Chairman's Update Week Commencing Feb 6th 2023

Monday

The responses I have had from people offering help, and the strong feelings in favour of the changes we have to make, has been overwhelming and has made me remember just how good that Bluebell camaraderie is. Thank you to everyone and please keep the offers coming, it is truly brilliant.

A very sad day in Bluebell history as we learned that Martin Miller, Operations Manager from 1991-1995, had passed away after a battle with cancer. Martin was an inspiration to many and his leadership and passion, working along with then Commercial Director, Neil Cameron, and Catering/Commercial Manager, Mike Sharland, transformed the Bluebell into a serious attraction to visit. For me personally, Martin taught me how to engage with people and lead teams. He was never shy to tell someone what he thought but you always respected him, and he was never personal just factual. Not only was he a railwayman, he was also a businessman and he knew how to make things work.

Tuesday

As we do every day, myself and the Directors and Trustees exchanged emails throughout the day, liaising with various staff members and with many others to keep the railway ticking along. At the moment the email traffic is increased owing to our current situation, and I know most of us end up spending probably at least an hour a day just dealing with them.

The Vaux End project is continuing apace and what an amazing job our Infrastructure team do. They are truly brilliant - and much of what they do is not fully appreciated by all, as it tends to happen out of sight, away from our stations. Within this week, the railway will once again be 'in one piece' although there is still plenty to be done before passenger trains can run over the re-laid section.

Wednesday

Tom Lawson and the carriage cleaning team are in their annual deep clean of the running carriages. These guys come in early morning and clear up rubbish, pick up food from behind seats and deal with all sorts of nasty things, but Tom and the team do it day in and day out – thank you all of you. Carriage presentation is key to our image.

Neil Glaskin attended the Managers' meeting and then both he and I attended the Commercial Meeting. Afterwards, we met the new chefs who joined us in January, along with the management of the Catering Dept to talk about this year's food offerings, plus changes and improvements. From Saturday we will take the making of sandwiches we sell in-house again (I remember doing that on a Saturday morning in the kitchen 30 years ago!)



Thursday

21246 – MK1 BCK (oh, a dreaded MK1 I hear you say!) - is currently in the paint shop having some attention to the bodywork, where some cracks have appeared and to refresh the paintwork. In just over a week we will finally move Car 54 to the paint shop for a 12 week programme which will bring this amazing restoration to its full glory. Our resident painter, Dave, has never done a Pullman before, and although his work is brilliant we are going to get him some support. Once 54 is done, we have a programme of refreshing the running fleet throughout the year as we must keep our carriages looking their very best. This is a key aspect of the Bluebell 'image' which our customers have come to expect – and which helps us justify the prices we want to charge. A poorly-presented product will put off our customers and they won't want to pay.

Friday

I am having a weekend away in Newcastle with my wife (who I think has forgotten what I look like!) As always, there is a hive of activity, with emails continuing to flow. The leadership team are reviewing our position on a daily basis to establish the true picture, and to set the immediate direction - but also to work-out our long term survival plan.

We start running again from tomorrow and we have the ice-rink and a daily Sheffield Park – Horsted Keynes service is running next week, for the local schools' half-term. We are very hopeful it will be busy, like last year.

I will be Signaller and Operating Supervisor at Sheffield Park on Monday – so any of you around the railway please do come and say hello.