



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 8th JULY 2023

I am back in the UK and I rather wish I wasn't, I am so done with this unpredictable weather. At the railway it also has an impact, where there's often a weather-induced effect on revenue. However, as a lot of bookings are now made online and in advance, this yields the benefit of bringing those pre-paid visitors to the railway irrespective of the weather on the day. Those who are in the 'just turn-up' category are more likely to think of something else to do, such as head for the seaside if it is hot.

Saturday

I was sitting in the 36-degree heat in Majorca. Meanwhile, back at the railway things seemed to be ticking along quite well with quite good visitor numbers. We had a Golden Arrow breakfast train and a Wealden Rambler which both had very good loadings.

Sunday

Another good day and we were running the two train service along with a GA lunch - which again had a good number of passengers on board.

The weekends that go with nothing exceptional to report are usually the best.

Monday

It was another day of 36 degrees in Majorca. I was loving it, and so was Mrs C, even though she is still in her 'boot' after breaking her ankle. In the evening we went to a very nice restaurant and enjoyed a show of fire eaters, dancers plus a drag queen who did a song and dance performance, which had Mrs C joining in the dancing and doing the splits!

At the Railway, there was no public running, but the '09' was out on the line between Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes with a film crew doing a 'recce' for a job we have coming up. There was also a shunt.

Tuesday

Public trains were running again after the day of respite. Loadings were reasonable but we are into the start of school holidays with private schools having broken up, so this is to be expected (and welcomed).

Unfortunately, it was time for me to leave the 38 degree heat in Majorca, returning home on a late evening flight.

Wednesday

It really was Hump Day Wednesday for me, waking up with the holiday blues and diving straight back into the day job (although throughout the holiday, both Mrs C and I had spent an hour a day doing work... for me, that was my day job plus Bluebell; and, for she, her day job plus pubs!)



At the railway, it was a good day for visitor numbers and the evening supper train was fairly well loaded too.

Thursday

I was at Horsted Keynes for 9am, firstly doing some 'day job' work for an hour, followed by my usual catch-up with the C&W team, to go through weekly progress and the longer-term plans, plus any other issues that had arisen.

Progress on the Bicester Mk1 continues, also on Car 54; the north end east side windows are now out of 5034 (a 'disabled' Mk1). C&W had got slightly ahead with scheduled maintenance tasks, which had allowed Rowan and the team to focus on the Bicester Mk1 bogie overhauls.

Then it was off to Sheffield Park for a catch-up with Neil Glaskin, Lisa Boyle and Chris Knibbs, plus a meeting about Steamworks.

After my meeting with Neil and Lisa I decided I needed lunch, so Neil and I wandered off to the buffet, where I spotted pasta Bolognese and decided I would try that. Literally everyone (including the catering staff) asked me why I wasn't eating the pie! Pie did look just as good as it always does of course, but I couldn't have anything too heavy as I had a gym session at 5pm!

After lunch was done, it was time for the meeting about Steamworks with Malcom Johnson, museum curator; Graham Aitken, senior station master at Sheffield Park; Chris Knibbs; John Hutchins, loco yard foreman; Lisa, Neil, and me. Steamworks has never really been given proper ownership, but Malcolm has now kindly agreed to take it within the museum portfolio. Going forward, and working with station staff, loco dept and Lisa, we will ensure that we don't have displays out of action, that everything is kept clean, and that stewards are available for Steamworks all the time we are open to the public. Opening and closing of the facility will also be properly managed. We also discussed how we can further enhance things, especially now we have more engines on display. Overall, an excellent and very positive meeting.

I also chatted with two of our fantastic education guides. These guys take visiting school parties round the railway, making sure they see everything they need to. They take their parties in the signal box, to have a look on the footplate, to see where the guard sits and answer questions as they go. The children on these organised school visits will not only go home and tell their parents - and they may well return - but they are also future visitors and potential volunteers when they are older. Our education guides are further examples of those unsung heroes who do important work at the railway, and which we should all recognise and appreciate.



Friday

What a dismal day in terms of weather. Shall we just leave it there?!

We operated a two-departure service today, and the footplate experience was also running, plus there was a Murder Mystery Golden Arrow this evening. So it was another busy day, which demonstrated that revenue from premium offerings is still strong.

And finally...

I am not going to make any demands, lectures or appeals this week (pauses for gasps!)

But I just want to say thank you to *all* of you for everything that you do: for the time you give up, for going that extra mile, as everyone (paid and volunteer) does all the time. We have a fantastic railway and please remember to go and enjoy it as a passenger from time to time, to see what our passengers see - it is truly amazing. I am immensely proud to be a part of the Bluebell, and so should all of you be.

Paul Churchman
Chairman
15th July 2023