



## **CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 10<sup>th</sup> JUN 2023**

I simply don't know where the time goes! The weeks are shooting by and so much is going on, and it is mainly all good – although, as ever in life, there are things which aren't quite so good.

### **Saturday**

Today was Day 1 of 'Bluebell on Parade' and I was there bright and early, as I was Operating Supervisor. Everything was set up and ready, and everyone I spoke to was excited for the day.

We had a great timetable with 'Fenchurch' sandwiched between the GN saloon and the OBO - which was having its first day back in traffic - running a shuttle between Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes. As well as the main service sets, we also had the '09' running shuttles between E Grinstead and Kingscote (this service should have been worked by the '73' but due to an ongoing issue with the air system the 'ED' was not available).

I had my youngest daughter with me, and she and I judged the cleanest engine award for the day - which went to 'Fenchurch'.

I went to Horsted Keynes for a meeting with the S&T, and I wanted to drop-in and see the C&W team as well.

The day was well-attended, and all went to plan including the two hour shunt I had to do at SP in the afternoon, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

The exhibits put on by various groups around the railway were all superb and everyone seemed to be having a great time – staff and visitors. The signal box visits and S&T demonstrations at Horsted Keynes were excellent and were particularly popular too.

### **Sunday**

Day 2 of 'Bluebell on Parade' and it was another good day but, perhaps owing to the heat, things were much quieter than they had been on Saturday. Nonetheless, the day again went very well, and everyone should be proud of what we delivered, showing our visitors more of what we do, including 'behind the scenes'.

The whole weekend was a big success and, with no significant additional costs, we were able to put on an excellent event which pushed our revenue far higher than a normal weekend, despite the heat.

So, to everyone that participated: thank you so much, once again you showed Bluebell at its best.



### **Monday**

A quiet day at the railway as no trains were running, but the usual hive of activity in preparing for this week's operations and the ongoing day to day. Autumn planning is to the fore now, and – yes – Christmas!

I was split between Bluebell and day job work mode, with a bit of personal fitness action too. I had a meeting at 10 o'clock with a guy who is going to do podcasts for us, and then I had my first session with a Personal Trainer. Apparently, I need to strengthen the core muscles around my back, which I have been told are not much helped by me spinning like a crazy hamster for 30 minutes on the cross trainer three times a week!

### **Tuesday**

Trains were running once more, but with disappointing loadings. Taking this into account, we are coming to the view that we will be knocking Tuesday running on the head for next year.

My day was a mixture of day job and pub meetings as well as about 60 minutes of Bluebell calls and emails.

### **Wednesday**

Another day another dollar, to coin a phrase(!). The visitor numbers seemed to be improving, perhaps helped by the sun coming out.

Work is progressing on the sleeping cars at Sheffield Park and hopefully we will get these commissioned very soon. This will be a tremendous help in providing accommodation for volunteers who want to spend a weekend at the railway, but who live a good distance away.

During the school holidays we are going to open the Bessemer Arms on Saturday evenings from 22<sup>nd</sup> July until the end of August. Many of you will recall that back in the 90's the Bessemer was very busy with staff on a Saturday evening, and we hope it will be so again. We will also advertise this to all the local glamping sites who we hope will appreciate a having pub nearby for a summer evening outing.

### **Thursday**

A busy day for me, starting at Horsted Keynes for my weekly C&W meeting with the team, where we went through several things. As is usual with projects involving old carriages, plans must change because you come across the next unforeseen challenge! Still, we have a fantastic team, and such challenges are faced head-on.

I then had to go back to work, returning to the railway for 6.30pm for the Trustees meeting. Sadly, I was delayed by the day job, and didn't arrive until at 7pm. Thankfully, Roy had opened the meeting and time was not wasted awaiting my arrival.



It was great to see new faces around the table as we welcomed newly elected Trustees Annette, Howard, and Keith. Within the Trustee group all existing roles remain the same and Annette is going to pick up Volunteer Resources and Welfare, Howard will pick up Museum – something we have been lacking - and Keith is going to do strategic work within C&W, looking at long term planning, viability, and delivery.

We had a good meeting, and I am excited we have a bigger team which allows us to be more ambitious for the things we can achieve in the coming year.

### **Friday**

I must say I feel knackered this week! I have had to drive a coach too many times as we are very busy (a good thing!), and it's summer. As ever, I'm busy with Bluebell activity too but I'm having a day off tomorrow. Little did I know I would end up at work all night, so my 'day off' was a bit of a glaze.

At the Railway, all was good; the trains ran OK, plus there was a supper train which was well filled. Everyone is now gearing up for Model Railway Weekend on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> July, but before that we have Reptile Day on the 24<sup>th</sup>. At least we don't need to do a lot of preparation for that, other than making sure the special visitors don't eat anyone, or escape!

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

Bluebell on Parade proved once again how we can put on a good show. We can all be very proud of what we have and what we do. When you look at the standard of presentation of our locos and rolling stock compared to many other railways, we are up there at the top.

It is sometimes easy to criticise - and I can be as bad as the next person for that - but I am driven by wanting everything to be 'right'. We need to begin reflecting on the fact we are struggling to hold our own on what we have, yet still having so much that has never been restored. I have said before: we are going to have to make some very tough choices - and imminently, as we have a space issue - as we simply do not have the resources (time, money or people) to undertake every restoration project. In all three key engineering functions, we are just managing to keep on top of routine maintenance, and we do not need to give ourselves unnecessary workloads. We have a diverse loco and rolling stock fleet, and we must protect what works. Being realistic, we must face letting go what we will never achieve.

Paul Churchman  
Chairman  
19<sup>th</sup> June 2023