



## **CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 11<sup>th</sup> MAR 2023**

You will all be pleased to hear that we have now recruited several people to work on the Golden Arrow, so you don't have to endure me going on about it this week! A big thankyou to everyone that has come forward.

### **Saturday**

Day 2 of the HRA Conference in Birmingham and another informative session, with presentations on social media, photography for marketing, and mental health awareness. In the evening was the HRA Awards dinner and we had a Bluebell table with some of the people who had worked on our two shortlisted entries - which were Fenchurch in the Coiley Award for Steam Locomotive Engineering, and the SR Wagon No.12058 for the Morgan Award for Rolling Stock Preservation. We achieved runner-up in both categories. Well done to everyone involved - we can be justifiably proud that the high level of workmanship produced time and time again at the Bluebell Railway is recognised at a national level .

### **Sunday**

Mrs C was glad to have me home. It was short-lived though, as I was at Sheffield Park in the morning doing an interview with PBS America (a news channel which you can find on platforms like Sky), who are doing a piece on heritage railways in the UK and the twin challenges we face, of rising costs and of maintaining visitor numbers as the cost of living crisis impacts disposable income.

The Railway was rather quiet and Saturday had been the same. It is often like this in mid-March as everyone is gearing-up for Easter.

### **Monday**

Preparations have started today for the filming that will be taking place over two weeks, starting Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March. This continues to require us to do much work, but the revenue it will generate for the Railway is enormous and will go a long way towards helping us recover (if we can just get another three like this, we will be fine!).

### **Tuesday**

As they do every day, our full time and volunteer staff are working away, in workshops, Catering, the shop, Commercial, Infrastructure and Operations. We are thankful for those regular and much needed volunteers who are very happy turning up to work at the railway even when we aren't running trains.

I was at work but met with a Bluebell member who has come forward offering to assist on a strategic and business level. This was a worthwhile meeting and discussions are now moving forward with Lisa and with Steve Trigg.



### **Wednesday**

This week, the volume of emails and Bluebell-related matters to be dealt with has sometimes seemed more onerous than the day job (it felt like it should have been Friday already, but it was only Wednesday!). Neil Glaskin felt the same, joking that his day job was getting in the way of his many Bluebell roles!

### **Thursday**

Another afternoon at SP, this time to spend time with Lisa on the business side of the railway, with Chris Knibbs in relation to some new ideas we have for this year and Christmas, and with Simon Blaker and Andy Sabin in relation to how we are doing in the Loco Works.

Lisa met with the Chairman of West Sussex County Council to see whether they might be able to support us with grants and/or any other resources that might be available.

Then it was the Society Board meeting at 6.30. This lasted for two hours, and a number of strategic matters were covered, relating to the Western Extension Project, to Preservation Standards, and to the need to review our corporate structures later this year. I managed to make it home to the pub for last orders!

### **Friday**

Back at work for me, but as always with one eye on Bluebell emails. At the Railway, work was being completed on the track renewals. All the new work has now been tamped and the line is back under normal operation, so we are on-schedule to resume full line working from the beginning of April.

Although it may seem not so much has happened this week, it most certainly has. Further events have been launched on the website, with tickets for the Dinosaur weekend (to be held in early April) and a number of other events released for sale.

The Staff Forum is being held on Saturday, which I will report on in the update next week. I hope you all have a lovely weekend.

Paul Churchman  
Chairman  
18<sup>th</sup> March 2023