



## **CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 14<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2023**

So, I must apologise for there being no update last week, I simply ran out of time as I had a very busy week in the day job and running pubs!

I want to thank everyone again for a fantastic Giants of Steam event – it surpassed everyone's expectations and the feedback I had from other railways and the press was amazing.

I did mention a few weeks ago about holding a staff party in November. Unfortunately, owing to the fact that Neil and I have been so busy, we simply haven't had time to organise it. It would anyway be quite a challenge to squeeze this in within the run-up to Christmas, what with Santa and Steam Lights preparations underway. So, we will defer this to a time in early Feb when things are quieter and it will give us all something to look forward to after the Christmas blues!

### **Saturday**

Second day of 'Giants' and wow – the number of people, the atmosphere, it was something truly amazing. The on-board catering of breakfasts and pie and mash was incredibly popular. Lots of comments about how good it was, plus we had a keg of Harvey's on board – never a bad thing.

Everyone can be justifiably proud of the show we put on.

### **Sunday**

Day 3 of Giants and once again an amazing day. The double-headed trains were a resounding success and brought a lot of attention.

Revenue for the weekend across the entire business surpassed £120k which was £25k up on last year, and a record for this event.

Considering 'all we did' was run a simple basic event but with some fantastic engines, this shows again that our strategy of keeping things simple but making them attractive is paying off.

I will admit the ice rink wasn't the sell-out phenomenon that I was hoping for, and we won't repeat this next year, but we had to try. Not everything will be a success, but if we don't try these things we will never know.

### **Monday**

No trains but we did have a photographic charter organised by Jon Bowers which was a great success.

The ice rink was open but it not very busy.



For me it was the beginning of a very busy week at work, and what would turn into a week of frustration at the Railway.

### **Tuesday**

No trains again but a shunt at Sheffield Park and Horsted Keynes and again a rather 'slushy' uptake on the ice rink!

### **Wednesday**

Trains were running today but unfortunately, we had a problem. The observation car had sustained flats over the weekend and was going to require the wheels to come out to be turned (that is machined to remove the flat spots to restore them to being circular once more... which is both costly and reduces the life of the tyres somewhat). This was definitely not what we needed! Next, a broken spring on RBR 1674 resulted in its immediate withdrawal from traffic. Withdrawal was scheduled for the end of the month anyway, but it was now unsafe to operate so, with five Wealden Rambler/Supper trains left, Neil, Megan and Lisa had to come up with plan B.

The railway was quite busy today which was of course a good thing.

### **Thursday**

I didn't have my usual meeting at C&W for two reasons. Firstly, I needed to be at work first thing; secondly, the team needed to crack-on with getting the Obo into the works and getting the wheels out. Rowan (being a superstar) had pulled some favours and had got a slot for the wheels to be turned - but they need to go to the machinist on Monday. Fortunately, the wheels will be back to have the Obo ready for Santas (phew!).

I got to Sheffield Park for about 5.30pm as we had a Society Board meeting at 6.30. This was a good meeting with some good debate. It was identified which of the trustees fall due for re-election and it appears that, even though I am only in year two of a three-year term, and because of my six months' first term before we became a Ltd company, I have to stand for re-election as well.

### **Friday**

Trains were running again and even though we are now approaching the lull before the rush of steamlights and Christmas, we still saw good loadings on both services.

There is much effort going into the setting-up of all our festive programme with Julia and the team working hard and doing a fantastic job.

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

Weeks like this when things break and go wrong are disheartening but we have to be resilient and remember we are achieving so much at the moment. Our continuing challenge is finance and ensuring we become profitable. During September we slipped to a year to date loss of £200k, but



with Giants in October and the onset of the Christmas season I remain confident we can end the year hitting our forecast ca. £150k loss.

Paul Churchman  
Chairman  
24<sup>th</sup> October 2023