



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 17th JUN 2023

I am rather late in doing this week's update as I had a weekend of birthday parties and, inevitably, a Bluebell meeting, plus work has been very busy at the start of this week. My apologies!

Saturday

A normal day at the Railway and quite busy which is good. Lots of activity around the place and people still talking about the success of Bluebell on Parade weekend.

I was not there I was looking after Mrs C with her fractured ankle.

Sunday

Another good day for revenue and passenger numbers. We seemed to get through the day without any issues which is always good, especially when dealing with vintage assets such as ours.

Monday

The start of another week, and the final touches were being done for model railway weekend on the 1st and 2nd July. There was also a meeting of the Safety Review Group at Sheffield Park. Owing to work commitments I was unable to attend OSG, but thankfully it was a fairly low-key event as we had not had any incidents needing investigation.

Tuesday

Trains were running again today, but sadly another disappointing Tuesday. We need to think about focusing on school traffic for next year as this has clearly declined in 2023.

Around the railway the unsung heroes of the week continued with their work on Infrastructure, in C&W, in the Loco, in S&T and in administration.

Wednesday

A better day for revenue, busier and - despite my pessimism - as things stand so far this year, we are 'up' on 2022. Once we pass the 6-month point, we will reveal how we have done in the first quarter of the year. What we do know is that we are up - some weeks by as much as 20%. Obviously, this is good news, especially as we are managing our costs very well, but we do have some major expenditure to deal with in the coming three years.

Thursday

I didn't get back from the Midlands until 0300 this morning as I had been working all week in our Tamworth business, which I oversee. Then I was up again at 0730 as I had a gym session.

It was a busy day, and I didn't get to the Bluebell either as I had so much on with the day job. Then I had to be in Swindon by 4pm for a charity dinner in aid of McMillan hosted by Greene King. For all



the football fans among you, Neil “Razor” Ruddock was the after-dinner speaker, and he was brilliant.

Back at the railway there was the usual Thursday shunt and, as well as the regular service, there was a ‘Wealden Rambler.’ All had good loadings. So, although it was hot, this clearly wasn’t having an adverse effect on our trade.

Friday

The last-minute touches for the weekend as always. Again, visitor numbers were good, but we are seeing a reluctance to spend in the shop. However, when we do sell, it seems to be high value items.

The weather was getting hotter still, and I had a much-delayed train journey home from Swindon owing to GWR cancelling trains.

And finally...

We are heading in the right direction, with everything we are doing yielding positive results. As interest rates seem likely to climb further though, we must remember that our current strong position can change as quickly as the wind!

With the economic situation firmly in mind, we are already looking at the commercial plan for 2024 and focusing on how to make it as resilient as possible to economic volatility. We need to ensure we continue to be seen as an attraction which gives great value for money.

Paul Churchman
Chairman
28th June 2023