



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 18th FEB 2023

I hope that you have all had an enjoyable week, mine has been as fast-paced as ever!

So, last week I made an appeal for people to come forward to work on the Golden Arrow (and to be paid!). Well I am pleased to say that I have received one offer of help so far... so *please* help me achieve my target of 10-15 - just another 9 offers would make me happy. If you can help, then email me: Paul.churchman@bluebell-railway.com

Saturday

The final weekend of half-term. Trains were well-loaded and the ice rink was busy too. It was a good day and everything ran nice and smoothly.

Sunday

The ice rink was again busy, and the trains had reasonable loading.

What has been apparent this week is no one has been bothered that we were only running to Horsted Keynes, it did not put anyone off. Unlike last year, where the two Sussex counties were split, this year we had only one week of half term, so our revenue overall has been lower, but at first glance we have probably made as much money if not more than last year. This was a consequence of only running to Horsted - and with using Fenchurch! Definite lessons to be learnt here for quieter periods.

Now we revert to weekend running until Easter.

Monday

A full day of Bluebell for me.

I started in C&W in the morning, spending some time with the team, also talking to Rowan and examining Car 54, where preparations were being made to drop the body onto its bogies and to move into the paint shop.

Then to Sheffield Park for a meeting with Lisa and Neil, and then a Catering meeting to review product, pricing, offering and staffing.

Then it was Safety Review Group (for those who don't know, this is the Group that advises the PLC on adherence to our SMS, deals with risk management and the overall safety assurance).

A busy day - and we got a lot done – but Car 54 is still not in the paint shop!



Tuesday

Just like last week, it was back to work today, although at times with emails and calls I did wonder where I was – Sheffield Park or Heathrow?! Still, there is a lot going on and stuff needs to be dealt with promptly.

The Observation Car is now in 'E' Road, and going up on jacks so we can confirm the brake-rigging design needed to allow this wonderful carriage back into traffic.

Wednesday

The weekly Commercial meeting was held at Sheffield Park and the work continues refining our offering for the year, and adapting things as we see increased or decreased demand for services. I have to take my hat off to the team for the way they are reacting to the ever-changing environment.

I have had a few moans about the delays in responses to email and phone calls to Customer Services. Just to put the record straight on this, last week we installed a brand-new phone system which is quite sophisticated; we had to make this change as the old system was unreliable and would anyway not work with upcoming changes to the BT infrastructure. In addition, we have had several cyber-security issues since Christmas which, happily, the IT team have dealt with really well but that also caused interruptions to server access. So, if I could appeal to those of you go straight to social media to criticise, please remember we have a very small team and they have to deal with a lot. If anyone feels they could help with Customer Services, please drop me an email and I will put you in touch.

Thursday

Another day of meetings at Sheffield Park. Another session with Lisa and Neil to go through outputs from the Commercial meeting. Then it was the Board meeting at 4pm. This was productive, and we spent a lot of time on finance, as we should.

The auditors arrive next Monday to start the year-end audit for 2022. Once this is complete, we will be able to say what was the position for last year with absolute certainty. I am hopeful that, although not good, it may be a little better than we thought.

We focused as well on the 2023 forecast, taking into account all the actions we are taking. It is still a work in progress and we have a way to go yet, but I am confident that with the continued efforts of everyone this will improve. What I can tell you is we will still lose money this year, just hopefully an amount that is manageable and on a path to break-even in 2024/25.

Friday

The film crew who had our carriages in Hull last week have been on-site at Horsted today doing a survey for when they come and film in March. This will bring much needed revenue for the Railway which is going to help us a lot. I have to give credit to Jon Beardmore, Chris Knibbs, Rowan Millard and Matt Crawford for the tireless effort they are putting into this project.



As ever, this was another fast-paced week in the life of Bluebell. The resilience of our people is phenomenal - but it is often the few that do the most (I mean the *few hundred*), but that is out of a Society membership of 10,000. If any (more) of you have time to spare, then I encourage you to get involved!

Have a lovely weekend everyone and I will communicate again next week.

Paul Churchman
Chairman
24th February 2023