



## **CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 24<sup>th</sup> JUN 2023**

I am not totally convinced I understand the weather anymore. The British weather is renowned for its unreliability in the summer, but I am honestly expecting the forecasters to say heatwave this week and snow the next!

### **Saturday**

It was hot. But interestingly we were busier than we thought we would be, given the heat. These things aren't easy to explain.

We had to bring the '09' into use because the '01' was at the Spa Valley and Fenchurch was in the Isle of Wight. Both were absent because of reciprocal agreements, but we had not anticipated the '73' would be out of traffic. Unfortunately, the previously reported small issue with the '73's air system was still unresolved, pending the arrival of a vital spare part. Still, there seemed to be quite a few people who wanted to see the '09' hauling trains, so not everyone was disappointed!

### **Sunday**

It was much quieter today – on this occasion it would seem the heat did send people to the beach rather than to the railway. I was at Roy Watts' 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party and I must admit it was very warm (though, happily I was sat under the gazebo and with a plentiful supply of cold beer).

The '09' was out again and doing a sterling job, with the added bonus that it can't start lineside fires!

### **Monday**

When I say not a lot was going on today, there obviously was - but just not *operationally*. The usual activities of those who are there every Monday go on, in C&W, in Loco, in S&T, Infrastructure, Commercial and Marketing, in Operations, and in Catering (making those all-important pies ready for the weekend!) - and indeed in any other group I have forgotten.

### **Tuesday**

Trains were running again today, and it was a slightly better than average Tuesday. In the loco works there is a sense of excitement as Sir Archibald Sinclair is now starting to look like a locomotive again. We are pushing hard to have her back in traffic by the end of the year.

### **Wednesday**

Hump Day Wednesday – that lethargic middle of the week day - it is equidistant and farthest from the weekend in both directions! For me, I was dashing around in the Midlands and thankfully was by now on my way home after spending two days up there.

On the Railway, things were ticking along with the final checklists for the weekends Model Railway event being gone over.



## Thursday

I was at the Railway and had my usual morning with C&W and, with the help of new Trustee Keith Leppard, we had a constructive meeting focused on developing our longer term strategy in C&W, as well as reviewing and implementing spreadsheets designed to aid with workshop loading, productivity and output.

We have done very well this year in C&W in getting so many vehicles back into traffic and next year looks like another year in which we will be outshopping vehicles.

I headed off to Sheffield Park for lunch and a quick catch up with Lisa ahead of the managers' meeting, followed later-on by the Board meeting. For lunch I sampled the beef and mushroom pie in The Bessemer, and it was amazing as always. I also witnessed pies being made ready for the weekend (some of you may have noticed, I have a thing about those pies!)

The managers' meeting is something we do regularly, allowing department managers to address the Board as a collective, to discuss areas of concern as well as looking at new ideas. Most importantly the Board can update them on where we are and on where we need to be heading. I felt it was a positive meeting.

Then on to the actual Board meeting, which started slightly late as there was a walk around of the site, to review some Infrastructure issues. It was a good meeting and, although it went on slightly longer than I might have wanted, we did have a lot to discuss.

We will be delaying the plc AGM as we have not yet signed-off the 2022 accounts, but we hope to conclude that soon and the notices for the AGM will then be issued.

On the finance front, we remain in a strong cash position. In the first four months we have lost a significant amount of money, but that is always the case with Bluebell as revenue is very low when we are not running trains - whilst the overheads do not go away. Nonetheless, I remain hopeful that we will hit our target loss of £200-300k at year end, and while this doesn't appear to be something we should be really excited about, it represents a significant improvement compared to how things looked at the start of the year.

The Board discussed a lot around Infrastructure and costs and priorities. There were also lengthy discussions on Safety and how we must continue to monitor, audit and improve. To this end, *please* would everyone complete the Working at Height training module on HOPS. Even if you don't perceive you ever do work at height, I can assure you that everyone at the Bluebell Railway sooner or later will definitely do so!



### **Friday**

The model railway layouts were being set up and the stallholders were preparing their sales stands too. Advance sales for this event have been very strong and we were very excited at the prospect of a great weekend - hopefully with decent weather too.

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

A mention for HOPS ('Heritage Operations Processing System,' to explain the acronym). HOPS is the system we have chosen to adopt for managing all aspects of scheduling, people and safety management across the whole railway. For it to be successful, it is vitally important that *everyone* who works on the railway is registered on the HOPS database - and by now most of you are, and the system is successfully operating across a broad swathe of railway admin. To address the few who are not yet registered, and to add weight to the message, the Board has decreed that anyone who is not registered on HOPS as of 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023, will be prohibited from working on the railway in any capacity until such time as they are registered. Everyone should please understand this should not be seen as a draconian or provocative action but is intended to emphasise the seriousness of this requirement. HOPS is the tool we have chosen to ensure we run a railway that is safe and compliant, and it cannot be fully effective unless everyone is registered. I'm sure not everyone will perceive this necessity, but I'm afraid the world has changed - and we must change with it.

Paul Churchman  
Chairman  
3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023