



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE – WEEK COMMENCING SAT 25th FEB 2023

Another week has passed-by and here we are again with my weekly blurb!

Last week I appealed again for help on the Golden Arrow but, to my amazement, still nobody has come forward. I'm afraid I won't shut up until we've recruited 10 people to these roles – so, until we do, I will start each weekly update with this appeal, and I will make it cheesier and cheesier until we get to 10. So don't let this go on and on, making things painful!! Please come forward and help; we are even willing to pay you (and it's more than minimum wage too). So, you know the drill: If you can help, then email me: Paul.churchman@bluebell-railway.com

Saturday

We are running at weekends on a regular basis now, and it was a good day for late February. It was also pleasing to see volunteers in great numbers, undertaking routine maintenance work across the Railway, capitalising on the fact this is the quietest time of year.

Sunday

The last running day of February... thank goodness next weekend it will be March and the evenings are getting longer. Today again saw an acceptable amount of trade for the time of year, which is a promising sign looking forward to the rest of the year.

Monday

The P-Way gang has moved to the north end of the tunnel and lifted the track there to deal with the unstable ground and clay which has given problems over many years. The formation was scraped out, membrane and drainage put in, and the track has been relaid. The Infrastructure team we have are fantastic, and their standards are as good if not better than Network Rail; plus, the speed and professionalism with which Matt and his team do their stuff is amazing.

Together with Neil Glaskin, I met with representatives from a company that has a potentially very exciting commercial proposition for the Railway, and which could generate us a lot of additional income. I will elaborate more on this as and when we get a deal across the line.

The audit for the year ended 31st December 2022 started today and Steve Trigg was on site to welcome the auditors, who we expect to with us for a week.



Track removed north of Sharpthorne Tunnel.

[Photo: Courtesy of Mike Hopps]

Tuesday

Lisa Boyle and Chriss Knibbs hosted managers/directors from four other heritage railways: the Kent and East Sussex, Isle of Wight, Spa Valley and Swanage (the Mid-Hants should have been there but were unable to attend on this occasion). The meeting was organised to discuss the challenges we all face and what we might do as a collective to help survive. It was also a good arena in which to share general ideas, to discuss problems and to look forward to what we thought this year may hold for us. We shall be repeating these meetings every two months.

The financial audit is in full-flow and as always with these things (I am about to start this in the day job), the emails are coming thick and fast with questions and also requests for verification - such as 'can you prove that 323 "Bluebell" actually exists'(!). Auditors must have their proof, and in some cases that means actually seeing and touching the asset.



Wednesday

Today was the managers' meeting and the commercial meeting. I haven't been to the railway this week as my day job has kept me busy - I am in Staffordshire - plus I have 'man-flu'! I shall of course receive the minutes of both meetings, and Lisa will keep me informed of anything I particularly need to know, which she does with lightning speed.

The audit continues – and I want to thank the staff who are dealing with the 20 thousand daily questions: Thank you for your patience, it will be over soon.

Thursday

The 'man-flu' got the better of me and I am at home, but being the epic keyboard warrior that I am, I am still processing those ceaseless emails for work and for Bluebell – all in-between bouts of sleep plus mindless daytime telly!

Email discussions throughout the day included a proposal for the Trust to contribute funding for building of access steps to the sleeping cars at Sheffield Park, which we hope will be ready for Easter.

I got my edition of Trackside this morning, and was proud to see Bluebell adorning the front page. Well done everyone.

Friday

I am feeling a bit better and made it out of the house for little while. At the Railway, work is underway putting all the tickets up online for the various events taking place through the first quarter of this year. We put up some of the Flying Scotsman tickets earlier in the week, and took £5k in a day! We are also selling well on Footplate Tasters, Golden Arrows, Supper Trains and Wealden Ramblers.

Offering 'Kids for a Quid' on all normal running days is proving to be the right decision - it is definitely helping to keep our numbers up.

So that's this week. I am off to Manchester in the morning as it is my step-daughter's 21st tomorrow and she is at University in Manchester. So, I won't be at the railway this weekend, but I shall be there next week. On Friday and Saturday of next week Lisa, Neil and I are attending the Heritage Railway Association autumn conference in Birmingham.

Have a lovely weekend everyone.

Paul Churchman
Chairman
24th February 2023