



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

2023

So, we have done it! We have delivered a fantastic Christmas season with revenue meeting our targets and, in catering, exceeding it. It was a hard slog and I want to thank everyone that played their part in achieving this.

The onboard stewards made sure our customers were fed and watered as well as being a very important point of information. The 9F Club were fantastic as the elves. To them, and to the station staff at all stations, to the loco crews, the guards, the signalmen, the catering staff, the shop staff, the carriage cleaning team - who seemed to be there for 12 hours every day – in fact to everybody: a huge THANK YOU. And - there is no resting for some - we have already begun planning for Christmas 2024!

We ended the year (albeit just in 2024) with our New Year's Day Gala - and what a massive success it was. Thank you to everyone who played a part in it, but special thanks must go to Neil Glaskin, who planned and managed the event. The success, both financially and in terms of customer satisfaction, was amazing. As well as travel tickets, shop sales and general refreshments, we also seemed to sell rather a lot of pie – which I inevitably sampled - and a delicious chicken and mushroom pie it was (so much so that I took a small one that was left over home!).

So, to round up the past year, we started in torrid waters, with little idea how it was going to pan out. By February, I was Chairman of both the Society and the PLC (not quite what I had had in mind for 2023!). With some fast decision making and the strength and cohesion of all three boards we quickly came up with a plan, and set about getting the whole organisation onboard to deliver it with a sense of urgency and common purpose,

In some ways it has felt like a long year, but equally seems to have passed in a flash. The achievements have been monumental... we reduced a loss of nearly £1.4m to a much smaller loss of less than £200k. We have put the Obo and the four-wheelers back into traffic, more goods wagons have been returned to service, and we have outshopped 'Archie' – all of which is amazing.

Our engineering teams have continued to deliver fantastic work and we are incredibly fortunate to have such a large and willing (and thankfully growing) workforce in Carriage & Wagon, in Infrastructure and in the Loco department.



2024

Happily, we can look forward to this year from a very much stronger position than we found ourselves in this time last year. But we cannot afford to be complacent. We have made a plan for 2024 which we hope will deliver even better results than in 2023 but, like every visitor attraction, we will have to fight hard for our customers. That means constantly reviewing things to ensure that what we are offering is what they actually want. Getting that just right is often difficult and we must remain vigilant and be ready to refine or alter our plans if needed.

We will be launching a new website and improving our online shop in a bid to boost sales. We will see Car 54 enter traffic as well the Maunsell 'Hastings' brake. We will start a carriage repainting programme and, in the loco, we will be outshopping 'Beachy Head' and 'Bluebell'. By the end of the year, we might even see the 'H' class come back. All of these are exciting attractions which we anticipate will generate huge interest.

Before any of this happens though, the Infrastructure team will have re-laid Platform 2 at Sheffield Park and the track at the bottom of Freshfield bank round to Ketches.

We may not be running public trains until the February half-term, but I can assure you everyone will be hard at work. The activity never stops.

The three Boards will also be looking at some of the longer-term challenges that face us. We need to develop a long-term funding strategy and we need to look at our corporate structure. This is of course in addition to everything else we have to do to operate the business.

And finally...

As we aren't running in January and February (apart from half-term), I shall only produce one update a month as there won't be quite so much to report on.

Once more, I would like to say thank you from me personally - and on behalf of the Society, PLC and Trust Boards - for all of your support during the past year. Let us all now look forward to an even better and even more exciting 2024.

Paul Churchman
Chairman
3rd January 2024