

# Severn Valley Railway: Entering the year with strong resolve and a determination

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The **Severn Valley Railway (SVR)** says it's entering the coming year with strong resolve and a determination to meet the challenges that it expects to encounter.

Tourist attractions across the UK continue to be impacted by up to 30 per cent drops in visitor numbers since COVID and this has been made worse by the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. The SVR is taking proactive action to protect its business and ensure it comes through to thrive in the future.

Announcing the SVR's plans, railway leaders say they remain committed to providing an exciting heritage railway experience for visitors, and alongside regular passenger services, they will continue to hold a wide range of special events throughout the year, for both rail enthusiasts and the general public.

Mike Ball, chairman of SVR (Holdings) Plc said: "When we planned our programme and budgets for 2022, it was on the basis that we would see a gradual return to 'normal' pre-pandemic levels of activity as the year progressed. This did not happen, and the economic outlook suggests that 2023 may well be worse than 2022.

“What we believed were temporary changes are going to be longer term ones, and we must adapt in order to survive now and thrive in the future.”

The measures announced include changes to staff working patterns, a recruitment freeze, voluntary redundancies and pro-active steps to save energy usage across the business. The railway says it hasn't ruled out compulsory redundancies but is working hard to avoid these.

The SVR is currently in its annual maintenance shut down period, and will reopen on Saturday 4th March. It's planning a mixture of hop-on hop-off services along with curated excursion-style trips. Operations will be concentrated into four days a week, using a mix of steam- and heritage diesel- hauled services.

Plans are being developed for the usual four steam and diesel enthusiast galas in the spring and autumn. This summer also sees the return of the SVR's ever-popular Step Back to the 1940s weekends.

The cost of utilities is one of the biggest expenses that the railway faces, and managers are clamping down on wastage across the 16 miles of the SVR's line. They've asked volunteers to consolidate their working patterns so that premises only need heating and lighting for minimal times, as well as encouraging work to be put off where possible until the spring and summer, to save on costs.

Helen Smith, the SVR's managing director added: “We are facing the double problem of a significant drop in passenger revenue and secondary spend alongside escalating costs across all areas of the business. The current situation in Ukraine means the cost of utilities to heat and light our premises has rocketed, along with the cost of coal and diesel to power our locomotives.

“We want to make these important changes, in the coming year and beyond, to ensure our award-winning attraction continues to offer an excellent value-for-money experience for visitors.

“The resourcefulness and dedication of the SVR's staff, both paid and volunteer, is truly marvellous. They are literally the life-blood of what makes this railway tick, and we're working actively with everyone to achieve our objectives this year. We're also grateful to our wonderful visitors who choose us to spend their time with. We want to make sure they have a heritage experience to cherish in 2023.”

Mike added: “The SVR has been running as a preserved railway since 1970, and it has an inspirational and glorious history. We're determined to do everything we can now to protect it for future generations to enjoy. The year ahead is going to be critical to achieving that aim.”

*Photo credit: Kevin Whitehurst*