

Getting in Touch...



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B&NES

Village
Agents

WERN
WEST OF ENGLAND RURAL NETWORK

Newsletter



Spring 2023

An innovative new system for running our local buses is under way, and we've already been hearing about some successful journeys that you've been making "on demand".



Making Demands on the Buses

WESTlink are operating a new on demand service (otherwise known as Demand Responsive Transport or DRT) over much of our region. It runs without a fixed timetable or route and is booked 'on demand' by users over the phone or app. Depending on where you travel to and from, your journey will be made entirely by DRT or it will link you with existing fixed routes.

The system knows where all the buses are at that time, and can plot a route for you based on this and who else is demanding transport. You can also use it to pre-book a journey at a specific time.

The great thing is that this will open up a much wider area of travel and improve access to buses for many people who have lost their local service over the years. We've already heard from people taking day trips to Clevedon and Wells from the Chew Valley, at a time that suits them.

Our area, known as WESTlink Southern Zone, stretches from Weston super Mare in the east to Freshford in the west and from Chewton Mendip in the south to Barrow Gurney in the north, as well as a spur that covers Clevedon and Portishead.

Even areas that no longer have an official bus stop will be included – the bus will collect you from a fixed point such as a church or village hall.

Call WESTlink DRT
0117 457 8561

The greatest positive impact of DRT will be in the Chew Valley, which will see its 640, 752 and 754 ceasing at the end of May and the 672 (Blagdon to Bristol) stopping on 31 July 2023. So for this area in particular, it's key that we embrace the new system and have a go at using it.

Adult single fares are £2 and all concessionary and older person's bus passes are accepted.

It's all very new at the moment, and the Village Agents will be making a few journeys to test the system. Please give it a go and tell us how you get on as you visit places that were difficult to reach in the past.

If you can go online

Information about the new DRT system is here:
www.travelwest.info/westlink/

If you're not online, contact your Village Agent.

Check other bus times

Be aware that many fixed routes are also undergoing changes and for much of the area, there will be new timetables, so it's advisable to check before you travel.

If you are online you can access the new timetable information here:
www.firstbus.co.uk/bristol-bath-and-west

Community Wellbeing Hub - Spreading the Word

Village Agents are one of the partners in the B&NES Community Wellbeing Hub which allows us to provide a stronger response to any issues that may arise in your life or to improve your general health and wellbeing.

Some difficult situations can only be resolved by professionals working together to tackle all the different elements. It might be that a person's anxiety is due to their housing situation, which is dependent on their financial status, which in turn is being affected by their health issues. In complex cases like this, we turn to specialist partners via the Hub to try and make improvements or plan a route to better wellbeing. In turn, our partners at the Hub refer people to the Village Agents if there is something we can help with at a local level.



Simon Allen and Keri Grinham of Age UK
with Aly Akroyd and Denise Perrin of WERN

Now available at RUH

People receiving hospital care or treatment are often at new tipping points in their lives. This is when the Hub can help patients and their family and friends. A new information point has been set up in the atrium area of the RUH. If you are there, pop by to see the team which include familiar Village Agent faces. The plan is to also do the same in Paulton and St Martins hospitals.

Voter ID: do you have yours?



What's this all about?

Local Elections take place on 4th May this year, and for the first time you will need photographic identification to cast your vote in Polling Stations.

What if I use postal voting?

No need to do anything. If you use Postal Voting, you do not need to provide ID.

I like to vote in person. What type of ID do I need?

One of the following:

- Passport
- Driving Licence
- Blue Badge
- Older Persons Bus Pass/Diamond Card

I have a passport, but it expired years ago...

That's fine. All these documents can still be used if they're expired – as long as the name is correct and the photograph still looks like you.

What if I don't have any photographic ID?

You can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate. This can either be done at www.gov.uk or by completing a paper form. You will need to provide your National Insurance (NI) number and a recent, photograph (a digital version if you're applying online).

That sounds complicated...

There is help available. Your Village Agent could help with advice or practical help to get it done.

Alternatively, you can apply in person at one of B&NES Council's drop-in centres. Make sure you know your NI number and staff will do the rest, including taking a photograph of you there and then.

Still sounds complicated...

You could register to vote by post instead. All you need for this is to complete a form with your Name, Address, Date of Birth and provide a Signature. No photo ID needed.

Do I need to do it now?

Yes! The deadline for applying for a Voter Authority Certificate or Postal Voting is Tuesday 25th April.

Village Agents: in Your Community



We are now working in more areas of B&NES than ever before, but you may still be unsure of how we can help you.

We keep an ear to the ground and make it our business to find out what services and support there is in your local area. So if you have a problem or a concern, we may be able to point you in the right direction and support you through the process.

They say Prevention is Better than Cure, and we can also help get things in place so that you stay well, whether that's making adaptations to your home or making sure you are claiming what you're entitled to such as Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance: we can put you in touch with the right people.



For example, one of our Village Agents recently met someone who was worried about their money situation and didn't know where to turn. She was able to introduce them to the financial charity Clean Slate and applied to St Monica Trust for money to enable them to buy a much-needed new household appliance.



Whatever it is, speaking to your Village Agent can be the first step in your journey to future independence.

Our service is for anyone over 18 living in B&NES and is free and confidential.

Call 01275 333700 and leave a message with your name, phone number and area where you live; your local Village Agent will get back to you.

We also take referrals from professionals. Visit wern.org.uk/banes-village-agents for a referral form.

We were sad to say goodbye to Anne-Katell recently, but wish her all the best on her return to France with her family.



Debbie Dufour has joined us to work alongside Aly Akroyd in the Chew Valley.

We are also delighted to welcome George Oughton who will be covering the Midsomer Norton area



Caring about Carers

Village Agents understand how hard it can be if you find yourself caring for a loved one or friend.

All sorts of emotions are involved and it can often feel like you're on your own.

Talking to a Village Agent can help. Perhaps it's time to bring in some extra hands to help take the strain?



Or we can put you in touch with specialist services that can support you as a Carer, perhaps by accessing peer support or taking time out to improve your own wellbeing.



Sharing Memories for Wellbeing

So far we have enjoyed three sessions of our new Reminiscence Group at Trinity Church in Westfield. Kindly funded by Westfield Parish Council, the group aims to improve wellbeing by reconnecting with memories of the past in a friendly atmosphere. Hosted by Alison Farrar from WERN, we pick a different theme each week and use objects, photos and old documents to spark off memories. So far have shared stories about childhood, transport and entertainment.

The group takes place on the third Thursday of each month, 11pm-12noon. New participants welcome.



Call Alison on 07919-006708 for more details.



Memories of the iconic "Bubble Car" got people taking at our recent session about travel. What was your favourite car from the past?

Digital Inclusion - coming soon...

If you do not own a device or own an outdated one, a new scheme from Age UK could provide you with a tablet computer and an internet connection on an 8 - 12 week loan basis.



This is a completely FREE service so you can explore whether or not using the internet is right for you.

They also provide tailored support for those who are not very confident about using a device, on a one-to-one basis, thanks to Volunteer Digital Champions.

Talk to your Village Agent if you want to register interest.



Home Fire Safety Visits from Avon Fire & Rescue Service

A few simple changes can reduce the risk of fire happening in your home.

The team from Avon Fire & Rescue can visit your home to carry out a free fire safety assessment and provide you with advice on how to stay safe from fire.

If they find you need smoke alarms fitting in your home or that existing faulty alarms need replacing, they can do this free of charge during their visit.

Ask your Village Agent to find out if you're eligible for a visit.

B&NES

Village Agents

- Free
- Confidential
- Professional Advice from specialists
- Peace of mind