

1st June 2020

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# Melksham

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## rail user group

Dear Members and Supporters,

### **Melksham Rail User Group newsletter Issue 3 - June 2020**



These are extraordinary times, and it's heartbreaking for us still not to be promoting travel by public transport. We are reminding you instead to stay home if you possibly can; take your exercise locally, keep your distance from others outside your household

\* Only travel by public transport if your journey is essential

\* Observe social distancing and other hygiene rules when using public transport.

During June, some elements of work and socialising in England are being relaxed, but the instruction on limiting public transport use remains. To some extent this creates a society where those who have cars can move around, but those who don't remain in an effective lockdown. We hope this is an inequality that can be fixed soon.

We are also looking ahead – planning for the future after lockdown, and further ahead as Melksham develops over the next decade with, we hope, sustainable, healthy and socially aware transport options.

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### **Melksham Buses and Trains for June 2020**

\* Trains to Swindon and to Westbury about every 2 hours Monday to Saturday, but no service on Sundays.

\* Daytime, Monday to Saturday, hourly buses to Bath, to Chippenham, to Devizes and to Trowbridge and Frome. Sunday daytime every 2 hours to Devizes and to Bath; no Sunday buses to Chippenham or Trowbridge. No evening buses.

\* Town Bus running Monday to Saturday with one vehicle - that's the usual Saturday service

\* Monday to Saturday - 2 buses per day to Corsham, 3 to Trowbridge via Holt (just 2 back).

**Full timetables all in one place at <http://www.mrug.org.uk/timetable.html>**

We will do our best to reflect any changes there; if in doubt please check with the operator.



The Town Bridge was re-opened to traffic both ways during May, and bus services have returned to their normal stops on routes 68, 68, 14, 15 and x34. New route 273 (Devizes to Bath) serves Bowerhill, Queensway, Church Lane, Forest Road, Town Centre, The Bear, Broughton Road, Shurnhold and Whitley. There is no service at present from Mallory Place, Melksham Community Hospital, or Shaw Hill to or from Bath.

**Bus and train travel IS safe - but capacity is very limited.** Please only make vital journeys, observe social distancing, and pay online or contactless if you can. Please say "thank you" to the driver too.

As passenger numbers grow with returns to work, buses may become full within new limits. Drivers are instructed to skip stops and not take passengers beyond those limits. In cities like Bristol, duplicate buses are running where buses become 'full' and the next service is probably not too far behind. Melksham (at the time of writing) is not approaching full on any public transport - but that may change. Exceptions to "full" are at the drivers' discretion on infrequent routes, for vulnerable passengers, and for the final service of the day.

To accommodate social distancing requirements, a number of changes to bus departing points from Bath Bus Station, and arriving service will empty at their last normal stop. That's Manvers Street for the 273 (271, 272 are not running) from Melksham, return services from bus stop bay 7. These changes will significantly reduce the number of customers in the bus station.

### **Train service report from May**

For May 2020, 350 services scheduled in the emergency timetables to call at Melksham:

305 ran on time                      5 were cancelled  
40 were late (13 by more than 5 minutes)

That's a 94.9% ppm (public performance measure) and 98.6% of trains running - good figures which far exceed figures we have seen with full services running. With a thin service, reliability is especially important and we hope these figures can be maintained as the remaining services return.

We really need Sunday trains back ... the early train off Westbury and late afternoon / early evening returns are called for by key workers. The train services did NOT suddenly turn into "leisure only" on Sundays prior to lockdown; medical, care and supply train work does not stop hereabouts on Sundays!



### **Planning for bus returns**

We look forward to the start of services 271 and 272 to Bath and 272 to Devizes (see later)

We are asking for the Town Bus service to restart to a modernised timetable, servicing locations such as Portal Way, Hampton Park West and the Railway Station which would have been impossible or pointless to serve when the current service was designed. And this opportunity will allow the town bus to complement the 271 and 273 rather than competing with them on many runs, to gain new traffic for buses, and to connect with trains.

Buses are not going to be commercially viable for a while - even the 271/2/3 will be to a timetable agreed by Wiltshire Council and Faresaver, and because of that the planning of routes into a network is a uniquely available option at present.

Services x76, 555 and 402 are currently suspended; services 68 and 69 are down to just one or two trips a day. These are occasional services designed for specific markets and each requires review to consider an appropriate future.

## **Summer 2020 train timetable**

The published National Rail timetable changed in mid May but the current emergency service makes that publication into just a piece of theory. We are heartened to see an additional train in that timetable on a Saturday evening from Westbury to Swindon, filling a timetable gap. Sadly it is show as being summer only, but it represents an understanding of and a willingness to fill this gap.

Great Western Railway are in "Emergency Measures" until 20th September and we would be very surprised to see things returning to exactly how they were on 21st.

Melksham Rail User Group has not produced a summer leaflet this year. Our usual distribution channels are closed, and just for the moment we are encouraging people to stay in Melksham and not to travel. And timetables are changing as the rules change at present, so any leaflet would be soon out of date. Our website at <http://www.mrug.org.uk> is updated weekly or even more often, and our Facebook page is regularly fed with updates if you're a Facebook user. This newsletter will be distributed in the early days of each month to the Melksham Rail User Group newsletter.

## **Autumn weekend engineering**

Trains will be replaced by buses for the first three weekends in October for Engineering works. Buses will run from Westbury to Chippenham calling at Trowbridge and Melksham. Thank you to GWR and TransWilts for sharing draft bus timetables for comment. We are delighted to see that connections between the buses and trains for onward journeys have been considered, and that connection at Chippenham to and from Swindon are pretty good.

## **13th May celebration – 35 years since re-opening**

On 13th May, Melksham Station celebrated 35 years since its reopening with an online Zoom talk and meeting.

In 35 years, the station has risen from being closed ... to open with a commuter service to Swindon ... to open with a service all day, every day (not Sunday just at the moment). Passenger journey numbers have risen from zero to 3,000 per annum as a commuter service, to 75,000 last year - and with projections of 250,000 per annum in the future during the life of the neighbourhood plan.



Pictures are online at [http://www.mrug.org.uk/wclub\\_20200513.pdf](http://www.mrug.org.uk/wclub_20200513.pdf)





## **Melksham Neighbourhood Plan**

from <http://www.melkshamneighbourhoodplan.org/>

Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council are consulting on a draft Neighbourhood Plan for a period of 6 weeks between: Monday 1st June - Monday 13th July

The plan web site includes a series of videos introducing each of the topic areas covered in the plan.

Click on "More Introductory Videos" at from the main web site link above.



**Business**



**Natural Environment**



**Environment (Sustainable Energy)**



**Transport**

From page 53 of the draft plan

"This policy helps meet objective 9: Supporting improved transport infrastructure for the increasing Melksham population. ...and objective10: Encouraging journeys by rail together with improving cycle and walking routes thus reducing the need to travel by car."

### **Draft Policy 11: Sustainable Transport and Active Travel**

**All developments must be planned in line with the Sustainable Transport Hierarchy. Applications for major development must demonstrate through an e active travel plan how sustainable transport modes in the Plan area are maximised and that safe and suitable access can be achieved for all people.**

**Further improvements to the accessibility and to the quality of Melksham Railway Station environment, as a key element in our sustainable transport network, will be strongly supported.**

There is explanation of the policy too

We want to see more opportunities to get around the town and the Parish without using a private vehicle. Accessible, safe and attractive infrastructure that promotes and enables walking, cycling and public transport choices for local journeys through the town and Parish to key locations such as schools, health and community facilities, green spaces and employment provision are important.

Following unprecedented levels of walking and cycling across the UK during the pandemic, in May the government announced a £2 billion package to create new era for cycling and walking. Vouchers will be issued for cycle repairs, to encourage people to get their old bikes out of the shed, and plans are being

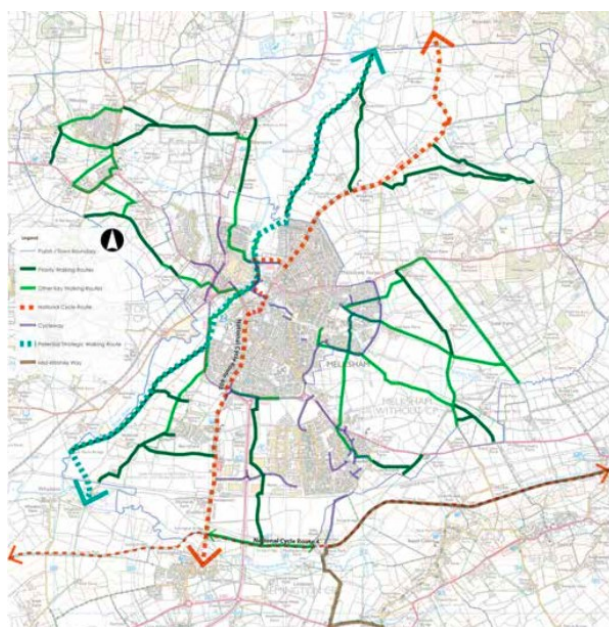
developed for greater provision of bike parking facilities, and it is hoped that many more will take up the Cycle to Work scheme, which gives employees a discount on a new bike.

Extensive networks of high quality routes that enable people to walk and cycle safely and conveniently should reflect the core design principles of:

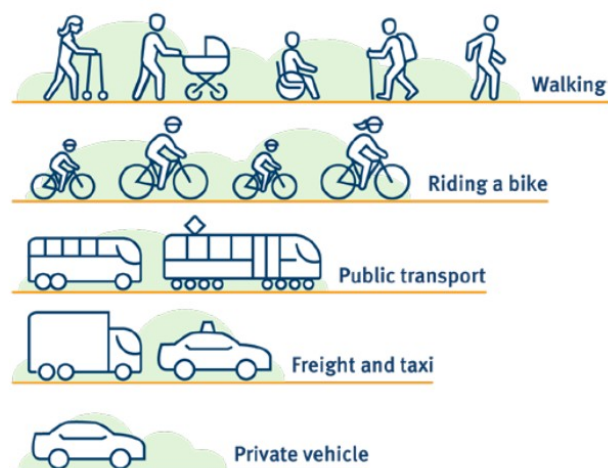
- coherence
- directness
- safety
- comfort
- attractiveness.

Key routes are shown on [figure below], and detailed in the Green Infrastructure Evidence Base Report. Melksham railway station, located in the north west of the town, is on the TransWilts Line which runs between Swindon and Southampton Central. Trains from the station run approximately every hour each way between Westbury and Swindon.

The railway line is an important sustainable transport link that enables residents and visitors to make sustainable transport choices and promotes an alternative to the private car. The railway station has car and cycle parking, but is currently poorly served by local bus routes. Additional funding for local bus routes was announced in March 2020 and the Melksham Rail User Group have put forward proposals for improvement to bus services in the Plan area.



### Sustainable transport hierarchy



## TransWilts news

Congratulation to the TransWilts CIC on their transformation of disused room within the grade 2 listed building at WESTBURY station to work both as a community space and a workable office area whilst being sympathetic to the station heritage. The room can be hired / booked via TransWilts

- see <https://transwilts.org/2020/05/28/new-transwilts-westbury-white-horse-crp-room-book-now/>

Improvements at Melksham station - in facilities and train services - planning goes ahead. The Coronavirus pandemic has slowed down some element but not stopped anything. TransWilts write "The TransWilts organisation is already working with train operating company GWR, to improve the frequency and destination choice of services from Melksham station. Now TransWilts has secured a major three-year support package from Knorr-Bremse Rail Systems UK, based in Melksham, which will help realise its ambitious improvement plans for the local station."

- see <https://transwilts.org/2020/04/28/melksham-station-set-for-transformation/>

## **Sustainable Travel and the Town Bridge**

It's great to see so many people out on their bicycles. How much of that is purely for exercise and will fade away when the gyms reopen and amateur football restarts we'll have to see. Melksham has some excellent facilities, but they are not properly linked and some lack signage.

Of particular note ... a good path for both pedestrians and cyclists leads from The Station through the underpass to the old Bath Road and down to the Town Bridge. The Town Bridge was always something of a pinch point, but newly installed segregation barriers between the road and the footway have seriously reduced the options available for walkers and cyclists crossing the bridge.



- \* It is no longer possible for pedestrians to cross the road to avoid someone coming the other way (and the footways are well less than 2 metres wide)

- \* It is no longer possible for a nervous cyclist to walk over the bridge, pushing his cycle on the edge of the carriageway

- \* It is no longer possible for a cyclist to dismount halfway across if the bridge gets busy and (s)he feels that (s)he should step off for safety.



We encourage people to use bikes - but please walk them over the bridge if you are a nervous cyclist, giving way to people coming the other way.

We have asked Wiltshire Council to consider a one way system on the footways across the bridge, and we have also asked them how they planned for cyclists to cross once the road (for motor vehicles) and paths (for walkers) were barricaded from each other

## **10th June MRUG meeting and other online meetings**

MRUG has moved from 6 meetings a year at the Union Church to an online zoom meeting every 4 weeks to which all are welcome. Next meeting is 10th June at 16:00. Link is at <http://www.passenger.chat/23458>

The agenda is likely to be a full one ... to be published a couple of days ahead. If you have not been to one of these meetings before you are encouraged - we not only accept newcomers, we welcome them.

If you are new to zoom, please feel free to get in touch with our meeting admin (Graham Ellis) ahead of time and we can run a one on one 'try it out' session ahead of time. 01225 708225 / [graham@wellho.net](mailto:graham@wellho.net)

Other online (zoom) meetings which may be interest – diary events at <http://www.passenger.chat/b34>

Every Tuesday at 4 p.m. - Sustainable Transport Users  
Every Friday at 4 p.m. - TravelWatch SouthWest



## **Wishing John Pickford a long and happy retirement & looking forward with Faresaver**

The origins of Faresaver can be traced back to the day in 1979 when village shopkeeper John Pickford bought his first Ford Transit minibus and started operating PSV vehicles. John retired from the business on 31st May, passing the reins to his sons Justin and Daniel. Justin and Daniel have been a long and thorough grounding at Faresaver and have been looking after day to day operation for some considerable time; we wish them well at this step. John remains available to them and on the board, but looks forward to holidays with his partner.

Operating and growing a bus company that has survived and thrived for over 40 years is a considerable achievement; Faresaver now runs most of Melksham's buses. The regulatory background of bus operation encourages competition and in that environment, John and Faresaver have proven to have had a winning strategy. Customers are key to any business, and Faresaver have clearly been providing products that their chosen customer base chose to buy.

I recall chatting with John Pickford in Chippenham Bus Station during a Wiltshire Council / Bus Users survey and discussing the very real problems under the current regulatory system of providing a complete service for the economy of the places served and the social need, whilst at the same time running a viable commercial company. John has his head screwed on right, and has had some difficult decisions to make.

Picture – John Pickford (nearest camera), Natacha Tagholm for Bus Users and Horace Prickett for Wiltshire Council talk to a local reporter at Chippenham Bus Station, February 2016




Last winter, Faresaver and Wiltshire Council worked together to replan the bus service from Bath through Melksham to Devizes in preparation for the withdrawal of First Bus in early April. The resultant timetable meets the community's requests including social and economic needs and (we can presume) Wiltshire Council's budget and Faresaver's business plan. How it should be - win, win, win. Our thanks to Wiltshire Council and John, Justin and Daniel for getting this together and we look forward to the service running as agreed in the not too distant

future. No doubt there will be a little fine tuning with experience, and we forward to helping all parties do that tuning for the benefit of all concerned.

Faresaver buses can be found online at <http://www.faresaver.co.uk> from where you can link to their Facebook and Twitter feeds

## **Online Quiz - how well do you know Melksham?**

We encourage our members to enjoy Melksham and the countryside around. There are plenty of lovely and quiet places for you to go. The Melksham Rail User Group quiz is online at <http://www.mrug.org.uk/qj20.html> and members are encourage to give it a go. Or if you prefer to sit back and see random pictures, try instead <http://www.mrug.org.uk/roller.html>



**Have you been stuck in Melksham?**

How many of these places do you recognise?

**Melksham**  
rail user group

Community Rail Network MEMBER

Home Page  
\*New\* 31.5.2020 Around Melksham Quiz

**Current timetables - from May 2020**  
See [Coronavirus](#) page for advice  
See [Timetable](#) page for current timetables.  
Updated 22.5.2020 - expect 6 weeks validity

## **Station Cleans, Imber buses and other planned excursions**

We advise, strongly, against travel by train at present. So - no special trips being promoted. Trains are still calling at the station, but our notice boards there and in the market place direct readers to the MRUG website where we can update them. As lockdown eases, we will update notices again.

Station cleans every few months have been suspended and the station is looking a little dusty though the flower bed has a brilliant display of hardy flowers this year.



Summer trips are all postponed (into to, we hope, a busy 2021). Santa is aware that his Christmas visit this year may need to be done with virtual magic.



**And finally – please take care of yourselves and your loved ones. We look forward to seeing you all at date some time in the future.**

Peter Blackburn - Chair

John Hamley – Secretary

Judith Gradwell – Treasurer

Graham Ellis – Vice Chair