

# 'Companion' travel blow

## Moves to bring back concessionary tickets look set to be turned down

**MOVES to bring back 'companion' bus passes in West Berkshire look set to be knocked back.**

They fell victim to a round of budget cuts about 10 years ago.

The move would cost the council £40,000.

The cost-conscious council says this would be in addition to the separate budget pressure for £145,000 that has been submitted for concessionary travel for 2025/26.

It is recommended that the motion to council is not progressed at the present time but that the council awaits the outcome of the central government review into the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme, and identify suitable funding, before reconsidering the introduction of companion passes.

In July 2024, the following council motion was submitted in the name of councillor David Marsh (Green, Newbury Wash Common) on companion bus passes: "Council notes that: Companion bus passes enable people with disabilities that prevent them travelling alone, such as blindness, to take a companion, free of charge, on their journey."

"This could literally transform the lives of some of our

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residents. West Berkshire Council offered a companion bus pass scheme until the 'austerity' cuts of 2016.

"However, neighbouring councils continue to offer companion bus passes, in some cases allowing reciprocal travel between different authorities.

"Companion bus passes are funded, in full or in part, by central government so reintroducing them would not put a large financial burden on council tax payers.

"By failing to enable all its residents to enjoy the benefits of bus travel, West Berkshire is in effect discriminating against some of them."

The council's current annual revenue budget for concessionary travel is £480,460.

Operators are reimbursed through this for concessionary journeys on commercial services.

The cost of concessionary travel for supported services is embedded within local bus contracts.

There are also concerns about reciprocal arrange-

ments with the acceptance of another local authority's companion pass within West Berkshire (enabling free travel for the companion) and the other local authority will then permit free travel within their area for the companions of any West Berkshire companion pass holder.

This will need to be negotiated individually with each neighbouring local authority.

In West Berkshire there are 18,626 discretionary passes, of which 17,600 are for older people and 1,026 for disabled people.

The council pays £424,185.06 to reimburse them.

With no current offer of companion passes in West Berkshire, companions who are required to travel to enable concessionary pass holders to travel would need to purchase a bus ticket.

All operators provide a range of options for multi-journey or multi-day discounted travel for bus users.

There are two broad categories of people eligible for a statutory concession – older people and eligible disabled people.

Both men and women are eligible for concessionary travel in England when they

reach state pension age.

Mr Marsh's view is that West Berkshire should fall in line with neighbouring authorities – some of which allow companion passes.

Bracknell Forest doesn't offer them, but Hampshire does.

This is available if unable to travel unaccompanied based on disability.

It enables free all-day travel on bus services for pass holder and companion on journeys starting in Hampshire (not Portsmouth and Southampton).

The companion holder can also travel for free on off-peak journeys between Wiltshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire.

A companion pass is available for a disabled person who cannot travel alone.

Children between the age of five and 15 who qualify for a disabled pass will be issued with a companion pass automatically.

And in Reading a companion pass is available for a disabled person who cannot travel alone.

That's not available in Slough, but a companion pass is available for a disabled person who cannot travel alone limited to journeys starting in Wokingham.



Do you want to see the town centre filled with flowers this summer?

## Blooming beautiful baskets

**NEWBURY Town Council has announced the return of its popular summer hanging basket scheme.**

The project offers local businesses the opportunity to enhance their premises with beautiful floral displays.

Each hanging basket is professionally arranged and designed to thrive throughout the summer months, adding pockets of colour throughout the town centre that improve the appearance of shopfronts as well as create a more welcoming atmosphere for residents and visitors.

Each basket costs £65, including watering and maintenance throughout the summer.

Town council leader Gary Norman (Lib Dem, East Field) said: "The town council puts up over 100 summer hanging baskets throughout the town

centre each year, including at our beautiful Victoria Park, and at Shaw and Newtown Road cemeteries.

"We're eager to see even more businesses get involved this year."

Local businesses interested in ordering a hanging basket should contact the town council office by emailing caroline.edmunds@newbury.gov.uk or calling 07399 122964 for more information.

Mr Norman added: "We are also launching our 2025 Newbury in Bloom campaign, which has been incredibly popular over the years."

"This year, we aim to enter Newbury into the Thames & Chiltern Britain in Bloom competition."

"Join us in making Newbury a brighter and more beautiful place this summer."

## Is something new being built near you?

**UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

## Keep up to date with new developments, proposed road closures and much more in your area

Turn to the public notices pages in the Classified section of this paper or visit **publicnoticeportal.uk** or scan the QR code



## What's on

### THURSDAY

**Book club, Wash Common Library, Glendale Avenue, 7.40pm.** The club will be discussing *A Single Thread* by Tracy Chevalier and sharing other reading recommendations.

### FRIDAY

**Thatcham Market, The Broadway, 8am to 1pm.** Whether you're looking to stock up on delicious produce for the week ahead or simply enjoy a leisurely browse, Thatcham Market has something for everyone.

### SATURDAY

**Aladdin's Cave event, Woolton Hill Church Hall, 10.30pm to 1pm.** New and as good as new items for sale as well tea, coffee and cakes being served. All in aid of St Thomas Church.

**Country and Western concert, Royal British Legion, Pelican Lane, 7.45pm to 10.45pm.** Country and Western singer Cole Jackson.

### MONDAY

**Elite Holiday Camp, Park House School, Andover Road, Newbury, February 17 to February 21.** An action-packed week filled with exciting activities, including sports, creative workshops,



The Elite Holiday Camp will be held at Park House School

and team challenges. Each day is carefully planned to keep children active and engaged and to allow them to have fun in a safe and welcoming environment. Tickets available at <https://rebrand.ly/42f1bd>

**Knit and natter, Wash Common Library, Glendale Avenue, 3pm.** Bring along your own knitting or join us in creating blankets, baby clothes and more to donate to Knit for Peace.

**Newbury Gardeners Association talk, Newtown Village Hall, 7pm to 9pm, £5** includes membership. Talk by former Sparsholt College lecturer Ray Broughton on 'Herbaceous Borders and Plants'.

### WEDNESDAY

**Shrek The Musical, John O'Gaunt School, Hungerford, February 19 to February 22, adults £14 and children £10.** Join The Community Of Hungerford Theatre Company for *Shrek The Musical* nightly during February half-term in John O'Gaunt School hall. There is also a Saturday matinee at 2.15pm. Tickets available at <https://rebrand.ly/ea0175>

### THURSDAY

**Kingsclere Local History Association talk, Kingsclere Village Club, 7.30pm,** members £1 and non-members £3. The talk titled 'The Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway' will be given by Richard Coghlan. According to organisers, it will be a "fascinating study in ambition, manipulation and failure". The talk will cover the history from 1879 onward and it will discuss rail stocks, stations and signal boxes.

■ If you are organising a charity or community event and would like to be included in these free listings, please email details – type of event, time, venue, date and contact – to [report@newburynews.co.uk](mailto:report@newburynews.co.uk)