Melksham & District Link

Annual Report

2025-26

Melksham & District Link Scheme

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 8th October, The Riverside Centre, 7.00pm

Link Schemes have existed in Wiltshire since 1979 and can be found in most rural and urban communities.

These schemes are set up in response to local people recognising a need for the service. They provide a safety net for those unable to access services in other ways, such as public transport.

Services offered by

MELKSHAM & DISTRICT LINK

include

TRANSPORT

For appointments to Hospitals, Surgeries, Dentists and other Medical appointments.

Melksham & District Link Scheme

Charity Registration No. 1044337

Melksham & District Link 2025-26

Trustees

Chair	**Liz Rowley**
Vice-Chair	*Vacant*
Treasurer	**Richard Clark**
Secretary	**Flis Hislop**
Committee Member	**Peter Smith**

Officers

Recruitment	**Richard Lamprell**
Health & Safety/ Safeguarding	**Liz Rowley**
Webmaster	**Ian Argyle**
DBS/Whitelist Officer	**Iain Houghton**
Media & Publicity	**John Rowley**
Assistant Treasurers	**Tina Melville** **Liz Lumley**

Transport Coordinators

Ron Walby

John Rowley

Helen Romaine

Gillean MacDonald

Sue Pollitt

Toks Ferguson

Chair

Another busy year has passed quickly for Link. In 2025, we covered 73,722 miles and completed 2,607 journeys, helping local people get to their medical appointments. These figures show how important we are to our community, but our drivers do far more than drive. For some clients, the conversation during the journey may be the only contact they have had for several days. Our volunteers also help clients reach the right department, offer comfort at difficult times, share garden produce, and show real compassion in many other ways. I receive many messages about how wonderful our volunteers are. We are a lifeline to some people, and our service is greatly appreciated. My complaints box remains completely empty.

I meet four times a year with the Chairs of the other Link Schemes in Wiltshire. Each scheme operates separately as a charity or charitable company, under the guidance of Community First. We share common aims and objectives, exchange good practice, and keep up to date with important requirements such as GDPR, health and safety, and safeguarding.

The Committee relies on drivers reporting any issues to either the duty coordinators or me. Good communication helps us ensure that clients and drivers remain safe and that trips take place appropriately.

Unfortunately, for the first time, I have had to tell two clients that they can no longer use our service because of misuse. The Committee always tries to resolve these issues first by speaking with clients and warning them when their behaviour has been inappropriate, but this has not always been successful. We cannot accept rudeness towards our volunteers or any blatant misuse of the service, and I have no hesitation in reminding clients that we are a voluntary organisation.

I regularly discuss our work with both the Parish and Town Councils, and we liaise with other local organisations to ensure we support those most in need in our community. Melksham Link also attends the regular Melksham Health and Wellbeing Meeting, which helps local community groups share good practice. I have shared our statistics with the local MP, Brian Matthew, to support calls for better health provision in Melksham, particularly upgraded services at Melksham Hospital and progress towards a minor injuries' unit. As drivers, we see occasions when a journey to the RUH is for such a short appointment that it could have been dealt with more appropriately locally.

Following discussions at last year's AGM, the Committee agreed to donate some of our reserves to other local charities whose work aligns with our aims. We have therefore donated to Wiltshire Air Ambulance and, more recently, to Melksham Community Transport to help with the purchase of a new minibus.

As our financial records show, we still have a healthy reserve. However, there will be more demands on our finances in the coming year. Funding for Community First is dwindling, which has a knock-on effect on all Wiltshire Link Schemes. For example, in future we will have to pay for DBS checks and for the 79-plus driver assessments.

The recent increase in the mileage expenses rate, from 45p to 55p per mile, has already had a significant effect on our monthly income. We have tried to inform clients about our rising costs, but this is difficult because we are a donations-based charity. However, we must be realistic: the minimum cost to us for a journey to the RUH is now £18 instead of £15, and we need to convey this clearly to our clients.

Clients who receive Universal Credit may be eligible for help with hospital travel costs, and we have advised a number of clients to take advantage of this support.

At the last AGM, the issue of travel costs for cancer patients was raised. We now negotiate with clients who need to visit hospital frequently, particularly those receiving blocks of treatment, to ensure that the cost is appropriate and affordable for them.

We currently have 42 drivers, although the number of active drivers at any one time is much lower because of other commitments or illness. Recruitment has been very low this year, which appears to be a common theme across many local charities. Recruiting coordinators is particularly challenging, as the role is perceived as more stressful. While that may be true to some extent, it is also rewarding because it is such a vital part of the organisation — the lynchpin, really. However, we remain one of the largest Link Schemes among the 43 in Wiltshire, and it is rare for us to be unable to help clients.

As Chairman, I am extremely proud of the work we do, and I am very grateful to everyone who works diligently to ensure that our Link Scheme runs efficiently. There is always space for others to assist with the running of the scheme, and we particularly need people to step up and help with recruitment. Any ideas or suggestions to support recruitment would be very welcome. Anyone who would like to help ensure that our vital service continues to run should please come forward and be proactive.

In summary, it has been another very successful year. A huge thank you to all the volunteers at Melksham Link.

Elizabeth Rowley

Treasurer

This is my fourth year in the role of Treasurer, and I continue to find the role interesting and rewarding. It is satisfying to know that the finances of the organisation are in good shape, and that all drivers are recompensed promptly with the money owed to them at the end of each month.

Even though I keep two set of accounts (manual and spreadsheet) it took several attempts to balance the end of year accounts. It is always the small amounts that take the time to find out where the differences are. However, on this occasion it was the way we record driver donations which caused the problem. Like last year, the accounts have been independently checked by someone not associated with Melksham Link. This was her first year as our independent examiner, and luckily, she found it easy to understand our systems and was able to deliver her report within a few days.

When I took over the role, I created a spreadsheet which quickly adds up both the monthly totals and contributes to the end of year figures. This helps in providing data for the various returns that Link has to submit to Community First. However, I still retain the manual books which are completed each month. This makes it easier to detect anomalies, faults and differences when regularly comparing the two independent sets of figures, rather than just leaving it all to the end of the year. It also significantly helps the auditor at year end. We are still retaining both sets of accounts which certainly helps during the time when the annual accounts are being put together.

We have two bank accounts, one with Santander, effectively our current account, and another with the Coventry Building Society which is a savings account. Due to the amount of donations received in recent years exceeding expenses, Melksham Link was in a position to donate £5,000 to the Wiltshire and Bath Air Ambulance charity. As you know, it does not receive any money from the government and totally relies on donations.

The amount of cash in the Santander account fluctuates each month depending on the donations received in client envelopes and the amount paid out in driver expenses. The amount in the Coventry Building Society has increased gradually throughout the year. On average the number of drivers submitting an expense claim form each month is approximately 33.

I would like to thank all the drivers who collected envelopes from clients and delivered them to either myself or the Chairman each month. I would like to thank all the drivers who donated money to Link and also clients who donated more than expected in the envelopes.

I would particularly like to thank both our Assistant Treasurers, Liz Lumley and Tina Melville, who help me in emptying the envelopes at the beginning of each month, preparing the money to be banked and helping me to pay all the drivers. This is accompanied by both cake and coffee to help us carry out the work.

Finally, I would like to thank our Auditor, Mel Rolph, who independently audited the end of year accounts. The current balance sheet shows, Melksham & District Link remains in a healthy financial position.

This Year 2025-26			Last Year 2024-25		
Income			**Income**		
Client Envelopes	£42,182.48		Client Envelopes	£42,839.4	
Donations Received	£669.50		Donations Received	£1764.45	
Driver Donations	£297.55		Driver Donations	£66.65	
Queensway Chapel Donation	£317.02				
Interest Received	£1,228.28		Interest Received	£1075.26	
Miscellaneous Income	£85.00		Miscellaneous Income	£0	
Total	**£44,779.83**			**£45,745.76**	
Expenditure			**Expenditure**		
Travel Cost	£33,136.10		Travel Cost	£34,808.60	
Driver Donations	£297.55		Driver Donations	£66.65	
Parking	£147.40		Parking	£83.5	
Refreshments	£852.59		Refreshments	£568.93	
Administration	£1,185.70		Administration	£727.57	
Equipment	£2,087.36		Equipment	£1702.89	
Insurance	£321.66		Insurance	£254.3	
Bowerhill Village Hall	£75.00				
Community First	£0		Community First	£0	
Link Donations	£0		Link Donations (Alzheimers)	£51	
Galileo Clothing (Fleeces)	£1,612.00				
Donation Marlborough Link/ Online database	£75.00		Donation Marlborough Link/ Online database	£100	
Donation to Air Ambulance	£5,000.00				
Food & River Festival	£20.00				
Mobile Phone	£165.36		Mobile Phone	£164.08	
Primate - Christopher Shuttleworth - Web Hosting	£109.00		Primate - Christopher Shuttleworth - Web Hosting	£188.00	
Ribbonworks - Lanyards ID	£108.40		Ribbonworks	£364.68	
Riverside Hire	£64.00		Riverside Hire	£45.5	
Townsend Design - Printed Stationery	£695.05		Printed Stationery	£805.4	
Wiltshire Publications	£0.00		Wiltshire Publications	£88.00	
Miscellaneous	£7.97		Miscellaneous	£.0.23	
Total	**£45,960.14**			**£40,019.33**	
Income over Expenditure	**-£1,180.31**			**£5,726.43**	

Balance Sheet

Opening Balance	**£38,544.96**		Coventry - Balance	£34,421.36
Toal Income	£44,779.83		Sanatander - Baance	£2,943.29
Total Expenses	£45,960.14			
TOTAL	**£37,364.65**		**TOTAL**	**£37,364.65**

Richard Clark		**Mel Rolph**	Rolph
Treasurer		**Independent Examiner**	
Dated	21/05/2026	**Date accounts signed off**	20/05/26



Recruitment

We have welcomed three new drivers this year and inevitably lost a couple of drivers due to other commitments. Therefore, our number remain approximately the same at 42 drivers. We have also recently welcomed two new coordinators which is very good news as this role is difficult to fill.

In January and February, we had a display at Melksham Community Campus to try to attract new volunteers – not much success. However, we do try to keep our name in the Melksham News to constantly appeal for volunteers but have found that most people are attracted by word of mouth from existing volunteers. So please keep telling everyone what a great role it is!

We decided not to attend the River and Food Festival this year because it requires considerable effort and has produced no results in recent years. Instead, we hope to carry out leaflet drops and place sponsorship advertising at the Football and Rugby Club soon. Any ideas or help with recruiting new volunteers would be greatly appreciated.

Richard Lamprell

Health & Safety

The risk assessment for volunteers is on our website in the secure section, and it is reviewed annually. Drivers are reminded to familiarise themselves with our procedures to keep themselves and our clients safe.

This year we have added a tick box to the expense claims forms to ask drivers to confirm that their car is taxed and has an up to date MOT and insurance each month. This serves as a reminder that it is the driver's responsibility to ensure their car is roadworthy.

Drivers are reminded that they should not be lifting wheelchairs or large walkers in and out of the car. Coordinators tell clients this. Volunteers do this at their own risk and can refuse to assist in this way if asked.

One of the greatest challenges is when a client has extremely poor mobility, particularly if it is a regular client who has declined. As hard as it is we have had to say to three clients this year that we can no longer accommodate them.

Elizabeth Rowley

Welfare/Safeguarding

There have been several occasions this year when we have raised safeguarding concerns with relatives of our clients and on one occasion with social services. Link volunteers may be the only people our clients see in a week, and we can often see that the client is struggling in various ways. It is vital that drivers continue to report any concerns to the Duty Coordinator and they then can pass on the information to me to decide the best way forward. Adult safeguarding requires us to tell the adult concerned that we are reporting our concerns usually by asking the client if they would like help.

Elizabeth Rowley



Appendix A - Data

Trends

In the 12 months April 2025 to March 2026 demand dropped by **6%**. We made **2640** journeys in comparison with the **2806** the year before. There is a pattern of ebb and flow. There is no obvious explanation for the downturn in demand. We have fewer regular clients, (currently 5) than in past years but this would only account for a small part of this trend. Some months demand outstrips the available drivers, while in others the demand is comfortably satisfied by the availability we have.

Clients

We currently have **836** active clients in our online database. **529 (63%)** are female and **307 (37%)** are male. We transported **537** clients to their appointments in this period.
We attracted **198** new clients in the year. which is just under **17** on average per month. This is similar to last year's figure. In the first 6 months of the current year we have attracted **130** new clients which is an increase to nearly 22 new clients each month (April- September 2026).

Destinations

We are asked to take clients to medical destinations near and far. We took clients to surgeries, district and community hospitals, as well as Dental Practices and Opticians. The distribution between these has changed since last year. Trips to District Hospitals were up **13%** and account for **52%** of all our drives. Community Hospitals were up **47%** accounting for **12%** of all drives. Trips to Surgeries were unchanged at **12%**. Other destinations were down. There were **64** trips to Bristol, with Southmead Hospital the busiest destination with **27** of those drives. Trips to Bristol overall were down on last year.

We were asked to go to **116** different medical destinations. As usual the most requested destination is the Royal United Hospital in Bath.

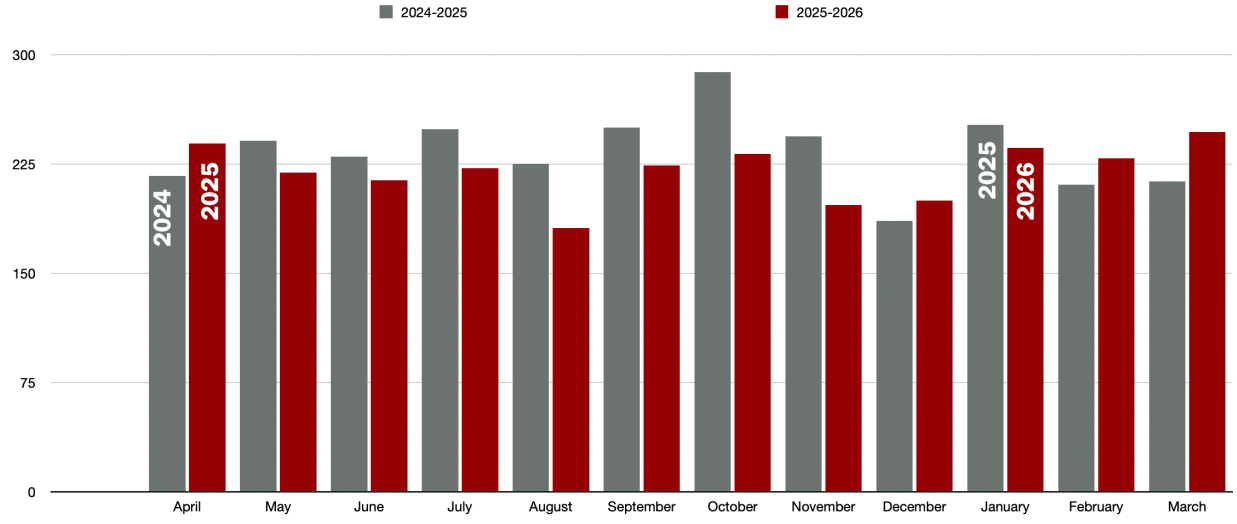
	Top 10 Destinations	2026 Drives	Last Year		Change
1	Bath - Royal United Hospital	1027	1st		<-
2	Melksham - Spa Medical Centre	161	3rd	Local	Up
3	Melksham Community Campus	136	2nd	Local	Down
4	Melksham - Community Hospital	116	4th	Local	<-
5	Melksham - Giffords Surgery	81	6th	Local	Up
6	Bath - Sulis (Formerly Circle)	78	5th		Down
7	Chippenham - Community Hospital	51	8th		Up
7	Melksham - Spencers Leg Clinic	51	6th	Local	Down
9	Bath - BMI Clinic Claverton Down	46	New		
10	Trowbridge Alzheimer's	41	9th		Down
		1788			

This is a snapshot of the journeys Link has made to our most popular destinations within this calendar year (January - September 2026). The figures for 2025 in last year's report were for a roughly similar time frame.

These Top 10 destinations account for **82.3%** of all drives in the target period **(1788 of 2173 drives). 545** were local **(30.4%)** and **1243** were distance drives **(69.9%)**

Drives Per Month Comparison (Financial Year)

	2024-25	2025-26	Difference
April	217	239	22
May	241	219	-22
June	230	214	-16
July	249	222	-27
August	225	181	-44
September	250	224	-26
October	288	232	-56
November	244	197	-47
December	186	200	14
January	252	236	-16
February	211	229	18
March	213	247	34
	2806	**2640**	**-166**



Drives per Month Comparison (Financial Year)

Drivers

We currently have **42** drivers. Our busiest 10 drivers made **1203** journeys between them, which is **45%** of all journeys made by our Link drivers. In total **48** drivers made journeys during the year. The average number of drives for each driver was **54**.

Co-ordinators

We currently have a team of 6 Coordinators. 4 Coordinators are also drivers. During the year Mandy Belgium retired, and we have recently been joined by Toks Ferguson.

Appendix B - Independents Examiner's Report

Name of Organisation - Melksham & District Link
Financial Year Reviewed : 1st April 2025 - 31st March 2026

Report

I have reviewed the accounts of Melksham & District LInk for the year ending 310326. My role was to look over the financial records and check that the figures presented in the accounts are consistent with the information provided to me. This was an independent examination, not a full audit. My review was based on the documents and explanations supplied by the organisation's officers.

Throughout my review I carried out the following -

- Checked the bank statements and compared them with the income and expenditures records
- Looked at receipts, invoices and supporting documents for a sample of transactions
- Reviewed the year end balances and ensured they matched the records.
- Considered whether anything appeared unusual or inconsistent.

Based on the information provided to me:

- I found no evidence of material errors in the accounts
- The financial records are properly kept
- The accounts agree with the records I was shown

I have noted the following minor points for the Committee to consider:

There is a small discrepancy of £7.97 which is noted on the paperwork I suspect that figure is an accumulation of several small amounts accrued from the driver's claims/donations over a 12 month period. There are no other issues that give me any concern.

Conclusion

In my opinion, the accounts give a reasonable and accurate reflection of the organisation's financial activities for the year reviewed.

The account have been completed to a good standard. The records were well kept, consistent, and easy to follow.

Melanie Rolph 20th May 2026