Accessible days out: Shapwick Heath – a window to the past, present and future

Paralympic star to open our Disability Somerset exhibition!

The facts and myths behind MS
Accessible woodland?
Blooming marvellous.

“After a quick look on VisitWoods.org.uk, we couldn’t believe how many accessible woods we found to visit. Just being among those fantastic bluebells was the perfect way to spend a spring day.”

VisitWoods is home to the UK’s largest database of woodland open to the public. To find out which of your local woods have been recommended for accessibility or to find bluebell woods flowering near you go to www.visitwoods.org.uk

A breath of fresh air
Compass Disability Services is an innovative, enlightened and positive organisation.

Our mission is ‘to enable disabled people to have equality of opportunity’. Our values, beliefs, and mission have allowed us to spread our influence in Somerset, North Somerset and Wiltshire.

Compass Disability Services is a user-led organisation and our Board of Trustees is comprised of at least 80% disabled people.

Our principles give us the authority to explore options to give a voice to disabled people.

Compass Disability Services works through consultation, representation and service delivery, facilitating various projects.

Editorial or advertising queries: Contact Greg Jackson on 0330 333 0089 or email greg@compassdisability.org.uk

Alternative formats: Networker is also available in large print, braille, on cassette, cd or by email. For further information, contact Greg Jackson on 0330 333 0089 or email greg@compassdisability.org.uk

Contact: Compass Disability Services welcomes any feedback on Networker, or any of the services it provides.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in Networker are not necessarily those of Compass Disability Services.
OVER the last few issues I have talked about the end of an era and the financial climate we find ourselves in.

This has been a trying and testing period in Compass Disability Services’ history – for its trustees and staff.

It has seen us lose some well-loved members of staff and have to restructure the organisation.

However, as we move into a new financial year, we are certainly sailing in the right direction.

We have appointed three new trustees to the organisation this month and are being steered at the helm by Cliff Puddy, the new Chair of trustees.

We have acquired some – albeit small – pieces of work, but they all add up, and enjoyed some successes in our funding bids.

Primarily, we have received £8,120 from the National Lottery to run our Training for Trainers course that will enable disabled people to be more equipped to deliver training alongside us in the future.

So, as we move forward, look out for new projects and opportunities in Networker.

Do you have the skills to become a Trustee?

COMPASS Disability Services is recruiting new Trustees with a range of skills to join the existing board.

The organisation is looking for people who are committed to its mission, values, aims and objectives and are passionate about the work it does.

As a Trustee you would be expected to ensure that the organisation complies with its governing documents, charity law, company law and any other relevant legislation or regulations.

Trustees also use their specific skills, knowledge or experience to help the board reach sound decisions.

Becoming a Trustee will involve:
• Scrutinising board papers
• Focusing on key issues
• Providing special expertise
• Leading discussions
• Promoting the organisation and enhancing and protecting its reputation
• Being a good ambassador for the organisation.

For more information please contact Paula Ingrey on 0330 333 0089 or email: paula@compassdisability.org.uk
You can access vital training resources for your care staff

If you employ care staff you could access training funds by registering on the Skills for Care National Minimum Data Set for Social Care (NMDS-SC)

What is the NMDS-SC?
• A government database containing information about the adult social care workforce.
• It is used by the government and policy makers to help make informed decisions.
• The NMDS-SC collects information online about: providers offering social care services; individual social care employers and their employees, including those using a direct payment and other funding to employ care staff; and personal assistants.
• In return for this information there are benefits:

FREE TRAINING
• By registering and updating your NMDS-SC information, you will have the opportunity to receive funds for training and your personal assistant or carer will be able to access free online training.
• This will help you develop the skills of your personal assistant or carer, giving them confidence and a sense of achievement.

COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHER EMPLOYERS
• You can use the database to compare your pay rates with other people who employ their own care and support staff in your area. This will not identify you or any of your employees.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE
• You can make a difference and inform government decisions about policy and funding for the sector. The more information that is gathered the more likely decisions are made on fact rather than fiction. This will not identify you as an individual or any of your workers.

Compass Disability Services can help you register
• Call 01823 282823 to make an appointment at our Taunton Offices.
• Come and see us at our Disability Somerset exhibition – on Thursday, May 10 at the Sedgemoor Auction Centre.
• We can also support you over the telephone. Call us on 01823 282823.
THE wait is almost over! Disability Somerset – the South West’s only major independent living exhibition – takes place on Thursday, May 10.

The event, organised by Compass Disability Services, is a must for disabled and older people, carers, and health and social care professionals, throughout Somerset and beyond.

Over 100 exhibitors will showcase an impressive range of disability-related equipment, services and information, designed to enhance disabled people’s independence and quality of life.

A fascinating programme of free workshops for professionals working in the health and social care sector will take place throughout the day, as will a number of demonstrations to entertain visitors.

Disability Somerset has the honour of being officially opened by the county’s very own multi-Paralympic gold medalist Deb Criddle, while BBC Somerset’s ‘touring’ bus will also be attending with popular presenter Emma Britton broadcasting her morning radio show live from the event.

The following pages give an insight into what you can expect to see at Disability Somerset – including a floorplan and exhibitor list on page 9. However, if you have any further queries, please get in touch.

Disability Somerset will have something for everyone – don’t miss out!

**Paralympic dressage**

**Disability Somerset will be officially opened by the county’s very own Paralympic star Deb Criddle (pictured).**

The talented dressage rider, who lives in Trull, has kindly agreed to take time out of her preparations for London 2012 to cut the ribbon, just before 10am.

Deb, who lost the use of her right arm in a motorcycle accident in 1985, won an incredible THREE gold medals at the Athens Games in 2004, and also competed at Sydney 2000 and Beijing 2008.

Deb has qualified for London 2012 as an individual rider, but is currently vying for selection for the team event – check out the latest in Networker’s sport section.
star to cut the ribbon

How to get there

Sedgemoor Auction Centre, Market Way North Petherton Somerset, TA6 6DF.

The venue is just off junction 24 of the M5, at North Petherton, between Bridgwater and Taunton

Tickets

DISABILITY Somerset is a free event for visitors, but by registering for tickets, you could be entitled to a free event bag.

The first 500 ticket-holders to arrive will receive an event bag which will contain a number of free gifts, magazines and disability-related information.

You can register for tickets by going to the event website www.disabilitysomerse.org.uk and clicking on ‘Get tickets’ on the menu.

Alternatively, you can call the office on 01823 282823 to register.

Workshops

THE following workshops have been organised for professionals working in health and social care or for people with an interest in this area and will be held in the venue’s Huntworth Suite.

To reserve your free place at any of the workshops, contact Paula Ingrey on 01823 282823 or email paula@compassdisability.org.uk

Spaces are limited so please book early.

For more information on the workshops, please go to www.disabilitysomerse.org.uk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORKSHOP TIMETABLE</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.45am to 11.45am</td>
<td>Assistive Technology – Telecare Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12pm to 2.15pm</td>
<td>Equality Act 2010 – Equality South West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15pm to 2.15pm</td>
<td>The engaged and activated patient – Expert Patients Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.30pm to 3.30pm</td>
<td>Dementia Awareness – Stuart Wright, of Brunelcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.45pm to 4.45pm</td>
<td>Personalisation and the future of health and social care – James Hood, of Somerset County Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Demonstrations

EVER fancied strutting your stuff on the dancefloor but held back because you’re a wheelchair user? Well, at Disability Somerset there will be no excuse!

**ISCA Wheelchair Dancers** (above) and **High Spirits Wheelchair Line Dancers** will be putting on demonstrations and providing visitors with a chance to join in with their routines.

The groups will be performing during half-hour demos throughout the day.

As will the **Canine Partners** assistance dogs (below). These fantastic, specially-trained animals and their trainers will be demonstrating how they help disabled people enjoy greater independence and quality of life.

For more information about our demonstrators, go to [www.disabilitysomerset.org.uk](http://www.disabilitysomerset.org.uk)

Accessibility

**Venue**
All areas of the arena are fully accessible with ample parking, flat level access and accessible toilets throughout.

**Wheelchair / scooter hire**
Taunton-based Orchard Mobility will be providing free wheelchairs and mobility scooters for hire. If you would like to reserve a scooter or wheelchair, please contact Paula on 01823 282823 or email info@compassdisability.org.uk

**Buses**
First Bus’s 21 and 21a services will stop at the Sedgemoor Auction Centre on the day of the exhibition. Service 21 runs from Taunton to Bridgwater to Burnham, via Brittons Ash, and 21a from Taunton to Bridgwater to Burnham, via Monkton Heathfield.

BBC Somerset’s Emma Britton interviews Compass Disability Services’ CEO Richard Pitman at the opening of last year’s exhibition. BBC Somerset are also hoping to attend this year’s event.

- Thursday May 10, 2012 • 10am-5pm • Sedgemoor Auction Centre
Exhibitor bookings were still being taken when Networker went to press – the final list will include additional exhibitors.
Hinkley C congestion concerns raised

THE new Hinkley C power station was the topic of discussion at the Sedgemoor Disability Forum at The Canalside, Huntworth, Bridgwater in February.

Compass Disability Network members were updated on the plans for the new power station in Bridgwater.

The forum was attended by Jeremy Damrel, Socio-Economics project manager for EDF Energy, Sergeant Steve Crago from Avon and Somerset Police and Kristy Blackwell, Community Safety Officer at Sedgemoor District Council.

A presentation was provided by Jeremy Damrel and members were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Concerns were raised about the effect the project will have on traffic and congestion in the area. Sgt Crago explained that a Community Safety Management Plan has been drawn up which addresses issues that have been identified from the consultations that have taken place.

Sgt Crago also explained that they want to hear your views and concerns. There will be a dedicated helpline, and people will also be able to contact the police on the non-emergency number 101, an anti-social behaviour line, and use groups such as the Sedgemoor Forum as a way of raising issues.

A full copy of the forum report is available on the Compass Disability Network website or you can telephone the office for a copy. Further contact details about the project are available in the report.

The next Sedgemoor Disability Forum takes place on Tuesday, May 22 at the Princess Hall in Burnham from 10.30am to 2pm. Contact Mandy for more details.

The next Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group takes place on Tuesday, June 26 at Compass Disability Services offices in Taunton. Transport can be provided to enable you to attend – contact the office for more details.

Annual Membership Evaluation

In April, the Compass Disability Network annual membership evaluation will be distributed.

This gives members an opportunity to give their views on their involvement with the Network over the past year. Project co-ordinator Mandy Seaman said: “We would really appreciate you taking a few minutes to complete this survey as it really does help us to plan and develop our services.”

A number of members took part in the Somerset County Council bus subsidies consultation during December and January. To find out the results, turn to page 14.
DISABLED people and carers can contribute to the learning and development of Adult Social Care staff by getting involved with the Hub.

Somerset Adult Social Care Learning and Development Hub is a project run by Compass Disability Services in partnership with Somerset County Council.

The aim is to bring together disabled people and carers, who are interested in the learning and development of Adult Social Care staff.

The Hub provides opportunities for members to share their experiences and skills to enable staff to reflect on working practices and think about how they relate to people who use services.

The Hub was launched in autumn 2009 and has been involved in various pieces of work including reviewing learning materials, producing two short-films used as a learning resource and, most recently, started delivering training sessions to adult social care staff and students.

HUB members and social workers take part in an ‘entanglement’ training exercise.

So, if you are a disabled person or carer, who has experience and knowledge you would like to give back to the community, contact Nat Stevens at Compass Disability Services on 01823 282823 to find out how you could get involved.
Support us by surfing the web!

IN these tough economic times, fundraising plays an increasingly vital role in Compass Disability Services’ work to improve the lives of disabled people in Somerset and beyond.

However, through easysearch and easyfundraising, it doesn’t cost you a penny to donate.

By using easysearch – instead of Google or any other internet search engine – to make ten searches a day, you could raise around £20 a year for Compass Disability Services.

• What do I do?
Go to www.easysearch.org.uk and enter the name ‘Compass Disability Services’.

Then, any search you make from the site (see screenshot above) or from your browser by installing the easysearch toolbar (see below) will generate around 0.5p for Compass Disability Services. And, by telling your family and friends, sharing it on Facebook, you will make a huge difference for us and the vital work we do.

Why use easysearch?
By combining the strengths of several search engines together – Yahoo!, Bing, MIVA, and many more – you get the best search results.

How does it work?
These search engines generate revenues from advertising goods and services. We receive a percentage of this revenue and pass on a large portion to the cause you are supporting.

The final amount per search can vary, however generally works out around 0.5p. The average user generates approximately £20 per year for their cause.

Make searches from your browser with easysearch

Spend £50 with Boden to raise £1.25!

Easyfundraising raises funds for Compass Disability Services when you shop online.

Thousands of well known retailers – including Boden, M&S, Argos, Vodafone – donate a percentage of your spend to your cause when you shop with them through the easyfundraising site.

For example, spend £50 with Boden and you’ll raise £1.25 for Compass Disability Services; insure your car with the RAC and they’ll donate up to £30; take out a new mobile contract with Vodafone and raise up to £45 ... it’s that simple!

• Register for free – just follow the links from easysearch – stating you wish to support Compass Disability Services.

When you’ve registered, click on the retailer you want, then shop as you would normally. When you make a purchase, you’ll receive an email telling you how much you’ve raised.

☑ For further details about easysearch, easyfundraising or other ways you can raise funds for Compass Disability Services, call us on 01823 282823 or email info@compassdisability.org.uk
Choose the support you want

- We provide a ‘helping hand’ when you need it.
- We can help with jobs around the home or simply help you to get out and about.
- We offer competitive rates on a wide range of services.

To find out more simply call us on: 03000 120 120

Alliance Homes is a community based social enterprise. We provide high quality support services to customers in North Somerset.
Bus routes earn reprieve after consultation

THIRTY bus routes could be protected by Somerset County Council after a consultation with passengers on future levels of transport subsidies.

They include funding services, running at least once per week, in areas that were facing the loss of buses, such as Babcary, Yeovilton, Winsham and West Fitzhead.

The Council will still invest around £1.9 million on subsidising routes across the county and supporting services taking children and students to schools and colleges.

Cabinet Member for Highways, Cllr Harvey Siggs, said: “We have talked to bus operators and bus passengers. We have always said this was about listening and have taken action where we can to help out. We have gone back to the budgets and found some areas where we can use money more flexibly to invest here.”

There were more than 1,500 responses from the public and bus companies to the consultation on subsidy reductions. These affected about half the 108 subsidised services in Somerset. Comments were reviewed and alterations proposed in many cases.

Bus companies and the Council are still negotiating some elements, but four routes mainly carrying fare-paying school children will be protected until at least the end of the summer term.

Some local services are likely to continue to be run by companies with reduced or zero subsidies.

Also, the number 99 (Taunton to Yeovil) could be re-routed to cover the loss to Winsham and Clapton of the 90 service (Chard to Crewkerne).

At a meeting of the Council in February it was confirmed the authority faces a £45 million budget gap over the coming two years. The original proposals for bus subsidies were a £1.5 million reduction, but that will be adjusted once negotiations with operators are completed.

Cllr Siggs added: “It is important that people use these bus services or risk losing them in the future, but we will help and support passengers as far as possible in these tough and challenging financial times.”

Bank Holiday recycling and refuse collection for Somerset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May Bank Holiday</th>
<th>Revised Collection Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usual collection day</td>
<td>Collections one day later, including Friday pick ups on Saturday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 7 to May 11</td>
<td>Collections one day later, including Friday pick ups on Saturday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diamond Jubilee

| Monday, June 4 | No change on June 4 – Monday collections as usual |
| Queen’s Diamond Jubilee – June 5 to June 8 | All collections one day later, including Friday pick ups on Saturday, June 21 |
‘Tramper’ events this summer

COUNTRYSIDE Mobility South West is organising a range of ‘tramper’ events in Exmoor National Park this summer.

- **Heddon Valley Walk, May 3** – A guided walk to Heddon’s Mouth and back is along the bottom of a steep wooded valley following the course of the Parracombe Water, with lovely views.
- **Nutcombe Bottom (Dunster) Big Adventure Day, June 6** – Explore Dunster Forest, where you can see England’s tallest tree.
- **Valley of Rocks (Lynmouth) Big Adventure Day, August 3** – A range of family activities including the ‘Exmoor Olympics’.

To book a place or a tramper, call 01392 456522. Trampers are all-terrain mobility scooters – pictured right.

Experience the therapeutic benefits of nature

SOUTH Somerset Mind’s ‘Natural Mind’ project aims to enable people from a variety of backgrounds, including those with experience of mental distress, to improve their mental and physical well-being through conservation activities and nature walks.

It is a great opportunity to experience the therapeutic benefits of being outdoors and physically active.

People can take part in guided nature walks in Yeovil Country Park, or conservation activities at Shapwick Heath Nature Reserve.

Both activities are free and open to groups and individuals aged 18 and above.

For more information, contact Gill Norton on 01935 474875 or email gill.norton@southsomersetmind.co.uk

Free carers courses in Williton and Wincanton

ST John Ambulance is running a free support programme for carers in Wincanton and Williton in May.

The course is aimed at people who care for someone at home and who would like to acquire more skills and knowledge.

It is run over four, three-hour sessions: introduction and the carer’s role; first aid and preventing falls; safer moving and handling, continence and benefits; memory loss, dementia and stress management.

The course in Williton takes place on May 1, 8, 15, 22 and in Wincanton on May 2, 9, 16, 23 – both from 10am to 1.30pm. For further details or to book a space, please contact Emily Lang on 01278 726740 or email emily.lang@somerset.sja.org.uk
TWO years ago, is someone had told me that a horse could teach a child to talk, I would not have believed it.

But two years ago in a book shop, I picked up a book called ‘The Horse Boy’ by Rupert Isaacson, and that is exactly what it said. It is the story of how horses helped the author’s son to overcome aspects of his Autism, including speech.

However, to get Conquest Centre For Disabled Riders to that stage we had to make some changes. Conquest – based at Norton Fitzwarren, near Taunton – caters for around 180 disabled riders a week, who mostly ride in traditional group lessons – the most effective way of ensuring as many people as possible benefit from our horses.

However, last year we noticed that some riders with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were becoming withdrawn and frustrated in group lessons. They can be overwhelming for a neuro-typical child, let alone a child who struggles to make sense of the outside world.

Instructors at Conquest have all been trained either by British Horse Society (BHS) or Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA), or both. These wonderful institutions teach riding and horse care in a logical and structured fashion. However, for a child with Autism, these traditional approaches can be isolating and confusing, and the goals meaningless.

Following the popularity of his book, Rupert Isaacson set up a training scheme that would allow instructors to learn the methods that he found to be successful with his son, Rowan.

And it has nothing to do with teaching children how to ride! But what it can do is offer the Autistic child a way to relate to the outside world – the horse literally carries them from their world into ours.

We try to treat the family as a whole, encouraging siblings and parents to take part. The horse becomes part of their family for a short time.

We tend to start with sensory work, which was initially developed to help reduce the neurological trauma experienced by children on the Spectrum, but also helps to reduce stress in other family members.

This involves getting on the horse bare-back whilst someone else holds the lead rope. After a few minutes of sitting, we encourage riders to lean forwards and hug the horse, and then backwards, opening their solar plexus. We are often taught to...
from their world into ours’

Riders is using the ‘Horse Boy Method’ to help Autistic children

coach, encourage, manage and discuss, but during this sensory work we become bystanders and allow unseen communication to take place between the horse and rider.

Another powerful tool that makes up part of Horse Boy Method is back-riding, where the instructor rides with the child in front of them.

The rocking motion of the horse is thought to open learning receptors in the brain. What you haven’t got is the child being faced with eye contact, or having to try and determine facial expressions, both of which can be distracting and worrying.

In a non-verbal child, this technique can help to start communication, be it copying noises, signing, whistling, laughing or even first words.

Although Horse Boy Method does not work for every child, and is not a ‘cure’ for Autism, so far it has been very useful for us. We still teach 180 riders a week in RDA group lessons, we just have more tools now to help reach children with ASD.

As a riding centre, we are at the beginning of what we hope will be a long and successful journey using these methods. As an instructor, it is a privilege to spend time with these children. They teach us more than we can ever teach them.

To find out more, go to www.conquestcentre.org.uk

The Conquest Centre is a leading charity dedicated to providing riding tuition and therapy to adults and children with all kinds of disabilities.

How to find it: Conquest Centre for Disabled Riders Ltd, Conquest Farm, Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton, Somerset, TA2 6PN
Shapwick Heath: A window to
A haven for wildlife and people of all abilities

IF YOU are looking for somewhere a little different to visit this summer which caters for all abilities, then Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve, on the Somerset Levels, may well be the answer.

Set in over 500 hectares, this special place is managed by Natural England and provides a haven for wildlife and people.

Although perhaps best known for its vast expanse of reedbeds, which attract millions of roosting starlings each winter, there are other habitats to explore via the many footpaths such as wet woodlands, wildflower meadows and lakes.

Without venturing too far you can find where the famous ‘Sweet Track’ was discovered by peat diggers in the 1970s.

This wooden trackway was built by Neolithic man 6,000 years ago (1,500 years before Stonehenge was erected!) and remains preserved in the peat as a monument to how the first farming communities in Britain cleared the landscape and created routes across the swamplands using only stone axes and other wooden tools.

Today, a path made from recycled waste plastic (a monument of our present times?) provides a wheelchair-friendly route to the site of the ‘Sweet Track’ where you can sense prehistory all around you.

Royal Ferns grow here with their majestic tropical fronds swaying in the breeze, reminding you of a time when dinosaurs roared.

Today you are much more likely to hear a cacophony of Marsh Frogs croaking from the nearby pools. These creatures are not native to Britain but have taken a liking to this landscape. Unlike many other ‘alien’ species these amphibians do not seem to be causing any major problems,
the past, present and future

especially as they are a favourite delicacy of Bitterns, an extremely rare bird which is now recovering well at Shapwick Heath and other nearby sites on the Avalon Marshes.

Each year, new species are breeding in this wonderful mosaic landscape. With careful management and expansion, the aim is that the area will provide a refuge for plants and wildlife affected by climate change, and also for people to enjoy for decades to come.

There are various facilities to make your visit as pleasant as possible. At the main Avalon Marshes Centre, there are accessible toilets, a powered wheelchair and RADAR key to borrow (bookable through Somerset Crafts on 01458 860426), a small information centre and cafe.

At the other end of the reserve there is an elevated boardwalk which provides a ‘Discovery Trail’ into the reedbeds for a real ‘close up to nature’, particularly suited to anyone with limited mobility.

More on the reserve and associated events as well as detailed access information can be found at www.naturalengland.org.uk or by calling the office on 01458 860736.

How to get there: From J23 of the M5 take the A39 Bridgwater to Glastonbury road. After six miles take the minor road left, signed Shapwick. Enter Shapwick Village and at the church continue north, following the brown tourist sign for Shapwick Heath.

By Kevin Anderson, Natural England
Gardens’ access issues

My son, Jordan, his Nanny Jean, and I visited Hestercombe on a nice dry day in February.

We had a very nice lunch in the restaurant, but found it very cramped with very little room for a wheelchair which made us feel a bit awkward. People kept bumping into Jordan’s wheelchair, one almost spilling her coffee on Jordan and I thought it would have been better if there had been a table reserved for wheelchair users in a corner of the restaurant.

There is an outside lift which takes you up to the top of some steep steps to the start of the walk. However, Jordan’s wheelchair would not fit on there, despite it being quite a small manual one.

We were told by a member of staff that we could access the gardens by starting at the end rather than the beginning. However, although I managed to push Jordan around the bottom of the garden past the lovely Victorian Terrace and the Great Plat, I had to give up half way around the Pear Pond as the ground was getting steeper and steeper and I could see that it was a very steep access around the lake to the end of the walk.

It was very disappointing to have to finish our walk after only about 30 minutes as I would have loved to have seen the rest of the gardens which looked lovely, even in the winter, with snowdrops everywhere.

After re-tracing our steps, I left Jordan at the car park with my mother and discovered that we could have started at the beginning of the walk by accessing the gardener’s path (where they take the staff vehicles), or by going through a locked door by the children’s playground. Despite this being a bit of a steep path, we could have started at the top of the walk and worked our way downwards and around the rest of the gardens.

I do not think that anyone elderly pushing a wheelchair could have managed the walk as the paths are bumpy and steep. However, I would love to go again without a wheelchair and have another visit as the gardens are amazing.

Gaynor Wright
HESTERCOMBE Gardens does its best to cater for as many people as possible including those with mobility challenges. The Visitor Centre has disabled toilet facilities, a ramp and a wheelchair lift which does accommodate most wheelchairs and pushchairs. Hestercombe also has its own wheelchairs which are bookable and free to hire.

The main obstacle faced by the Gardens is trying to achieve an acceptable balance between making the grounds accessible without detracting from the original design. For those with mobility issues the Gardens can be hard going, particularly as Lutyens was not shy in his use of steps in the design of the formal gardens.

It is equally tricky out in the landscape garden and, although the estates team has endeavoured to make paths as compact and wheelchair-friendly as possible, they are limited in their efforts by the need to remain faithful to the original Bampfylde scheme. The result is that a reasonable area of the landscape gardens and select parts of the formal garden can be accessed, although it is hard work on the wheelchair pusher. Recognition of this limitation is given by a reduced entry fee for wheelchair users and their helper comes in free. Restrictions aside, the views from the Octagon Summerhouse across the Pear Pond are worth the hard work to get there!

We are constantly looking to increase visitor satisfaction and it is only by 'visitor experience and comment' that this can be achieved so we make every effort to encourage feedback affording the opportunity to develop and improve facilities and service.

Mrs Wright's comments are gratefully received and are being discussed by management.

SALLY BENNETT, Hestercombe

Advice available for health, social care and disability

SOMERSET Community Care Matters (SCCM) can now provide advice on health, social care and disability rights.

It is open full time – Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm – with advice provided by the new caseworker, Ed Morton, who is qualified in law. SCCM will work within the legal aid system, but will seek to provide initial information or advice for all enquiries.

SCCM will have a stand at Compass Disability Services’ Disability Somerset Exhibition on May 10 at the Sedgemoor Auction Centre in North Petherton. They will be available for enquiries of all kinds and will be happy to discuss casework they can carry out.

For further advice, call 01823 334 906 or email sccmenquiries@mindtws.org.uk and a trained advisor will respond.
Pip to be rolled out in northern England

The new Personal Independence Payment is to initially be rolled out across the north of England next year.

According to the Department for Work and Pensions, this is so it can learn from each stage and get the process right.

Pip will replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) from April 2013 for eligible people of working age (people aged 16-64).

It is designed to be a simpler benefit than DLA, which ministers say is too complicated. It is being introduced under the controversial Welfare Reform Bill that passed through Parliament last month.

DLA claimants will be reassessed and a decision made on whether they can stay on the new Pip.

In a written statement to MPs, Minister for Disabled People Maria Miller said: “To ensure a smooth introduction, the launch will be undertaken through a phased approach, commencing initially with a subset of new claimants.

“This will ensure processes and procedures are working fully before moving to process all new claims and then reassessing existing disability living allowance.”

In a written Commons statement, she said the Bootle Benefit Centre would administer the first new claims from next spring for recipients in Merseyside, the north west, Cumbria, Cheshire and the north east.

She said it would provide a “robust test of the Pip processes and new computer systems” set-up to handle the claims before it is rolled out across the country.

A DWP spokesman said: “Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is an outdated benefit with the vast majority of people getting it for life without systematic checks to see if their condition has changed.

“This has led to hundreds of millions of pounds in overpayments.

“We are replacing DLA with the personal independence payment and introducing a new face-to-face assessment and regular reviews, to make sure support is going to those who need it most.”

FOR more on the Pip, turn to Networker’s ‘Have your say’ section on page 33.

Welfare Reform Bill becomes law

The government’s controversial Welfare Reform Bill has become law after passing its final hurdle in the House of Lords.

It contains a number of disability-related reforms, including the replacement of Disability Living Allowance with the Personal Independence Payment, as well as introducing a £26,000-a-year household benefit cap.

The bill has been described by Prime Minister David Cameron as the “biggest welfare revolution in over 60 years”.

The bill had ‘ping-ponged’ between the Commons and the Lords for several weeks.

Peers inflicted seven defeats on the bill but, one by one, the votes were overturned by MPs.

The reforms have been heavily criticised by disabled people, organisations and charities, while a report from a parliamentary committee has warned that changes to the benefits of disabled people may risk their right to independent living.

MPs have said that the rights of disabled people to lead an independent life must be written into UK law.

The cross-party, Joint Committee on Human Rights said the “cumulative impact” of welfare reforms could force some people out of their homes.
Remploy closures put 1,700 jobs at risk

REMPLOY – which provides work for disabled people – announced last month that it is planning to close 36 of its 54 factories, putting more than 1,700 jobs at risk.

The decision came as the government said it would accept the findings of the Sayce Review which looked at ways “to support disabled people to work in any role in any sectors”.

In a written statement to MPs, Minister for Disabled People Maria Miller (pictured) said the Remploy board was proposing to close the sites by the end of the year because they were unlikely to achieve independent financial viability.

Remploy, which is owned by the government, is one of the biggest employers of disabled people in the UK with over 2,300 employees.

Ms Miller said the £320m budget for disability employment has been protected, adding that the money will be spent more effectively.

On its website, Remploy said: “The Remploy board has proposed a series of significant changes to its operations as a result of the government decision to reduce current funding for Remploy.

“The government has accepted the recommendation in the Sayce Review which reported in June 2011 that, in future, government funding should be used to maximise the support for disabled people rather than subsidise specific organisations like Remploy.”

The decision was met with anger by Unite union general secretary Len McCluskey, who said: “This is a barbaric decision. The government has sunk to a new low by sacking over 1,000 disabled workers. In the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, these workers’ prospects of finding work are almost zero.”

The Employers’ Forum on Disability, which represents more than 300 employers, welcomed the announcement. Chief executive Susan Scott-Parker said: “The government’s implementation of the Sayce Review recommendations is good news for everyone. The UK already benefits from nearly 3.5 million disabled people already in employment. “This is a much-needed step towards eliminating the barriers to employment faced by the many people with disabilities who want to work but are denied the chance to compete.”

after passing final Lords hurdle

It criticised changes to benefits, including restrictions in local authority eligibility criteria for social care support and the replacement of the DLA with PIP.

Committee chairman Hywel Francis MP said: “We are concerned to learn that the right of disabled people to independent living may be at risk through the cumulative impact of current reforms.”

Mr Francis said the government had been “unable to demonstrate that sufficient regard has been paid to the (UN) Convention in the development of policy with direct relevance to the lives of disabled people”.

Responding to concerns, a spokeswoman for the Department for Work and Pensions said: “We welcome the committee’s acknowledgement that this government is committed to removing barriers and creating opportunities for disabled people.

“And, that the UK is a world leader on disability rights and in relation to independent living in particular.

“We continue to spend over £40bn a year on disabled people and their services, and our welfare reforms will ensure that support is focused on those who need it most – those facing the greatest barriers to living an independent life.”
THE cost of a Blue Badge has risen from £2 to £10 over three years following a consultation by Somerset County Council.

The new charge, which came into effect on April 1, is due to increased costs of producing the new harder-to-forge badges (see photo and adjoining article).

Almost 1,300 people responded to the Council’s consultation survey – around three-quarters of Blue Badge holders.

The responses were reported to councillors to inform their decision – the full report that summarises the responses is available on Somerset County Council’s website.

An increase in the charge for a Blue Badge from £2 to £10 was considered to be “reasonable and fair” by more than two-thirds of respondents.

This was largely consistent across Blue Badge holders, carers, the public and stakeholders (organisations that support or represent the interests of Blue Badge holders or their carers).

Seventy per cent thought that such an increase would affect Blue Badge holders “slightly” or “not at all”. Again, this was roughly consistent across Blue Badge holders, carers, the public and stakeholders.

Frequent comments made included £10 being value for money, £10 being unreasonable, that there is a need for tighter controls on issuing badges and better enforcement of disabled parking, and that there should be exemptions to a cost increase.

A Council spokesman said: “Due to national changes introduced by the Department for Transport, from 1 January, 2012, the Council has no longer been able to make its own badges. We have to pay an additional £4.60 per badge to a national supplier to make them for us.

“This will reduce fraud and misuse because badges will be harder to forge, copy or alter, and a national database of Blue Badge holders will be set up.

“However, it means the average cost to the Council has risen to around £14 per badge.”

The increased fee will:

- Cover the additional costs the Council is facing to fund the harder-to-forge badges and the national database.
- Help fund additional checks of residency and identity that will be happening in the future.
- Cover more of the Council’s costs for running the service at a time when its budgets are very stretched.

With the increased charge the Council will be subsidising the scheme by around £40,200 per year, compared to the previous subsidy of around £80,200.

This is the first increase in charges for Blue Badges since 1983. There are currently around 32,000 Blue Badge holders in Somerset. Each year the Council issues around 10,000 new or renewed badges, previously for a charge of £2 each.
TOUGH new measures to crack down on drivers who abuse the disabled parking system – including a new Blue Badge design which is harder to forge – have now come into force.

Previously, Blue Badges were made from card and handwritten but now disabled drivers will be able to apply for an electronically-printed badge, much like a driving licence.

The new badge has security features such as a unique hologram, digital photo and serial number allowing parking attendants to check for genuine badges more easily through the windscreen.

Blue Badge fraud is estimated to cost the UK £46 million a year and it was generally accepted that reform is urgently needed. The new badge is part of a wider crackdown on misuse of the scheme to ensure disabled parking spaces can only be used by those most in need.

Transport Minister, Norman Baker, said: “Motorists who pretend to be disabled to get some free parking are frankly disgraceful.

“They prevent real Blue Badge holders from using parking bays designed for those genuinely in need and they cheat the vast majority of road users who play fair when they park their cars.

“Our new Blue Badge will be as secure as a banknote and anyone thinking of faking it can forget it. We are also tightening up on enforcement and eligibility so there will be no way to scam the system.”

Blue Badges provide a vital lifeline to more than 2.5 million disabled people every year by prioritising key parking spaces close to important services. However, increasing levels of badge fraud have meant those spaces are often full.

Helen Dolphin, Director of Policy and Campaigns at Disabled Motoring UK, said: “After years of campaigning for improvements to the Blue Badge Scheme, I’m delighted that changes that make the scheme fit for the 21st century have been introduced.

“The new badge design will stop badges being so easily forged and new guidance to local authorities will make the issuing of badges fairer.

“The Blue Badge is a fantastic scheme and all these changes will help ensure the scheme will only benefit those it was intended for.”

For readers’ comments on the new Blue Badge charges, turn to ‘Have your say’ on page 32.
Facts and myths of

Many assume Multiple Sclerosis – often labelled the ‘invisible illness’ – only affects older people and automatically leads to life in a wheelchair. However, these are among a number of myths held about a condition which 100,000 people in the UK have. Here, we look at the facts behind MS.

MULTIPLE Sclerosis is a neurological condition whereby the fatty myelin sheaths that protect the nerves around the brain and spinal cord are damaged.

In simple terms, this means that abnormal and mixed messages are sent to various parts of the body, and affects the ability of the spinal cord and brain to communicate.

To break the word down, Multiple means ‘many’ and Sclerosis means ‘scars’.

Most people are diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 40, but it is not impossible for younger and older people to have it too.

Around 5-10% of people with MS are under 16 and almost twice as many women have MS than men.

Types of MS

There are four types of MS:

• Relapsing remitting – The most common. About 85% of people with MS have RRMS. Symptoms appear in an unpredictable relapse, which lasts approximately 4-6 weeks.
• Primary progressive – Affects about 10-15% of people with MS. Symptoms gradually get worse over time rather than appearing in attacks like relapses. They are usually subtle problems, e.g. walking, that develops over a period of time.
• Secondary progressive – Usually comes after RRMS. It is the build up of disability which is independent of relapses. Around 65% of those with RRMS will develop SPMS.
• Benign MS – A small number of relapses followed by complete recovery. This can only be diagnosed when the person has suffered little or no disability for a period of 10-15 years.

Some people often end up in a wheelchair or using a walking stick to aid mobility.

Some adaptations may also need to be made to the home, e.g. stair lifts, lower cupboards and ground floor bedrooms.

Many people try to live a normal life and make adaptations, e.g. on a night out, they may need to rest a few days before, while holidays may take more planning such as booking ground floor rooms, medical suite accessibility and taking a walking stick or wheelchair.

However, there is nothing to fear, as there are ways of coping and many people that have the same condition and worries as another.

MS is initially worrying for many, particularly as lots of people confuse it with ME or do not quite understand the implications and symptoms of MS.

However, many still lead a full and normal life, albeit with adaptations and changes.

To help people understand the condition, the MS Society has a helpline – 0808 800 8000 (9am-9pm Mon-Fri, and Sat 10am-1pm for a trial period until October).

Their website (www.mssociety.org.uk) and various leaflets and booklets provide further information about the illness.
the ‘invisible illness’

Signs and symptoms

- **Physical** – Blurred vision, balance problems, dizziness, fatigue, bladder problems, stiffness, spasms, bowel problems and constipation, speech difficulties, swallowing and tremors.
- **Memory and thinking** – Cognitive problems, problem solving and word finding becomes difficult, difficulty attaining attention, remembering new things, recognising objects, judging distances and understanding or using a language.
- **Mental health issues** – Depression, stress, anxiety (50% with MS experience serious depression at some point).

Some people have labelled MS the ‘invisible illness’, as many people can look absolutely fine and still have MS.

Just because they aren’t in a wheelchair or look ill does not mean they don’t have it, it just depends on the person and how impacting their relapses are or whether they are in remission.

Many people fail to understand the severity of the illness such as fatigue and mistake it for laziness, and some become frustrated as they think people with MS are abusing the disabled parking.

However, using facilities such as this helps to have a better day, as it is less tiring and allows them to feel safer in the knowledge that there is help if they need it.

MS is very much an individual illness, as it affects each person differently.

The symptoms of each person vary. It does not affect just the person that has MS either, as people around that support such as friends and family also have worries or stresses.

The MS Society helpline is also available for them to talk to an expert if they have troubles, and young carers can apply for grants to enable them to take up hobbies, take a short break or try a sport.

An estimated 100,000 people in UK and 2.5 million around world have MS

The exact cause of MS is yet to be discovered, but it has been found to be a mixture of environmental and genetic factors.

It is not directly inherited as there is no single gene that causes it. There is only about a 2% chance of a child developing MS if their parent has it.

Geographically, it is more common in areas further away from the equator.

No single virus has been found to contribute to MS, but evidence is mounting that common childhood viruses such as Epstein Barr virus may act as a trigger. However, there are many theories which contradict this.

The lack of Vitamin D has also been found to contribute to MS, which comes from exposure to sunlight. There are many research studies going on regarding what causes MS, and you can find them on the MS Society website.

Relapses can also be brought on by many different factors. What affects one person may not affect another however, so it is difficult to associate them with everyone that has MS.

People affected by MS cite stress as a big impacting factor, and some infections such as bladder infections may make an attack more likely.

Pregnancy has also been found to trigger relapses; with many women having a particularly bad relapse after their child is born.
There is no known cure for MS, but there are many ways that it can be handled.

- **Disease Modifying Drugs (DMDs)** – These can reduce the frequency and severity of relapses. They are not effective for primary progressive MS. Licensed drugs include Beta Interferon (which help fight viral infections in the immune system and can reduce inflammation that damages nerve fibres. Gilenya – an oral tablet taken once a day – is new and was licensed in the UK in April 2011. NICE has just approved this pill, making it the world’s first for MS.

- **Diet and exercise** – Such as complimentary and alternative therapies, aerobics and stretching, physiotherapy and managing weight.

- **Interestingly, a positive mental attitude and grasp of life** – Rather than letting the illness get them down, they fight back and accept the fact that there may be limitations and more rest needed, but a full life can still be lived.

---

### About the MS Society

The MS Society (www.mssociety.org.uk) is the UK’s largest charity dedicated to supporting everyone whose life is touched by MS, providing, an award-winning free phone helpline (0808 800 8000), specialist MS nurses and funding around 70 vital MS research projects in the UK.

The MS Society has 38,000 members, 9,000 volunteers, 440 staff. It has been around since 1953 and is a democratic organisation.

The MS Society: funds research, provides information, campaigns for change, invests in specialists, and is a source of support, including financial, online, over the phone and in person.

It has branches all over the UK in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including over 350 branches supporting their local area.
**MS Week** takes place from April 30 to May 6. This is a great time to raise awareness of, and money for, MS and the MS Society. One easy and fun way of doing this is Cake Break – the MS Society’s annual fundraising event where families and communities come together and enjoy cake while raising vital funds for the MS Society.

Cake Break officially takes place on Friday, May 4, however it can happen any time you want – just request a free host pack bursting with tips and ideas at www.mssociety.org.uk/cakebreak

---

**Dedicated, local service for people affected by MS**

THE Taunton and District Branch of the MS Society has joined forces with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to provide a dedicated service for people affected by MS in the area.

The service can provide advice on, and support with, a range of issues such as benefits, debt, housing, employment and carers’ rights.

Fleur Bale, chair of the Taunton and District Branch of the MS Society, said: “Navigating your way through the benefits system can be difficult and stressful.

“We believe the expertise provided by a CAB adviser who has a good understanding of all aspects of MS will be a great help to people affected by the condition.”

To contact the dedicated CAB adviser for MS ringing 01823 448957 or email advice@tauntoncab.org.uk

---

**About the Taunton Branch**

- The Taunton and District Branch of the MS Society is run by an elected committee of friendly volunteers, some of whom have MS.
- The branch is committed to supporting people with MS whether or not they are members of the Society.
- It depends on local fund-raising and donations to provide services and support.
- It produces a bi-monthly newsletter, available to anyone affected by MS to inform them of local services, fund-raising and events.
- The branch has two social groups – over 45s and under 45s – that meet every other month.
- The MS physiotherapy group meets on Fridays 12.30-1.30pm at the Blackbrook Pavilion, Blackbrook Way, Taunton.
- The branch also provides aromatherapy sessions to people with MS.
- For more information contact Fleur Bale on 01823 251138 or email fleur.bale@gmail.com
Shuker nets double in season opener

SOMERSET’S Lucy Shuker capped her seasonal reappearance by winning the women’s singles and doubles titles at the Northern Counties Wheelchair Tennis Tournament in Sunderland, last month.

After time out at the end of 2011 for routine surgery, Shuker’s first match since November’s Doubles Masters in Amsterdam ended with the top seed defeating up-and-coming young Brit Lauren Jones 6-0, 6-0.

She went on to beat German fourth seed Bianca Osterer 6-0, 6-3 in the semi-finals and then claimed her third career title in Sunderland with a 6-0, 6-4 victory over Spanish second seed Lola Ochoa.

Shuker’s victory took her tally of women’s singles titles at world ranking events to 14 and she went on to extend her tally of doubles titles to 24.

Shuker renewed a successful 2011 partnership with British number three Louise Hunt, the duo easing past fellow Brits Debbie Brazier and Val Fisher 6-1, 6-0 in the final.

“It was great to be back on court in a competitive situation and I can’t do more than win two titles out of two events,” said world number 13 Shuker, who recently lost the British number one ranking after her rehabilitation meant she was unable to travel to Australia in January.

“It’s obviously starting my season in the right way and I can go to the USA now looking forward to mixing it with more of the world’s top players as we all work towards the end of the qualification window for the London 2012 Paralympics.”

Shuker, who trains at Taunton Tennis Club, was due to play a series of three tournaments in Louisiana and Florida from the end of March and through into April before going overseas again before the end of the qualification period for the London 2012 Paralympics ends on 20 May.

Deb on track for Team GB qualification

SOMERSET’S Deb Criddle is on course to qualify for the GB dressage team at the London 2012 Paralympics.

The Trull-based rider made a great start to the team selection process after producing a fine performance at a qualifying event in Leicestershire last month.

Deb has already secured qualification for the games as an individual competitor.

Deb said: “I posted some good scores in Melton Mowbray and I carry those points forward to the next team qualifying event.

“There’s a long way to go but the process has started very well.

“Although I’ve already qualified as an individual rider, it’s always a huge honour to be selected for Team GB. GB has won team gold medal in every top level event – Paralympics, World and European Championships – since 1996, so everyone always wants to be part of that unbeaten record.”

SOMERSET’S Kieron Cosens has returned from a trip of a lifetime playing cricket for England Physical Disability XI against Pakistan in Dubai, writes Richard Walsh.

Kieron, who is slightly paralysed down his right side as a result of a stroke when he was born, became involved with cricket when was a pupil at Kingsmead School in Wiveliscombe.

The all-rounder, who lives in North Petherton with his wife and young family, has been part of the high performance squad since it was set up in 2010, and relished the experience of representing his country in their first full international.

The England PD XI played two T20 and three one-day matches against Pakistan, of which Cosens played in two.

Kieron said: “I played in the first T20 game and the final ODI match. I didn’t bat as well as I would’ve liked to but the situations weren’t easy.

“This was the first time that I have batted under floodlights and to play on very different sorts of pitches to the ones I am used to was really good.”

“While we were out there we got to train with the England senior squad as well and Stuart Broad was bowling at us which was interesting!

“I also managed to have a good chat with Somerset players Craig Kieswetter and Jos Buttler which I really enjoyed.

“It was a great experience and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I wouldn’t change it for the world and can’t wait for the next one.”

Kieron will take part in a training session with the England PD squad in April and has already joined up with the Somerset Disabled team, who have begun their preparations for the new season, when they will be aiming to regain their County Championship title.

On his trip to Dubai the Somerset all rounder was sponsored by Millichamp and Hall, the bat makers who are based at Somerset CCC’s County Ground in Taunton, and Irwin Mitchell Solicitors, one of the UK’s most successful and respected law firms.
Blue Badge cost is still great value

I HAVE very little spare money left from which I can pay frightening increases in food and fuel bills but, in my opinion, the increase in the ‘Blue Badge’ charge is small and understandable, given the improvement in the new badge.

There are few (if any) increases of a maximum of £8 over three years for anything and this ought to be applauded, especially when one considers the intended advances in help for users.

Of course it is rather sad, that cheats seek to defraud disabled badge holders, either by forging badges or using badges, which belong to other people/members of their family, when the actual named holder is not in the vehicle.

Personally, I find no credible reason why the badge holder’s photograph (NOT the name) should not be on the front of the badge.

I do think that there ought to be more strenuous, physical tests on applicants for a disabled person’s badge, as I see very many users of such badges jumping out of their cars and walking or running very quickly, as soon as they get out of their vehicles.

This makes me very angry, when I struggle to walk with my stick and one bag of shopping to my car parking space, far from those allocated for disabled persons.

However, if there is not some sort of increased policing for false use of the new badges, the effort and the increase will be futile and unnecessary.

Supermarkets ought to police the disabled spaces, issuing parking fines (which could pay for the policing) or employing a clamping system, operated by a member of the supermarket staff, NOT contracted, outside firms.

Everything increases as time advances and we all must pay our fair share. I consider the rise of the Blue Badge fee, given the satisfactory explanation, is great value.

Edmund Raphael

Enforcement is the problem, not the price

MY main point regarding Somerset County Council’s recent Blue Badge consultation is not the price increase, but the lack of enforcement.

In theory, on-road parking and municipal car parks that have warden-controlled enforcement present no real problem, provided there are enough enforcement personnel.

However, usually there is not – e.g. no police or wardens etc.

Able-bodied people display a badge and all enforcement staff say to me is “as long as there is a badge up, that is ok by me”.

Or if an, apparently, able-bodied person is asked if they are entitled to park in the space and don’t have a badge, the usual answers are that they are disabled but the badge is at home, they have not applied for one or they just tell you where to go!

The main problem is parking in supermarkets etc. Shops in these multi-shop car parks – e.g. at Hankridge Farm in Taunton – have no jurisdiction over the car parks and the owners are usually in another part of the country.

Another problem is the mother and child parking. They park in disabled people’s spaces but if you mention this to the mother, there usually follows a stream of filth from her mouth.

Park in any disabled space, road or mall in the USA and, no messing, your vehicle is towed. They have a system of CCTV that can find the space where no badge is displayed.

We are given every excuse under the sun why there is no enforcement, so able-bodied people will continue to use these spaces.

Edward TH Cox

Turn to page 24-25 for more on Somerset County Council’s Blue Badge consultation
How will PIP affect pensioners?

The February issue of Networker featured an article featuring some frequently-asked-questions on the soon-to-be-introduced Personal Independence Payment. Following the article, several readers queried how the new benefit will affect people over 65 or who receive state pension.

Below, is a reader’s correspondence with the Department for Work and Pensions.

Dear Sir or Madam, could you please clarify.

You suggest pensioners will not be reassessed for the new PIP payment, but only people between 16 and 64.

I am on state pension but am under 60 and receive DLA. Will I be reassessed and if so, will I be still entitled to, upon receiving PIP, both this and state pension?

Response from the DWP:
Whether you are eligible for reassessment will depend on your age not on the receipt of state pension. The Government’s intention is that Personal Independence Payment will be introduced for people aged 16-64 from 2013.

Current plans assume that everyone aged 16 -64 when PIP is introduced in April 2013 will be reassessed for PIP starting in Autumn 2013.

It would appear that you would be within scope for reassessment under PIP.

Everyone of working age (aged 16- 64) who gets DLA will need to be reassessed for PIP as the new benefit will have different entitlement criteria to those for DLA.

Most people will be asked to have a face-to-face consultation with a trained independent health professional, as part of their claim. Individuals with the most severe health conditions or disabilities, or those who are terminally ill, are unlikely to need to attend a face-to-face consultation. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

As with DLA, PIP will remain a non-means tested benefit, it will not be subject to tax and it will not affect payment of State Pension.

Information about PIP is available online on the DWP web pages at www.dwp.gov.uk/pip – this includes frequently asked questions.

From the DWP’s frequently asked questions:

18. Will pensioners receiving DLA be affected by these changes?

• No. At the moment Personal Independence Payment will not replace DLA for those aged over 65 at the time the benefit is introduced.
• They can continue to receive DLA so long as they continue to satisfy the qualifying conditions.
• We want to see how the assessment for the new benefit works for people of working age before deciding if Personal Independence Payment should be extended to people over 65.
Useful contacts

**Somerset Direct**  
PO Box 618, Taunton, TA1 3WF.  
Tel: 0845 3459133 Minicom: 0800 7834518  
Email: somersetdirect@somerset.gov.uk

**Care Connect North Somerset**  
North Somerset Council, Town Hall, Weston-super-Mare, BS23 1UJ.  
Tel: 01275 888801 Minicom: 01275 888805  
Email: care.connect@n-somerset.gov.uk

**Somerset Primary Care Trust**  
Wynford House, Lufton Way Yeovil, Somerset, BA22 8HR. Tel: 01935 384000 Fax: 01935 384079  
Email: headquarters@somersetpct.nhs.uk

**Somerset Patient Advice and Liaison Service**  
NHS Somerset, Freepost RRKL-XKSC-ACSG Yeovil, BA22 8HR Tel: 0800 0851067  
Email: pals@somerset.nhs.uk

**NHS Direct**  
Tel: 0845 4647

**North Somerset Primary Care Trust**  
Waverley House, Old Church Road, Clevedon, North Somerset, BS21 6NN  
Tel: 01275 546770 Fax: 01275 546769

**North Somerset Patient Advice and Liaison Service**  
Waverley House, Old Church Road, Clevedon, North Somerset, BS21 6NN  
Tel: 0800 923 2222 (Freephone)  
Email: pals@nsomerset-pct.nhs.uk

**Equality and Human Rights Commission**  
Freepost RRLL-GHUX-CTRX, Arndale House, Arndale Centre, Manchester, M4 3AQ  
Tel: 0845 6046610 Textphone: 0845 604 6620  
Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

**RADAR**  
12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London, EC1V 8AF  
Tel: 020 7250 3222 Minicom: 020 7250 4119  
Email: radar@radar.org.uk
HeadSaver® Soft Head Protector
Protecting Frail Elderly People from Fall Related Head Injuries

HeadSaver Soft Head Protector

- Validated
- User Friendly
- Stylish
- Lightweight
- Comfortable
- Practical
- Washable
- Discreet
- Durable

HeadSaver is a soft head protector designed to protect the head and scalp of the elderly or infirm people from the fall related impact forces that could cause head or scalp injuries.

HeadSaver Soft Head Protector is suitable for adults at risk of falling, including the elderly men and women in care homes as well as elderly people living and receiving care at home.

HeadSaver soft head protector can also help to protect people suffering with medical conditions that make them unsteady on their feet, such as Epilepsy, Parkinson’s Disease or Cerebral Palsy.

HeadSaver is a Class 1 Medical Device.

Win Health Ltd.
Brockhirst, Oxnam Road
Jedburgh, TD8 6QN
Phone: 01835 864866
Fax: 01835 863238

www.win-health.co.uk
info@win-health.co.uk

HipSaver® Soft Hip Protectors

Protecting Frail Elderly People from Fall Related Hip Injuries and Hip Fractures

- Validated and proven
- Global player since 1994
- Used by the NHS and Private Care Providers since 2002
- User friendly & comfortable
- Compatible with incontinence
- Durable with convenient ‘Wash & Dry’ @ 95°C
- Affordable from £33.99 + VAT

HipSaver® Soft Hip Protectors are compatible with the needs of the elderly people and the needs of the carers. Choose from soft underwear, soft pyjamas or casual trousers in 7 sizes.

Win Health Ltd.
Brockhirst, Oxnam Road
Jedburgh, TD8 6QN
Phone: 01835 864866
Fax: 01835 863238

www.win-health.co.uk
info@win-health.co.uk
Disability Somerset
Independent living exhibition

• Thursday, May 10th 2012 • 10am-5pm
• Sedgemoor Auction Centre (just off jct 24 of the M5).

• A great opportunity for disabled people, older people, carers and professionals to view the wealth of equipment, information and support available to enhance quality of life.

• To book exhibition space or to register for free tickets visit www.disabilitysomerset.org.uk or call Compass Disability Services on 01823 282823.

• The venue has ample free parking, and all facilities – including cafes and licensed bar – are fully accessible.

Disability Somerset is sponsored by
Disability Claim Management
The first choice to fight discrimination

**ARE you reading Networker in a doctors surgery, hospital waiting room or other public place? Would you like to receive your own copy? Then get in touch and we’ll be happy to send you a copy or add you to our mailing list. See page three for our contact details.**