



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

No. 113
Spring
2017

THIS IS THE EDITION of the *Newsletter* which includes the report of our A.G.M. in February. We think it's important to print in full the reports of our activities which were presented to the A.G.M., both for our members and friends who weren't able to be present, and as a permanent record. As a result we have 12 pages this time.

Although the A.G.M. looks back at the calendar year 2016, it's impossible when telling the stories of what we've been up to to stop arbitrarily on 31 December. As a result, the A.G.M. reports often contain news which would otherwise have appeared in our 'normal' pages. The A.G.M. finished with advance notice of two events which are happening very soon. They're on 15 March, so please make sure you look at the 'Dates for your Diary' (page 11) before reading anything else!

Paul Mizen stood down from the Committee at the A.G.M., but he volunteered to continue to make the arrangements for our events if we told him what to do! Thank you, Paul. Ideas for a summer event or visit are very welcome – please contact any committee member (details on the back page).

We're delighted to welcome Martin Grant to the Committee. Martin has done a tremendous job organising coppicing and other volunteering work in Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve – read all about it on pages 7 and 8. And Marie Jo Coutanche, who had been co-opted on to the Committee to take the minutes, is now 'officially' elected. But there is still room for other members to join the Committee – please let me know if you think you might be interested.

As we embark on our 23rd year, things have never been so uncertain at our principal partner, Bristol City Council. But there are still plenty of good people there who are doing their best. Fingers crossed!

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

IN THIS ISSUE

Manor Woods Valley News ...	Page 2
Report from the A.G.M.....	Page 3
Accounts for 2016.....	Page 10
Dates for your Diary.....	Page 11
Wild BS13.....	Page 12

NEWS FROM MANOR WOODS VALLEY L.N.R.

IN THE OLD QUARRIES, a large area has now been cleared of scrub (see pages 6 and 7). Volunteers will soon start gathering the debris. In preparation for that, two M.V.C.G. members have spent several hours picking up rubbish,



from old plastic bottles and bags to a plastic crate, an old tent, a gas cylinder and two broken spades. We hope you will enjoy the area when the summer comes.

MARIE JO
COUTANCHE
*Manor Woods
Valley Working
Group*

A BIG **THANK YOU** to all those members who have renewed their membership of Malago Valley Conservation Group (and WELCOME to those who have recently joined). A further thanks to those who added a donation by generously rounding up their subscriptions. As you'll see from the Report of our activities during 2016, and from the Treasurer's Report (page 10), the extra cash is put to good use in improving our environment.

Only a handful of people haven't yet renewed – if you're one of them you will find a renewal form enclosed with this *Newsletter* (or attached to the e-mail if you receive it electronically). You don't need to fill in the form unless any of your details have changed – just add a note of your name if you're dropping cash through the letterbox (cheques are self-explanatory!).

Please send your renewal to either Beryl Heaton (3 Kings Walk, BS13 8BB) or André Coutanche (14 Queens Road, BS13 8LB). **THANK YOU!**

REPORT FROM THE A.G.M.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE welcomed everyone to the meeting. After the usual – and extensive – reports on our activities during 2016, there were the elections to the Committee. Our topical talk was from Heather Williams, who gave us much food for thought, looking back on her experience in her recent job with Hartcliffe & Withywood Community Partnership. The traditional drinks and nibbles rounded off M.V.C.G.'s twenty-second A.G.M. and birthday party.

Programme Report: PAUL MIZEN reported that the Summer Outing had been to the HHEAG Roundhouse at Bourchier Gardens allotments. We were well received by Steve and Geoff, who explained the history and construction of the Roundhouse. It was a lovely venue for our picnic with super views from the terrace and a most convivial evening was enjoyed. The Christmas party was its usual mixture of a quiz and fun and games, with much chatting and good food. As always, a good time was had by all. Paul said that he was standing down from the committee but would still help to arrange events in the future.



Planning Issues: ANDRÉ COUTANCHE said that, as usual, he had been monitoring the weekly lists of planning applications which we receive by e-mail from the City Council. For the few applications in our two wards which seem to need checking, he looks up the details on the Council's website and he brings a few of those to our Committee. In many cases, the Committee doesn't want to comment, and in a handful of cases each year we submit our comments on an application – usually to oppose it either in whole or in part, and occasionally to support what we see as a good effort out of the normal rut.



The former United Reformed Church on Church Road, Bishopsworth, is a continuing saga which we've reported on for the last three years. 2016 brought a new owner and new planning application for the site – the conversion of the church building into flats, and replacement of the church hall behind by five houses in a terrace. That got its planning permission, but only after some negotiations with the planners who were concerned about the restricted width of the access lane from Fernsted Road. Nothing actually happened, and we heard early this year that there

was another new owner. The development of flats in the church building may well be going ahead soon, but there is a new planning application for the houses round the back – now six houses are being applied for, as three pairs of semi-detached. Whether the applicants will be able to convince the planners that the extra demand on the access lane will be acceptable remains to be seen.

We reported last year on the former ‘Woods’ pub on Fouracres in Withywood, where nine houses were applied for. We saw no problem with the plans, but the Council planners had some reservations and things were pending this time last year. The planners subsequently refused permission, so it remains a derelict site.

Housing on what’s known as Plot 4 at Imperial Park was granted permission last year and work should be starting soon. That left Plots 1-3, which are currently being consulted on as one site. There was an exhibition recently at Imperial Park to show what’s proposed. It would be an extension of the existing shopping area, containing an Aldi, other shops, a gym and the inevitable coffee shop. We’re told that a full planning application will be made fairly soon.



Two years ago, we reported that the over-intensive scheme for new houses at 131 Bridgwater Road – which we had opposed – had been granted permission. As is often the case with ‘fill-in’ sites, the address is misleading – this is effectively an extension of Kings Walk. The developers have behaved disgracefully and built more than the permission allowed – they have made the houses too high and added unauthorised dormer windows. Planning Enforcement have looked into this and have allowed the developers to submit a retrospective planning application for what has actually been built. We regret this – our view is that developers who cynically ignore the rules should immediately be told to stop and put right what they have done wrong. This new application is currently in the works, and both we and Highridge Forum will be strongly opposing it when it becomes available for comment.

There continued to be a number of ‘fill-in’ applications on corner sites. In general, this is potentially a good use of land, though neighbours are often opposed. In these cases, we usually leave things to the planning officers and do not comment.

There have been two interesting ‘pre-apps’ during 2016. These are consultations which developers do with local groups before working up an actual planning application. The first one is for Churches Yard, off Whitchurch Road, opposite the bottom of Derham Road. The proposal is for nine houses. There is a lot of potential here for improving the setting of the Malago and for including a pedestrian route from Whitchurch Road to Headley Road. However, the sloppy phrasing in the pre-app. document suggests a very speculative approach, and we’ve heard no more since the initial contact last March.



The other pre-app. is much more serious. The old Bristol Water depot opposite Bishopsworth Road from the Cross Hands is a big site which is being proposed for 62 dwellings, ranging from two-bedroom apartments to four-bedroom houses. The artist's impression shows three-storey blocks of flats

facing onto Bishopsworth Road, with mostly two-storey buildings elsewhere on the site. We've said we're happy with the general principle and we are expecting a detailed planning application in due course.

As we reported last year, the South Bristol Link is a subject we have been monitoring at Committee meetings since it received planning permission in November 2013, though it's not a planning issue as such. Highridge Forum has been the lead organisation liaising with the contractors in our area and we work very closely with them. Of course, the road itself is now open, and we continue to monitor its effects. The other 'Metrobus' route, up Hartcliffe Way, is currently under construction, and, again, we are monitoring its effects.

Progress with Manor Woods Valley: MARIE JO COUTANCHE, as Convenor of the Manor Woods Valley Working Group, reported that we have welcomed two new members to our working group: Mo Harding and Martin Grant.

Starting in the woodland: the edgings to the Woodland Path were repaired by ParkWork. ParkWork is a joint initiative between Bristol Parks Forum and Bristol Parks. It uses some volunteer labour and provides training opportunities. So in the summer Joe McKenna and his team replaced a few damaged edgings, repaired the collapsed step riser and damaged areas of path surface. Since then, they have done some regular maintenance. This path is used by a lot of people which is excellent news. However we are aware that the general surface is becoming rather worn out and muddy in the winter.

The end of the path, near the interceptor, was always very muddy and slippery in wet weather. Our aim was to extend the path out of the woodland. In the summer, M.V.C.G. applied for a Neighbourhood Partnership Wellbeing Grant



for half the cost with M.V.C.G. paying the other half. Our application was successful and ParkWork completed the work in January. It has certainly improved the access to the woodland. Also Joe used the remaining crushed stone to fill the hole in front of the bench financed by M.V.C.G. a few years ago, situated at the top of the flower meadow. Thank you to Joe and his team for all their hard work. Our group has enjoyed collaborating with them.

In the summer it was time for the 'Himalayan Balsam Big Pull' led by Neil Green from the Avon Invasive Weeds Forum. Members from our group and other volunteers met four times this summer and managed to pull out most plants, sometimes on precarious areas along the stream. We spent a lot of time on the island in the middle of the pond. This island is the result of silt having accumulated for about twenty years without being removed. Apart from being fertile ground for Himalayan balsam it is also covered with rubbish brought by the stream.



Along the Malago Greenway, near the interceptor, the meadow interpretation board which M.V.C.G. designed had been vandalised. It has now been replaced and we will enjoy it when the meadow is in bloom in May/June. Thank you to Tom Penn for organising the replacement. Also a month ago two members of our group cleaned the woodland interpretation board at the library entrance. The area near the interceptor has also been improved

since the willow trees which had grown out of the silted stream have been finally removed.

It is always rewarding to think of the number of people who contribute to making Manor Woods Valley a nicer place: Parks Department staff, a lot of members of the public who use it regularly and M.V.C.G. members of course. This year, many people have helped our group keep the area free of litter as much as possible. Early in the year a group from Community Payback spent half a day litter picking. A few weeks ago a group of volunteers spent time around the pond and on the island in the middle of the pond. They filled a lot of bags which were then quickly collected by the Council litter team.

One area which is gradually changing is the Old Quarry. For people who may have just discovered Manor Woods Valley it is the area you access from the Vale Lane entrance. It is partly at the back of the Vale Lane industrial estate. In the past few years the Avon Wildlife Trust and some volunteers had cleared areas of invasive vegetation in the winter, particularly around the apple trees. Last August we took Becky Belfin, then the Council Nature Conservation Officer, round the area. Aerial photos she later sent us showed that in the past few years areas of neutral grassland with wildflowers had turned into scrub. On 4 October 2016 a group of Avon Wildlife Trust and M.V.C.G. volunteers tackled the area of grassland on the edge of the quarry area. We removed the rough grass and tree saplings to allow wild flowers to come back. Scrub is a valuable habitat but there is no shortage of it in Manor Woods Valley! In early February



this year contractors arrived to tackle the area of brambles in the central area and some of the tall scrub on the slope nearby, in order to restore some areas of neutral grassland. It is so exciting to see the Old Quarry which used to be completely inaccessible coming back to life, with some areas going back to their original habitat. The Old Quarry harbours flower species which do not exist elsewhere in Manor Woods Valley, so it must be looked after. Thank you to all those who help us achieve this aim.

Finally, let us not forget it should be incorporated into the Local Nature Reserve like the rest of Manor Woods Valley so that it is fully protected.

In the autumn 2016 we heard excellent news: Manor Woods Valley was one of four sites chosen by Bristol City Council to receive special help from the Avon Wildlife Trust for practical work but also events and activities for local people. On 8 November we welcomed Nicole Daw and took her round Manor Woods Valley. She is the 'People and Wildlife Officer' for A.W.T. She has been helping us in our new coppicing team and is preparing some local events in the next few weeks in collaboration with Zion. We are very much looking forward to them.

Our 'new coppicing team' is M.V.C.G.'s latest venture. For many years we have highlighted the poor state of the woodland which had not been managed for years. We have tried to raise its profile with a lot of people and dreamt that one day light would shine through the trees, there would be glades where we would enjoy the sunshine and it would encourage the regeneration of young trees and flowers on the woodland floor. Martin has been leading on the coppicing.

MARTIN GRANT reported that, thanks to the support of Bristol City Council, Forest of Avon Trust and Avon Wildlife Trust, we were able to run a programme of coppicing in Manor Woods Valley this winter. The Council funded the Forest of Avon Trust to provide two days of coppicing training for volunteers and the Avon Wildlife Trust supported the volunteers in three further days of coppicing. In exchange for firewood logs, Campus Pool Skatepark funded a licensed chainsaw user to coppice some mature trees in the Woodland Path that were too big for hand tools.

The volunteers were recruited through poster adverts, Facebook and word of mouth. The areas chosen for coppicing are close to the Valley Heights flats and the work involved clearing the areas of bramble and scrub,



removing embedded litter (including a car wheel and a sofa!), coppicing the secondary planted hazel trees and building dead hedges.

The coppicing involves the use of pruning and bow saws to cut the hazel to ground level, ensuring the cuts are angled to allow the rain to run away from the centre of the stool to prevent rot. Products from coppicing include tree stakes, bean poles, pea sticks, firewood and charcoal. We have few outlets for these products at the moment but we are more concerned about the biodiversity value of coppicing.



To date, this is our coppicing story in numbers:

- 200+ hours of volunteering
- 21 volunteers recruited (7 from BS13 and 14 from the rest of Bristol and beyond)
- 15 volunteers trained by Forest of Avon Trust and 6 by MVCG
- 5 days of coppicing including 2 training days and 1 of chainsawing
- 3 dead hedges built
- 1 more day of coppicing this year, planned for 11 March.

Future plans include:

- devising a woodland management plan with Bristol City Council
- becoming trained in health and safety and first aid to give us insurance liability cover
- having our own coppicing tools and equipment
- identifying outlets for coppiced products
- retaining the interest of the volunteers.

Feedback from volunteers included:

- *'Thank you for providing that amazing opportunity to learn an old skill. I immensely enjoyed the day and am looking forward for the next.'* - Tatjana
- *'I really enjoyed my day in Manor Woods Valley with you all. Keep me posted and I'll come along again when I can.'* - Kate
- *'Thanks for the instruction and support on Saturday, it was an experience we both greatly enjoyed. We will be sure to make ourselves as available as possible.'* - Daniel and Corinna.

Progress with Other Projects: ANDRÉ COUTANCHE reported that, as in recent years, many of the projects we are involved with are progressed through the working groups of our Dundry View Neighbourhood Partnership. Both the 'Pride of Place' group, the Environmental sub-group, and the Transport Group have bi-monthly meetings which he attends, and they remain good forums both for learning about new developments and for getting things done.

But things will be changing soon, and not for the better. We all know the extreme financial pressure which the Council is under, and the reason why our City Councillors aren't able to be at the A.G.M. is because they are at a Full Meeting of the Council which is setting the budget for the coming year. All we know at present is that there are proposals to cut spending on the neighbourhood partnerships throughout the city to an extent which makes it difficult to see how they can continue. Time will tell.

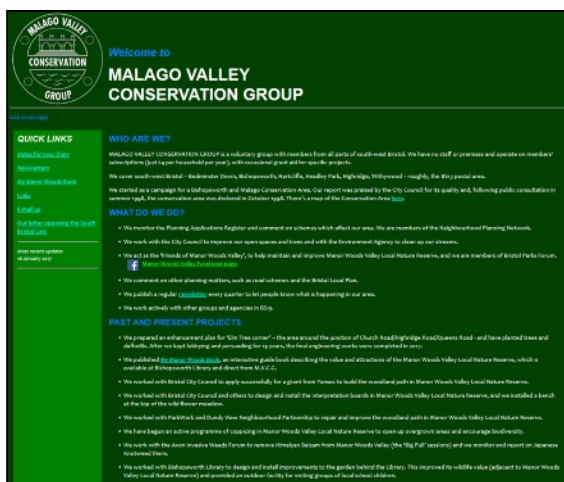
That thought brings us to some much better news – Elm Tree Corner. This time last year we reported that we were expecting construction to start before too long, and the work should be finished before next year's A.G.M. That was a successful prediction! So having been keeping up the pressure in the background for this project to be completed for 19 years, one reaction might be: 'about time'. The other reaction may turn out to be: 'just in time'. It could be the last significant highway scheme in our area for quite a while, and certainly the last where the local community has had a say via the Neighbourhood Partnership system. But the achievement of these practical improvements marks a major milestone in M.V.C.G.'s 22-year history and we're both highly delighted and very grateful for the co-operation we've had from other local groups, especially Highridge Forum, and from successive ward councillors and Council officers.

Progress has continued to be made on Dundry Slopes, with Volunteering Matters and the Avon Wildlife Trust doing a lot of work, and the founding during the year of a new community group, the Dundry & Hartcliffe Wildlife Conservation Group. As in recent years, we've been happy to let these other organisations get on with it while we concentrate our limited time and resources elsewhere.

We continue to go to the Parks Forum, which has quarterly meetings, and their very good e-mail circulation keeps us informed. Parks is another area under very severe financial pressure and we don't know how things will evolve in future.

Our website is regularly maintained with details of our events, and we continue to put our *Newsletters* on the website as they are published. We recently did a more general updating to reflect our current activities – comments welcome! And the website now has a link to the new Facebook page which Martin has set up to publicise the coppicing and other volunteering activity in Manor Woods Valley.

www.mvcg.org.uk



ACCOUNTS FOR 2016

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Membership.....	216.00	Refreshments at A.G.M.	21.23
Donations	39.00	Printing	18.00
Christmas party raffle	23.00	Hall Rent.....	66.00
Book sales	6.80	Christmas meeting	21.43
Bank Interest	<u>2.37</u>	CPRE subscription	36.00
		Web domain fee	8.39
		Postage.....	3.84
		Donation to HHEAG.....	<u>20.00</u>
Total	287.17	Total	194.89
			£
Excess of income over expenditure			92.28
Brought forward from 2015			4321.27
Balance carried forward to 2017			4413.55
Made up of:			
Cash in hand			3.43
HSBC Money Manager account			3386.62
HSBC Current account			1023.50

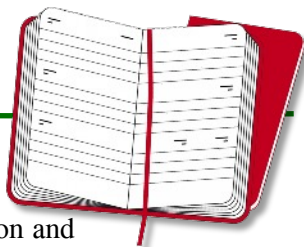
Beryl wasn't able to be present at the A.G.M. but sent this report:

The finances are in a healthy state with an excess of income over expenditure of £92.28. This has been helped considerably by the generosity of members' donations totalling £39.00.

Work has recently been completed on the extension to the woodland path in Manor Woods Valley which M.V.C.G. has agreed to finance. The total cost of the work is £850, but we obtained a grant of £425 from the Neighbourhood Partnership so we will be paying the remaining £425 from our funds. This will of course appear in next year's accounts but as the expenditure is imminent I felt I should mentioned it now. I am sure members will be pleased to know that we are using our funds to improve our environment.

BERYL HEATON
Hon. Treasurer

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



THESE EVENTS have been arranged in co-operation with the Avon Wildlife Trust and Zion Bristol. We're very grateful to Jess at Zion and Nicole at A.W.T. for all their help. The first two events really are on the same day – it's not a typo!

Wednesday 15 March: TALK on 'The History of Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve and the Malago and Pigeonhouse Valleys' by André Coutanche with Martin Grant. At Zion starting at 10.30am. Free. *My Manor Woods Book* will be on sale after the talk. See also www.facebook.com/events/379794275728054/.

Wednesday 15 March: OWL PROWL starting at Zion with the Hawk and Owl Trust. Numbers are limited and **BOOKING IS ESSENTIAL** – e-mail nicole.daw@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk. Meet at 6.00pm for a 6.30pm start. No charge but a donation of £2 per person is suggested for the Hawk and Owl Trust. See also www.facebook.com/events/1790776831246254/.

Easter Monday, 17 April: TREASURE HUNT – a day out at Zion and the surrounding area. This is a family-friendly activity for all ages, and there will also be a few questions set by Avon Wildlife Trust based on Manor Woods Valley. Register your team for a clue-led trail and pit your wits against the other teams to win a prize and be crowned champions of the Down! Up to 6 persons per team (under 12s not counted), £15 per team, and all teams must register and pay before midday on 7 April. The Trail will last approx. 1-1½ hours at a steady pace. It's accessible for all ages but buggies may be needed for little ones. Doors open 1.30pm, Treasure Hunt starts 2.00pm, bar and buffet (buffet included in entry) at Zion at the end. See also www.facebook.com/events/254269988359399.

Saturday 22 April: MANOR WOODS VALLEY OPEN DAY EXTRAVAGANZA. There will be something for everyone between 11.00am and 3.00pm. Join in with stream dipping in the morning, or bug hunting in the afternoon. Bring a picnic and learn more about the site on a guided walk. Find out how you can get involved with practical management such as coppicing and looking after the newly cleared orchard. For more details please contact nicole.daw@avonwildlifetrust.org.uk.

WILD BS13

SPRING IS IN THE AIR! It may still be cold at night, and overcast skies and brisk winds aren't encouraging anyone to look out the shorts and T-shirts, but nature knows it's on the way.

- The FROGS in our garden pond (and the neighbours') have been very active, and frog-spawn is now in evidence. Let's hope for no late hard frosts, which knocked them back last year.
- WOODPECKERS have been heard drumming in the woodland in Manor Woods Valley. They don't sing, but the 'drum roll' tells potential rivals that the nesting territory is taken.
- Corvids (crows, rooks, magpies, jackdaws) are seen much more in and from gardens than they used to be. RAVENS remain a bit special, though their distinctive 'grok' call can often be heard as they fly over our part of Bristol. Most unusually, a pair have started to frequent a tall conifer in a local garden, though whether they will attempt to nest isn't clear.
- Finally, not exactly wild, but definitely a sign of spring: the DAFFODILS which M.V.C.G. has planted over the years in open spaces in BS13 are putting on a good show. The variety is 'February Gold', and they really were out in February this year; they usually wait until March!

MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

Chairman	André Coutanche	964 3106
Vice-Chairman	Mary Sykes	964 3712
Hon. Secretary	Peter Crispin	939 0256
Hon. Treasurer	Beryl Heaton	964 5780

Committee Members

Marie Jo Coutanche, Martin Grant, Lis Pibworth

Co-opted Committee Members

Richard Bevan (Highridge Forum), Diana Porter (Bedminster Down & Uplands Society), Sue Walker (HHEAG), Ken Kennedy (Volunteering Matters), Cllrs Mark Brain, Richard Eddy, Paul Goggin, Helen Holland, Kevin Quartley
(All the City councillors for Bishopsworth ward and for Withywood and Hartcliffe ward are invited to become co-opted Committee members)

Newsletter edited by André Coutanche, 14 Queens Road, Bishopsworth, Bristol, BS13 8LB; tel. 964 3106; e-mail andrec@mvcg.org.uk; website www.mvcg.org.uk.

Letters, articles and suggestions from readers are welcome.

The opinions in this *Newsletter* do not necessarily represent those of M.V.C.G.