MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP
NEWSLETTER
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Spring
2018

MOST OF THIS SPRING EDITION of the *Newsletter* is about our A.G.M. in February. We print the reports of our activities during 2017 which were presented to members, both for those who weren't able to be there, and as a permanent record. As a result we have 12 pages this time.

Pete Crispin stood down as Hon. Secretary at the A.G.M. but remains on the committee. We're delighted to welcome Peter Loy-Hancocks as a committee member – Peter is a retired ecologist and has been very active with Martin in Manor Woods Valley; he also knows about planning. More committee members would be welcome – please get in touch if you'd like to know more. We need a Secretary, but that job isn't necessarily too arduous. It may or may not include minuting the committee meetings, and the division of responsibilities between Secretary and Chair has traditionally been rather fluid. Informal enquiries welcome! Beryl has given notice that she will retire (very honourably!) as Treasurer at the 2019 A.G.M., and Lis Pibworth has volunteered to take over then – thanks, Lis!

As usual, our Manor Woods Valley Group has been very active, and Martin provides a 'post-A.G.M.' update on page 2. There are no 'Dates for Your Diary' in this edition because we haven't yet fixed a summer outing. Ideas are very welcome.

Another 'post-A.G.M.' update, this time on the planning fiasco which is 131 Bridgwater Road (see also the report on page 6). A briefing went to councillors on the City Council Planning Committee on 14 March to explain why things had taken so long and what would happen next. The short answer seems to be that the planners ceded decision-making to the Council's lawyers, who advised against enforcement action being taken. This is worrying, and we will monitor closely both this case and any other examples of this.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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NEWS FROM MANOR WOODS VALLEY L.N.R.

2018 BEGAN WELL with offers of volunteering help from GoodGym, Forest of Avon Trust, Avon Wildlife Trust, TSB Bank, ParkWork and, of course, our regular M.V.C.G. members and volunteers.

22 GoodGym runners joined seven M.V.C.G. volunteers in early January to complete the work of clearing the Woodland Path of encroaching bramble and scrub. This was followed by Anna and her chainsaw, felling the large branches and trees that were obstructing the path.

Anna and her chainsaw

Brambles are a prominent feature of Manor Woods Valley and are good for wildlife – they provide cover for nesting and fruit for birds and other animals. And, because we have so much of it, we are keen to stop it from spreading and can afford to cut back some of it to allow other forms of habitat to flourish. In February we removed the island of bramble near the Valley Heights flats to reveal a hawthorn, an elder and an oak tree.

Before …

… After

We also cleared, with the help of Avon Wildlife Trust volunteers, a large swathe of bramble in the Orchard area. This is part of our ongoing attempts to restore this area to its original mixed grasses and wildflower status.

The Rabbit Field, adjacent to the Orchard, is another area that was cleared of brambles in January and February. ParkWork (an organisation that offers training and skills development for volunteers who need additional support to secure permanent employment, while improving Bristol's green spaces) is carrying out this work as part of the funded project to improve the habitat for slow worms and other wildlife.

Bramble clearance is a winter activity, to avoid disturbing nesting birds. Our challenge over the summer months will be to prevent the brambles growing back again, and for this we need all the volunteering help we can get!

Coppicing hazel is another activity confined to winter. In February and March we continued coppicing in the area near the Valley Road entrance. A small group of volunteers from the Bristol Rehabilitation Service, working with the Forest of Avon Trust Wellbeing project and M.V.C.G. volunteers, made a significant contribution to this work over six Fridays – they became known as Forest Fridays. As well as coppicing, the group learnt woodland craft and outdoor cooking skills. Staff from the TSB bank legal team also devoted a day to coppicing in this area as part of their community volunteering policy.

Clearing brambles and coppicing hazel are traditional ways to manage woodlands to allow in light and encourage dormant diverse plants to flourish. Unfortunately this work also exposed large amounts of accumulated litter. So, on a cold and windy March morning, 18 local volunteers set about spring-cleaning the whole of Manor Woods Valley and collected 32 bags of rubbish as well as parts of cars, bikes and trolleys. It was a huge effort and the turn-out of local people shows how much they appreciate the beauty of Manor Woods Valley.

Just part of the litter haul

The importance to aquatic wildlife of a clean and healthy river was underlined by a recent study of water quality in the Malago carried out by University of Bristol students. It pointed to the high levels of micro-plastics in the water as a result of discarded plastic bottles. It also warned about the polluting effect of dog excrement leaching into the river. Their report will feature in the next *Newsletter* and will be available soon on our website.

Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve is a very valuable and valued amenity for the local community and for wildlife. And there was a rare occasion of sledging enjoyment this winter on the snow-covered slopes of the wildflower meadow.

There is much to do over the spring and summer months to help maintain and develop Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve for the benefit of people and wildlife. We are hugely grateful for all the volunteering support so far this year and we look forward to welcoming more local volunteers in the coming months.

MARTIN GRANT
on behalf of the Manor Woods Valley Working Group

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.

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.

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 reports on our activities during 2017, there were the elections to the Committee. Our topical talk was from LEN WYATT, who gave us a punchy and entertaining overview of his experiences running the Northern Slopes Initiative. The traditional drinks and nibbles rounded off M.V.C.G.'s twenty-third A.G.M. and birthday party.

Programme Report: MARIE JO COUTANCHE reported that the Summer Outing had been to the University Botanic Garden on 12 July on a lovely summer evening. Our guide, Jo *(right)*, took us round the garden which has been designed to tell visitors about plant evolution and is home to four core plant collections: Evolution; Mediterranean Climate Regions; Local Flora & Rare Native Plants; Useful Plants. Our walk through the evolutionary garden transported us back millions of years, passing a dinosaur on the way. One area in the local flora garden was devoted to plants growing in the Avon Gorge. We also visited the Chinese herb garden and Jo explained to us the uses of many of these herbs. Lastly we made our way to the large glasshouses which provide the right climatic conditions for many exotic plants such cacti, orchids and carnivorous plants as they recreate their original habitats. Then we came to the giant water lilies and we were delighted to find one in flower and one just forming. It is an ideal place for a most enjoyable and informative evening. Thank you to Jo, and to Lola who suggested this summer outing. If you have an idea for this summer's outing please let the committee know.

On 14 December we enjoyed our usual Christmas Party in St Peter's Rooms. We started with a quiz on our area, prepared by Beryl and Danny. This was followed by games organised by Mary. We all had a lot of fun! We always look forward to the last part of the evening – sharing the food which everybody has brought. There is always an excellent variety of dishes prepared and displayed with imagination. It is a very relaxed atmosphere with an opportunity to meet new people and catch up with friends you meet every year. Next Christmas it would be lovely to see more people coming and some volunteering to take part in the organisation of the evening. Beryl, Danny and Mary have been thinking of ideas and entertaining us for at least ten years. They do it so well but they may enjoy being entertained as well!

We used to have an 'Events Organiser' – Lola for many years, and more recently, Paul. If anyone would like to help with this role in future, please speak to any committee member or ring or e-mail André.

Planning Issues: ANDRÉ COUTANCHE reported that he had been monitoring the weekly lists of planning applications which we receive by e-mail from the City Council. For the applications in our two wards which seem to need looking at in more detail, he checks 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 make a comment, and in a handful of cases each year we submit our comments on an application – usually to oppose it or to suggest ways of improving it.

Of the applications reported at our last A.G.M., the first of those is the former United Reformed Church on Church Road, Bishopsworth. Work to convert the church building into flats is nearly finished. There was an application during the year to convert the large flat in the front of the building into two smaller ones, and this was granted. So the church building is becoming six flats plus an extension with another flat. As reported last year, there was also an application to replace the church hall at the rear with five houses. That got its planning permission, but, after a change of ownership, a new planning application was submitted for the houses round the back – six houses instead of five, as three pairs of semi-detached. That application was refused during 2017 and the developers have appealed against the refusal. So the story continues …

We reported last year that housing on what's known as Plot 4 at Imperial Park was granted permission in 2016 and work is well advanced. That left Plots 1-3 which were proposed for development as one site. What was planned was an extension of the existing shopping area, containing an Aldi, other shops, a gym and the inevitable coffee shop. A full planning application was made in 2017 and was granted in November.

The next planning issue looks as though it will run for ever. Three years ago, we reported that the over-intensive scheme for new houses at 131 Bridgwater Road – which we had opposed – had been granted permission. The address is misleading – this is effectively an extension of Kings Walk. The developers behaved disgracefully and built more than the permission allowed – they made the houses too high and added unauthorised dormer windows. We reported last year that, to our regret, the developers had been allowed to submit a retrospective planning application for what had actually been built. That application was made in May and refused in August. The reason for refusal was unfortunately rather restricted – the developers hadn't provided any affordable housing, which Council policy says they should do when ten or more houses are applied for. The developers then applied for nine houses on the site – one under the obligation to provide affordable housing. What that would actually mean if it was granted wasn't put to the test because the application was refused. Things then became quite baroque. An application has been made to retain nine of the existing houses – it's unclear what would happen to the others. That application is pending. Another application has been submitted which is a straight repeat of the refused retrospective application – also currently pending. And to add to the confusion, the company which owned the site has recently been wound up. The Council planners are pointing out, quite correctly, that the fact that the company has been would up doesn't invalidate the planning applications and the processes will take their course. It's anybody's guess what will happen next or how this will end.

The last planning item to 'bring forward' from last year's report is the former Bristol Water depot opposite Bishopsworth Road from the Cross Hands. There was a 'pre-app.' proposing 62 dwellings, ranging from two-bedroom apartments to four-bedroom houses. The artist's impression showed three-storey blocks of flats facing onto Bishopsworth Road,

with mostly two-storey buildings elsewhere on the site. There isn't a formal planning application yet, but Newland Homes are consulting the public on the scheme and this computer-generated image appears in the consultation document. They're suggesting a planning application in March. We'll look at that when it arrives.

What the new houses may look like

There are three major planning applications to report which arrived in 2017. The Merchants Academy on Gatehouse Avenue in Withywood applied to build a Primary School and a Nursery catering for children on the autistic spectrum. The access would be from Hareclive Road, with the St John Ambulance building demolished. We didn't comment, and the application eventually went to the Planning Committee with an officers' recommendation for approval. There were many objections from local people who saw the proposal as overbearing and intrusive on neighbouring properties. A majority of the councillors on the committee agreed with them and the application was refused.

The next big application on our patch was from Brunelcare to extend the Waverley Gardens Sheltered Housing scheme. This application officially dates from early January 2018, though we looked at a pre-application during 2017, and public consultation also happened in 2017. The extension would take over the site of the former Redhouse School and double the capacity of the existing building. The architecture would carry on the existing style. Inevitably with any large scheme, there are concerns about access and parking. There would be a new access on Heggard Close, but the main access would stay on Queens Road. So far, we haven't commented.

The last big planning proposal to report is the site of the former Bishopsworth Police Station. We looked at a pre-app. in 2017, and the official planning application arrived just before the end of the year. The proposal is for nine houses arranged as three pairs of semis stepping down Kings Head Lane and a terrace of three houses at the lower level, facing onto Bishopsworth Road. We think this is reasonable and we haven't commented.

Progress with Manor Woods Valley: MARTIN GRANT, as Convenor of the Manor Woods Valley Working Group, reported. Malago Valley Conservation Group acts as The 'Friends Group' for Manor Woods Valley and works with Bristol City Council to protect and improve the nature reserve for the benefit of local people and wildlife. What we do matters for people's health and wellbeing and for the diversity of animal and plant wildlife.

During 2017 we intensified our work in Manor Woods Valley by continuing with the coppicing, orchard development and invasive weeds projects from the previous year and initiating two new projects: improving the habitat for slow worms and improving access along the Woodland Path.

Coppicing Project: Coppicing is all about opening up glades in the woods to sunlight so that dormant plants have a chance to flourish. In January and February we coppiced an area near the Valley Heights Flats path and in November and December we worked in the area near the Valley Road path and near the Woodland Path by the steep flight of steps (see the Spring 2017 *Newsletter* for more details on coppicing).

Orchard and Rabbit Field Project: Throughout the year we had regular work sessions in the Orchard area and Rabbit Field, cutting back the brambles with a view to restoring these areas to their original mixed grassland status. And we are delighted to report that the bee and pyramidal orchids have already made a comeback in the area. We have also improved access to the apple and pear trees, clearing the brambles to make a circular path connecting all the fruit trees (see the Summer 2017 *Newsletter* for more details on the Orchard/Old Quarry work).

Slow Worm Project: Over the summer months we were delighted to be part of the Council's initiative to translocate a population of slow worms from a construction development site in Ashton Vale to the Orchard and Rabbit Field areas following research that established that these were ideal habitats for slow worms and other reptiles to flourish. But just to make sure that the areas could accommodate the additional slow worms, two reptile hibernacula were created, one in the Orchard and one in the Rabbit Field (see the Autumn 2017 *Newsletter* for more details).

Invasive Weeds Project: Every year the river banks become invaded by Himalayan Balsam and every year we pull it up by the roots before it seeds – but it still keeps coming back. This year we decided to investigate if it was growing upstream and, perhaps, sending its seeds downstream to take root in Manor Woods Valley. A group of us walked to the source of the Malago on Dundry Slopes but found no sign of the Balsam. So no doubt we'll be back again next year for another 'Big Pull'. (see the Autumn 2017 *Newsletter* for more details).

Woodland Path Project: Our volunteers have been a regular sight on Saturday mornings along the Woodland Path, cutting back the encroaching scrub and bramble to improve access for those who enjoy this idyllic walk through the woods (see the Winter 2017 *Newsletter* for more details).

M.V.C.G.'s banner – a regular sight

Earth Day Project: International Earth Day in April was celebrated in Manor Woods Valley with a range of activities including stream dipping, bug hunting, a guided tour and a picnic lunch (see the Summer 2017 *Newsletter* for more details).

Regular Maintenance: As well as our organised project work we have been busy trying to maintain our local nature reserve by collecting

litter, fishing abandoned bikes and trolleys from the river, reporting fly-tipping, carrying out small scale repairs and reporting more serious issues to the Council (see the Summer 2017 *Newsletter* for examples of regular maintenance work).

2017-18 Wildlife Sightings: The whole point of our volunteering in Manor Woods Valley is to maintain and improve the habitat for wildlife. In 2017 slow worms were encountered in the Orchard during bramble clearance works (prior to the translocation 'import'). A very young Common Toad was found near the dam, indicating breeding in the marsh (ex-pond) area. Bird sightings have included three pairs of Teal and two pairs of Mallard on the Malago, several Moorhens and a Water Rail on the banks of the river, at least four Grey Wagtails on the rocky sections and the weir, and also a Little Egret. Ravens are often spotted over the valley and perched on the Ilchester Crescent TV mast near the Orchard. Fallen apples encouraged winter migrant Blackbirds, Fieldfares and Redwings in to the Orchard. Occasional Song Thrushes were also spotted in this area. A male and female Pheasant *(right)* were seen in the Rabbit Field and Orchard respectively. Over 280 individual plant and wildlife records, representing nearly 70 species, have been submitted to BRERC (Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre).

Challenges: Looking after Manor Woods Valley is not without its frustrations: the untreated Japanese Knotweed in the Orchard area is spreading; fly-tipping on the boundary between the woodland and St Peter's Rise is increasing; motor bikes are sometimes found burnt out on the Malago Greenway path or in the river; and litter and dog mess are constant nuisances and a danger to health and wildlife. But most worrying of all are the draconian cuts proposed by Bristol City Council to its parks and green spaces budget: plans to reduce hay cuts to wildflower meadows will, if carried through, result in the eventual loss of wildflowers in Manor Woods Valley.

Volunteering: The work carried out by members of Malago Valley Conservation Group and local volunteers during 2017 and by organisations across the city who appreciate and support what we do is a testament to the value placed Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve and its importance to community wellbeing and wildlife diversity.

- Bristol GoodGym, the Environment Agency and Avon Wildlife Trust helped with the Orchard and Rabbit Field project
- Bristol GoodGym and ParkWork helped with the Woodland Path project
- Forest of Avon Trust, Bristol Community Links and the TSB bank helped with the Coppicing project
- Bristol Invasive Weeds Forum helped with the Invasive Weeds project

- Avon Wildlife Trust organised and helped run the International Earth Day Event
- University of Bristol students devised a business plan for Malago Valley Conservation Group with a focus on Manor Woods Valley
- Bristol City Council Parks Team helped established the Slow Worm project and supported us with excellent advice, training and practical help.

The Year in Numbers:
- 800+ volunteering hours
- 100+ volunteers
- 50+ days when there was a volunteering event
- £6,000+ monetary value of volunteering hours based on minimum wage rate
- Incalculable – value added to health and wellbeing of volunteers and the public and to wildlife conservation

Looking forward to 2018: In 2018 we will continue to work on coppicing, bramble clearing, wildlife habitat development, tackling invasive weeds, path maintenance and litter picking. We are also looking forward to two new projects: working with the Forest of Avon Trust Wellbeing team on woodland skills, and working with University of Bristol students on topographical mapping and water quality monitoring. We also hope to plant new trees – hazel and field maple in some of the bigger spaces in the coppiced areas, and fruit trees in the Orchard. Feedback on our work and suggestions for improvement are, as always, very welcome.

Other Activities/Projects: ANDRÉ COUTANCHE said that last year he had reported the successful completion of our long-running 'Elm Tree Corner' project. With so many activities now in Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve we don't have anything that could be labelled a 'project' in the same way as Elm Tree Corner. So this section of our report is really 'all other activities'.

We reported last year that there was quite a cloud hanging over the future of the neighbourhood partnerships – throughout the city, not just here in our 'Dundry View' Neighbourhood Partnership. The five councillors in our two wards are keen to keep something going, and Hartcliffe & Withywood Community Partnership, despite their own straightened circumstances, are helping with logistical support. So the two working groups which we used to attend, the 'Pride of Place' Group, and the Transport Group, still meet, but less frequently and with close to zero input from Council officers. The exchange of information is still useful, and we will see how things evolve.

We continue to go to the Parks Forum, which has quarterly meetings, and their very good e-mail circulation keeps us informed.

Our website is regularly maintained with details of our events, and we continue to put our *Newsletters* on the website as they are published. Martin updates the Facebook page to publicise the volunteering work in Manor Woods Valley L.N.R. and has also set up a Twitter page. They're both linked from our website.

ACCOUNTS FOR 2017

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Membership	158.00	Refreshments at A.G.M.	26.49
Donations	40.00	Printing	19.80
Christmas party raffle	15.00	Hall Rent	66.00
Book sales	40.00	Christmas meeting	12.13
Slow Worm Project	5200.00	CPRE subscription	36.00
Bank Interest	1.35	Postage	12.30
		Tools	125.83
		First Aid Kit	19.99
		Banner	34.80
		Coppicing Support	120.00
		Contribution to Path	425.00
		Ring Binders	38.88
		Sundries	5.50
Total	**5454.35**	**Total**	**942.72**

	£
Excess of income over expenditure	**4511.63**
Brought forward from 2016	4413.55
Balance carried forward to 2018	**8925.18**
Made up of:	
Cash in hand	5.56
HSBC Money Manager account	8387.97
HSBC Current account	531.65

Beryl introduced the accounts: 'I expect you have noticed the large sum of £5200 which appears as the Slow Worm Project. You will hear all about this from Martin when he gives the report of the Manor Woods Valley Group. From a treasurer's point of view I must point out that, whilst a welcome boost to our funds, this money must be ring-fenced for work agreed to be carried out over the next five years. Martin has put this in place with ParkWork in order to maintain the habitat for the slow worms to survive. You may also notice that we have been able to purchase tools and coppicing support which I am sure you will agree is an excellent use of our inherited funds.

'Once again we have benefitted from members' donations – this time a total of £40. Another £40 was realised from the sale of *My Manor Woods Books* after a publicity drive. This also involved Martin and his links with Zion.

'So, all in all a successful year, when we have been able to use our funds to improve the environment in Manor Woods Valley, organised another enjoyable Christmas party as a get-together for our members, and of course today's event, our 23rd A.G.M. and Birthday Party.'

BERYL HEATON
Hon. Treasurer

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL SHOPS

AS A GROUP we do much to protect our environment by keeping a watch on planning issues and working in Manor Woods Valley to conserve this lovely area too. However, I have been giving some thought to another issue, our local shops. I have lived in the area all my life (a very long time!) and over the years I have seen so many small shops and two Post Offices close. I feel we should protect shops if they are providing a good service in the local community.

A case in point is Dave John, the butcher in Headley Park. He is up against opposition in the form of a mobile butcher who trades locally once a week. Dave works hard to provide excellent meat as well as sausages and faggots. He also has a good selection of fruit and vegetables which are reasonably priced. I for one would be very sorry to see this shop close.

Whatever particular shops you use in your part of the world, remember that they're only there if they can be commercially viable. Let's support our local shops – use them or lose them!

BERYL HEATON

MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

Chairman	André Coutanche	964 3106
Vice-Chairman	Mary Sykes	964 3712
Hon. Secretary	*[Vacancy]*	
Hon. Treasurer	Beryl Heaton	964 5780

Committee Members

Marie Jo Coutanche, Peter Crispin, Martin Grant, Peter Loy-Hancocks, Lis Pibworth

Co-opted Committee Members

Richard Bevan (Highridge Forum), Catherine Withers (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 Hartcliffe and Withywood ward are invited to become co-opted Committee members)

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Letters, articles and suggestions from readers are welcome.

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