



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

No. 121
Spring
2019

AS USUAL, MOST OF THIS SPRING EDITION of the *Newsletter* is about our A.G.M. on 14 February. We print the reports of our activities during 2018 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.

The existing officers were re-elected at the A.G.M. That wouldn't normally be news! – but Beryl had given notice that she would retire as Hon. Treasurer at this A.G.M. However, in the light of the plans for winding up M.V.C.G. later this year, she has kindly agreed to stay on. Read how things are planned to develop on page 4. One job less for Beryl will be processing 2019 membership subscriptions – because we expect M.V.C.G. to cease to exist during the year, there won't be any!

In the meantime, M.V.C.G. will continue to do its best for our corner of Bristol, and Martin and the Manor Woods gang will – when they're not busy setting up the new organisation – continue to work hard making our Local Nature Reserve a better place for wildlife and for people. Read Martin's account of the incredible amount of work done in 2018 in the A.G.M. report starting on page 5, and the continuing work done in 2019 on page 2.

M.V.C.G.'s Summer Outing will be to Manor Woods Valley, where you will be able to see for yourself everything that has been done and is being planned. See the back page for the details of that and for Peter's guided walks in May.

This won't be the last *Newsletter* you receive from M.V.C.G. There will certainly be one more in the summer, and possibly another one after that to announce the arrangements for winding up.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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NEWS FROM MANOR WOODS VALLEY L.N.R.

THE EARLY MONTHS OF 2019 saw some stark contrasts in Manor Woods Valley, with snow in January followed by the hottest February day on record. Other records were also broken: over 30 volunteers joined our February Saturday morning work party and March saw over 300 people following our Facebook page.



The transformation of the once 'hidden' Manor Woods Orchard into a soon-to-be-thriving community orchard continued apace. As well as our growing band of local volunteers,

GoodGym runners (*above*) and TSB bank staff helped us remove unwanted Elder trees, cut back brambles, dig up bramble roots and sow wildflower and grass seeds. Manor Woods Valley Young Rangers joined in to help plant new fruit trees and Anna from Forest of Avon Trust put a finishing touch to the winter work by cutting down the Elder tree stumps with her chainsaw.

While all this was happening, two other groups were hard at work and having fun. Students from the University of Bristol carried out soil surveys in the orchard and wildflower meadow (see our website, www.mvcg.org.uk, for a summary of their reports); and users of the Bristol Rehabilitation Service spent eight Fridays on the Forest of Avon Trust Wellbeing Course, creating a woodland glade by coppicing hazel and making delicious wild garlic pesto and wild garlic bread.

*Cooking wild garlic breadsticks
on the Wellbeing course*



It all goes to show that there is so much to learn about nature from Manor Woods Valley. And there's so much more to learn about local history too. The 'ghost' hedges of Manor Woods Valley was the subject of a fascinating talk by Peter, our very own ecologist, to a packed audience at Zion Community Arts Space in January. Look out for Peter's guided tours of Manor Woods Valley in May as part of the Bristol Walking Festival (see 'Dates for your Diary' on the back page, and www.bristolwalkfest.com for details).

The January snow brought hundreds out to enjoy sledging and snowballing (right).



March ended with another fun event: It was Charlie's eight birthday and his mum arranged for him and his friends to clear Manor Woods Valley of litter as part of the Great Bristol Spring Clean. Well done Charlie and his friends and well done everyone who is helping to keep Manor Woods Valley a very special place for wildlife and people.

Thanks to Charlie and his 17 friends for collecting all this litter – great job! Thanks also to Bristol Waste Company for the loan of the litter picking kit.



MARTIN GRANT
on behalf of the Manor Woods Valley Working Group

THE FUTURE OF M.V.C.G.

IN THE LAST *NEWSLETTER*, I described the process which we were going through to ‘reconfigure’ M.V.C.G. to deal with all the changes which had happened during our nearly quarter-century of existence. An important part of that for any voluntary group is to put the effort where the active volunteers want to do the work.

The ‘Futures’ working group has had more meetings since the last *Newsletter*, and we carried on the debate at our A.G.M. in February. Some good points were made and pertinent questions asked, but nobody disagreed with the policy we had arrived at – to set up a new group more tightly focussed on Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve, and to wind up M.V.C.G.

We had previously announced that no membership subs would be requested for 2019 at least until the A.G.M. Because we now expect M.V.C.G. to be wound up before the year is out, we won’t be asking for any more subs – ever!

The ‘Futures’ working group has now made its final report to the main M.V.C.G. committee and finished its work. M.V.C.G. will carry on for the time being, doing what it has always done, and, in parallel, a ‘shadow management committee’ has been formed, to set up the new group. That committee consists of Martin Grant (Chair), Peter Loy-Hancocks (Vice-Chair), Davina Blake (Treasurer) and Cheryl Loy-Hancocks (Secretary). In due course, the group will be formally constituted and open a bank account. One important decision has already been taken: the name of the new organisation which will take over from M.V.C.G. will be **MANOR WOODS VALLEY GROUP**.

When M.W.V.G. has a bank account, we can start to transfer to them the M.V.C.G. funds which relate specifically to Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve. When the Extraordinary General Meeting of M.V.C.G. is convened to approve the winding up – probably in late summer/early autumn – the committee will no doubt be recommending that the balance of M.V.C.G.’s funds be handed over to M.W.V.G. When they are up and running, we will let existing M.V.C.G. members know how you can transfer your support to the new Group.

So the future of Malago Valley Conservation Group will be **MANOR WOODS VALLEY GROUP!**

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

REPORT FROM THE A.G.M.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE welcomed everyone to the meeting and read out supportive e-mails from Heather Williams, Helen Holland and Kevin Quartley. After the usual reports on our activities during 2018, there were the elections to the Committee. Our topical talk was from our own PETER LOY-HANCOCKS, who surprised and intrigued us with his researches into the lost landscape of Manor Woods Valley. The traditional drinks and nibbles rounded off M.V.C.G.'s twenty-fourth A.G.M. and birthday party.

Programme Report: ANDRÉ COUTANCHE reported that we organised our two traditional 'social' events in 2018 – the Summer Outing and the Christmas Party. We also joined in the organisation and guiding of a Walk on 11 July to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1968 floods. Working with Bristol Avon Rivers Trust, the Flood Risk Officer at the City Council and the Environment Agency, we started at the Vale Lane entrance to Manor Woods Valley and looked at the Interceptor. Then we walked through Manor Woods Valley and along parts of the Malago and Pigeonhouse with talks along the way about flood relief work undertaken and planned and the recent flooding on Whitchurch Lane.

On Saturday 4 August, we had our Summer Outing to the 'Feed Bristol' site of the Avon Wildlife Trust (*right*). Most of us hadn't been before and we were impressed by the size of the site and the variety of habitats and activities. We were made very welcome and shown all around the extensive site. Thanks to Marie Jo for organising the outing.

On 13 December we held our Christmas Party in St Peter's Rooms. It was organised in the traditional way; we started with a photo quiz, by Beryl and Danny, then silly games organised by Mary. Peter stood in and ran the Raffle – our thanks to him – and we finished with our American Supper, which is always over-supplied and delicious!



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 look interesting or contentious, he checks the details on the Council's website, and reports a few of those to our Committee. In most cases, the Committee doesn't want to make a comment, and once or twice a year we submit our comments on an application – usually to oppose it or to suggest ways of improving it.

The first of the applications reported at our last A.G.M. is the former United Reformed Church on Church Road, Bishopsworth. The conversion of the church building into flats is finished. The story left over from last year concerns the new-build houses behind the church on the site of the former church hall. These houses are currently approaching completion. Overall, we see

this as a good re-use of the site which maintains a distinguished part of the architectural heritage of the Bishopsworth & Malago Conservation Area.

A much less good story concerns 131 Bridgwater Road. Four years ago, we reported that the over-intensive scheme for new houses on this site – which we had opposed – had been granted permission. 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. After much prevarication and manoeuvring, the developers put in an appeal against the Council’s refusal of permission to legalise what they had built. Last year ended with that appeal pending. It was subsequently allowed by the Government Planning Inspectorate, who – correctly and inevitably – disregarded the disgraceful way the developers had behaved and decided on narrow considerations of planning law.



The next planning item from last year was the former Bristol Water depot across Bishopsworth Road from the Cross Hands (*right*). The application for 62 dwellings was approved last September.

The Merchants Academy on Gatehouse Avenue in Witherwood applied last year to build a Primary School and a Nursery catering for children on the Autistic Spectrum. There was local opposition and the scheme was refused by councillors on the planning committee. The school appealed against the refusal, and also submitted a new application which differed slightly from the first one. Before the appeal was heard, that revised application was approved by the planning committee.

The next big application on our patch was from Brunelcare to extend the Waverley Gardens Sheltered Housing scheme. The application was made in January 2018 and approved in June.

The last big planning proposal to bring forward from last year’s report is the site of the former Bishopsworth Police Station. The original proposal was for nine houses but this was reduced to eight, and it got permission last November.

During 2018, the only other really big planning application was for up to 350 dwellings on the Hartcliffe Campus site. This is associated with a bigger proposed development at Hengrove Park, which is outside what we normally consider our area. We’ve left detailed consideration of these applications to the Pride of Place Group, where there are more people with detailed local knowledge. The applications are currently still pending.

Otherwise, the trend of recent years continues, of small ‘in-fill’ applications, often on large corner gardens on the Witherwood or Hartcliffe estates, or in Highridge. We look at these but haven’t commented, since the general principle of in-fill on brown-field sites is fine – it reduces slightly pressure to build on the Green Belt.

Progress with Manor Woods Valley: MARTIN GRANT, Convenor of the Manor Woods Valley Working Group, reported. Manor Woods Valley is a place where wildlife thrives; where people enjoy the health, learning and fun opportunities it provides; where people are safe; and which is a source of great pride for local communities. That is the vision that was foremost in our minds throughout 2018 in our work with Bristol City Council to help maintain Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve and Manor Woods Orchard.

During 2018 we continued with the development of Manor Woods Orchard, established a new wildflower meadow (Valley Heights Meadow), created an outdoor classroom and coppiced Hazels in the wood near Valley Road (now called the Allotment Wood), carried out the annual cull of Himalayan Balsam, led walking tours, hosted University of Bristol student research projects, organised a family nature event, contributed to the local history project at Zion, held several litter picking events, cleared the river of fly-tipped rubbish, monitored the progress of the Slow-worm project, cleared encroaching scrub in selected areas and much more. It's certainly been a busy year.

Manor Woods Orchard: The orchard is beginning to look like a real community space. When we began this project a few years ago, head-height Brambles made it almost impenetrable, preventing easy access to an estimated 12 apple and pear trees. Following extensive and repeated Bramble clearances, and latterly Elders, we now have a clear space revealing about 30 apple and 5 pear trees. We employed a local expert to identify the fruit varieties. She concluded that all were self-seeded from pips, and as such were not true varieties, but the fruit is no less delicious for that!

A New Wildflower Meadow: Late in the year we had an opportunity to begin restoration of the small meadow area, now named Valley Heights Meadow, below Valley Heights Flats, to its former status of mixed grasses and wildflowers. With the Council's help in cutting back the tough grass and coarse vegetation, and with a generous donation of wildflower seeds, plug plants and bulbs from the Bristol Urban Buzz Project, we raked, sowed and planted over several days in December.



Coppicing: Thanks to the Forest of Avon Trust's Wellbeing course, a small area of Hazel was coppiced in Allotment Wood near Valley Road. Adults and young people, referred to the course by Bristol Rehabilitation Service and Bristol Community Links, created an outdoor classroom area and a clearing around a newly discovered large apple tree.



Invasive Weeds: It was ‘business-as-usual’ in 2018 as far as Himalayan Balsam was concerned. Working with the Bristol Invasive Weeds Forum and staff from the Environment Agency, we spent several days in July and August uprooting this highly invasive weed along the Malago and in former pond area (Pond Wood). No doubt we’ll be back again next year. Japanese Knotweed is another non-native invasive weed that has established itself in several places in Manor Woods Valley, but mainly adjacent to

the orchard. This is now being treated with herbicide by the council but it will take some years of continuing treatment before it is brought under control.

Research and Learning: Manor Woods Valley is a wonderful resource for people of all ages who are interested in natural and local history or just curious about their local environment. Geography students from the University of Bristol carried out very useful research for us on the quality of the water in the Malago as it flows through Manor Woods Valley. They also plotted the route of the Woodland Path and provided us with a GIS base map of the whole site; the latter to be used by future research groups. University of the West of England MSc students studied the ground flora of our woodlands.

And, just to prove it’s never too soon to start learning about nature, 4-7 year olds had a fun Family Nature Day in August, learning about mini-beasts and tree leaves and twigs, and making small rafts for races down the Malago, followed by a nature craft workshop and lunch in Zion Community Arts Space.

Community and Partnerships: We were fortunate, again, to have the support of so many wonderful groups, organisations and individuals without whom these projects would not happen. As well as the excellent support from Bristol City Council’s parks team, we have had invaluable hands-on volunteering support from GoodGym Bristol, ParkWork, Forest Of Avon Trust, Avon Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency staff, TSB Bank staff and University of Bristol students. We are also deeply indebted to our increasing body of local volunteers who regularly turn up in all weathers to help to develop and maintain the wildlife habitats and amenity areas. We are also grateful for support from Zion Community Arts Space and Bristol Fish Project. We are also benefiting from the generosity of John Taylor, a founder member of Malago Valley Conservation Group, who died recently and whose gift will fund new fruit trees for the orchard and new tools. All of us have benefited hugely from working with, and being in, nature.

The year in numbers: In 2018 over 1600 hours of volunteering time were devoted to maintaining and improving Manor Woods Valley – more than double that of the previous year. That is at least equivalent to employing a full-time member of staff or about £20,000 casual labour costs. Of course, the real value goes way beyond that.

Looking forward to 2019: In addition to continuing work on orchard development, coppicing, Bramble clearing, wildlife habitat development, tackling invasive weeds, routine maintenance and litter picking, we are looking forward to two new projects in the coming year: working with the newly recruited Manor Woods Valley Young Rangers, an exciting national project managed by the youth organisation, Groundwork South, and with University of Bristol students on soil surveys of the Wildflower Meadow and orchard, and air quality monitoring.

Concerns beyond our immediate control: Fly tipping along the boundary between the Old Manor Wood and the lane behind St Peter's Rise has long been a problem. But it appears to have intensified over the last year or two. It is now encroaching on the ancient woodland and endangering a priceless asset that has harboured wildlife, woodland plants and ancient trees for thousands of years.

The Woodland Path is beginning to show serious signs of erosion and disrepair (*right*). Unless it is refurbished in the next few years it will become dangerous in places and fall into disuse. We are determined that this wouldn't happen and we will be appealing for ideas to raise support to renew the path.



Some Examples of feedback about our work:

- 'a really big thanks for the amazing work you're doing....' *Christopher, Facebook comment*
- 'I'm so glad it's [Manor Woods Valley] being looked after again. Thanks you. I treasure that little place.' *Karen, Facebook comment*
- 'Well done to all who help' *Carole, Facebook comment*
- 'Thank you for all your hard work. Looking good!' *Pattie, Facebook comment*
- 'My husband, tiny son and I took a walk through the orchard yesterday and both said how great it's looking and what an effort this group is making. We just wanted to say thank you and once our little boy is a bit less demanding of our time and attention we would love to help.' *Emily, Facebook comment*
- 'Thank you! Fantastic work' *Sue, Facebook comment*
- 'A huge thank you to whoever opened the Riverside Path up. Great work!' *Liz, Facebook comment*
- 'We had a great day and thank you for your time. It was great to hear of the history about the park and how its changed over the years. You helped us understand more about the environment and the types of issues you are trying to address.' *Eva, Environment Agency staff volunteer, by e-mail.*

Wildlife spotted



Other Activities/Projects: ANDRÉ COUTANCHE said that last year he had reported that the two working groups of the former Dundry View Neighbourhood Partnership - the Pride of Place Group and the Transport Group - were being kept going, but we would see how things would evolve. It's to the credit of Hartcliffe & Withywood Community Partnership that they have tried to continue to provide logistical support, but it isn't easy for them. Partly because of that, the two groups merged during 2018, which isn't a problem in principle. Two of the five local councillors make every effort to attend the meetings, but they often have clashes and have to send their apologies. With no Council officer input, the value of the meetings is inevitably reduced. We will have to see what 2019 brings.

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 he also runs a Twitter page. They're both linked from our website.

The other important 'Project' activity this year has been the working group to consider the future development of M.V.C.G. The group, consisting of Beryl, Martin, Peter, Marie Jo and André, has met five times and at least one more meeting is planned. The M.V.C.G. committee has discussed the reports from the working group on two occasions. The next step in the process is at item 8 on the A.G.M. agendas - to get members' reactions and opinions on how our thoughts are going.

ACCOUNTS FOR 2018

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Membership.....	96.00	Refreshments at A.G.M.	26.29
Christmas party raffle	20.00	Printing	17.70
General Donations	180.00	Christmas Meeting	17.10
Donation for Orchard.....	900.00	Hall Rent.....	68.00
Book sales	34.00	CPRE subscription	36.00
Bank Interest	9.20	Postage.....	17.31
Family Fun Day.....	15.00	Tools.....	129.99
Fee University of Bristol.....	<u>100.00</u>	ParkWork (Slow-worm)	1050.00
		Tools (Slow-worm)	79.90
		Web domain fee	11.99
		Coppicing Support.....	70.00
		Fruit Tree ID (Orchard)	149.00
		Donation to Wildlife Trust	25.00
		Sundries.....	<u>10.29</u>
Total	1354.20	Total	1708.57
			£
		Excess of income over expenditure	354.37
		Brought forward from 2017	<u>8925.18</u>
		Balance carried forward to 2018	8570.81
		Made up of:	
		Cash in hand	8.89
		HSBC Money Manager account	7801.17
		HSBC Current account	760.75
		Ring fenced for Slow-worm Project	4070.10
		Ring fenced for Orchard Project	751.00

I EXPECT THAT MEMBERS WILL NOTICE that we have an excess of expenditure over income of £354.37. There is no need for this to cause concern as we have used some of the ring-fenced funds to pay ParkWork to carry out work to maintain the area as a suitable habitat for the slow-worms. This is, of course, why we received those funds. It has also allowed us to purchase tools which are vital for equipping the voluntary groups who give valuable support. From the ring-fenced Orchard Project donation we were able to use the services of a professional to identify the fruit trees.

The donation of £25 made to the Wildlife Trust was because they made us most welcome at Feed Bristol where we went for our summer outing. All in all, we have had a busy but productive year. We also had a successful Christmas party and now we celebrate our 24th A.G.M. and Birthday Party.

This is my last report as Treasurer after almost 20 years in the post. I informed the committee a year ago of my decision to stand down at this A.G.M. That was before the idea to reorganise the group came about. I have agreed to stay on for the time being whilst the necessary arrangements are made to facilitate a change-over.

BERYL HEATON
Hon. Treasurer

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



IT'S SUMMER! Or it will be by the time of these events. Very appropriately, as M.V.C.G. hands over to the new MANOR WOODS VALLEY GROUP, our favourite Local Nature Reserve is the star.

Monday 13 May: From 10.30am-12.45pm. A WALK AROUND MANOR WOODS VALLEY LOCAL NATURE RESERVE accompanied by a knowledgeable guide (our Peter!), exploring many habitats and features. Part of the Bristol Walking Festival – book via www.bristolwalkfest.com.

Saturday 25 May: From 10.30am-12.45pm. A WALK AROUND MANOR WOODS VALLEY LOCAL NATURE RESERVE – as for 13 May.



Sunday 28 July: M.V.C.G. SUMMER OUTING. A Guided Tour around some of the habitats, special places and hidden history of Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve. Meet at 2.30pm at the entrance off St Peter's Rise (behind Bishopsworth Library).

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), 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.