



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

No. 26
March
1999

GOOD NEWS and bad news from Manor Woods ... If you were at the A.G.M. you will already have heard the super news that the Owl Prowl in February with Chris Sperring revealed the presence of at least one (female) tawny owl there. We are now arranging to put up a couple of nest boxes to encourage them.

In the interests of the aquatic birds, however, we are having to postpone the amphibious garbage raid planned for 25 April as part of the National Spring Clean event. Helen Hall, the City Council Conservation Officer, advises that there is a danger of disturbing nesting ducks and moorhens, so we will re-arrange the clean-up to a less critical time later in the year.

Late news as this *Newsletter* is being prepared: Caroline Smart, the Project Officer for the South Bristol Rivers Initiative (whose report to our A.G.M. you can read on page 5) has decided not to renew her contract when it ends on 31 March. This certainly doesn't mean that the *project* is coming to an end - we are awaiting clarification and further developments. In any case, the Initiative has, along with our own efforts over the years, significantly raised the profile of Manor Woods and brought home to a lot of people what a tremendously rich asset we have on our doorstep.

And it's to help make that asset known and appreciated more widely that we are continuing work on '*My Manor Woods Book*'. We are at the stage of assembling the draft sections and working out final lay-out. We have such good illustrations from our talented contributors that we would like to use quite a lot of colour printing - which isn't cheap. If anyone knows someone who might be able to help this good cause, please let us know!

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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PLANNING MATTERS

PLANNING APPLICATIONS seem to be like buses - weeks go by with nothing much happening, then several come along at once. Having the conservation area in place certainly helps us not to miss potentially interesting planning applications, because there are stricter rules for what has to be advertised in the newspaper. M.V.C.G.'s concerns stretch wider than the conservation area, of course, and we would always like to be told if there is an application near you which you are worried about for any reason.

Even when we do look at a planning application, it isn't with the automatic intention of opposing it. We try to be realistic about what can be achieved - and as Cllr Peter Crispin pointed out in his talk to the A.G.M., it's not sufficient to say that an application should be turned down because you don't like it; there have to be valid planning grounds for refusal.

It's this measured approach which we brought to the Tesco application on the former Wills tobacco factory site; we could see arguments for and against, and expressed concern about certain aspects and implications. The City Council have now refused the application, though it's more than likely that Tesco will appeal. (As an aside - there's no process of appeal by third parties against the *granting* of a planning application, just the outside and expensive chance of a judicial review if the planning procedures weren't properly followed).

There have been various planning applications very recently in the conservation area. These range from minor tree works (don't forget that planning permission is needed for most pruning of trees in a conservation area), to a revamping of one of the Headley Park shops at the bottom of St Peter's Rise. There has also been a retrospective application for a partial change of use at the former carriage-works opposite St Peter's Church. Unless anyone is aware of a possible problem with any of these, our initial reaction is that there is no reason for M.V.C.G. to comment.

The planning application which will probably cause most interest, however, is for a change of use of 'Bishopsworth Hall' (17 Church Road, opposite the Manor House). This was built in what we might now call 'classic' sixties style as a church hall. The application is for conversion to a single dwelling house, with no external alterations at all - i.e. the interior would be rearranged to provide bedrooms, lounge, study, kitchen and bathroom but there would be no rebuilding of the main structure and its appearance would remain unchanged

(one of the bedrooms would be in the sloping roof area to the right of the building as seen from the road). M.V.C.G. would be interested to know what members think about this. It would be an improvement to having it boarded up and vulnerable to vandalism, and hopefully there would then be someone who would take the garden in hand.

If you would like to inspect this or any other application for yourself, you can call in at the City Planning Department at Brunel House, St Georges Road (behind the Council House). The Bishopsworth Hall application is no. 99/00370/F/S. The Planning Department is worth a visit when you're passing in any case - there are many helpful, free leaflets and various interesting models of major schemes which are proposed for (usually) central Bristol.

Finally, not a planning application, but a follow-up to an event at the A.G.M. If you were there, you will remember (and if you weren't, you will read on page 6) that we presented one of our **Environmental Award** certificates to Bristol City Council for the external refurbishing of the Bishport Five blocks of flats and the high quality landscaping, seating, fencing and light fittings. We have now received a 'thank you' letter from Diana Kershaw, the City's Director of Planning, Transport and Development. The letter includes the (heartfelt?) remark that 'it is not often that Council Officers receive these awards from local people and, when they do, they are much appreciated.' We're delighted to offer credit where it's due - and brickbats, too, should they ever be necessary!

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

RAMBLING ON

THE REGULAR fortnightly short walks run by the Dundry Hill Group are now in full swing. Although the first walk was rained off, since then we have been very lucky with the weather and the walks have been quite well attended and very enjoyable. Barbra, our guide, is very knowledgeable about the countryside and is able to point out many interesting things which we might otherwise miss. The next walk is on 28 March (see the Programme on page 7 for details) and everyone is welcome to come along - but walking boots or wellingtons are essential until the fields become less muddy than they are at present.

LOLA HARDINGHAM

A.G.M AND BIRTHDAY PARTY

THE FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of Malago Valley Conservation Group was held on 16 February. André Coutanche (Chairman) welcomed everyone, including our guests from the City Council and other local organisations. A special welcome was given to our younger visitors from Cheddar Grove School.

Treasurer's Report: John Taylor reported that the membership income (£312) did not cover our expenditure (£431.49). He therefore thanked all the members who raised funds by other means such as the collection and sale of aluminium cans by Marie Jo (£52.22), Lola's plant sale in June (£32.80) and the October Coffee Day and Sale which raised £96.12. The accounts showed an increase over the year of £690.21 but £500 of this is a grant towards the production of 'My Manor Woods Book'. For the period 1 January to 31 December 1998, the accounts showed a total income of £1121.70 with expenditure of £431.49. The balance carried forward to 1999 is £1213.75, £1213.71 in the Building Society account, leaving a magnificent £0.04 as cash in hand! The accounts were formally adopted.

Programme Report: Lola reported that we had enjoyed talks on Owls and Hawks, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, Willows, Digital City Bristol (in Bishopsworth Library) and Bristol Zoo's endangered species programme. We had had visits to Castle Farm to see the stewardship scheme in action, an interesting tour of Clevedon and recently an Owl Prowl in Manor Woods which eventually revealed the presence of a female tawny owl. Our visit to the Failand Observatory had been postponed more than once due to inclement weather.

Conservation Area and Other Planning Issues: André reported that the Bishopsworth & Malago Conservation Area was formally established in October. This had been our original project and after many delays we were all delighted. We are now pursuing our plans for 'Elm Tree Corner' and keeping Chestnut Court on the planners' agenda. We have also commented on the roads plan, Hengrove Park, and proposals to revamp the 'Matties' block.

Litter Clearing: Anton spoke about the regular garbage raids and the annual clean-up of the pond in Manor Woods but went on to highlight three areas which he felt would help to diminish the quantity of litter dropped: (a) more and better litter bins in our open spaces; (b) educational projects in schools already started by Chris McFarling; (c) a reduction in non-biodegradable litter following the example of some of our E.U. partners in encouraging recycling by companies producing packaging.

Manor Woods: Caroline Smart, the South Bristol Rivers Initiative project officer, reported on progress so far. A proper path through the woods has been started; some scrub clearance done, designed to produce bays giving more boundary habitats; the water project has evolved into a proposed wetland area along the original course of the Malago to be formed by diverting some of the Malago flow before it enters the interceptor. Caroline is also planning a grand litter clearance in collaboration with M.V.C.G. as part of the National Spring Clean

campaign in April. She is also intending to organise a fair in June. At the end of this item an Environmental Award was presented to Sue Burrough's class at Cheddar Grove School for the project they have undertaken and the interest they have shown in Manor Woods during the year. 'I'm a Malago Minder' badges were awarded to all class members.



The badges for Cheddar Grove school-children - artwork by Lola Hardingham

Dundry Slopes: Barbra Wharton, project officer for the Dundry Hill Group, spoke about some of the difficulties of managing this large area which has three local authorities responsible for different parts. Practical training events have been organised for dry-stone walling and hedge-laying, and an ancient tree survey has been carried out. A local voluntary ranger service has been established to monitor the area, encouraging appropriate access and attempting to reduce dumping, litter and vandalism. A programme of short walks has started with two aims - enjoyment and identifying problems such as blocked footpaths. Barbra mentioned the sterling work by the Blenheim Venture Scouts - mapping the public footpaths.

Hartcliffe Community Campus: Tessa Coombes told the meeting of progress with the Millennium Green, the largest such green in the country. Funding to match the Millennium Grant was almost achieved and work had started on site last month. Consultation was taking place about the use of this quality open space. Parks and gardens, a performance area and sports facilities are planned. It is important that there is local involvement and a 'Bring a Plant' day is planned. Tessa also mentioned that £13 million is available from the Single Regeneration Budget which 30 groups in Hartcliffe and Withywood are benefitting from.

Other Activities: André reported that bulbs have been planted in four public areas along Church Road and Highridge Road; we have continued to attend VOSCUR meetings; newsletters had continued to be produced, and André thanked John Taylor for his speedy deliveries; we have also produced a leaflet giving details of M.V.C.G. and its aims; last but by no means least, we are preparing 'My Manor Woods Book' with information for people visiting the Woods and also space for them to add their own observations.

Election of Officers and Committee: The Officers and Committee were returned unopposed: André Coutanche (Chairman), Lola Hardingham (Vice Chairman), John Taylor (Treasurer), Anton Bantock, Brenda Docherty, Royston Griffey, Beryl Heaton, Mary Sykes. There remained a vacancy for the post of Hon. Secretary.

The formal business being completed, refreshments were served to celebrate the Group's fourth birthday.

Presentation of 1998 Environmental Awards: André presented an award to Cllr Peter Crispin as a representative of Bristol City Council for their external refurbishment and high quality landscaping of the Bishport flats. An award was also announced to the owners of 89 Church Road for their stone wall built in the local style.

Special Guest Speaker: Cllr Peter Crispin of the Planning, Transport and Development Committee, Bristol City Council, and one of our members, spoke about the ways in which public concern and action were able to affect planning decisions. He illustrated his remarks with details of applications where local concern had led to united, intelligent opposition which had influenced the decision, such as the extension of the Yanley landfill site and the proposal to add a spraying workshop at Pylle Hill Goods Yard. Where there is large-scale public concern, such as with the Bedminster Down travellers' site proposal, the Planning Department will advise on objections but Peter emphasised that applications cannot be refused because local people do not like them but only on planning grounds. Applicants have a right to appeal against refusal so the Planning Committee must have legal reasons for refusing. Peter finished his illuminating talk by mentioning the Wills site. The local plan designated the site for non-retail business. It was never intended to have a supermarket on the site and permission had been refused on these grounds, but Tesco was powerful and further instalments of the saga may be expected.

After thanks to Peter for his interesting talk, the meeting closed at 10.00pm.

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS

THE **M** symbol means an event organised by M.V.C.G. Members are also very welcome at events organised by Dundry Hill Group (DHG - phone 935 9710) or Hartcliffe Health & Environment Action Group (HHEAG).

Sunday 28 March: *Informal Walk* on Dundry. Meet at 10.00am at the 'Carpenters Arms' car park. Return at 11.30am (DHG).

Sunday 28 March: *Leisurely local walk*, starting at 2.00pm at the junction of Four Acres and Highridge Road (HHEAG).

Saturday 10 April: *Walk on Dundry Hill* starting at 2.00pm at Strawberry Lane (off Sherrin Way) (HHEAG).

Friday 16 April: *Informal Walk* on Dundry. Meet at 10.00am at the Dundry car park. Return at 11.30am (DHG).

M Tuesday 20 April: CHRIS McFARLING, safely back (we hope) from his EarthWatch expedition, will give us some *Tales from the Jungles of Brazil*. We will also have a repeat of last year's successful PLANT BRING AND BUY to add to our funds - please bring what you can.

Wednesday 21 April: *Ancient Tree Survey*. Meet at 10.00am at Norton Malreward notice board. Return at 11.30am (DHG).

M Monday 26 April The amphibious garbage raid pencilled in for Sunday 25 April has been **postponed** to later in the year. Meet instead for our normal Monday *Garbage Raid* at Bishopsworth Library at **3.45pm**. PLEASE NOTE THE NEW TIME.

Sunday 25 April: *Informal Walk* on Dundry. Meet at 10.00am at the end of Alderwick Avenue. Return at 12.00pm (DHG).

Wednesday 28 April: *Wildflower and Butterfly Survey* of the Woodland Trust's Littledown reserve. Meet at 2.00pm (DHG).

M Tuesday 18 May: MIKE HOOPER will talk about our *Local Geology* and how it affects the landscape. Plus PLANT BRING AND BUY.

M Monday 24 May: *Garbage Raid*. Meet at Symes Avenue at **3.45pm**. (Not the last Monday because of the Spring Bank Holiday).

M Monday 28 June: *Garbage Raid*. Meet at **3.45pm**. Venue to be confirmed in the next *Newsletter*.

IDEAS PLEASE

IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED that the Group might like to commemorate the Millennium in some way. We could plant a tree or provide a seat, for instance, but would very much welcome any other suggestions. So, put on your thinking caps and let us have some ideas.

By the way, it is pleasing to see that the bulbs we planted at the beginning of the winter are coming into bloom. Although only in a few places so far, we plan to build on this beginning to brighten up our surroundings and make them more colourful and attractive. We may be appealing for help later on, both for donations and manpower, so watch this space!

LOLA HARDINGHAM

Malago Valley Conservation Group Committee Members

Chairman	André Coutanche	964 3106
Vice-Chairman	Lola Hardingham	964 1116
Treasurer	John Taylor	964 2913

Other Members

Anton Bantock, Brenda Docherty, Royston Griffey, Beryl Heaton, Mary Sykes.

Co-opted Members

Geoff Clarke, Tessa Coombes, Tania Ford, Peter Hall, Chris McFarling, Lis Pibworth, Sue Walker, Barbra Wharton, Cllr Bernard Chalmers, Cllr Terry Cleverley, Cllr Peter Crispin, Cllr Paul Walker, Cllr Claire Warren (*All the City councillors for Bedminster, Bishopsworth, Hartcliffe and Whitchurch Park wards are invited to become co-opted Committee members*).

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