



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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A S THIS IS BEING WRITTEN the sun is shining and it's fine and hot. But it must be autumn because the new season of talks is about to start. Our Programme Group have prepared yet another varied and interesting range of meetings which you can read about on page 7 (get your diary ready).

The first meeting, on 21 September, carries on from our A.G.M. in February. Cllr Peter Crispin spoke to us then on how individuals and groups like ours can influence the planning process. That developed into a wide-ranging discussion about how the City Council does its job and our relationship as citizens with the Council. It was fascinating to discover how few people even knew what ward they were in, never mind who their councillors were.

Some people may say that there are better things in life to worry about than bureaucratic procedures and - as they might see it - second-rate politicians. In fact, local government has, for good or ill, a far greater effect on most people's day-to-day lives than national government. We all need to know how the Council 'machine' works; it will affect us, whether we like it or not, and we will get a better life as citizens of Bristol (and better value for our Council Tax) if we take a positive role in local affairs.

That's the philosophical argument. As active M.V.C.G. members know, it's also good fun. And, like following a soap opera, the more you know of the characters and background, the more fun it is. Lola and I attended the recent meeting of the South & East Bristol Planning Committee, where I made a statement on a planning application (details on page 3). We both agreed that as an afternoon's entertainment (with a free cup of tea thrown in), it was hard to beat. Seriously, involvement in local democracy *does* matter. Make a start on 21 September.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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MANOR WOODS: THE GRAND TOUR

FOLLOWING A REQUEST by the Bedminster Down & Uplands Society for a guided tour of Manor Woods, the event was duly arranged for the evening of 12 August. A dozen or so B.D.U.S. members joined us to be led by our Chairman, André Coutanche. Our first stop was just inside the entrance, where André told us something of the history of the wood. The area on the right of the Malago was the actual Manor Wood itself and was part of the Manor of Bishopsworth. There are ancient woodland indicators which support this theory and it was mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Stopping by one of the new metal benches, we realised that Bristol had vanished, with just a distant hum of traffic on Bishopsworth Road. The benches themselves were an attractive modern design and seemed so far to be successfully resisting vandalism.

We continued to the pond, which as André pointed out, is actually a silt trap for the flood defence scheme. This has made a natural looking area which is a haven for mallards, moorhens, and herons, all of whom were in evidence that evening. The silt now needs clearing, and this Bristol City Council intends to do in the near future. The other rubbish would be tackled by M.V.C.G. on the amphibious garbage raid the following Sunday.

We stopped briefly at the dam before carrying on to the interceptor and the open space there. André explained that Allied Domecq were sponsoring work being done by South Bristol Rivers Initiative to improve the area, making it more accessible to the public and more amenable to wildlife. Work had been done on a path through the wood and would be continued this autumn. There was also the possibility of a wetland area being developed near the Vale Lane entrance which would provide a habitat for a diversity of wildlife. The sympathetic grass cutting regime introduced by Bristol City Council in latter years has resulted in an abundance of wild flowers hitherto not seen. This year, much to the excitement of M.V.C.G. members, these included Bee Orchids.



*Bee Orchid in Manor Woods
(photo by Beryl Heaton)*

We went towards the quarry, admiring the attractive gateway feature at the Vale Lane entrance, its design being inspired by a drawing by Anton Bantock. By this time it was getting dark and as we made our way back we saw bats flying overhead. Before we went our separate ways, Barbara Withers, Chair of B.D.U.S., thanked André for the interesting tour and hoped that the two societies could work in harmony for the mutual benefit of all.

BERYL HEATON

PLANNING MATTERS

THERE HAVE BEEN some planning applications which have either come up since the last *Newsletter* or which there wasn't space to report on last time.

One of the latter is the application for **55 Whitchurch Road**. This is the old 'Esso' petrol station opposite the bottom of Derham Road. There was an application to demolish much of what is currently on the site and build a carwash. This site is immediately adjacent to (but not in) the Bishopsworth & Malago Conservation Area. We wrote to oppose the application because one of the buildings to be demolished is the former Brook Farm. The Malago Society also opposed the scheme for the same reason. The application went to the City Council's South & East Planning Committee on 25 August, with an officer's recommendation to grant permission with various conditions to minimise noise and nuisance. I made a statement to the Committee to reinforce our arguments, but, after some debate by the councillors, permission was granted. We understand the reasoning, because, as an unlisted building which is not in a conservation area, Brook Farm could be demolished tomorrow by the owners without needing any planning permission at all. Criticism is not of the officers or the Committee but of the system which gives no control of demolition of unlisted buildings outside a conservation area, irrespective of their historic interest.

It's a happier story at **2 Grange Road**, the former upholstery business at the junction of Grange Road and Church Road, where there was an application for change of use to a take-away. M.V.C.G. together with several neighbouring residents opposed this, not least on traffic grounds - it's on a difficult junction with no legal parking. We're pleased to report that it has just been confirmed that the application has been refused.

Finally, the planning application reported last time for **Chestnut Court** has been withdrawn. We had welcomed the possibility of progress here, and we await further news with impatience.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

THE RENDEZVOUS was at 1030 hours on Sunday 15 August, at Manor Woods. Our assignment: to clean the rubbish and debris polluting the stream and pond - Mission Impossible, some would say.

However, nothing daunted, our task force set to work with a will. Special Agents Barry Gray and Paul Scotford from the Environment Agency, equipped with hard hats and life-jackets, together with our own Tony Insall, plunged into the stream bed, unearthing bed-springs, drainpipes, scaffolding poles and other miscellaneous rubbish, which they deposited on the bank. Along came the collecting detail, Don Bartlett, Patch the dog and his mistress, bagging up and lugging to the side of the path, so that the transport section, consisting of your correspondent with our famous supermarket trolley, could trundle the garbage off to a central point for collection by the Council the next morning.

In the meantime, the amphibious platoon, Norman Shaddick and André Coutanche, were wrestling with the inflatable on the pond - no easy task - ably assisted by the cadet force, Elaine and Matt, under the direction of mum, Jackie. Eventually ropes were arranged more or less as we wanted them and the pond clearance resulted in a good haul, although some junk was well dug in and lived to fight another day. Lis and Lee Pibworth formed a roving commando, tackling pockets of resistance before the final assault on the dam.

The official photographer, Beryl Heaton, was busily recording the whole operation and we look forward to seeing the results at the debriefing (*special clearance has been obtained for a few suitably censored shots to appear here - Ed.*). Incidentally, it was heartening to hear the comments of passers-by on how improved the area has become recently.

By 1300 hours all had retired in good order with no casualties. We may not have won the war, but another battle has been successfully fought. Congratulations to all combatants, and special thanks to Norman for the inflatable and to Steve Sparks of the City Council for his help in arranging the clearance the next morning.

LOLA HARDINGHAM



Top left: Gone fishin'

*Top right: Straight down
the middle*

*Middle left: Jolly boating
weather*

*Middle right: Mud, mud,
glorious mud*

*Right: With a little help
from my friends*



UP ON THE FARM: HARTCLIFFE FARM VISIT

OUR VISIT TO HARTCLIFFE COMMUNITY PARK FARM on 17 August was a delightful and fascinating evening. We were welcomed by Peter Hall, the Farm's Co-ordinator, who didn't seem to mind being dragged out of a finance meeting to show us around!

Hartcliffe Farm is one of the biggest city farms in the country with 70 acres of land and over 100 sheep and cattle. As with all city farms, the 'pure' farming activities are at the core of a wide range of projects, most of them in the broadest sense educational. Day-to-day operations are the responsibility of Rocky Pearce, the Farm Manager, while Peter's job as Co-ordinator is to generate and maintain a business and development plan. This will underpin improvements of both buildings and services over the next few years and is an essential basis for grant applications.

Peter told us some the ideas while we surveyed the farm area from the Dundry slopes above. The six acre site nearest to the surrounding houses could be developed with a farming and nature trail, and a secure new fence and improved car parking facilities are already at an advanced stage of planning. A café, shop and better toilet facilities would also enhance the attraction for both casual and regular visitors.

Behind the central farmyard area there could be a recycling facility, and a new barn cum community space is also being discussed - though just as with a 'real' farm, things have evolved so that there are potential conflicts of use to consider and overcome. There was just time as dusk fell to leave the slopes and have a look at some of the animals and to see the 'Kiddies Corner' where animals with particular appeal for children are kept.

There is a loyal band of volunteer workers and helpers, many of whom have been involved with the Farm since it began fifteen years ago. A recently acquired second-hand tractor has been totally stripped down and reconditioned by volunteer labour. The Farm are always on the lookout for volunteers with all sorts of different skills and backgrounds to help with the machinery, the animals, DIY, gardening or office work.

Volunteers would also be welcome to serve on the Management Committee, so if you would like to know more, ring Peter Hall on 978 2014.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS

THE **M** symbol means an event organised by M.V.C.G. The regular talks on the third Tuesday of the month (except November) start at 7.30pm at St Peter's Rooms (by the side of St Peter's Church, Bishopsworth). Everyone is welcome (non-members will be asked to pay a 50p visitor's fee). Most months we will also have a repeat of our successful PLANT AND PRODUCE BRING AND BUY to add to our funds - please bring what you can.

M Tuesday 21 September: *'On the Nail'*. We kick off the new season of talks with Cllr PETER CRISPIN. Peter will be following on from his talk at the A.G.M. which generated a lot of discussion. The theme is local democracy, how it works and how it is changing. Come and join the debate! Plus BRING AND BUY.

M Monday 27 September: *Garbage Raid*. Meet at **3.45pm** at the top of Symes Avenue.

Monday 11 October: DUNDRY HILL GROUP A.G.M. The Group has achieved great things in the last year, but how should it go forward? All are welcome for the meeting at 7.30pm at Dundry Village Hall.

M Tuesday 19 October: *Eating the Countryside*. BARBRA WHARTON will tell us about the surprising range of edible plants around us. Plus BRING AND BUY.

M Monday 25 October: *Garbage Raid*. Meet at **3.45pm** at the 'Elm Tree'.

Tuesday 16 November: BISHOPSWORTH QUIZ. The annual challenge between local groups and societies. If you would like to come to this fun evening at the Royal British Legion, please let André have your name in advance.

M THURSDAY 18 November: PLEASE NOTE THE CHANGE FROM TUESDAY TO THURSDAY BECAUSE OF THE BISHOPSWORTH QUIZ. A talk on *Energy Efficiency* - more details in the next *Newsletter*. Plus BRING AND BUY.

M Tuesday 21 December: Mulled wine and merriment; nosh and nonsense - M.V.C.G.'s infamous CHRISTMAS DO.

BLACK OR WHITE?

THE COFFEE TEAM announces that hot drinks served at M.V.C.G. meetings in future will be FAIR TRADE coffee and tea. The cost is no more than for other reasonable products, and the environmental and other benefits mean that, in our small way, we are helping to make a better world.



AT THE VISIT to Hartcliffe Farm (see page 6) we learned that lamb and pork from the farm animals is available. Though not officially to Soil Association standards, it is virtually organic. It is sold as half an animal, but comes prepared in a range of cuts. Phone the farm on 978 2014 to learn more.

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

Co-opted Members

Geoff Clarke, Tania Ford, Peter Hall, Chris McFarling, Lis Pibworth, Sue Walker, Barbra Wharton, Cllr Bernard Chalmers, Cllr Tessa Coombes, Cllr Peter Crispin, Cllr Richard Eddy, Cllr Ron Hodges, Cllr Dave Johnson, Cllr Mary Sykes *(All the City councillors for Bishopsworth, Hartcliffe and Whitchurch Park wards are invited to become co-opted Committee members).*

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