



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

No. 105
Spring
2015

AS USUAL, the Spring edition of the *Newsletter* carries the report of the A.G.M. It's effectively our 'Annual Report' and puts on record our activities over the past year for those members and colleagues of M.V.C.G. who weren't at the A.G.M. You'll read the usual mixture of successes and frustrations, and there are updates about what happened after the A.G.M. on page 2 for Manor Woods Valley and on page 11 for the South Bristol Link Road.

Manor Woods Valley is the only Local Nature Reserve in a big area of south Bristol, west of Wells Road and south of the Cut. (Others are on the way in Bristol, including our friends and neighbours the Northern Slopes). We're hoping that, after a long period of neglect in Manor Woods Valley, new Council staff and new links with other organisations – not to mention some hard work by our own Manor Woods Valley Working Group – will help us to make progress in the coming year. Something we've already learned is that we can't refer all day-to-day problems to our new contact, Tom Penn – he's got other priorities and is covering too wide an area. The phone number for reporting problems in parks and green spaces is (0117) 922 3719, where Parks admin. staff will log all problems which are reported and give them a reference number which can be used to chase up any queries. If you want to report a problem in Manor Woods Valley or any other park, please use that number. By all means let us know as well, but we would only ring the number when we've been to have a look ourselves – so cut out the middle man!

At the A.G.M. we reported real progress on the Elm Tree Corner scheme. Since then, a working meeting has taken place between highways engineers, Highridge Forum and ourselves. Plans will now be drawn up and public consultation will happen later this year.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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NEWS FROM MANOR WOODS VALLEY L.N.R.

IN THE LAST *Newsletter* we told you that our group went for a walk to assess how we saw Manor Woods Valley evolving in future years. In the current absence of a management plan and consistent maintenance, how will habitats such as the woodland, silted pond, scrub and stream develop? Will the public still be able to enjoy the woodland if the path is left to deteriorate as it is now? Will we have more young trees and wild flowers in the woodland if the canopy is not thinned to let in more light? Will we have healthy hazelnut bushes if they are never coppiced? Will herons and other birds come back if the pond is not desilted? If you attended our A.G.M. you had the pleasure of going on a 'virtual walk' round the whole of the reserve and the quarry area when Heather Leeson showed us slides she had taken there and led a discussion about it.

On Tuesday 24 February six M.V.C.G. members met Joe McSorley from the Wildlife Trust at the entrance behind the library. In the past couple of years he has worked with his team in the Quarry area – Malago Orchard as we often call it now. We had asked him to give us his professional opinion. His advice for the woodland was most useful. Doing some coppicing, maybe a little every year, creating glades among the trees to get more sunny areas, and removing some invasive saplings would renew the woodland floor vegetation and revive the trees. Then we walked along the River Path and looked at the silted pond, discussing possible solutions. We thank Joe for his time, for the information he gave us and for making a lot of suggestions which will help us progress.

On Friday 27 February we met Tom Penn in Manor Woods Valley. He is the City Council employee for open spaces in the whole of south Bristol. He had agreed to meet us on site. We gave him background information on Manor Woods Valley and how M.V.C.G. had been involved for many years, and it was a very timely opportunity to share our concerns. We walked through the woodland, visited the old quarry area, pointed out the flower meadow, walked along the River Path and spent some time discussing the silted pond and the boggy area nearby. Thank you to Tom for listening to us and answering our questions.

How will we improve Manor Woods Valley? With the City Council reorganisation we will all need to adjust to new people and new situations. We have started by doing some homework ourselves. We may consider applying for grants. We have made contacts. From our experience we believe this always helps achieve projects. Any suggestions or comments from our members would be very welcome.

MARIE JO COUTANCHE
Manor Woods Valley Working Group

REPORT FROM THE A.G.M.

PETE CRISPIN welcomed everyone to the meeting. As usual, there were reports on our activities during 2014, followed by elections to the Committee. Our topical talk was from our own Heather Leeson, who took us on a 'virtual walk' through Manor Woods Valley, pointing out the good things and the bad things that she and Marie Jo had observed. Drinks and nibbles rounded off the evening which marked M.V.C.G.'s twentieth birthday.

Programme Report: PAUL MIZEN reported that this year's summer outing was more of an expedition, a search for the source of The Malago. He was slightly concerned when two members of the local constabulary turned up to escort us! A group of fifteen or so started out on what was a dry and pleasant evening and before long we were well on our way on what was a pretty steep climb, some moving somewhat quicker than others. However, we all made it in the end, and were greeted by the sight of the recently refurbished spring, paid for by M.V.C.G., where André gave a speech with a brief history of the site and told us about the work that had taken place. A toast was made, some with wine, other with their flasks of tea. It was agreed that it was all well worth the effort, and we all looked forward to a much easier descent. Everybody returned safely and all were accounted for!



The Christmas party was its usual good fun and again well attended. We seem to have found a formula that works each year. The Heatons provide the picture quiz, won this year by Heather which, considering it was about Bristol and she is a relative newcomer, says something about Bristolians walking around with their eyes closed, and the Fun and Games were provided by Mary. We also had some carols from the M.V.C.G. Choir. The American Supper was its usual excellent self, and Marie Jo and Kate kept everyone well refreshed. A good time was had by all.

Planning Issues: ANDRÉ COUTANCHE said that he always started this report the same way, and nothing's changed this year! We monitor the weekly lists of planning applications which we receive by e-mail from the City Council. For a few of the applications in our three wards which seem to need checking, André 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 make a comment, and in a handful of cases each year we submit our opposition to an application, often on the grounds of over-intensive development, access, parking, or its effect on the character of the Bishopsworth and Malago Conservation Area.

We reported at our last AGM that we had been involved with plans for the former United Reformed Church on Church Road. The ‘pre-app. consultation’ was very good, and our only concern was over the detailed design of the proposed new flats which would have replaced the hall behind the church. However, the arrangement the owner thought he had with an adjacent landowner on Fernsteed Road to acquire the back of their back garden to improve access to the new flats fell through and he obviously gave up and sold the church building on. Although a contractor’s board went up in front of the church this year, no work seems to have started – there isn’t a planning permission anyway – and things remain quiet.



We also appreciated the very good pre-app. consultation we had in 2013 with the architect for the owner of the former Methodist church hall, next door but one to Zion on Bishopsworth Road. The year ended with the planning application for its conversion into seven flats being withdrawn because the planning officer was unhappy about some aspects of it. In 2014 a revised application was submitted and approved – also following consultation with us and the Bedminster Down and Uplands Society – and you’ve probably seen that building work

is under way. The new brick structures at the front are a cycle shed and bin storage.

We finished 2013 with the very contentious planning application for 131 Bridgwater Road, which is effectively an extension of Kings Walk. We and others objected, both to the intensiveness of the scheme and the shocking lack of proper pre-application consultation. However, the Planning Committee gave permission, though work hasn’t started. That was one year ago. Planning permissions last for three years, in case you want to make a note on your calendar ...

There was a loose end at the last AGM over a planning application which started in 2012 – Wessex Water’s engineering work on the drains at the junction of Highridge Road and Bishops Cove. Two trees had to be removed, but with the undertaking that they would be replaced in the planting season following the completion of the work. The slight complication was that Wessex wouldn’t do the replacement themselves, Bristol City Council would. We’ve every sympathy with the situation the Council are in, with serious cuts imposed by central government and staff reductions, but it does often make it difficult to get a response from the staff that are left. After some chasing, helped by Councillor Richard Eddy, we heard that the replacement trees have been bought and will be planted very soon.

We reported at the last AGM that excellent process had been made to identify what should happen on the site of Bishopsworth Swimming Pool. The year ended with a final decision very close on a good way forward. As our guest speaker last year, Richard Bevan, told us, that decision was to convert the building into an indoor skatepark run by a not-for-profit company called Transitions Skate. There was a wide-spread welcome for this outcome, with Transitions running the building and a 'Friends' group of local people being formed to manage the grounds in conjunction with the City Council. The first step on the road to make it happen was what's called a Community Asset Transfer agreement between Transitions and the City Council. We spent most of 2014 waiting for that to happen, with increasing frustration and incomprehension that it wasn't happening. It still hasn't happened, so the former Swimming Pool just sits there waiting for its new lease of life. *[Post meeting note: at last, the C.A.T. has been signed!]*

There were two smaller planning applications last year, one in February and one in April, which undermined parts of the character of the Bishopsworth & Malago Conservation Area. The first one was for the removal of the historic shopfront at the former Marpets shop on Highridge Road. We thought that this was just the sort of thing that a conservation area was supposed to protect, but the planning officer gave permission, while acknowledging that it was 'regrettable'. The second one was for the removal of the wall in front of 33 Queens Road and a full-width dropped kerb to enable more cars to be parked off the road. This wall is a modest but historic unifying feature of this part of Bishopsworth, running continuously from the Elm Tree pub in the north to King Georges Road in the south, and then from opposite the Queens Head pub south to Gatehouse Avenue, with just a couple of lost sections. Ironically, the next-door property had already tidily paved their front garden to allow more parking, while retaining the wall and the existing dropped kerb. We pointed this out to the planners, but permission was still given. In both these cases, we



were up against the test which the planners always apply: is an application refusable? What planning grounds could justify preventing a property owner from doing what he likes with his property? We recognise the problem, but we wrote to the Head of Planning to point out that, in a conservation area, more could and should be done to persuade applicants to respect the historic built environment.

An historic shopfront and an historic wall – now gone from the Conservation Area

We've saved the worst till last. The South Bristol Link received planning permission in November 2013. M.V.C.G. has been consistently against this road, which we see as a road chasing money, since the government have agreed to provide most – but not all – of the money for its construction. We and many others believe that it is a massive White Elephant which will cost us dear in both financial and environmental terms, and give nothing back. The final release of money from central government happened in late January, so work is due to start very soon. Mayor George Ferguson, who is in favour of the other two so-called 'Metrobus' schemes in Bristol, doesn't like the South Bristol Link but insists that his hands are tied by the legal agreement Bristol entered into several years ago with North Somerset Council, with heavy penalties for withdrawing. We fear that a point will come when the cost overruns – which have to be paid for entirely by the two councils, with no further support from central government – will be such that a way *will* be found to cancel the agreement, but leaving us with a torn-up Highridge Common and a damaged King Georges Road. *[See also the update on page 11]*

Progress with Manor Woods Valley: MARIE JO COUTANCHE, the Convenor of the Manor Woods Valley Working Group, reported that 2014 has been a busy year with some element of frustration at times and others when we felt we were making some progress.

You will remember that the Quarries area, which we now call the Malago Orchard, is not part of the Local Nature Reserve. M.V.C.G. has always been concerned about its future and has worked to raise its profile at any opportunity. Over a year ago the Avon Wildlife Trust contacted us to offer help to make the old quarry more accessible. In March 2014 they cleared the central area around the apple trees and kept the paths opened. We have noticed that more people use the area particularly in the autumn to collect fruit. Thank you to Joe McSorley, the Reserves Officer, and his team.



We cannot mention the Quarries area without thinking of Justin Smith. He was the Woodland and Wildlife Officer of Bristol City Council. He died suddenly at the beginning of March 2014. He was a great friend of M.V.C.G. and other park groups. In fact he started the clearance of the Quarries area after we had contacted him about it. He was always available to advise and help.



At the end of February we did our annual clearance of the entrance behind Bishopsworth Library, removing litter and brambles. We also washed the outside of bins covered with mud and cleaned the three interpretation boards. It is also an opportunity to chat with people going for a walk or using the Malago Greenway.

We hope that more people have enjoyed the flower meadow after we contacted members on e-mail to let them know it was in bloom. We collected seeds which the Wildlife Trust sowed in Crox Bottom last September to create a flower meadow there.

On 24 June some of our members and other volunteers took part in the Himalayan Balsam Big Pull. This was organised by Neil Green from the Avon Invasive Weeds Forum. Those of us who have taken part for a number of years know we have made a difference and have enjoyed meeting other volunteers.

We reported last year that the area around the interceptor at one end of the River Path and of the Woodland path had been of some concern to us. In the end the wall and the finger post were repaired. This year we have had to report the grid covered with rubbish a number of times. Branches and other debris are carried by the stream. Quadron Services were always prompt to clear all this rubbish and take it away.



You will have all heard of the reorganisation of the Council Services. It meant that towards the end of the year it was difficult to find somebody to help us if there was a problem to report for example. So, last November the Manor Woods Valley Group decided we would go for a walk, observe and make notes. Our report was in the *Winter Newsletter* which was published in early December. We identified three main areas of concern: the woodland, the stream and the silted pond, and the areas of scrub. We can confirm negative effects for the wildlife. Later in the meeting Heather Leeson will take us for a virtual stroll around Manor Woods Valley. We hope that 2015 will bring some changes for the better around our Local Nature Reserve.

Progress with Other Projects: ANDRÉ COUTANCHE said that, as in recent years, many of the projects we are involved with are progressed through the 'Pride of Place' working group, the Environmental sub-group in our Dundry View Neighbourhood Partnership. It has monthly meetings which he attends, and it is a very good forum both for learning about new developments and for getting things done.

Reorganisation and under-staffing in Parks continued for another year, which meant that we continued to find it frustrating maintaining the good working relationship we have built up over the years. Towards the end of 2014, an interim manager was appointed for South Bristol, but things started to look up at the end of the year when Tom Penn was appointed as the person who will work with us to monitor, maintain and improve our parks. The drawback is that he will also be working with all the other community groups throughout the whole of South Bristol, so he's going to be spread uncomfortably thin. 2015 will be a learning curve for him and for us as new systems evolve to look after our parks and green spaces.

Progress has continued to be made on Dundry Slopes, with CSV Environment and the Avon Wildlife Trust doing a lot of work, both with young people and the community, and practically on the ground. With other things occupying us elsewhere, we have taken a back seat on Dundry Slopes in 2014.

At the last A.G.M. we did a resumé of our 'Elm Tree Corner' project – which started in 1997! Having achieved various aspects of it over the years when circumstances allowed, we reported last time 'it may be that I'll be reporting actual progress at the next A.G.M.' Well, it's happened! This has been progressed not through the 'Pride of Place' group but through the other sub-group of the Neighbourhood Partnership which we attend, their Transport Group. The engineering works to improve pedestrian safety, parking and landscaping were adopted by the Neighbourhood Partnership at their meeting in July 2014 as one of the two main schemes they wanted to implement. Shortage of Council staff – does that sound familiar? – meant that a few months went by with not much progress, but a full topographical survey of the area was done at the end of 2014 as a basis for designing the new works, and we will be having a meeting with the transport officers shortly to define the brief for the scheme which will then be consulted on. That meeting will also include Highridge Forum, who have been our allies on Elm Tree Corner for the past seventeen years.

You've already heard Paul mention the Malago Spring Artwork, which we visited for our members' Summer Outing. And you've heard from Beryl that we spent a good chunk of money repairing the damage which had been caused, partly by minor vandalism, but mostly by big flows of water flows of water which decide for themselves where they will go, knocking out any stones in their way! As many members will remember, we inherited the bulk of the funds of the Dundry Hill Group when it had to wind up, and we always recognised a moral responsibility to maintain the Malago Spring Artwork which they had built when the need arose. 2014 was the year when we met that need. We employed our good friends from CSV Environment to do the work, and they got in a professional dry-stone waller to supervise the volunteers. The finished result is strong, durable and beautiful, and with a laid hedge as well, to discourage people from climbing over the wall and damaging it.



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

Publicity is sort-of a project, but it goes on for ever! Our website has been regularly maintained with details of our events, and all the newsletters are put on the website as they are published. Newsletters are now circulated mostly by e-mail, which also means that they're in colour. Sometimes a mail-out gets back a nice appreciative response! We're happy to go on producing paper newsletters for everyone who needs one, but if you do get a new e-mail address, or if you change an existing one, do please let André know. Increasingly, our website provides a way for people who wouldn't otherwise know about M.V.C.G. to find us and contact us.

And that happened with this last item – which is a bit of a cheat, since it all started after the end of 2014. We had reported at the last A.G.M. that we would like to get things moving in Crox Bottom, but we were too stretched ourselves and it would be good to get people living in Lakeshore involved. We recently had an e-mail from a lady called Alison who doesn't actually live in Lakeshore but who works in Cater Road and walks her dog in Crox Bottom. She was struck by the amount of litter in this otherwise delightful spot, and she e-mailed us to propose a clean-up operation. She is in a position to help with equipment. We met her for a walk through Crox Bottom to check it out, and we have arranged a clean-up for the morning of Saturday 21 March.

Alison thinks she can get access to Lakeshore to put up posters there, so we're hoping that this event could be the start of a 'Friends of Crox Bottom' group based in Lakeshore. If any M.V.C.G. members would also like to get more involved in a Crox Bottom group, please let André know.



Litter

**HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE
IN CROX BOTTOM**

CLEAN UP OPERATION

Saturday 21 March 11.00am - 1.00pm

**Meet at the top entrance to
Crox Bottom (by the notice board)**

Litter pickers, gloves and refuse sacks will be provided but if you do have a pair of thick gloves please bring them. Please wear sturdy shoes and dress for 'gardening duties'.

If the weather is too bad (snow or heavy rain), the operation will automatically be postponed to the following Saturday, 28 March, at 11.00am

**ALL
WELCOME**

**MALAGO VALLEY
CONSERVATION
GROUP**

ACCOUNTS FOR 2014

Here are the accounts for 2014 which Beryl Heaton presented to the A.G.M.:

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Membership	242.00	Spring repair	1500.00
Donations	27.00	Refreshments at A.G.M.	15.76
Christmas party raffle	30.00	Printing	17.00
Sale of scrap metal	20.40	Laminating pouches	4.80
Book sales	14.00	Christmas meeting	15.04
Petty cash from D.H.G.	51.00	CPRE subscription	36.00
Bank Interest	<u>3.08</u>	Web domain fee	<u>5.99</u>
Total	387.48	Total	1594.59
		£	
		Excess of expenditure over income	1207.11
		Brought forward from 2013	5454.61
		Balance carried forward to 2015	4247.50
		Made up of:	
		Cash in hand	2.87
		HSBC Money Manager account	3381.88
		HSBC Current account	862.75

Although the accounts show a loss of £1207.11 over the year, our contribution to the spring project was £1500, so in actual fact we made a modest gain in our day-to-day running expenses. We felt that the expenditure on the spring was well worthwhile and the work was professionally executed by dedicated craftsmen.

During the year André was sorting through some paperwork which had been handed over some time ago, pertaining to the Dundry Hill Group. To his delight he discovered a purse containing £51 in cash, and he also found stamps which he has used for M.V.C.G. correspondence. Both of these items have helped our funds.

With reduced expenditure in other areas I did not feel it necessary to suggest to the committee that we increase the subscription. We are therefore maintaining the subs at £4 per household membership, bearing in mind the large numbers who make it up to £5 anyway. This is apparent by the £27 in donations.

To sum up: I feel we have had a successful year and have used our inherited funds to good effect.

BERYL HEATON
Hon. Treasurer



WHITE ELEPHANT UPDATE

As you probably know, preliminary work on the South Bristol Link Road has started, following final release of central government funding in late January. It's a massive black cloud for our part of Bristol – with one or two *very* small silver linings.

Firstly, the contractors, Alun Griffiths, are keen to work with local people to minimise adverse impacts during the construction work. They're also open to proposals for minor tweaks to details of the design to make things easier – or less difficult – for people near to the route. Highridge Forum has been recognised as the main channel of communication for this and they've set up a working group to talk to the contractors. Actual ground-breaking will start after Easter.

Secondly, unlike earlier suggestions which showed twin bus lanes in King Georges Road, this stretch will be an 'ordinary' two-way road (as will the whole route apart from between the A38 and the A370). On King Georges Road there will be a narrow 'separation' strip down the middle of the tarmac, and a cycle lane in the grass verges, which will be reduced in width. Since there will be a left-turn lane added at the bottom of King Georges Road where it joins Queens Road – which many people have long asked for – and since there will be no parking on the roadside, and the trees now being removed will be replaced and more planted, it's just possible that the *appearance* of King Georges Road will be improved.

None of that, of course, will compensate for the additional traffic through this residential area – and the building of a road across Highridge Common and the Green Belt in 'Green Capital' year would be funny if it wasn't disgraceful. By the way, forget any idea that it's a 'Metrobus' route – to quote our mayor, George Ferguson, 'it's just a road with a bus on it'. And not a very frequent bus, at that.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



PAUL MIZEN would be pleased to have any ideas for a SUMMER OUTING – you can contact him on 964 0825 or p.mizen@blueyonder.co.uk.

Monday 16 March: NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTNERSHIP MEETING, 7.00pm-9.00pm, at the Blenheim Scout Hut, Cheddar Grove Primary School Field – access via Banwell Close.

Saturday 21 March: CROX BOTTOM CLEAN-UP, from 11.00am to 1.00pm – see the poster on page 9.

Saturday 28 March: EASTER EGG HUNT in Manor Woods Valley between 11.00am and 3.00pm. Details at www.betterbybike.info/event/easter-egg-hunt-2015.

THANK YOU to everyone who has renewed their subscription. Some people haven't got round to it yet, so you'll find a renewal slip attached to this *Newsletter* if we haven't heard from you. There's no need to fill in the form unless your details have changed – just let us have a note of your name with your cheque or cash – but **do please let us know if you have a new or changed e-mail address**. Please send your sub. to either Beryl Heaton (3 Kings Walk) or André Coutanche (14 Queens Road). *Thank you!*

Malago Valley Conservation Group

Chairman	Peter Crispin	907 0623
Vice-Chairman	Mary Sykes	964 3712
Hon. Secretary	André Coutanche	964 3106
Hon. Treasurer	Beryl Heaton	964 5780

Committee Members

Anton Bantock, Heather Leeson, Paul Mizen, Lis Pibworth

Co-opted Committee Members

Richard Bevan, Diana Porter, Sue Walker, CSV Environment, Cllrs Mark Brain, Richard Eddy, Helen Holland, Tim Kent, Kevin Quartley, Naomi Rylatt
(*All the City councillors for Bishopsworth, Hartcliffe and Whitchurch Park wards 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.