



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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THINGS ARE CHANGING. Of course, things on the ground are always changing, and Malago Valley Conservation Group has worked hard for the last 24 years to help to make good changes happen and to oppose or mitigate bad changes. But now it's M.V.C.G. itself which will be changing.

We've said before that M.V.C.G. in its present form is becoming unsustainable – too few people are doing too much. So a working group of committee members has been considering how we can best carry on into the future. As this *Newsletter* is being finalised, that work is still in progress, so we don't have firm proposals just now – come to the A.G.M. on 14 February to hear more and to share your ideas. But don't wait until then if you have some thoughts on our future – please e-mail or phone me (contact details on the back page).

You can read more about how our ideas are developing on pages 5-6. Because of the uncertainty at this stage, we aren't asking members to renew their membership on 1 January as would usually be the case – all memberships are being extended at least until the A.G.M. So there's no renewal slip attached to the e-mail or included in the printed *Newsletter*.

Meanwhile, our ever-active Manor Woods Valley group is hard at it. Read about the latest work and future plans on pages 2-4.

Finally, M.V.C.G. acquitted itself well at the annual Bishopsworth Quiz on 26 November. We had three teams this year and they all came not far from each other in the final scores. None was in danger of winning, though, and therefore organising next year's Quiz! That honour went to one of the teams from St Peter's Church – well done them!

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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NEWS FROM MANOR WOODS VALLEY L.N.R.

THE LINGERING SUMMER-LIKE WEATHER brought glorious colour to the trees and woodland; the woodland path is particularly inviting for winter strolls. The mild weather also allowed the Manor Woods Valley group to continue our work in the orchard and to begin work on new projects.

Step across the Malago and into the ancient woodland for a winter stroll



Manor Woods Orchard

The Environment Agency, Bristol GoodGym and TSB staff helped us, yet again, with the removal of brambles and obstructive Elder trees. And we received Liz Copas's report on the identification of the apple trees. Liz concluded that there



are no true apple varieties in the Orchard and that they had most likely evolved from discarded apple cores. She suggested that the trees were well worth looking after and the fruit would be excellent for making juice or cider.

Hard work in the Orchard

In the light of Liz's conclusions we decided not to proceed with the plan to employ an expert tree-pruner but instead to look after the trees ourselves by removing any dead, diseased and damaged branches, with benefit to wildlife as the top priority. Our future plans for the Orchard include the planting of new fruit trees in the New Year.

Grass cutting, scrub clearance and a new wildflower meadow

Following discussions with the Council's Parks Team, their grass cutting schedule has been modified to include the cutting back of bramble and scrub that has been encroaching over recent years along the riverbank and in parts of



the wildflower meadow boundary, and the reinstatement of the annual hay cut of what was once a mini-wildflower meadow near the Valley Heights Flats entrance. Our members and volunteers will follow up the hay cut with a day of raking the cut grass and scrub and scarifying the soil to allow the light to get to the dormant wildflower seeds.

Our new wildflower meadow

To help us manage the areas of mixed grasses in the orchard and elsewhere, three of our members were trained in the use of scythes, adding yet another skill to our repertoire. We are grateful to Haley Herridge of the Bristol Urban Buzz Project for providing the training and for donating seeds for the restored mini-wildflower meadow. Manor Woods Valley now has the distinction of hosting two Urban Buzz hotspots for pollinators.



Wildlife friendly hay cutting

River Path

We also turned our attention this winter to the task of clearing the river path which, in recent years, had become overgrown by brambles, particularly around the path entrance by the interceptor.

The overgrown entrance to the River Path



Forest of Avon Trust Wellbeing Courses in Manor Woods Valley

The eight-week autumn course for young people at risk of becoming homeless was very successful and the next course, starting in January, will focus on improving the mental health of vulnerable adults. We are giving these groups our full support by identifying appropriate woodland management tasks, including Hazel coppicing, for them to work on and we are grateful for the contribution they are making to the maintenance of the nature reserve.



Winter Wildlife

Notable wildlife sightings in the past few months include Rabbits, Jays, lots of Blackbirds and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Badgers and the usual wintering Teal and Grey Wagtails on the Malago. There have been occasional sightings of Kingfishers and Grey Herons on the Malago, and Buzzards and Ravens are commonly seen and/or heard on the wing.

Teal on the Malago

MARTIN GRANT
and the Manor Woods Valley Working Group
(Angela, Beryl, Davina, Marian, Marie Jo and Peter)

THE FUTURE OF M.V.C.G.

THERE'S NO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION which has enough people to do all the work it would like to do. And even when it has volunteers filling a post, they sometimes want a change, or a chance to step back and do less. That's the situation Malago Valley Conservation Group is in as we approach our 24th birthday.

And, of course, the world has changed in the last 24 years. When M.V.C.G. started, e-mail barely existed, and Facebook and Twitter hadn't been invented. Now, we couldn't interact with the City Council and other organisations without e-mail, and Facebook and Twitter are the main tools for recruiting and keeping in touch with the volunteers who do so much in Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve.

So is M.V.C.G. still 'fit for purpose' as the business jargon has it? And are we expecting too much of a small handful of people? It was to discuss this that a working group was first convened in early November, consisting of André, Marie Jo, Beryl, Martin and Peter. As this *Newsletter* is being written, the group has met twice, and a third meeting is scheduled.

The working group began with a quick résumé of the history of M.V.C.G. It was useful to have a mix of 'old hands' and 'new boys' on the group! When we started, the obvious model for a group like ours was Bristol Civic Society and the other local conservation and amenity groups which existed – and still exist – in many parts of Bristol. And so M.V.C.G. was founded as a membership organisation with a constitution and a committee and a regular *Newsletter*. We also mimicked the Civic Society in another way; right from the start we declared that we were concerned both about planning and about green spaces – the built environment and the natural environment.

We had debated in those early days what area we wanted to cover. We were founded as a continuation of the working group which had successfully campaigned for the setting up of the Bishopsworth & Malago Conservation Area, which itself recognised the value of old Bishopsworth 'village' in its natural setting of the Malago Valley. Very ambitiously, we expanded well beyond that, taking an interest in the whole of outer south-west Bristol – the BS13 area. As things evolved, we tended to focus more on the western side of BS13 – Bishopsworth, Highridge and Withywood – while other organisations, especially Hartcliffe & Withywood Community Partnership, led on planning and environmental issues elsewhere.

Now we feel that we need to draw our area of interest more tightly. We are the *de facto* 'Friends of Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve', but we're pretty sure we want to draw any boundaries more widely than that. We're also pretty sure that we will continue to take an interest in planning issues – and 'planning' includes roads, of course. We've also been a 'Rivers' group in the past, championing the setting and the condition of the Malago and Pigeonhouse streams. Discussion in the working group is still continuing on 'boundaries' – both geographical and thematic.

To make the sort of changes we're talking about, we will have to change the M.V.C.G. constitution. That can only be done by all the members meeting in a General Meeting. The forthcoming A.G.M. on 14 February will be too soon, so we won't be proposing anything drastic then. Our constitution is written in such a way that changes are awkward to implement, so our current thinking is that it might be easier to officially wind up M.V.C.G. as an organisation and replace it with a new group with a new and simpler constitution. If the members at a General Meeting approve, then M.V.C.G.'s funds could be passed over to the new group – which is certain to have many familiar names and faces involved with it! Before that can happen, a 'successor' group would have to be officially set up, with its own bank account, so we're some time away from that.

It's also been floated that any 'successor' organisation wouldn't need to have members who paid a subscription, with the consequent admin. Many groups these days have supporters who get communications, electronically or otherwise, but don't pay to 'join'.

Just to repeat: all this is the current thinking of the working group. It has at least one more meeting scheduled, and when it has reached a proposed decision, the full M.V.C.G. committee will have to discuss it. None of these ideas can be implemented by the committee unless M.V.C.G. members approve at a specially called General Meeting. It's just possible that this may happen in the late spring/early summer.

We'd love to hear from M.V.C.G. members, both 'old hands' and 'new boys and girls' with your thoughts. Please e-mail or phone me or any of the members of the working group – my contact details are on the back page. There will be more about this important topic at the A.G.M. and in the Spring *Newsletter*.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND BIRTHDAY PARTY

THE TWENTY-FOURTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of Malago Valley Conservation Group will be held on Thursday 14 February 2019 at St Peter's Rooms (by the side of St Peter's Church), Church Road, Bishopsworth, starting at 7.30pm. The Officers and Committee members retire each year but are eligible for re-election. The names of the current Officers and Committee members appear on the back page.

Nominations for Officers or Committee members are very welcome. Nominations can be made to the Chairman, André Coutanche, at 14 Queens Road, Bishopsworth, BS13 8LB (phone number and e-mail address overleaf). Please feel free to contact me or any Committee member for an informal chat if you'd like more information about joining the Committee.

The formal A.G.M. business will include a report-back to members on the year's events and an update and discussion on how we see the future (see page 5). We want the views and suggestions of as many people as possible as we consider how the work of M.V.C.G. will evolve.

There will be also be a short talk by M.V.C.G. member Peter Loy-Hancocks, who is a very active member of the Manor Woods Valley working group. Peter has been delving into the history of Manor Woods Valley, both in the archives and on the ground. He will reveal the lost landscape of our favourite Local Nature Reserve.

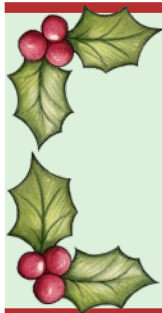
Since we regard our A.G.M. as M.V.C.G.'s birthday, we will finish with wine/orange juice and cheese/other nibbles to celebrate. All members and friends of M.V.C.G. are invited to come to our birthday party.



ANDRÉ COUTANCHE
Chairman

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

AS USUAL, our Winter *Newsletter* has details of our Christmas Party, and, in the New Year, our A.G.M.



Thursday 13 December: M.V.C.G. CHRISTMAS PARTY at St Peter's Rooms (by the side of St Peter's Church, Bishopsworth), starting at **7.45pm**. *Please note the slightly later start to allow time for the organisers to set up.* There will be the usual fun and games, including a raffle for our funds. We'll finish with our traditional American Supper, so please bring a little something for the refreshment table if you can (but don't worry if you can't – there's always lots!).

Thursday 14 February: M.V.C.G. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING at 7.30pm at St Peter's Rooms. Please do your best to be there – it's important! See the 'official' announcement on page 7.

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)

Newsletter edited by André Coutanche, 14 Queens Road, Bishopsworth, Bristol, BS13 8LB; tel. 964 3106; e-mail andrec@mvcg.org.uk; website www.mvcg.org.uk.

Letters, articles and suggestions from readers are welcome.

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