



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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2006

AS USUAL, this *Newsletter* contains the report of our Annual General Meeting on 21 February. You can read all about it starting on page 2. What you can't do here, of course, is enjoy the nibbles and wine and chat which makes our A.G.M.s agreeably unusual, and our special guest speaker, Peter Milner, gave us a most interesting account of the report he has produced on Crox Bottom - so come along next year and join in!

Please do think about what I said at the A.G.M.: I *won't* stand as Chairman next time, so we *do* need someone to take over. However, I will carry on doing all the other bits and pieces which are not part of the Chairman's role, which, of itself, isn't a major commitment. Please get in touch if you would like to know more - or can suggest someone else for the job!

Because of the A.G.M. report, some things have had to be held over until next time, including Manor Woods Valley and the continuing saga of the 'Matties' block (see the A.G.M. report for the background stories; things have since moved on and there's good news and bad news ...).

The Programme on page 7 is as full as ever, but there's more ... Firstly, the University of Bristol has a wide range of walks and tours, though they all need booking in advance. You can see the programme at www.bris.ac.uk/cms/ppo/university-tours.html or Lola has a copy of the brochure. Secondly, we are planning a new addition to our activities - open local gardens.

Would you open your garden one weekend afternoon in June? This would be informal and restricted to M.V.C.G. members and friends. If you would like to volunteer your garden for a couple of hours, or just to discuss the idea, please ring Lola on 964 1116. More information in the next *Newsletter*!

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

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REPORT FROM THE A.G.M.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE welcomed everyone to the meeting. He pointed out that he had been Chairman for 11 years now, and that it would be time for a change next year. He asked members to consider taking on the Chairman's job; it was not very onerous of itself, and he would continue with his other roles.

Programme Report: Lola Hardingham reported that there had been some very interesting and entertaining speakers this year. Les Davies talked about his work as a Warden in the Mendip Hills Area followed by Sue Walker of HHEAG on their Plot to Plate project. The Malago Trek took place on 15 May in glorious weather and was well supported. All of our summer events took place in lovely weather; there was a wildlife walk in Arnos Vale Cemetery at the end of May. Sally Oldfield took us for a walk on Royate Hill which was fascinating and in September we were given a tour of the Lifeskills at the CREATE Centre. The Winter season started with a talk from Jon Atwood about Improving the Urban Environment followed in November by Julie Seaton of the Planning Department who explained to us the proposals for the former Wills office block. Both our sociable Christmas 'At Home' and Christmas Party were as popular as ever and we thank those who gave contributions, their time and for coming along. Last month we heard an excellent talk about the geology of our region by Andrew Mathieson which was particularly well attended.

Planning Issues: André Coutanche summarised some of the major planning issues dealt with during 2005, starting with the Old Vicarage, Bishopsworth. There was a planning application for a further two bungalows in the grounds of the Old Vicarage, and this was, not surprisingly, refused by the planners. While writing to oppose the application, we made the point that action will need to be taken to ensure that the grounds, which the developers cleared when they shouldn't have, are re-instated. We recently heard that the developers are going to appeal against the refusal, thereby spinning the process out even longer.

Last year, the development of Highridge Playing Fields was 'pending' It still is, and from what we can gather, there is no sign that progress will be made in the foreseeable future. We decided towards the end of 2005 that the dim prospect of new development on the site was no longer reason for tolerating what has been there for some time. We are therefore asking the planners to investigate the status of the shipping containers and the rest of the mess which looks as though it belongs in a South American slum.

For a couple of years, the major developments which were expected in BS13 have been Symes Avenue, Hartcliffe Community Campus, Hengrove Park (on the edge of our area) and the Withywood Church Centre. All of these moved forward during the year. Long-awaited development at Symes Avenue got permission but is currently caught up in a compulsory purchase wrangle. The Community Campus and Hengrove Park both received outline planning permission during 2005, so we await detailed plans. And the New Withywood Church Centre on Queens Road, which got planning permission in 2004, is well under way. The development of the former Esso petrol station on Bishopsworth Road moved on during the year, though it's still far from finished, and we continue to monitor its impact on Manor Woods Valley.

There has been some development on roads in our area during 2005 but only in the sense that reports have been published. We remain opposed to a road on the line of the pre-war ring road because it isn't a ring road but a road through built-up areas. We also oppose the route across Highridge Common and down to the Long Ashton Park & Ride because of its impact on areas which are valuable for both wildlife and amenity. We haven't taken a view on the line of a road elsewhere, and we are not automatically opposed to all new roads as a matter of principle. We supported the 'Orange Route' for a link between the A38 and A370 because it would have brought much-needed relief to Barrow Gurney. We do have some difficulty taking it seriously because of the profoundly unsatisfactory and undemocratic nature of the regional system and because of the complete implausibility of any money to construct a road becoming available in the foreseeable future.

Last year's planning report ended with Crox Bottom - the regrettable widening of the path. We said then that there was a silver lining - the work included a barrier to keep out vehicles, and there were proposals to develop an interpretation scheme for this neglected area. Peter Milner has now produced a report. But the year ended, as we hardly dared to hope, with a stunning proposal for the re-use of the Wills Office Block. We support just about every aspect of this scheme, and are commenting only on the desirability of maintaining some sort of public access to at least part of the lake.

Finally, there is a planning issue which we have been working on behind the scenes for the whole of 2005 and it's still going on. It's not a planning application but a question of planning enforcement - and without effective planning enforcement when it's needed, the whole of the development control system becomes an elaborate bluff. The site in question is what we call 'the Matties block' because we remember Matties Restaurant being there, but its

proper name is the Parade, Bishopsworth, and it contains now the Indian Restaurant opposite St Peter's Church. When three of the former shops were turned into flats, the owner failed to carry out the landscaping which was part of the permission. For over a year, we have been e-mailing Planning Enforcement and trying to get this eyesore properly finished. We aren't there yet, and it may be that next year's A.G.M. has the final story. Thanks are due to Marie Jo who has doggedly pursued this.

Progress with Projects: Marie Jo Coutanche reported on Manor Woods Valley. Our working group is nearly two years old and its members are Marian Green, Lis Pibworth, Angela James, Mavis Palmer and Marie Jo Coutanche. Our work falls into two categories, firstly activities initiated by the Group, which include clearing of brambles and planting of wild flowers at the entrance behind Bishopsworth Library; clearing old stems of Japanese knotweed before spraying by the Council contractors; 'impromptu' garbage raids when needed; selling *My Manor Woods Books* in the park and at a stall at the Cheddar Grove School fête; and our own fête in Manor Woods Valley in July. A big 'thank you' to everyone who worked so hard on that event, especially Lola who bore the brunt of the organising.

The second category is liaising with the City Council, and this has included helping with 'Booted Up Bristol', the project which brings primary school children to Manor Woods to help them discover various aspects on the environment; getting the branches cleared which were blocking the stream near the pond (we alerted Julian Cox to this in February and the work was done in the autumn); Japanese knotweed; pressing for a sign alerting people to the danger caused by the silt around the pond, especially on the woodland side where children play (we alerted Julian Cox a year ago; we were told last month that the sign was ready but there was no money to pay for it to be put up); park furniture - we are still asking for at least one picnic table; pressing for proper sign boards at the entrances (we have been promised these now for this coming year); grass cutting - we alerted the Council when the grass on the slopes was cut very early, thereby losing this year's bee orchids. We initiated a meeting on site in the autumn with Julian Cox, Sally Oldfield and Helen Hall (conservation officer) and discussed and agreed different mowing regimes for different areas; getting rubbish cleared which is beyond our means, most recently at the path from Valley Road which is still not done properly; pursuing the plan for an improved path through the woodland (we are awaiting an answer from the Council). As the year ended, we were still discussing silt clearance with the Council, and we were still awaiting formal designation of the Local Nature Reserve.

We hope we have raised the profile of Manor Woods Valley and that, with the help of our members who regularly turn up to help, we have improved it. However, we feel extreme frustration when we see that basic maintenance is not often achieved and that so much effort is required. This isn't a new problem this year! Julian Cox seems to spend his time chasing contractors. The system isn't working.

André reported on other projects. Our monthly Garbage Raids took place, usually on the last Monday of the month at 3.45pm at various venues round BS13. In one hour we usually collect a trolley load of litter. And we have our annual Amphibious Garbage Raid when we tackle the Malago in Manor Woods. We helped to organise the Malago Trek again in 2005 and guided visitors from the lowlands of Bedminster and Southville through our patch and up Dundry Slopes to the Malago Spring artwork.

One of the things we do on garbage raids is separate and save aluminium cans. We also collect cans from other sources and have a number of collectors. A big 'thank-you' to them. These are sorted and sold to help our funds. The money we raise from cans is roughly what we spend on buying daffodil bulbs, hence our slogan that we are turning cans into daffodils. In 2005 we planted at Wilmott Park in Hartcliffe, and we did a second round of planting on Highridge Road to help the Council who had some 'spare' bulbs.

There was no development on the ground in 2005 at Elm Tree Corner, but there was a very welcome agreement by the Council to install the pedestrian crossing which is a key part of our plan.

We have been members of the Parks Forum for some while, and during 2005 more members began going to the interesting meetings. It's often a bitter-sweet exercise, when we see that we're doing as well as many other groups, and that everyone is suffering from the Council's systems!

We have continued our bi-monthly newsletters, even though they sometimes appear a little late! They circulate widely to our members and to other organisations we work with, not least Bristol City Council. Our website is kept up to date with our Programme, though sometimes the newsletters on the website fall behind.

LIS PIBWORTH

THE MAJORITY of members have now renewed their subscriptions for 2006 - thank you! If there is a membership form with this *Newsletter*, it's because we're still waiting to hear from you ...

RENEWABLE ENERGY

On the evening of 26 March we gathered to hear a presentation on 'Agricultural-related Bio-Energy Production' by Dr. Rebecca Heaton, Senior Renewable Energy Consultant for ADAS (v. upmarket!). However, the speaker was better known to us as Beryl and Danny's daughter, Becky (who last spoke to us eight years ago, would you believe). Straight away our attention was grabbed by several references to 'Biomass', but we soon discovered that this referred to sustainable crops grown specifically as fuel - at present mainly Willow and Miscanthus (Elephant Grass) although Birch is also being considered as a possibility. The Willow is chipped or turned into pellets (like cat litter, apparently), and the Miscanthus dried so that it becomes rather straw-like. This latter, although initially expensive to plant, is perennial and grows to a height of 12 feet or more in a year. A Good Thing, as responsible management can be beneficial not only to the health of the woodland itself, but also encourages all sorts of wildlife to colonise the improved habitat.

Interest in developing sources of renewable energy was aroused in the '70s, waned in the '80s and it is only now that at long last the powers-that-be are taking Global Warming and Climate Change seriously. But while much research still has to be done, it was encouraging to see that this is not all Science Fiction - the use of renewable energy sources is being taken seriously by some councils, particularly in Wales it would appear. Because of the expense involved, most schemes in use at present are therefore 'community' based - schools, community centres, new estates, etc. - and it will be many years before this is available to the average individual, although of course electricity can be produced in this way to supply the National Grid. But the important point is that Things Are Happening, albeit perhaps rather belatedly.

We were reminded that as well as the use of 'biomass', there are other sources of renewable energy such as solar panels, wind farms, methane from landfills and sewage, using methane to produce hydrogen for vehicle fuel, etc. It was emphasised that all possible sources would have to be developed and that no one method could produce all the energy needed by modern civilisation.

There then followed our own personal source of renewable energy - namely the tea/coffee break - after which the usual lively 'interactive' discussion took place. We were certainly given much food for thought that evening, and I am sure that we all went to our beds much better informed on, and, it is to be hoped, a little more concerned about those vital issues affecting not just ourselves, but perhaps more significantly those generations as yet unborn.

TONY INSALL

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS

SPRING is in the (still chilly) air, and the programme moves from evening meetings at 7.30pm at St Peter's Rooms (by the side of St Peter's Church, Bishopsworth, opposite the Swimming Pool) to some outdoor events. The **M** symbol shows our own events, to which everyone is welcome, member or not.

M Tuesday 18 April: JOHN TULLY will give us an illustrated talk about *Birds and birdsong*, as a preparation for ...

M Saturday 22 April: A *Dawn Chorus Walk* in Manor Woods Valley, guided by JOHN TULLY. Meet at 7.00am (not dawn, really!) at the entrance to Manor Woods behind Bishopsworth Library. (Apologies for mis-spelling John Tully's name in the last *Newsletter*).

M Monday 24 April: *Garbage Raid*, meeting at Withywood Post Office at 3.45pm.

Thursday 11 May: *Evening walk* in Badock's Wood guided by members of the Friends of Badock's Wood. Meet at 7.00pm at the Lakewood Road entrance, Henleaze. The walk will finish around 8.30pm, and will be followed by a (purely optional!) visit to a local pub. We will try to co-ordinate transport, so please phone André on 964 3106 if you are planning to come on the walk.

Sunday 14 May: *Malago Trek*, starting at 10.00am at ASDA car park, or join in anywhere along the route. Bring your own picnic to eat on Dundry at the Malago Spring artwork. Leaflets with more details will be available soon, at our meetings and in public places (or see last year's if you kept it).

M Monday 22 May: *Garbage Raid*, meeting at the junction of Fernsteed Road and Church Road at 3.45pm.

M Thursday 1 June: *Evening walk* in Manor Woods Valley guided by - er, us! This walk is aimed at green space community groups and river groups so they can see what M.V.C.G. have been achieving. However, all M.V.C.G. members and friends are welcome - just be prepared to spread the word to people on the walk whom you don't recognise! Meet at 7.00pm at the Library entrance.

Sunday 4 June: *Herb Walk* organised by CSV Environment. More details from 964 2831 or in the next *Newsletter*. There will also be walks on 9 July and 10 September.

Saturday 10 June: *Fun Day* organised by the Friends of Hartcliffe Millennium Green at the Millennium Green, Bishport Avenue.

SPRINGING INTO ACTION ...

WHEN M.V.C.G. 'inherited' the funds of the Dundry Hill Group, we said we would carry on maintaining the Malago Spring artwork on Dundry. Some running repairs have recently been necessary, but on this occasion CSV Environment had some 'spare' funds to do the work. Here are Hartwood Enterprises (fairly) hard at it ...



Malago Valley Conservation Group

Chairman	André Coutanche	964 3106
Vice-Chairman	Lola Hardingham	964 1116
Hon. Secretary	Lis Pibworth	939 0698
Hon. Treasurer	Beryl Heaton	964 5780

Committee Members

Anton Bantock, Don Bartlett, Mavis Palmer

Co-opted Committee Members

Valerie Gay, Diana Porter, Sue Walker, CSV Environment, Cllrs Mark Brain, Peter Crispin, Richard Eddy, Royston Griffey, Ron Hodges, Helen Holland, Colin Smith, 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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Letters, articles and suggestions from readers are welcome.

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