



MALAGO VALLEY CONSERVATION GROUP

NEWSLETTER

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Winter
2006

THIS first 'quarterly' *Newsletter* should arrive just in time to remind you of our CHRISTMAS PARTY on 19 December - see the details on page 7. We also have to cover in this edition what would previously have appeared in the January *Newsletter*, so you'll find the notice of our A.G.M. on page 6. And the other traditional January news is, of course, the reminder that annual subscriptions are due on 1 January - please see the notice on page 7.

One tradition which we have kept up in most years - though we will only do it when it is deserved, of course - is to recognise good developments on our patch with an ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD. Have a look at page 6, and let us have any ideas for anything you have noticed in the last twelve months.

There's a good chunk about planning issues in this edition, and a lot of that is about 'the Matties block'. I'm quite sure that many of you will find it all rather bewildering, but it really is important that a local conservation group like ours keeps tabs on this sort of thing. The City Council simply doesn't have the resources to monitor everything which happens - or fails to happen - on the ground. (Some may say that the Council jolly well *should* have the resources, but that takes us into a much wider debate about the relationship between local and national government in this country). This saga illustrates how we can have a positive relationship with the Council which is simultaneously co-operative and critical, and how an informed and professional approach is the best way to get things done (well, the least bad way ...).

That's enough philosophy - it's Christmas! Whether or not you're able to be at the M.V.C.G. Christmas Party, have an excellent time over the holidays - and perhaps consider a New Year's resolution to get a bit more involved with M.V.C.G. in 2007 ...

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

IN THIS ISSUE

Team Effort	Page 2
Planning Matters	Page 3
Dare We Hope ... ?	Page 5
A.G.M. and Birthday Party	Page 6
The Programme	Page 7
Wild BS13	Page 8

TEAM EFFORT

IN THE July *Newsletter* we reported the work we are doing to improve the entrance to Manor Woods Valley behind Bishopsworth Library. We have now painted extra panels of the fence at each end so that the whole of the path down into the Woods is now bordered by attractive, green railings, and on 15 November, we planted a row of *Rosa rugosa* behind the railings. Our grateful thanks to those members who organised the work, ordered the plants, advised on planting, donated home-made compost etc. And thank you to everybody who gave time and energy to the project!



Watch this space in the spring!

We will carry on putting pressure on the Council to put up signs at each entrance. We hope that by the time the official designation as a Local Nature Reserve comes through, the signs will be in place. We know that Julian Cox, our Community Parks Manager, wants to get signs up, but his budget for such things is severely restricted. Perhaps we will make progress in the New Year, because we recently received a letter from Bristol Parks about their proposed 'Park Group Agreements'. This is a pilot project which would be an informal agreement between Bristol Parks and groups like M.V.C.G. on future plans and activities. We already meet Julian regularly, so in many ways this would only make 'official' what we are already doing. We shall sign up to this pilot, and we hope that it will encourage 'the powers that be' to find the necessary resources for things like signs at Manor Woods Valley.

We've kept the best news till last! Working closely with Sally Oldfield, our Local Nature Reserves Officer, M.V.C.G. applied for grant money from Yansec to carry out some major work in Manor Woods Valley. Yansec is the



Benefiting the Environment

organisation associated with the land-fill site at Yanley Lane which makes local grants to improve the environment in parts of North Somerset and Bristol. We recently heard that our application had been granted, to a value of £12,650! The majority of this will be spent on repairing and upgrading the footpath through the woodland, with some money for wooden finger posts pointing the way to the path, and for coppicing some of the streamside trees.

We'll be meeting Council officers early in the New Year to plan the work, and we're very grateful to Yansec for having made it possible.

MARIE JO COUTANCHE

COME AND JOIN US! On SATURDAY 30 DECEMBER AT 11.00AM we will meet at the entrance to Manor Woods Valley from Valley Road for an hour's litter picking. We will finish at the entrance behind Bishopsworth Library (where you can admire the railings and the planting!). Bags and gloves provided.

PLANNING MATTERS

CARRYING ON from our reports in the last *Newsletter*, you may have seen that work has started in earnest on the Urban Splash development at the former Wills office block in Crox Bottom. At some stage, this will include draining and cleaning out the lake.

The planning application by Wring's for a stone crusher at the quarries at Manor Woods Valley is still pending. We had thought that it might be about to go to the Council's South & East Development Control Committee, but, as I write, it's not scheduled for the December meeting. More news, no doubt, in the New Year ...

We reported last time about the unauthorised demolition of the toilet block near the Elm Tree pub by the Neighbourhood & Housing Services Department of the Council. An initial exchange of e-mails petered out, and pressure of other work has meant that we haven't yet followed this up. Another thing to look forward to in the New Year!

What we tend to call ‘the Matties block’ - correctly described as 1-4 The Parade, Bishopsworth - is still a continuing saga, though perhaps recent developments represent at least the start of a resolution (we can hope!). Here’s a reminder of the story so far: we asked the Council to take enforcement action over the lack of landscaping, but their reaction was that because not all aspects of the planning permissions had been implemented in full (even though all building work had stopped years ago and the flats were occupied), that then meant that the scheme was incomplete and enforcement action on the outstanding landscaping conditions was therefore not possible. We didn’t understand this, which would seem to be a blank cheque for a ruthless developer; leave unfinished some trivial part of a permission and you can ignore all the inconvenient and costly conditions.

Although the Council had told us that enforcement wasn’t possible, they began negotiations with a view to an agreed landscaping scheme and we were shown the proposed landscaping plan and invited to comment, which we did. The process was very drawn-out because, we understand, the owner was obstructive and reluctant to co-operate. We believe that a landscaping plan was agreed which was largely that on which we had commented (we were never shown a final, agreed version), and work began. Progress on the ground was very slow as well, but we and local residents were pleased to see at last the prospect of some improvement on this site in the heart of the Conservation Area opposite St Peter’s Church.

When the railings were erected, it was clear that progress was *not* being made. The landscaping scheme we had seen and supported had railings at the back of the open area, not against the pavement. The owner seemed to be implementing whatever suited him with no regard to the agreement with the City Council. The height of the railings gives the impression of a cage in a zoo and has caused a great deal of concern and adverse comment in the area.

These railings, being over one metre high next to the pavement, needed planning permission, which the owner hadn’t applied for. The Council *did* decide to take enforcement action about this, which we support. The owner responded by (a) appealing against the enforcement notice, and (b) putting in a retrospective planning application for the railings. We opposed the application, and it was recently refused. We have written to the Planning Inspectorate to support the Council’s enforcement over the railings and to ask the Inspector to dismiss the owner’s appeal. We have also described the story so far to the Inspector, pointing out that the owner has made life unnecessarily difficult not only for local residents, for M.V.C.G. and for the City Council, but also for himself.

Again, the New Year will (eventually) bring this part of the saga to a head, though the owner can still appeal against refusal of the planning permission. It's tempting to say that he wouldn't be so stupid while the other appeal is running, but, as you may have seen, he has very recently planted unauthorised conifers on the site, which we have told the Council about. It's very difficult to fathom exactly how his mind works.

ANDRÉ COUTANCHE

DARE WE HOPE ... ?

FOLLOWING a recce of our habitual BLACK SPOTS in early December, we dare to report that parks and open spaces in our bit of south Bristol have never looked better:

- **WITHYWOOD PARK:** New pedestrian lights, seats and litter boxes; only the entrance still messy. Skateboard park cared for; motorbike nuisance much reduced by Police warning notices. 8/10
- **WILLMOTT PARK:** Trees groomed, verges cleared. Controlled and clean entrances. New litter boxes. Only nuisance are the teenage motorcyclists. 9/10 *[This park is benefitting greatly from the new Park Rangers paid for by the Neighbourhood Management scheme in Hartcliffe & Withywood - Ed.]*
- **MANOR WOODS VALLEY:** Brilliant! Top marks! 10/10 *[Except for Valley Road path! See page 3 - Manor Woods Valley Group Convenor]*
- **MALAGO GREENWAY:** (under Hengrove Way) Newly landscaped. Cycle track now continuous to Crox Bottom. Water feature filled in and big garbage removed. Graffiti and casual litter need attention. 7/10
- **PARSON STREET-MARKSBURY ROAD:** Malago dredged and cleaned out. Trees groomed and garbage removed. Entrances still need attention. 8/10

Other open spaces which in the past were strewn with Bonfire Night rubbish well into the next year are all clean and green ...

Footpaths are another matter. Report on them will follow later.

ANTON BANTOCK

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND BIRTHDAY PARTY

THE TWELFTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of Malago Valley Conservation Group will be held on Tuesday 20 February at St Peter's Rooms, 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.

According to the M.V.C.G. constitution, nominations for either Officers or Committee members should be made in writing at least 14 days before the A.G.M. They must be supported by a seconder and the consent of the nominee must first have been obtained. Nominations can be made to the Hon. Secretary, Lis Pibworth, at 31 Vicarage Road, Bishopsworth, BS13 8ER or to the current Chairman, André Coutanche, at 14 Queens Road, Bishopsworth, BS13 8LB (phone numbers and e-mail addresses on the back page).

However, anyone thinking of volunteering to join the Committee should not be put off by these formal requirements. If you think you may be interested, please contact any existing Committee member for an informal chat. New members are always welcome! The current Chairman has said that he will not stand again, so nominations are particularly required for this post.

The formal A.G.M. business will include a report-back to members on the year's events, and this will be followed by a guest speaker who will update us on a topic of current interest.

As usual, we will finish with wine/orange juice and cheese/other nibbles to celebrate our birthday. All members and friends of M.V.C.G. are invited to come to our birthday party.

LIS PIBWORTH
Hon. Secretary

M.V.C.G. has in past years made ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS for any new development completed during the year which has enhanced the public face of BS13. This can be a new building, a restoration or a good new use of an old building, or a positive improvement in a public open space. If you can think of anything completed in 2006 which deserves recognition, please let André know (contact details on the back page).

PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS

THIS should be with you just in time to remind you to come to our Christmas Party on 19 December. If you know of any other events which would interest M.V..C.G. members, we'd be delighted to list them here. The **M** symbol shows our own events.

M Tuesday 19 December: Our daft and delightful *Christmas Party*. PLEASE NOTE THE LATER STARTING TIME OF 7.45pm. Please bring a contribution to the American Supper if you can. We shall also have a sales stall of Christmas goodies and small Christmas presents - contributions will be welcome on the evening!

M Saturday 30 December: A healthy *Garbage Raid* to set you up for the New Year festivities. Meet at the Valley Road entrance to Manor Woods Valley at 11.00am; we shall clear the path down from Valley Road and finish at the Library entrance by noon. Bags and gloves provided.

M Tuesday 16 January: Our first meeting of 2007 will hear ROGER SYMES talking about *Wildlife Indoors*. 7.30pm at St Peter's Rooms.

M Tuesday 20 February: Our *Annual General Meeting and Birthday Party*. See page 6, opposite.

M Tuesday 20 March: Details in the next Newsletter, but make sure you have the date in your 2007 diary!

MEMBERSHIP of Malago Valley Conservation Group runs on a calendar year basis, so the approach of the New Year means that it's time to renew your subscription. If you joined in the last few months of 2006, then your membership runs through to the end of 2007; otherwise you should find enclosed a membership renewal form (unless you are receiving a complimentary copy of the *Newsletter*).

Please bring the completed form and your sub. to the Christmas Party, or to any other meeting, or send it to either Beryl Heaton (3 Kings Walk) or André Coutanche (14 Queens Road). *Thank you!*

WILD BS13

This dramatic photo was taken by Angela James one foggy day a month or so ago. A BUZZARD, perhaps confused by the bad visibility, was perched on a neighbour's garage.

Dramatic scenes, too, in André & Marie Jo's garden recently, when a SPARROWHAWK caught and devoured a pigeon on the terrace (but we'll spare you the gory pictures ...).



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, Paul Harvey-Worsley, Paul Mizen, Diana Porter, Sue Walker, CSV Environment, Cllrs Mark Brain, Peter Crispin, Richard Eddy, Royston Griffey, Helen Holland, Tim Kent, Kevin Quartley, 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.