

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

Decision Made: 11 January 2012

FEASIBILITY STUDIES TO INVESTIGATE POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS TO LAND LEASED TO THE MUSEUM OF KENT LIFE TRUST

Issue for Decision

To consider undertaking two feasibility studies to look at potential improvements to land leased to the Museum of Kent Life Trust as follows:-

- A feasibility study to investigate the possibility of linking the towpath at Allington Lock with Cobtree Manor Park by a combined footpath and cycle way.
- A feasibility study to investigate the possibility of creating allotments on land adjacent to this proposed footpath and cycle way.

Decision Made

1. That a feasibility study be commissioned to investigate the possibility of linking the towpath at Allington Lock with Cobtree Manor Park by a combined footpath and cycle way along the route shown on the plan attached as Appendix A to the report of the Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services.
2. That a feasibility study be commissioned to investigate the possibility of providing allotments on land leased to the Museum of Kent Life, shown edged red on the plan attached as Appendix B to the report of the Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services, opposite Cobtree Manor Park and adjacent to the proposed footpath and cycle way.

Reasons for Decision

Combined Cycle Way and Footpath

It is considered that the feasibility of a combined footpath and cycle way should be investigated because it will improve sustainable transport links to Cobtree Manor Park. At present this involves the use of busy roads. The proposed path would provide a pleasant traffic free route from the

town centre to the Park. The path would follow the route shown on the plan attached as Appendix A to the report of the Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services.

The study will link into the wider feasibility study, being undertaken by Sustrans on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council and other land owners along the River, looking at the possibility of creating a cycle path along the River Medway between Maidstone and Tonbridge. Sustrans is a leading charity which promotes sustainable transport.

Cobtree Manor Park could potentially become a destination park and activities such as cycle hire could be considered. The feasibility of this final link to Cobtree Manor Park could potentially be included at no cost in the study by Sustrans, which is already funded by Maidstone Borough Council.

The longer term aspiration of the project being undertaken by Sustrans is not only to create the cycle path between Tonbridge and Maidstone, but to investigate continuing this path all the way to Rochester. This is unlikely to happen for some time but if it does it would make Cobtree Manor Park strategically important as the midway point.

If Sustrans are unable to incorporate the additional path at no cost as part of the existing study, then the feasibility study could be undertaken by the Cobtree Officer. It is estimated that this will take approximately 2 days of Officer time.

The feasibility study will involve consultation with the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited and other stakeholders as well as an investigation of the cost and practicalities of the project.

The findings of the feasibility study will be reported back to the Cobtree Manor Estate Committee.

Allotments

The Museum of Kent Life has approached Maidstone Borough Council about the possibility of creating allotments on land adjacent to the proposed path. The freehold interest in the land, which is shown edged red on the plan attached as Appendix B to the report of the Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services, is owned by the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited which sub leases it to Maidstone Borough Council as corporate Trustee of the Charity known as the Cobtree Manor Estate. Maidstone Borough Council sub leases the land to Kent County Council which in turn sub leases it to the Museum of Kent Life Trust and their operating body Continuum.

There is currently a waiting list of 142 people for allotments in Maidstone and the possible use of this land for allotments would help to alleviate some of the shortfall in supply. It would also be consistent with the object of the Charity to manage its assets 'in such a way for the benefit of the inhabitants of Maidstone and other members of the general public.'

The allotments could be managed by the Maidstone Allotments Management Committee (MAMC). The MAMC is a voluntary organisation which runs all allotments owned by Maidstone Borough Council. The MAMC is very keen to find new sites in order to reduce the waiting list, and would be interested in taking on this site.

Alternatively the allotments could be run by Continuum on behalf of the Museum of Kent Life Trust. This would give an element of independence from the existing allotment arrangements in the Borough and allow alternative tenancy arrangements for plot holders to be considered.

The land is disused at present and the proposed creation of allotments would bring it into community use.

The feasibility study will involve consultation with the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited and other stakeholders as well as an investigation of the cost and practicalities of the project.

The feasibility study could be undertaken by the Cobtree Officer. It is estimated that this will take approximately 2 days of Officer time.

The findings of the feasibility study will be reported back to the Cobtree Manor Estate Committee.

Alternatives Considered and Why Rejected

Combined Cycle and Footpath

The alternative would be to take no action on the proposed commissioning of a feasibility study to investigate the possibility of linking the towpath at Allington with the Cobtree Manor Park by a combined cycle way and footpath. However, this is not considered appropriate as the study currently being undertaken into the possible creation of a cycle path along the River Medway provides an ideal opportunity to examine the possibility of improving cycle and pedestrian access to Cobtree Manor Park.

Access to the Park is restricted at present predominantly to road traffic. Improving cycle and pedestrian access will make the Park more sustainable for the future. This is important if the Park were to be entered for a Green Flag Award.

Easier access will encourage more people to use the Park. It has the potential to become a destination on the new cycle route.

Allotments

An alternative would be to take no action on the proposed feasibility study to investigate the potential for allotments on land identified by the Museum of Kent Life. This is not considered appropriate as the Museum of Kent Life has identified an opportunity which would be consistent with the objects of the Charity known as the Cobtree Manor Estate and potentially help to resolve the deficiency in allotment provision in the Borough.

Background Papers

None.

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Change and Scrutiny by: **20 January 2012.**