

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

Decision Made: 14 April 2014

COBTREE ESTATE PROGRESS REPORT

Issue for Decision

- (a) To consider the work being undertaken across the Cobtree Estate as set out in the progress report attached as Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer; and
- (b) To consider the Cobtree Manor Park events programme for 2014 and the proposal to charge for events.

Decision Made

1. That the progress report on work being undertaken across the Cobtree Estate, attached as Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer, be noted.
2. That the Cobtree Manor Park events programme for 2014, as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer and as updated at the meeting, be approved.
3. That a budget of £2,000 be allocated for the events programme for 2014.
4. That agreement be given to the introduction of a charge of £3 per person for the events arranged for 2014 with the exception that where the events are for children the charge is per child and accompanying adults go free.
5. That agreement be given to the Maidstone Leisure Centre taking on the handling of events bookings and that, in this connection, the Leisure Centre be allowed to take 10% of the charge referred to above as the handling fee and, where it is requested that tickets are posted, to charge an additional postal fee.
6. That the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership be allowed to take on the running of the events programme for this year and to receive the proceeds outlined above to enable it to put on more events at Cobtree whilst accounting to the Officers for the running of these events.

Reasons for Decision

The Committee has asked to be provided with a progress report on the work being carried out across the Estate at each meeting. The report for the most recent period is attached as Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer.

The events programme has proved to be very popular in the Park and the proposed programme for 2014, set out in Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer, includes two extra events giving a total of 27 events in the Park for 2014. Two further orienteering events have been scheduled since publication of the report.

The budget of £2,000 is the same as that for 2013 and sufficient to allow for a successful programme.

Charging £3 per head is proposed for all general events; for family events the charge is £3 per child and accompanying adults go free. This is a first step towards the programme potentially becoming self funding in the future. Charging also encourages those who have booked to turn up, as it is not unusual for people to book and fail to come, meaning that others who wanted to book get turned away.

The pricing is based on the charges that other organisations (e.g. Kent Wildlife Trust and other country parks) make. These range from £2.50 to £5 for a walk. £3 comes closest to covering costs and it is the same as the charge made by the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership for events elsewhere.

The charges are the same as those due to be introduced this year in Mote Park and this will ensure that charging for Parks events is consistent across the two sites.

Future events have the potential to be self funding, particularly when the Visitor Centre is running and a more substantial programme can be introduced. The gradual introduction of charges will make this easier. The lack of certainty over income from the Golf Course and possible maintenance costs to the play area and Park mean that the potential money available for events is less secure. Charging can provide a long term future for the events programme.

The Leisure Centre has the facilities to handle events booking and to process charging and give out tickets. Events at Cobtree Manor Park have in the past been booked through the Ranger. To facilitate the handling of money and the distribution of tickets and to provide cover when the Ranger is away or off duty, it is proposed that the Leisure Centre take on this function.

The events programme this year has been put together by the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership. They approached the Officers at the end of last year requesting that funds be put towards a new educational post because the demand for their events is so high. Rather than committing funding for an additional staff member it was suggested that the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership put together the programme and receive

the funds raised through charges to enable additional events to be put on. This has resulted in two additional events being added to the calendar. The Medway Valley Countryside Partnership will be required to account to Officers for the way in which monies received are expended, so that a complete audit trail is in place.

Alternatives Considered and Why Rejected

An alternative would be not to endorse the works ongoing across the Estate. This is not considered appropriate as the works are in the best interests of the Estate and it is important that the Committee is aware of ongoing actions.

The decision could be taken not to run an events programme or put money towards it. However, the programme is very popular and has enabled many visitors in previous years to gain a better understanding of the Park and encouraged more people to come.

The decision could be taken not to charge £3 for events; however, this means that events will always run at a cost to the Charity. The introduction of charging will enable the events service to move towards a self financing model. Not charging will also mean that there is a discrepancy across the Parks Service when charging at Mote Park for similar events is introduced, albeit the main purpose of the charge at Cobtree is to ensure that the provision of the events is cost neutral to the Charity.

The Committee could have rejected the proposal that the Maidstone Leisure Centre takes on the function of handling events bookings. However, there are no facilities at the Park at present to take bookings and money in an alternative way.

Events could continue to be organised and run through the Ranger and the Parks Department. However, the use of the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership has given rise to two extra events for this year and it will be a good test as to whether they could run more events in the Park in future.

Background Papers

Cobtree Manor Estate Master Plan

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 Policy and Communications by: 24 April 2014.
