

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**RECORD OF DECISION OF THE COBTREE MANOR ESTATE
CHARITY COMMITTEE**

Decision Made: 26 October 2022

Cobtree Staff Welfare Facilities

Issue for Decision

To address the provision of suitable staff welfare and storage facilities at Cobtree Manor Park.

Decision Made

That the Officers proceed with seeking estimates and proposals for a stand-alone staff welfare and storage facility at Cobtree Manor Park.

Reasons for Decision

The proposal to review the retained areas of the Cobtree Manor Park Café (café) are likely to result in the Park Ranger needing new welfare facilities. The Park Ranger previously used a metal storage container in the Park for welfare, but this facility deteriorated and became less suitable. At present the Ranger is using the room that was previously the Park Manager's office for welfare purposes. The Park Ranger uses the container for storage only.

The office room used by the Park Ranger is larger than it needs to be and would have more value if it were let as catering hospitality retail space. It is necessary to manage the consequences of reviewing the premises arrangements in the café building and to provide suitable staff welfare facilities that are overdue.

The Park Ranger works full time in Cobtree Manor Park supported by the Mote Park and Cobtree Manor Park Manager who splits his time across both Parks. Other members of the Parks and the Grounds Maintenance teams support work and projects at Cobtree throughout the year.

The welfare facilities provided in the container are no longer usable. The container is no longer weather-proof and water ingress has taken the electrics out of action. It has no heating, and, in the winter, water can freeze on the floor inside making it slippery and unsafe. Rust to the container will soon render it unsecure meaning it cannot be used solely as a storage container either. As well as its unsuitability, the container is also unsightly in the landscape of Cobtree Manor Park.

Reclassifying the retained and the let spaces of the café presents an opportunity to increase the service provision to the people in the Park, to maximise rental yields from a café tenant and to use the yields from the café to provide suitable welfare facilities for staff. A new stand-alone welfare unit will be more in keeping with the look and the feel of the Park and make it a more attractive place to visit.

The Committee agreed that, to deliver the best outcome in terms of value for money and staff welfare, the Officers should proceed with seeking estimates and proposals for a stand-alone staff welfare and storage facility at Cobtree Manor Park.

Alternatives Considered and Why Rejected

Not Provide New Welfare Facilities

The staff in the Park have access to welfare facilities by using the vacant Park Manager's office as a rest area. This office has running water, but it is larger than it needs to be and is also part of the café building. Using it as a staff room means the Charity continues to be a sub-tenant in a café building it lets to someone else and also denies the café the opportunity to use that room as a sales kiosk selling drinks and snacks in the Park thus hampering the ability to obtain maximum rents.

Use the Elephant House as a Parks Management Building

Surveys have been undertaken and quotes obtained for converting the Elephant House into a Parks management building. The Elephant House is far larger than required for welfare and storage and it could be converted to include a staff room and office. However, doing so requires more investment than a stand-alone unit. It requires additional investment to ensure utilities services can support the building and it sits a fair distance away from the main hub of Park activity meaning when in use it would present some operational challenges.

The provision of a new stand-alone welfare and storage unit can achieve what the Park needs in a relatively cost-effective way. It can be located close to the main activity areas of the Park and in the vicinity of utilities and services. It would be decorated accordingly to match the aesthetic and appeal of the Park, making it visible and discreet at the same time. This option will provide suitable provision for Park staff and will also release the potential of the café building.

Background Papers

None

I have read and approved the above decision for the reasons (including possible alternative options rejected) as set out above.



Signed: _____
Leader of the Council – Councillor David Burton

Full details of the report for the decision can be found at the following area of the [website](#).

Call-In: Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call-in form signed by any three Members to the Proper Officer by: **5pm 4 November 2022**