

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 NOVEMBER 2013**

**Present:**            **Councillor J.A. Wilson (Chairman) and  
Councillors Garland, Greer and Moss**

**Also Present:**    **Mr Richard Corben - Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd.**

23.    APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

24.    URGENT ITEM

The Chairman said that he had agreed to take the report of the Cobtree Officer proposing a one year extension to the current contract between the Council acting as Corporate Trustee of the Charity known as the Cobtree Manor Estate and the operator of the Golf Course as an urgent item. The current contract term was due to expire on 8 January 2014, and following negotiations with the contractor, a decision was now required to enable the legal documentation to be completed.

25.    NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

26.    DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

27.    DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

28.    EXEMPT ITEMS

**RESOLVED:** That the exempt Appendix to the report of the Cobtree Officer relating to the proposed one year extension of the contract for the operation of Cobtree Manor Park Golf Course be taken in public, but the information contained therein should remain private.

29.    MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 AUGUST 2013

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 August 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed.

30. CHARITY KNOWN AS THE COBTREE MANOR ESTATE - FINANCIAL POSITION 2013/14

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Finance and Resources setting out details of the financial position in respect of the Golf Course and the Manor Park as at 30 September 2013. The report also included details of capital expenditure and total investments held. It was noted that:-

- No significant financial issues had arisen during October. The Golf Course was running within budget, but additional running costs of approximately £19,000 had been incurred in respect of the Manor Park due to the need to maintain a staff presence during opening hours given the increase in the number of visitors. Costs of £10,000 had also been incurred for professional advice in connection with the recent negotiations regarding the future of the Kent Life attraction. The impact of these costs in the short term was that the net surplus in respect of the operation of the Estate for 2013/14 was likely to be lower than initially forecast. However, the ongoing implementation of the Master Plan presented the opportunity to develop additional income streams to cover these costs.
- The budget for the implementation of the Master Plan had been set at £1.065m, to be funded by drawing down from the endowment funds invested with Charifund. In addition to this, the Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd. had offered the sum of £300,000 towards the cost of the Visitor Centre and Cafe. To date there had been expenditure of £637,506 on Phase 1 works, and funding to the value of £296,000 had been drawn down from the endowment funds to cover the expenditure in the 2012/13 financial year. When the accounts for 2012/13 had been approved, a further draw down would be made.
- The market value of the endowment funds invested with Charifund was now £1.34m.

RESOLVED: That the financial position in respect of the Golf Course and the Manor Park be noted.

31. COBTREE ESTATE PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Cobtree Officer setting out details of the work undertaken across the Cobtree Estate during the period July-October 2013, and summarising achievements over the past year.

In response to questions, the Officers updated the Committee on the negotiations regarding the future operation and management of the Kent Life visitor attraction, including the timescale for and terms of the surrender of the sub-leases to the Kent County Council and the Museum of Kent Life Trust. They also undertook to arrange for publicity to be

given to the increase in the number of visitors to the Manor Park year on year.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

32. COBTREE MANOR PARK VISITOR CENTRE AND CAFE

**DECISION MADE:**

1. That the final designs for the Visitor Centre and Café be developed in line with the concept design previously endorsed, as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer, which fully supports the delivery of the Charity's objects;
2. That the base option design set out in Appendix B to the report of the Cobtree Officer which sets out in further detail the previously approved concept design (Appendix A) be approved;
3. That the contract for the construction of the Visitor Centre and Café be put out to tender abiding by Maidstone Borough Council's procurement rules and that following evaluation by the Officers the recommended tender be reported to the Committee for acceptance;
4. That the offer of £300,000 from the Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd. towards the cost of the Visitor Centre and Café be accepted with thanks and that the Head of Legal Services be given delegated authority to enter into an agreement with the Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd. to this effect;
5. That agreement be given to the Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd. having full publicity rights over a plaque or interpretation area within the new Visitor Centre and Café to tell visitors how Cobtree Manor Park has been made available for the benefit and use of the general public by the founder, Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake;
6. That the Officers be authorised to investigate options for the future management and operation of the Visitor Centre and Café that will deliver the Charity's objects and to report their recommended option back to the Committee;
7. That the Officers be authorised to seek approval from the Charity Commission as to the variation of the terms for the way in which the finances for the construction of the Visitor Centre and Café are arranged, as previously agreed by the Charity Commission, if considered necessary; and
8. That the renewed spirit of co-operation between the Charity known as the Cobtree Manor Estate and the Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd. be welcomed and recorded.

To view full details of this decision, please follow this link:

<http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IIId=21283&Opt=0>

33. CAR PARKING AT COBTREE MANOR PARK

**DECISION MADE:**

1. That consideration of the introduction of car parking charges at Cobtree Manor Park be deferred until the new Visitor Centre and Cafe has been built.
2. That approval be sought from Kent County Council Highways and Transportation to install a signal controlled pedestrian crossing on Forstal Road at an estimated cost of £60,000 in conjunction with a package of traffic calming and parking restrictions in order to encourage alternative more sustainable means of travel to the Park, and in the interests of pedestrian and highway safety, and that funding in the first instance be sought from the County Member's Highway Fund with additional funding sourced from the improvement project, possibly from funds released from the Visitor Centre and Cafe phase as a result of the donation made by the Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd.
3. That the Officers be requested to investigate the potential for an additional overflow car park on the old hardstand off Forstal Road, and that recommendations resulting from this research be brought back to the Committee in due course.

To view full details of this decision, please follow this link:

<http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IIId=21197>

34. COBTREE MANOR PARK GOLF COURSE - ONE YEAR CONTRACT EXTENSION

**DECISION MADE:**

1. That agreement be given to a one year extension to the current contract relating to the operation of Cobtree Manor Park Golf Course on the current terms which apply other than as detailed in the Exempt Appendix to the report of the Cobtree Officer, for the reasons set out in the report;
2. That the Head of Legal Services be given delegated authority to agree a supplemental agreement with the current operator in relation to this extension; and
3. That the Officers be given authority to investigate the options for future arrangements being considerably longer term in respect of Cobtree Manor Park Golf Course and to report back to the Committee with recommendations.

To view full details of this decision, please follow this link:

<http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Id=21376>

35. MR STEVE GOULETTE

The Committee noted that, following the recent review of the Council's senior management structure, this was the last meeting that Mr Goulette would attend as lead Officer.

**RESOLVED:** That Mr Goulette be thanked for his work on behalf of the Charity known as the Cobtree Manor Estate over the years and, in particular, for his contribution to the ongoing implementation of the Master Plan.

36. DURATION OF MEETING

5.30 p.m. to 6.05 p.m.