

Cobtree Manor Estate Committee

3rd August 2016

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Cobtree cycle path and crossing

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| Final Decision-Maker | Cobtree Manor Estate Committee |
| Lead Head of Service | Head of Commercial and Economic Development |
| Lead Officer and Report Author | Cobtree Officer |
| Classification | Non-exempt |
| Wards affected | Boxley |

Recommendations in the report:

- That approval be given to the proposed Towpath changes detailed in the drawings attached.
- That approval be given to the proposed Toucan Crossing design as attached.
- Officers seek additional funding to contribute towards this scheme.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all -
Ensuring that there are good leisure and cultural facilities.

Timetable

| Meeting | Date |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Cobtree Manor Estate Committee | 3 rd August 2016 |

Cobtree cycle path and crossing

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To review the proposed changes to the River Medway Towpath and road crossing facilities for pedestrian and cycle access to Cobtree Country Park, and to consider seeking grant funding for a financial contribution towards the schemes.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Cobtree Manor Estate covers a large area of land left in Trust to the people of Maidstone. The Cobtree Trust hold the freehold to the estate whilst the Cobtree Manor Estate Trust (CMET) have a 999 year lease. The land is administered on behalf of CMET by Maidstone Borough Council.

Governing Object

The governing object of the Charity remains that defined in the lease of the Cobtree Estate dated 13 July 1971 between the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited (the lessor) and the Maidstone Borough Council (the lessee). The governing object is stated as:

“To hold Cobtree Manor and Cobtree Manor Estate for the benefit of the inhabitants of Maidstone and other members of the general public in one or other or all of the following ways:

- i) By maintaining the Cobtree Manor Estate as an open space as defined by the Open Spaces Act 1906 and if the lessees think fit providing thereat facilities for organised games and other sports”.
 - ii) With the consent of ...[the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited and the Kent County Council]... in such other way for the benefit of the inhabitants of Maidstone and other members of the general public as the Council shall from time to time think appropriate.”
- 2.2 Kent County Council (KCC) and Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) have approved a South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) funded walking and cycling scheme to enhance the River Medway Towpath for the purposes of encouraging sustainable access to the various destinations along the river’s course.
 - 2.3 Four drawings have been appended to this report demonstrating detailed designs of proposed works that would provide a desirable end destination to the River Towpath within Maidstone Borough and provide options for sustainable access to the Country Park. The first is for a Toucan Crossing (pedestrian crossing with lights) requiring changes to the park entrance layout. The second is for an improvement to the riverside towpath on Kent Life (KL) land. The design for KL has been approved by the site contractor.

- 2.4 In order to maximise the benefits of Towpath scheme KCC is seeking additional match funding contributions. The indicative cost for both elements outlined above is in the region of £70,000. KCC are therefore requesting a contribution of £30,000 to deliver these elements. Because of the financial constraints on the charity resulting from the change in golf course income it is suggested that funding for this could be sought from other grant awarding bodies such as the Cobtree Trust.
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3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

Option 1

- 3.1 The Committee could choose to do nothing and not endorse the design alterations to the towpath and/or the crossing. This would mean that the improvements to the towpath to enable cycling would stop at the Malta Inn, before the path reaches the Cobtree Estate. This is not recommended because improvements in cycle access to Cobtree Manor Park will help to encourage sustainable access and will enable the park to be a destination for those using the new cycle path.

Option 2

- 3.2 The Committee could choose to approve the drawings as designed in the appendices of this report, any alterations to the design would need to be approved by KCC, and approve officers to seek additional grant funding for a contribution of £30,000 towards the project. This is the recommended option.

Option 3

- 3.3 The Committee could choose to approve the drawings as designed in the appendices of this report, any alterations to the design would need to be approved by KCC, and reject seeking a financial contribution. This is not recommended as the County Council are seeking match funding and may decide not to go ahead with the works if no financial contribution can be found.
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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Committee choose to approve Option 2, to agree that the Towpath and Toucan Crossing can proceed to be built, subject to any minor changes they may consider being approved by KCC. To also approve officers to seek additional grant funding for a contribution of £30,000 towards the financial contribution to part fund the crossing. Organisations such as The Cobtree Trust may be interested in assisting with this.
- 4.2 Approval of the recommended option would add value to the accessibility of the site and improve the existing park entrance, to meet safety

recommendations from the highways engineer. In addition to the works to the crossing KCC Highways will be moving the 40mph limit “significantly” back towards the M20 bridge. Both County and Borough Members have expressed a desire to link the recreational facilities along the River Medway which would be facilitated by the proposed recommendation.

- 4.3 Connection from an improved River Medway Towpath is likely to increase the share of non-motorised access to the park whilst also providing a valuable destination and connectivity between Kent Life and Cobtree Manor Park. It would improve the sustainability of the park and encourage visitors who may not be able, or want to come by car.
- 4.4 Making a financial contribution towards the scheme increases the viability of including the crossing into the wider Towpath project. This would also provide good value with additional funding required being drawn from the wider LEP grant funding. The proposed contribution is a small amount of the overall cost of the scheme which is being funded through the SELEP. Whilst the charity does not have the funding to contribute itself to this, it could seek funding else-where so that a contribution can be made.
- 4.5 KCC engineers are looking into whether the scheme can be altered to retain the bus stop. If this cannot happen the next nearest stop is by the water works, approximately 400m from the entrance to the park.
- 4.6 Although in a report some years ago a pedestrian crossing was proposed the cost of this proved prohibitive at the time. Safety concerns at that time related to the proximity of the speed restriction and the additional road entrance opposite the park. The new proposal has been assessed by KCC highways engineers and is cheaper as a result of fewer road alterations and safer as there will be junction changes and the speed restriction will be moved further away from the park entrance.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 No consultation has been undertaken on the proposals specifically affecting Cobtree, however the cycle path was discussed with ward councillors by the KCC officer running the scheme.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 If approved the designs would be passed over to contractors for tendering and final costs would be presented back to the Committee.
 - 6.2 Officers would begin sourcing grant funding for the financial contribution.
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7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

| Issue | Implications | Sign-off |
|--|---|---|
| Impact on Corporate Priorities | This report directly supports the aims of the charity and the corporate priorities of the council. | Head of Commercial and Economic Development |
| Risk Management | There are no risk implications for CMET. The project itself will be subject to a full risk assessment. | |
| Financial | Implications if a grant funded contribution of £30k is unable to be found, the scheme may not go ahead as KCC require match funding to meet their contribution. | Cobtree Finance Officer |
| Staffing | No implications | |
| Legal | No implications | Legal Team |
| Equality Impact Needs Assessment | A full EIA would be completed however could only produce positive outcomes in this respect. Improves safety for crossing the Forstal Road | Parks and Leisure Manager |
| Environmental/Sustainable Development | Improves accessibility for non-motorised access. | Parks and leisure Manager |
| Community Safety | No implications | |
| Human Rights Act | No implications | |
| Procurement | No implications | |
| Asset Management | Implications are in respect of minor changes to the estate layout and entrance to the park. | Parks and Leisure Manager |

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

For the Toucan Crossing at Cobtree Park.

- Proposed Toucan Crossing

For the Kent Life Towpath changes.

- Museum of Kent Life Landscape Design
 - Fencing Type details
 - Towpath Layout Sheet 9 of 9
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are no Cobtree reports however this scheme is part of the wider towpath improvement scheme being run by Kent County Council.