

**Cobtree Manor Estate Charity  
Committee****30<sup>th</sup> March 2017**

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

**Yes****Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Café Update. March 2017**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Jason Taylor – Parks and Leisure Manager
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	Boxley

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. The Committee is asked to note the contents of Visitor Centre/Café Update.
2. To approve the inclusion of the Cobtree Manor Park Café in an invitation to tender for an external operator for the Council's various catering outlets, reserving the right to not appoint if the Committee decides to continue operation in house.
3. To approve the installation of a server hatch for the café at a cost not exceeding £5,000.
4. To receive a further report on the results of the tender exercise in order to make a decision on the future operation of the café.

**This report relates to the following corporate priorities:**

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

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	30 <sup>th</sup> March 2017

# Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Café Update

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The information in the report is to update the committee on the performance of the Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre as agreed at the Committees 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2016 meeting.
- 1.2 Contained within this report is a table which shows the financial performance of the Visitor Centre/ Café since it opened in August 2015.
- 1.3 Committee is also being asked to make a decision on the option to include the Cobtree Manor Park Café in an Invitation to Tender for the Council's carious catering outlets.

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Cobtree Manor Visitor Centre/ Café opened in August 2015, and has now been operational for 18 months.
- 2.2 Below, in Table 1, is a breakdown of the month on month café/ visitor centre costs and income from when the facility opened to the current time.

**Table 1:**

	Salaries	Agency Staff Cost	Total Staff Cost	Catering Provision cost	Staff & Catering Provision Cost	Average Service Costs	Total Cost	Sales (Income)	Outcome
Aug-15	2,392	5,719	811	4,709	12,820	2,844	15,664	- 13,591	2,073
Sep-15	3,822	6,485	10,307	6,562	16,869	2,844	19,713	- 16,349	3,364
Oct-15	3,179	9,883	13,062	8,766	21,828	2,844	24,672	- 18,972	5,700
Nov-15	2,768	7,725	10,493	8,471	18,964	2,844	21,808	- 8,729	13,079
Dec-15	3,159	7,779	10,938	3,949	14,887	2,844	17,731	- 9,730	8,001
Jan-16	2,205	6,344	8,549	1,314	9,863	2,844	12,707	- 8,367	4,340
Feb-16	3,584	7,727	11,311	5,029	16,340	2,844	19,184	- 12,392	6,792
Mar-16	6,064	5,191	11,255	2,625	13,880	2,844	16,724	- 14,082	2,642
	<b>27,173</b>	<b>56,853</b>	<b>76,726</b>	<b>41,425</b>	<b>125,451</b>	<b>22,752</b>	<b>148,203</b>	- <b>102,212</b>	<b>45,991</b>
Apr-16	6,185	5,314	11,499	8,393	19,892	3,286	23,178	- 21,027	2,151
May-16	6,403	4,118	10,521	6,464	16,985	3,286	20,271	- 19,805	466
Jun-16	8,024	2,403	427	11,493	21,920	3,286	25,206	- 19,818	5,388
Jul-16	9,632	854	10,486	11,704	22,190	3,286	25,476	- 36,492	- 11,016
Aug-16	10,674	3,526	14,200	7,535	21,735	3,286	25,021	- 32,848	- 7,827
Sep-16	12,667	2,133	14,800	17,293	32,093	3,286	35,379	- 21,179	14,200
Oct-16	10,672	453	11,126	15,058	26,184	3,286	29,470	- 21,605	7,864
Nov-16	9,726	47	9,773	10,162	19,935	3,286	23,221	- 10,942	12,279
Dec-16	7,287	-	7,287	3,081	10,368	3,286	13,654	- 11,888	1,766
Jan-17	10,828	-	10,828	1,151	11,979	3,286	15,265	- 10,100	5,165
Feb-17	6,303	-	6,303	5,894	12,197	3,286	15,483	- 13,935	1,548
<b>Totals</b>	<b>98,401</b>	<b>18,848</b>	<b>107,250</b>	<b>98,228</b>	<b>215,478</b>	<b>36,146</b>	<b>251,624</b>	- <b>219,639</b>	<b>31,984</b>

- 2.3 It should be noted that Staff costs have increased since the January report to include £3,278 Casual's holidays excess, and £2,723 Agency staff costs outstanding from earlier in this financial year and the previous financial year, which had not previously been billed.
- 2.4 We will be making a number of changes in April which will enhance the customer experience whilst improving the business in the cafe. These changes include:
  - 2.5 During holidays and weekends we are going to change the menu to food that can be served straight away. This will comprise of food that customers can select, pay for and go, as opposed currently where customers queue, place an order, wait for food to be cooked to order and served by a member of staff. This will greatly reduce waiting times, enable us to operate with fewer staff and mean fewer lines have to be stocked.
  - 2.6 Through benchmarking we know that our prices are considerably lower than other park cafes in the area, we will increase our prices so that they are more comparable to the offer elsewhere. We have not increased our prices across the board since the café opened 20 months ago.
  - 2.7 We are going to trial using quality recyclable packaging at busy times rather than using crockery and cutlery as we currently do. This will reduce the amount of time that staff spend collecting and cleaning crockery and cutlery, which will enable us to reduce the number of staff required. We do currently use take away containers but going forward these will be of sustainably sourced materials as opposed to foam boxes. We will be installing more bins with signage encouraging customers to use them.
  - 2.8 We propose the installation of a service hatch in the window next to the main entrance door. This will give us a second point of sale for ice creams and drinks and a separate, faster moving queue. The cost of this will be approximately £5,000.
  - 2.9 We are going to trial moving the counter forward so that customers are collecting their food, drinks and ice cream on their way to the till. This will operate more like a canteen. This is a system that works very well in other park cafes and will make for a much smoother operation. We can trial this for an initial period before committing to making permanent changes to the current counter.
  - 2.10 These changes will reduce customer complaints about long waiting times for food, reduce the number of staff needed, which will increase profit from the operation and make it more sustainable in the long term.
  - 2.11 Maidstone Borough Council will shortly be running a tender process to find an external operator for its cafes in Mote Park and at Maidstone Museum. There is an opportunity to include Cobtree Café in the Invitation to Tender. This would give CMET the opportunity to test the market for an external operator and assess the potential income from such an arrangement against the current operational performance.

2.12 Cllr Cox visited the café in mid-March as discussed at January's meeting. At this meeting he highlighted a number of issues that the team quickly resolved. The visit helped highlight these issues which will improve the offer in the café, and we hope that he will revisit in the future.

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### **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

**3.1** To approve the inclusion of the Cobtree Manor Park Café in an invitation to tender for an external operator for the Council's various catering outlets, reserving the right to not appoint if the Committee decides to continue operation in house. **This option is recommended.**

3.2 To reject the inclusion of the Cobtree Manor Park Café in an invitation to tender for an external operator for the Council's various catering outlets. This is not recommended as it would be a missed opportunity and there would be no commitment to appoint but we would be able to test the market and assess the likely revenue available from an external operator.

**3.3** To approve the installation of a new server hatch for the café at a cost not exceeding £5,000. This will give us a second point of sale for ice creams and drinks and a separate, faster moving queue which will result in increased revenue. **This option is recommended.**

3.4 To reject the proposal to install a new server hatch as the café is currently operating at a loss and further capital expenditure would not be prudent.

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### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

**4.1** It is recommended that options 3.1 and 3.3 above are approved for the reasons stated.

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### **5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

5.1 The committee has previously resolved to receive regular updates on performance of the Café/ Visitor Centre.

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### **6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

6.1 Any comments from the Committee will be passed on to the relevant parties.

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### **7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS**

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
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<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objects and the corporate priorities of the Council.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
<b>Risk Management</b>	Risks to running the estate are dealt with in the annual Estate Risk Management Report.	
<b>Financial</b>	Financial risks are considered in the ongoing finance updates.	Cobtree Finance Officer
<b>Staffing</b>	No implications.	
<b>Legal</b>	The legal team will assist in the preparation of the tender in the usual way.	Interim Head of the Legal Partnership
<b>Equality Impact Needs Assessment</b>	No implications.	
<b>Environmental/Sustainable Development</b>	No implications.	
<b>Community Safety</b>	No implications.	
<b>Human Rights Act</b>	No implications.	
<b>Procurement</b>	No implications.	
<b>Asset Management</b>	No implications.	

## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

None

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None