

Cobtree Manor Park Cafe Easter Trial.

April 2017

At the March Cobtree Manor Estate Trust (CMET) meeting proposals were presented for a number of changes to the operation of the Cobtree Manor Park Café during April, to enhance the customer experience whilst improving the operation and profitability of the cafe. Committee members had some concerns about the proposed changes and it was agreed that the options would be trialled over the Easter holidays. The success of these changes would be monitored, customers feedback sought and the results reported back to the committee.

1. Changes implemented

It was hoped that these changes would reduce the time that customers waited to order and receive their food, and in turn reduce complaints. Due to the excellent weather over Easter the park and café were incredibly busy which meant that these trials were tested at the busiest time.

The changes that were taken to committee in March 2017 are shown below in bold with the results shown below in italics:

- 1.1. **During holidays and weekends 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.**

*A 'Schools Out Menu' was introduced and immediately pressure was taken off the kitchen with the waiting time for food reduced. Instant grab and go hot and cold food was trialled but with the changes and simplification of the 'Schools Out Menu' it meant that the kitchen was able to deal with the reduced food orders adequately. It was also observed that the thing that generated most of the waiting time was ice cream and drinks sales. **We recommend that this is continued.***

- 1.2. **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.**

Café prices were increased by around 15%; this was rounded up for ease of change management. The prices were set to be comparable with other park cafés in the surrounding area, and notices were put up informing customers of the price increases.

*The introduction of price increases did not appear to concern customers, with only one verbal comment from a customer. The increase had no impact on sales. **We recommend that prices are reviewed twice a year.***

- 1.3. **Using quality recyclable packaging at busy times rather than crockery and cutlery. To reduce the amount of time that staff spend collecting and cleaning crockery and cutlery, which should reduce the number of staff required.**

*Quality recyclable packaging was introduced and was used both inside the cafe and outside. This helped keep the café and kitchen clear of dirty crockery at the busiest time, and enabled the café to operate with 5 rather than 7 staff, which ultimately helped to make the café more profitable. Whilst there were one or two comments from regular customers the recyclable disposable packaging was received well by customers. There is an increased cost to this packaging when compared to the foam equivalent of on average about 7 pence per item. We are happy that this increased cost can be passed onto the customers. **We recommend that this is continued.***

- 1.4. **The installation of a service hatch in the window next to the main entrance door. To give a second point of sale for ice creams and drinks and a separate, faster moving queue.**

In order to experiment with this a second point of sale selling ice creams and drinks was set up at various locations in and around the building. What we did find was that wherever the second point of sale was opened it reduced the queue to the main counter very quickly. What worked most effectively was monitoring the main queue and when it started to get too long moving a member of staff from the main counter to the second point of sale.

*The best location for the second point of sale was the far corner of the café next to the office. To set this up permanently requires a small counter to be purchased, a drinks fridge and an ice cream freezer will be obtained free of charge from the product suppliers. **We recommend that this is continued and a counter purchased.***

The only disadvantage to this option is that there would be no hatch to serve people outside.

- 1.5. **Trial moving the existing counter forward so that customers would collect their food, drinks and ice cream on their way to the till.**

*We did trial this in a very limited way by using tables and having products that customers could pick up whilst queuing. This did have limited success but compared to the improvements made by having the second point of sale made a very small difference to the operation of the café. It was also very difficult to monitor what was being picked up by customers and could lead to increased levels of theft. In order to do this properly there would need to be a major reconfiguration of the counter. **We recommend that this is deferred.***

2. Customer Feedback.

Whilst trialling these changes to the café we were obviously very keen to get feedback from customers, we did this in three ways:

2.1. On site observation and talking to customers.

Either the Cobtree Manger or Leisure Manger was on site at all times to not only observe but to talk to customers and staff regarding the changes.

2.2. Customers Survey.

A special customer survey was put in place for the two weeks of the trial regarding the changed menu and all aspect of their experience. To encourage people to fill this in and ensure that we had an adequate number of responses, we offered a prize of a £20 family meal voucher.

2.3. Social Media

Social media sites, particularly Trip Advisor give a very good honest opinion of what visitors think of the park and café.

2.4. Results

The feedback from customers has been very positive with very few complaints. At the time of writing this report customer surveys were still being completed but these, along with Trip Advisors feedback will be brought to the CMET meeting.

3. Conclusions of Trial

The conclusions from the trial are:

- 3.1 The introduction of a weekend and holiday menu was a success and should be continued on during holidays and busy periods.
- 3.2 The grab and go offer was received with limited success so in future should just be used for cold items presented on the counter such as cake, biscuits and confectionary.
- 3.3 The increase in prices was a success.
- 3.4 The use of quality recyclable packaging was a success. It was liked by customers, reduced the amount of table clearing and washing up, which in turn meant staff numbers could be reduced.
- 3.5 The proposed introduction of a service hatch and remodelling of the existing counter is not required, if a second point of sale for busy times is introduced at the back of the café.
- 3.6 All methods of customer feedback showed us that customers are not only very happy with the park and café but also there were very few negative comments about the changes introduced over the Easter period.

4 Level of Business over the Easter Period

The Easter holiday was especially busy and the park was full to capacity. The table below shows the level of trading during this time.

April	Salaried Staff	Casual Staff	Total Staff Costs	Provision (Av)	Staff + Provision s Total Cost	Services (Av)	Total Costs	Sales Gross	Outcome	Sales Net	Outcome	% Profit
Tues 4th	212	202	414	710	1124	106	1230	1080	-150	900	-330	-36.67
Weds 5th	211	257	468	710	1178	106	1284	1871	587	1559	275	17.64
Thurs 6th*	217	252	469	710	1179	106	1285	2251	966	1876	591	31.50
Fri 7th	212	317	529	710	1239	106	1345	2609	1264	2174	829	38.13
Sat 8th	99	383	482	710	1192	106	1298	1915	617	1596	298	18.67
Sun 9th	178	306	484	710	1194	106	1300	2441	1141	2034	734	36.09
Mon 10th	217	241	458	710	1168	106	1274	1997	723	1664	390	23.44
Tues 11th	206	186	392	710	1102	106	1208	2091	883	1742	534	30.65
Weds 12th	217	208	425	710	1135	106	1241	2041	800	1701	460	27.04
Thurs 13th	100	290	390	710	1100	106	1206	1804	598	1504	298	19.81
Fri 14th	217	263	480	710	1190	106	1296	2039	743	1699	403	23.72
Sat 15th	118	290	408	710	1118	106	1224	1983	759	1653	429	25.95
Sun 16th	100	339	439	710	1149	106	1255	1561	306	1301	46	3.54
Mon 17th	217	175	392	710	1102	106	1208	1806	598	1505	297	19.73
Total for period	2521	3709	6230	9940	16170	1484	17654	27489	9835	22908	5254	22.94

* Price increases introduced on Thursday 6th April

Services include cleaning, electricity, gas, equipment services, IT and Communications for the whole building

The Easter Egg trail also generated £1,200 income over the holidays which is included in the above table.

5 Other Observations and improvements to be made

Whilst observing the Easter Trials at Cobtree Manor Park at such a busy time, a number of other potential operational efficiencies became apparent. These are listed below:

5.1 Poor car parking.

Visitors park very inefficiently with very large gaps between cars, as well as this there have been problems with cars blocking areas such as the entrance to the overflow car park. At busy times this resulted in a member of staff having to direct cars in the car park. On a number of occasions cars were parking along both sides of Forstal Road which needs to be avoided in future.

In the short term we need to mark out car parking bays and make it very clear where cars can and can't park.

In the long term redesigning the car park should solve these issues.

5.2 Limited capacity for storage of chilled and frozen food.

Due to the limited capacity to store stock, deliveries to the café are required every day at busy times. Whilst these are arranged before 10am it does mean that on occasion stock runs out, or if the delivery is late means that one member of staff has to stop serving customers to process the order and restock freezers.

Currently long term solutions to this such as incorporating a cold store room are being investigated as this would make operations more efficient, improve customer service and

reduce reliance on delivery companies to be on time.

5.3 Amend staff structure to improve resilience.

Currently the team is able to cope adequately when they are all in and no one is sick or on holiday, which gives little resilience and means that customer service is reduced when the whole team is not in. Currently we have two senior members of staff who oversee operation of the café 7 days per week. There could be an opportunity to train up some of the junior members of staff to act as duty managers. Having a duty manager on at all times would not only build resilience and improve customer service but would also enable us to extend the opening hours at busy times which would increase income. Officers will model this and the increased costs associated with a new structure.

5.4 Improve how issues and minor emergencies are dealt with.

The efficiency of the café suffers greatly when staff are called away to deal with issues such as lost children, first aid, to open the height barrier into the park, issue season tickets, deal with issues with toilets, etc. Going forward we need to ensure that at busy times there is a person available and contactable to deal with these issues. This could be a manager or the park ranger.

5.5 Increase levels of change held to reduce visits to the bank.

This has been increased but needs to be increased further at busy times.

5.6 Improve signage.

Giving directions on ordering food, to include menus on tables to encourage customers to find an empty table and make their choices *before* joining the queue, as making selections at the point of sale slows down the speed of service. Further signage to encourage customers to put their own rubbish in bins to support staff keeping the café clear of waste.