

APPENDIX A

Cobtree Park Ranger's Progress Report for period 25-12-2009 to 12-04-2010

1. Progress to date

- 1.1. The new **gates** were officially opened by Councillor Peter Parvin, His Worshipful the Mayor, on February 1st. Since their installation, there has been no more vehicle damage to the grass within the park and the amount of litter found in the car park in the mornings has gone down considerably. Wooden bollards have been installed in the verges either side of the main gates to prevent parking on the grass.
- 1.2. Four **events** have taken place: three guided walks and a treasure hunt. The attendance was low at the guided walks (5 in total) but the High Tech Treasure Hunt attracted 58 people and 20 more came without booking but could not be accommodated due to a limited number of GPS units. The Hunt went very well; the organisers, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP), are happy to repeat it next year and allow for more participants.
- 1.3. **Information** about the park and the events can now be found on the internet: on www.digitalmaidstone.gov.uk and on www.tour-maidstone.gov.uk, as well as in the park 'yellow' leaflet which has been distributed locally. The draft of a new park's leaflet has been sent to the Marketing Team who will propose a house style to be adopted for all of the park's publicity materials. The events are also advertised at the park, in an MVCP brochure, on Boxley and Aylesford Parish notice boards and information was sent to local primary schools. The Park Ranger is now in possession of a colour printer and a laminator and she can produce notices and posters at very short notice.
- 1.4. The **volunteers** have donated 196 man-hours of work this year, mainly clearing scrub and the invasive elder, but also improving paths and collecting litter. Most of the volunteer workforce came from DHL, the haulage company.
- 1.5. The winter **maintenance** work focused on further improving the sight lines, selective removal of invasive species, improving the appearance of the shrubberies and improving access within the woodland area. Any clearance was done with the aim of not destroying any important habitats, but rather improving the existing habitats through allowing more light to the ground and thus encouraging a greater variety of species to thrive. The chipping of branches has been delayed by ground conditions preventing access by heavy machinery.
- 1.6. The Park Ranger has produced a draft **Management Plan** for the park, focussing on the management of the vegetation. The Plan will be amended as needed following consultation with the Parks Team, adoption of the masterplan and receiving the results of habitat surveys. In preparing the Plan she conducted research and collated information on

the history, current condition, usage and the management of the park. Beside using this information as a management tool, it will be of use if/when applying for external funding for the park.

- 1.7. The **habitat surveys** commissioned last year commenced in March with the installation of 20 reptile 'refugia' and 6 dormice boxes. So far there has been confirmation of the presence of the protected great crested newt in the parkland pond. Investigations into both flora and fauna will be carried out on several days during spring and summer, with interim results given to the Park Ranger.

2. Issues outstanding

- 2.1. Damaged fence along Forstal Road. About 20 metres of timber post and rail fence awaiting replacement following a car accident last summer.
- 2.2. Ruts in grass verges in Forstal Road opposite the Travis Perkins site exit. Quotation will be requested for 8 more bollards.
- 2.3. Polluted water discharge into the park from neighbouring property (properties). This was first reported last summer as an on-going problem. The MBC Pollution Team has now begun investigation into the cause of the discharge.
- 2.4. Large crack in the wall of the Llama House. Reported to the Property Team and a repair is to be carried out.
- 2.5. Poor condition of the Sheep Dip and danger of visitors falling in. Following a site visit by the Property Team they resolved to repair the structure and provide a metal grid cover.
- 2.6. Hazardous trees and tree stump removal. Last summer a survey of hazardous trees along walking routes and boundaries was carried out and a report set out the recommendations. Initial quotations for the work were received by the Parks Team together with a quotation for selective stump grinding as requested by the Park Ranger.
- 2.7. Review of Park Ranger's salary and job description. In view of the range of tasks performed by the Park Ranger greatly exceeding the scope of her original job description, she has applied to her line manager – the Grounds Contract Supervisor – for a review of her position.

3. Actions planned for spring and early summer by the Ranger Team

- 3.1. Grass cutting, with several areas of grass left un-cut as 'meadows'
- 3.2. Building log piles with tree works arisings
- 3.3. Removal of the chainlink fence by the row of mature conifers
- 3.4. Preparation and conducting of further guided walks
- 3.5. Amendments to the Draft Management Plan in line with the adopted Masterplan

- 3.6. Identification of non-native trees and shrubs in the collection
- 3.7. Investigation into the best ways of re-creating the Arboretum
- 3.8. Assistance with habitat surveys
- 3.9. Meeting with a local expert on hazel and cobnut production
- 3.10. Establishing links with local schools and community groups (scouts, WI etc.)
- 3.11. Working towards the creation of a constituted Friends group (subject to approval by the Committee)