

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES (PART I) OF THE REMOTE MEETING HELD ON
31 MARCH 2021**

Present: Councillor Cox (Chairman) and
Councillors Daley, Mrs Gooch, Perry and Springett

152. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

153. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

154. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

155. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

156. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

157. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor Perry stated that he had been lobbied on the report of the Leisure Manager providing an update on activities at the Cobtree Manor Estate; in particular, the issue of the tee markers at Cobtree Manor Park Golf Course.

158. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED:

1. That item 14 (Minutes (Part II) of the meeting held on 26 January 2021) be considered in public, but the information contained therein should remain private.
2. That the following items be taken in private because of the likely disclosure of exempt information:

Item 15. Cobtree Estate Contracts Update

Item 16. Cobtree Golf Course

Item 17. Cobtree Manor Estate Cashflow Projection
Item 18. Future Residential Management Arrangements

159. MINUTES (PARTS I AND II) OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 JANUARY 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes (Parts I and II) of the meeting held on 26 January 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

160. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

161. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

162. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

163. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION

The Senior Finance Manager (Client) introduced his report summarising the financial position of the Cobtree Manor Estate as at 28 February 2021. The report covered the Golf Course, Kent Life, the Manor Park and the residential properties.

The Senior Finance Manager (Client) advised the Committee that:

- The figures set out in the summary totals included the value of invoices sent to the contractors providing services at the Estate, less the agreed contract reliefs. It was assumed that these invoices would be paid, but ongoing issues relating to the closures due to COVID-19 meant that some invoices remained unpaid. Discussions with the contractors to resolve these issues were ongoing and, in the meantime, the Officers were continuing to monitor the financial position and restricting expenditure where possible to essential items only.
- Other than the contract situation, there were no other significant issues with the budget. Car park income had continued to recover very strongly and was now exceeding the original target despite the closure of the Park for parts of the year. After taking into account investment income and the car park loan repayment, the forecast outturn surplus was £27,350 compared to a budget deficit of £10,740, assuming receipt of all outstanding contract payments.
- There were no cash flow issues at present, but the Officers were continuing to monitor the financial position closely to ensure sufficient resources were in place to meet ongoing commitments.

- The value of the Charity's investment in Charifund had recovered strongly and currently stood at £820,915 compared to the value of £769,426 in January 2021. However, this was still considerably lower than the value of £930,938 in January 2020. Further updates would be provided at future meetings of the Committee.

Members thanked the teams involved in the operation and management of the Cobtree Manor Park for keeping costs down at a time of increased visitor numbers.

RESOLVED: That the financial position of the Cobtree Manor Estate as at 28 February 2021 be noted.

164. COBTREE ESTATE UPDATE

The Leisure Manager presented his report providing an update on activities at the Cobtree Manor Estate since the last meeting of the Committee in January 2021. It was noted that:

Cobtree Manor Park

The Manor Park continued to be very busy. Car park income at the end of February 2021 was £115,015 compared to the budget of £53,119.

The new staffing structure would be implemented from 1 April 2021. The staff had been conducting handover meetings and the transition was progressing smoothly. A fulltime Ranger would be retained working 37 hours a week supplemented by daily visits by grounds maintenance staff from the Borough Council's depot to carry out checks and litter picks. This meant that the Ranger could focus on projects rather than frontline delivery. The Manor Park would be overseen by a Manager who would also be responsible for Mote Park as the management issues were the same.

Cobtree Golf Course

The Golf Course re-opened on 29 March 2021 and had been fully booked. During the closure of the Course, it had been maintained by Mytime Active staff who were not furloughed. In addition, Golf Club members had been volunteering on-site, looking after flower beds, varnishing benches and decking, weeding bunkers and monitoring the site for litter.

An issue had been raised by Golf Club members regarding tee markers and tee measuring. Mytime Active had reviewed their decision not to have all the tee marker options measured and from mid-April onwards, the Course would be registered for handicapping purposes from all tee marker positions.

Kent Life

Kent Life was planning to re-open on 12 April 2021 in line with the Government's roadmap out of lockdown. Some activities were being

adapted/alterd to make them COVID-compliant, but others would not be permitted until later in the year.

Cobtree Café

Cobtree Café had continued to operate on a take-away basis and was very busy due to the increased number of visitors to the Manor Park.

Elephant House

The structural works at the Elephant House had not progressed since the last meeting, but the Cobtree Shed Group was unable to meet at present due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

In response to a question, the Leisure Manager confirmed that concerns raised by the operator of the Cobtree Café about broken sliding doors were being addressed. The doors needed to be fixed in place and some parts were required. The preferred contractor had them on backorder.

RESOLVED:

1. That the update on activities at the Cobtree Manor Estate since the last meeting of the Committee in January 2021 be noted.
2. That the Golf Club members be thanked for their assistance in preparing the Course for re-opening and that the Officers be requested to consider the most appropriate time/mechanism to recognise their efforts publicly.

165. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reasons specified, having applied the Public Interest Test:

	Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description
Cobtree Estate Contracts Update	3 – Financial/Business Affairs
Cobtree Golf Course	3 – Financial/Business Affairs
	5 – Legal Proceedings
Cobtree Manor Estate Cash Flow Projection	3 – Financial/Business Affairs
Future Residential Management Arrangements	1 – Information re. Individual

The Chairman advised the Committee that he intended to amend the order of business on Part II of the agenda to take the report relating to Future Residential Management Arrangements first.

166. FUTURE RESIDENTIAL MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The Leisure Manager introduced the report of the Accommodation Manager recommending changes to how the residential properties at the Cobtree Manor Estate are currently managed and let for use as private rented accommodation. The Committee gave instructions to the Officers as to the way to proceed, including the establishment of an emergency budget for repair works to a vacant property at the Estate to return it to a lettable condition.

167. COBTREE ESTATE CONTRACTS UPDATE

The Leisure Manager introduced his report providing an update on the current position regarding the Kent Life and Cobtree Café contracts. A separate report had been included on the agenda regarding the Cobtree Golf Course contract. The Committee noted the report and gave instructions to the Officers as to the way to proceed in relation to issues that had arisen regarding one of the contracts.

168. COBTREE GOLF COURSE

The Leisure Manager introduced his report providing an update on the contract situation at Cobtree Manor Park Golf Course. It was noted that there were contractual issues that needed to be resolved and the Committee gave instructions to the Officers as to the way to proceed in the circumstances.

169. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CASH FLOW PROJECTION

The Senior Finance Manager (Client) introduced his report setting out different cash flow projections based on various scenarios relating to ongoing discussions with the operator of the Cobtree Manor Park Golf Course. It was noted that:

- The projections had been prepared before the most recent discussions with the operator of the Golf Course. The projections were for ten years to show the longer-term impact. The current contract with the operator of Kent Life would expire at the end of 2024/25 and the projections assumed that a similar level of contract payments would continue to be received. The projections also assumed that the car park loan from the Borough Council would continue to be repaid.
- The capital expenditure was based on previous projections with some adjustments to the timing of the works and made no allowance for the replacement of the current play area which would require a significant amount of expenditure. Options for funding the replacement of the play area were being examined.
- The Officers would continue to monitor the cash flow position and take appropriate action where necessary.

RESOLVED: That the cash flow projections be noted.

170. DURATION OF MEETING

10.00 a.m. to 11.35 a.m.