

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 JULY 2021

Present: Councillor Garten (Chairman) and
Councillors Harper, Mrs Joy, Perry and Mrs Ring

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Cox and Springett.

2. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The following Substitute Members were noted:

Councillor Mrs Joy for Councillor Cox
Councillor Mrs Ring for Councillor Springett

3. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED: That Councillor Garten be elected as Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2021/22.

4. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED: That Councillor Perry be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2021/22.

5. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

6. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

There were no Visiting Members.

7. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

8. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

9. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the Minutes (Part II) of the meeting held on 31 March 2021 be considered in public but the information contained therein should remain private.

10. MINUTES (PARTS I AND II) OF THE MEETING HELD ON 31 MARCH 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes (Parts I and II) of the meeting held on 31 March 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

11. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

12. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

14. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION

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

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

- Despite the closure of the Manor Park, Kent Life and the Golf Course at various times during the year due to COVID-19 and the contract issues which had been experienced, the provisional outturn for 2020/21 showed an overall surplus of £79,570 against a projected deficit of £10,740. There were three main reasons for this:
 - a) Car park income was higher than had been forecast;
 - b) There were staff vacancies during the year; and
 - c) There was a partial deferral of the loan repayments for the car park works.
- The figures assumed that all outstanding contract payments would be made. Planning Solutions, the operator of Kent Life, had now settled all outstanding sums. However, an outstanding payment was awaited from Mytime, the operator of the Golf Course.
- Due to the uncertainty over contract payments, there were concerns about the cashflow position. It was agreed with the Director of Finance and Business Improvement that loan repayments for the car park works could be deferred to mitigate any possible problems. Half

of the sum due for 2020/21 was paid. However, if the outstanding contract payments were received, it would be possible to repay the remaining balance together with the sum due for 2021/22.

- Subject to the contract issues being resolved, an updated cashflow projection would be reported to the September meeting of the Committee.
- The budget for 2021/22 was agreed at the meeting of the Committee held on 26 January 2021 and reflected the new management arrangements for the Manor Park and the establishment of a COVID-19 Recovery Fund to cover any COVID-related costs that might be incurred which had not otherwise been budgeted for.
- A surplus of £49,660 was projected at the end of the financial year.
- The value of the Charity's investment in Charifund was continuing to recover and currently stood at £866,198 compared to the value of £820,915 in March 2021. However, this was still lower than the value of £930,938 in January 2020. Further updates would be provided at future meetings of the Committee.

In response to questions the Officers advised the Committee that:

- A cautious approach had been taken when setting the budget for car park income in 2021/22 to avoid becoming too over reliant on it as it could, for example, be affected by a poor summer season. Any income in excess of the budget would be a bonus.
- In terms of the provisional outturn 2020/21 in relation to Repairs and Maintenance at the Manor Park, there had been additional expenditure as it had been necessary to install bollards in the car park due to the high number of visitor vehicles.
- For some years no tree works were carried out so last year a larger budget than usual was required. The budget for this year would be sufficient because of ongoing planned maintenance of trees and shrubs as part of the new management arrangements for the Manor Park.
- When the budgets for 2021/22 were set in January 2021, recharges from the Borough Council were updated following a review of the services provided. A schedule was presented detailing the services provided by, inter alia, Finance, Human Resources, Legal Services, Parks and Leisure and the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development, together with the charges allocated across the service areas.
- The reason why the budget for the Manor Park had increased for 2021/22 over what was actually spent in 2020/21 was because of the additional car park income last year which was not budgeted for. This would have reduced the overall net cost of running the Park, but the

assumption had not been made that this would happen again this year for various factors, including the risk of a poor summer season.

In response to a question about whether more interpretive signage was required to assist visitors in identifying tree species etc. at the Manor Park, it was suggested that consideration of this matter be deferred until after the proposed briefing and tour of the Estate as other approaches such as guided tours might be more appropriate in delivering a positive visitor experience.

RESOLVED: That the current financial position of the Cobtree Manor Estate be noted.

15. 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 March 2021. It was noted that:

Cobtree Manor Park

The Manor Park continued to be very busy. Car park income for 2020/21 was over £137,000, which was a positive variance of £63,000. Car park income for 2021/22 was currently £13,000 ahead of budgeted targets.

The new staffing structure for the Manor Park was implemented on 1 April 2021 bringing savings to the Cobtree Manor Estate and efficiencies for the Parks team.

Cobtree Golf Course

The Golf Course had re-opened on 29 March 2021. Golf trade during April, May and June had been strong with limited food and beverage sales also achieved. A further increase in trade was projected during the second half of 2021 with the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions.

Kent Life

Kent Life had re-opened on 12 April 2021 with activities adapted/alterred to make them COVID-compliant. In May 2021 the indoor play areas and refreshment outlets re-opened for takeaway sales. Visits by school groups had resumed on site, but children's birthday parties were still suspended until the COVID-19 restrictions were lifted fully. Events and activities were being planned for the second half of 2021 and could be adapted in response to any changes in restrictions that might occur.

Cobtree Café

The 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/Cobtree Shed Group

The structural works at the Elephant House had not progressed since the last meeting, but the Cobtree Shed Group had been unable to meet due to the COVID-19 restrictions and vulnerabilities within the Group. The Leisure Manager was working with colleagues to bring forward proposals for the project.

Contracts

The Committee's decisions regarding the Cobtree Estate contracts had been implemented and the contracts were operating on a stable footing.

Cobtree Charity Trust Limited

The Cobtree Charity Trust Limited, holders of the freehold interest in the Cobtree Manor Estate, would be holding a meeting on 19 July 2021 and had invited the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the Committee to attend together with the Leisure Manager.

In response to questions, the Leisure Manager explained that:

- He would be meeting with representatives of the Cobtree Shed Group the following week to talk about resuming their activities.
- Mytime Active, the operator of the Golf Course, had reviewed its decision regarding tee markers and tee measuring and all tee marker options had been measured.

RESOLVED:

1. That the update on activities at the Cobtree Manor Estate since the last meeting of the Committee in March 2021 be noted.
2. That a briefing and tour of the Estate be organised for Members and Substitute Members of the Committee.

16. DURATION OF MEETING

2.00 p.m. to 2.35 p.m.