

Cobtree Estate Update

Final Decision-Maker	Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee
Lead Head of Service	John Foster, Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Mike Evans, Leisure Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Boxley

Executive Summary

An update report on the Cobtree Estate and its constituent venues and facilities.

Purpose of Report

Noting

This report makes the following recommendation to this Committee:

1. That the contents of the report are noted.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	4 November 2021

Cobtree Estate Update

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objectives and the corporate priorities for the council.	Leisure Manager
Cross Cutting Objectives	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objectives and the cross-cutting objectives of the council.	Leisure Manager
Risk Management	There are no risk management implications in this report.	Leisure Manager
Financial	Financial implications from this update are managed day-to-day in line with council procedures and policies.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Staffing	Staffing implications are managed day-to-day in line with council procedures and policies.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Legal	There are no specific legal implications at present as this report is presented for noting only.	Team Leader Contracts and Commissioning
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no new implications as a result of this update report and recommendation.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	No impact identified as a result of this update report and recommendation. An EqIA will be required for the project phase.	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	The Cobtree Estate works towards improving the health of our community and residents through its day-to-day operations.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Crime and Disorder	Crime and disorder implications are managed day-to-day in line with council procedures and policies	Leisure Manager
Procurement	Procurement implications are managed day-	Head of

	to-day in line with council procedures and policies.	Regeneration and Economic Development & Section 151 Officer
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and there are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As agreed at the 8 July meeting, the members of this committee attended a tour of the golf course, the park and Kent Life on Monday 9 August. The tour was used to explain more about the estate to new members, and was a chance for existing committee members to see the venues post-Covid.
- 2.2 Also since the last meeting, the Chair, Vice Chair and Leisure Manager attended a meeting of the Cobtree Charity Trust.

Cobtree Manor Park

- 2.3 The park has once again achieved Green Flag status, further validation of its recognition as a destination park for Maidstone and the local area. The park's management plan, which was submitted as part of the application, will be presented to the next meeting of this committee.
- 2.4 Car park income for the period of Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 is £67,363, which gives a positive variance of more than £26,000.
- 2.5 The Hazlitt Theatre held two sell-out performances of Alice in Wonderland in the park on 3 and 4 September 2021. There were a total of 500 visitors who came to the performances and the debrief from the event indicated that many more could be accommodated next year. The winter lights trail planned for the period of 15 December to 31 December is selling well.
- 2.6 Repairs have been completed recently on the sheep dip feature in the park.
- 2.7 Boundary and fencing work has progressed, with fencing restored between a key junction of the park, the private road and the golf course. The park manager has agreed a donation and a volunteer workforce that is facilitating the creation of new hedgerows along the bridleway in the park, around some of the park's other boundaries with the golf course, and some of the boundaries of the wider bridleway that surrounds the estate. The hedgerows will be planted in areas where they have the highest chance of good growth and becoming established. They will provide good natural habitat in the park and will also preserve boundaries where they need to be preserved. In time the established hedgerows will be a natural replacement to the ageing fencing.

2.8 The Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager has identified areas of the Cobtree estate as being suitable for additional tree planting and some natural flood prevention work. Areas and opportunities have been identified using aerial maps and a visit in early November with the park manager and some of the tenant organisations will be used to understand the practicalities and management requirements associated with planting additional trees on the estate. The areas identified as possible locations are:

- The perimeter of Forstal Field including the boundary with the M20
- The Kent Life boundary with the M20
- The north west corner of the estate beyond the golf course

Golf Course

2.9 Summer trading at the golf course has continued to recover after the Covid-19 pandemic. Membership numbers are now above 2019 levels as are green fees and casual visitor numbers. The uplift in golf participation seen during the Covid-19 pandemic has subsided slightly, but Cobtree continues to trade above pre-pandemic levels.

2.10 Societies, group bookings and social functions are also returning to pre-pandemic numbers and staffing issues and vacancies, common across the hospitality sector at present, are being resolved by the operator.

2.11 A drainage project to improve the playing conditions on the 1st, 9th, 12th and 18th holes will begin soon. This project will create better waterflows between two ponds and will also improve the ecology of the pond by the 12th and 18th holes.

Kent Life

2.12 Kent Life continues to recover post-pandemic. School trip numbers are increasing and events planning for Halloween and Christmas is in full flow.

2.13 Two new bee hives have been placed on site and the Kent Life team is working in conjunction with a local beekeeping business. There is potential for this to develop to include educational activities on site and for items to be sold in the Kent Life shop.

2.14 Some areas of Kent Life have been updated, making them more friendly for visitors in wheelchairs, and through consultation with wheelchair users other areas where further improvements can be made are also being identified.

2.15 Work to catalogue the Kent Life inventory has progressed. Meetings have been held with colleagues at Maidstone Museum and some external heritage organisations specialising in farms and rural life have been engaged. The Leisure Manager will bring a report with recommendations to a future meeting when plans are sufficiently developed.

Cobtree Café

2.16 Cobtree Café has continued to trade well throughout the summer. Repairs to the flooring in the centre toilets have been completed.

Cobtree Shed Group

2.17 The Cobtree Shed Group has arranged alternative accommodation at Kent Life. The new accommodation is much closer to a concrete parking area and welfare facilities making it more suitable for the shed group. The Kent Life site also has opportunities for small craft projects. There is currently no timeline for the group's switch from the park to Kent Life but the Leisure Manager will ensure a smooth transition and will keep committee members informed.

2.18 The vacant elephant house building will be made good and other uses for it will be considered. In the short term it will relieve storage pressures that the park manager and park ranger have, which should mean that the metal container box can be removed from the park eventually.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Committee can note the information in this report.

3.2 Committee can choose not to note the information in this report, however the Committee has requested regular updates on the operations of the Estate.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 It is recommended that the information in this report is noted.

5. RISK

5.1 This report is presented for information only and has no risk management implications.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 No consultation has taken place since the last update report.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 Any comments from the Committee will be passed on to the relevant party.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- None
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None