

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH 2024

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors David Burton (Chairman), Cooper, Parfitt-Reid and Perry
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42. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

43. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

44. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

45. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

46. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

47. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public, unless any Member of the Committee wishes to discuss Item 14 – Exempt Appendix to Item 12 – Cobtree Estate Update or Item 15 – Exempt Appendix to Item 13 – Elephant House, in which case the Committee would enter into closed session due to the possible disclosure of exempt information, for the reason specified having applied the public interest test.

48. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 JANUARY 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

49. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

50. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

51. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

52. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that there had been a change to the order in which the reports would be taken as follows:

Item 13 - Elephant House

Item 11 - Cobtree Manor Estate Financial Position

Item 12 - Cobtree Estate Update

53. ELEPHANT HOUSE

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING

The Committee, wishing to discuss the information in the exempt appendices in private:

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

**Head of Schedule 12A and
Brief Description**

Cobtree Estate Contracts Update 3 – Financial/Business Affairs

The public were excluded from 5.11 p.m. to 5.20 p.m. after which the Committee:

RESOLVED: That

1. The Elephant House is let to applicant A on the terms shown in exempt Appendix 3 to the report subject to an added clause stating that use cannot be changed without consent and an added clause to specify requirements for fencing;
2. As landlord, CMEC invests in upgraded drainage and installs a toilet in the Elephant House;
3. CMEC approves the capital budget proposed in the landlord's works section of exempt Appendix 3 to the report, in order to complete the landlord's works, with a best value approach taken to complete the works;
4. Delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement to agree the final lease with applicant A; and
5. Delegated authority be given to the Head of Mid-Kent Legal Services to enter into such lease documents and any relevant statutory notices and declarations, as required, to complete the lease process.

(See Record of Decision)

54. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION

The Senior Finance Manager (Client) introduced his report summarising the financial position of the Cobtree Manor Estate as at 31 January 2024 and stated that the current position showed a surplus of £55,000 for the year to date and no significant issues to report. The following points were noted:

- As previously reported, gas and electricity costs at the café were to be largely recharged to the contractor. The exercise to calculate the recharges would be completed shortly, with invoices raised. This would largely eliminate the overspend;
- Cleaning responsibilities for the toilets had been taken on by the café tenant, who had redecorated and attended to the cleaning regularly. The cost of this approach was less than using external cleaners and the standards were noticeably better;
- The income from the new café contract was higher than budgeted for and there has been no need to date to draw on the additional set-aside budget for the Parks Management agreement with the Council. This resulted in an underspend on the Manor Park budget;
- Investment income and bank interest had been higher than anticipated so there was expected to be a surplus on the activities of the estate at the end of the year with no unexpected or significant costs incurred; and
- In response to a query from the last meeting, the Senior Finance Manager (Client) advised that the recharge costs for the Democratic Services team were considered appropriate. The rate was based on the average salary plus overheads for a Democratic Services Officer, who was responsible for the Committee meetings.

In response to a query, the Senior Finance Manager (Client) advised that the £40,000, listed under 'Other income – Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd' in Appendix 1 to the report, referred to income from an investment the freeholder has, which the Cobtree Manor Estate were entitled to the interest from.

RESOLVED: That the current financial position be noted.

55. COBTREE ESTATE UPDATE

The Head of Property and Leisure introduced the report providing an update on activities at the Cobtree Manor Estate including the following points:

- The new café operators had completed their internal fit-outs and redecoration of the toilets. They had also taken over cleaning responsibilities which were more regular and had received positive feedback from visitors. Visitors were comparable to previous years;
- One of the Elmer the Elephant sculptures themed on Maidstone Zoo and Cobtree Manor Park was kindly gifted by the charity to the Cobtree Estate and would have a permanent home there after being part of an exhibition

on the history of the zoo at the Mote Park Visitor Centre in April;

- There had been a slight decrease in rounds at the golf course in comparison to previous years but the numbers were still positive considering a particularly wet Winter. The new operators were in situ and working on improvements;
- Kent Life were maintaining visitor numbers and providing a good service.

It was noted positively that the first collection of the new cardboard recycling bins had taken place, with 4.2 tonnes of cardboard removed from the site.

RESOLVED: That the Cobtree Estate update be noted.

56. DURATION OF MEETING

5.00 p.m. to 5.31 p.m.