

Appendix A
Cobtree Estate Progress Update
July 2013

Introduction

This report sets out an update on the work undertaken at Cobtree Estate and covers the period March 2013-July 2013.

Cobtree Manor Park

Maintenance of the park over this period moved on to the main summer programme of mowing and weeding, the large increase in visitor numbers has also led to an increase in litter collection.

The main tasks have been focused on seasonal maintenance, events and the arboretum:

- pruning of trees and shrubs,
- maintaining the ground in shrubberies (weeding, edging, mulching with woodchip),
- spreading woodchip on woodland paths
- scrub clearance in the 'Secret Garden' near the Manor House boundary
- from April, implementing the 2013 programme of events
- devising a tree trail
- drafting a tree trail leaflet
- commencing the labelling of the arboretum trees

The Cobtree Ranger has attended training courses in carrying out safety inspections of trees and of play equipment.

An additional temporary ranger has been brought in to cover weekends, bank holidays and school holidays in the afternoon to provide cover to improve maintenance of the park in its busiest periods. This arrangement will be reviewed at the end of the summer and a plan for future staffing will then be brought before this committee.

The events programme for 2013 is well under way and once again proving popular.

Visitor figures for the quarter 1st January 2013 to 31st March 2013 were 38,911. Figures since electronic recordings began in June last year were 156,445 based on an estimate of 2 people per car. In comparison annual estimates based on the weekly car count for 2012 prior to the play area installation are in the region of 22,000 (it should be noted that this figure is based on a count of cars each week at 1pm on a Wednesday and therefore doesn't include busy period such as weekends and bank holidays).

Cobtree Manor Park Project

The project is progressing on schedule. Phase 2, (the installation of the zoo play area, new car park and parkland walks) is complete apart from minor works such as new parkland tree planting which will be undertaken in the autumn and the creation of the sculptures which should be completed by January 2014. The new play area was opened on 8th June.

Jason Mulligan was the successful artist in the sculpture completion. He is due to begin work on the project shortly, the winning designs are shown in **APPENDIX B**.

The winning Architects for Phase 3 were Guy Holloway Associates the design is shown in **APPENDIX C**. This is currently on hold until further decisions are made regarding the future operation of the Museum of Kent Life and finalisation of the golf course contract with MyTime.

Cobtree Golf Course

Discussions are ongoing with Ian Mitchell the Managing Director of MyTime regarding the 5 year extension to their current lease. The lease is based on a 5+5 year contract. The initial contract term runs from 9th January 2009 until 8th January 2014, with a 5 year extension until 8th January 2019 being negotiated currently. Customer satisfaction with the golf course is high.

Estate properties

4 Stream Cottages was re-let on 19th April 2013 on a 22 year lease.

Tyland Farmhouse was runner up in the Building Conservation category of the RICS 2013 South East Awards. The citation stated:

“Conker Conservation Ltd. has turned an obsolete, derelict farmhouse in Maidstone, Kent, into a comfortable sustainable and efficient office for the Kent Wildlife Trust. Heat loss through the fabric has been reduced by 85% through the use of natural breathable insulation. A purpose built bat loft has been created in the roof space and landscaping created by volunteers encourages wildlife to inhabit the surrounding gardens. Kent Wildlife Trust has practiced what they preach, by putting the environment at the top of their agenda.”

Museum of Kent Life

Negotiations with Continuum and Kent County Council are ongoing regarding the operation of the Museum of Kent Life following the decision of Continuum to serve notice to quit effective 30th September 2013.