

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL
COBTREE MANOR ESTATE COMMITTEE

14th April 2014

REPORT OF THE COBTREE OFFICER

Report prepared by Joanna Joyce

1. Estate Progress Report

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the work being undertaken across the Cobtree Estate as set out in the attached progress report (**Appendix A**).

and

1.1.2 To consider the events programme and the request to charge for events.

1.2 Recommendation of the Cobtree Officer

It is recommended that the Committee:

1.2.1 Note the contents of the progress report attached at **Appendix A**.

1.2.2 Approve the events programme for 2014 as set out in **Appendix A**.

1.2.3 Agree to £2000 for the budget for the events programme for 2014.

1.2.4 Agree a charge of £3 per person for the events arranged for 2014, to be booked through Maidstone Leisure Centre, noting that where the events are for children the charge is per child and accompanying adults go free.

1.2.5 Allow the Leisure Centre to take 10% of the charge referred to in paragraph 1.2.4 as the handling fee and where it is requested that tickets are posted to charge an additional postal fee.

1.2.6 Agree to Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP) to take on the running of the event programme for this year, and to receive the proceeds outlined at paragraph 1.2.4 to enable it to put on more

events at Cobtree, accounting to officers for the running of these events.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 The Committee previously resolved to receive a progress report on the work across the estate at each meeting. Attached at **Appendix A** is the report for the most recent period.

1.3.2 The events programme has proven very popular in the park the proposed programme for 2014 includes two extra events this year giving a total of 27 events in the park for 2014.

1.3.3 The budget of £2000 is the same as 2013 and sufficient to allow for a successful programme.

1.3.4 Charging £3 per head is proposed for all general events, for family events the charge is £3 per child and accompanying adults go free. This is a first step towards the programme potentially becoming self funding in the future. Charging also encourages those who have booked to turn up, as it is not unusual for people to book and fail to come, meaning that others who wanted to book get turned away.

1.3.5 The pricing is based on the charges that other organisations (e.g. Kent Wildlife Trust other country parks) make. These range from £2.50 to £5 for a walk. £3 comes closest to covering costs and is the same that MVCP charge elsewhere.

1.3.6 The charges are the same as those due to be introduced this year in Mote Park and will ensure that charging for parks events is consistent across the two parks.

1.3.7 Future events have the potential of being self funding, particularly when the Visitor Centre is running and a more substantial programme can be introduced. The gradual introduction of charges will make this easier. The lack of certainty over potential income from the golf course and possible maintenance costs to the play area and park mean that the potential money available for the events is less secure. Charging can provide a long term future for the events programme.

1.3.8 The Leisure Centre has the facilities to handle event booking and to process charging and give out tickets. Events at Cobtree have in the past been booked through the Ranger. In order to enable the handling of money and distribution of tickets and to provide cover for times when the Ranger is away or off duty it is proposed that the Leisure Centre take this on.

1.3.9 The events programme this year has been put together by the MVCP. They approached officers at the end of last year requesting additional funds were put towards funding a new educational post because the demand for their events was so high. Rather than committing funding for an additional staff member it was suggested that they put together the programme and receive the funds raised through charges to enable additional events to be put on. This has resulted in two additional events being added to the calendar. MVCP will be required to account to officers for the way in which monies received are expended, so that the council has, in place, a complete audit trail.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The alternative is that the Committee reject the request for the endorsement of works ongoing across the estate. This is not recommended as the works are in the best interests of the estate and it is important that the Committee is aware of ongoing actions.

1.4.2 The Committee could choose not to run an events programme or put money towards it, however the programme is very popular and has enabled many visitors in previous years to gain a better understanding of the Park and encouraged more people to come.

1.4.3 The Committee could choose not to charge £3 for events; however this means that events will always run at a cost to the Charity. The introduction of charging will enable the events service to move towards a self financing model. Not charging will also mean that there is a discrepancy across the Parks service when charging at Mote Park for similar events is introduced, albeit the main purpose of proposing the charge is to ensure the provision of these events is cost neutral to the charity.

1.4.4 The Committee could request that the Leisure Centre do not handle events bookings, however we do not have facilities at the park at present to take bookings and money in an alternative way.

1.4.5 Events could continue to be organised and run through the ranger and parks department; however the use of MVCP has given two extra events and for this year and will be a good test of whether they could run more events in the park in future.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The work of the Estate directly supports the achievement of the Charity's objectives.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 There are no additional risks to the Charity through charging for events. It is possible that demand for the events may be reduced, although as proposed the outlay would be the same as if there were no charges. Charging will reduce the future risk of the charity being unable to fund an events programme.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1. Financial	X
2. Staffing	
3. Legal	
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development	
6. Community Safety	
7. Human Rights Act	
8. Procurement	
9. Asset Management	

1.7.2 The financial implications are discussed in the report. As previously mentioned the £2000 recommended is as per previous years. Officers have confirmed that this money could again be made available this year.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

Appendix A Estate Progress Report

1.8.2 Background Documents

Cobtree Manor Estate Master Plan

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

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This is a Key Decision because:

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Wards/Parishes affected:

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