

Appendix A

Cobtree Estate Progress Report

Introduction

This report sets out the work on the estate and covers the period November 2013 to June 2014.

Cobtree Manor Park

Maintenance of the park over this period covered the winter and spring. The winter period was dominated by the storms of the autumn and Christmas period which resulted in a number of trees in the park being lost, notably including 3 mature Eucalyptus. Works to the park included the following;

- Ongoing shrub renovation throughout the park
- Turfing around the pond and the sheep dip
- Installation of knee rail around the islands in the car park
- Improvements to the overflow car parking
- Start of the 2014 events programme

Works undertaken as part of the Master Plan for phase two of the project.

- Installation of the sculpture trail within the park (below Zebra rock)
- Extensive tree planting throughout the park





The progress of the final sculpture to be installed can be followed on the blog written by sculptor Jason Mulligan <http://thecobtreesculpture.blogspot.co.uk> this main piece is to be installed next to the visitor centre.

Cobtree Monthly and Quarterly footfall figures

	2012	Quarterly	2013	Quarterly	% on previous year	2014	Quarterly	% on previous year
Jan			14,675			18,133		
Feb			12,092			17,626		
Mar			12,144	38,911		24,503	60,262	54.87
Apr			19,012					
May			26,325					
Jun	10,347		27,906	73,243				
Jul	18,509		32,277					
Aug	25,461		38,100					
Sep	20,268	64,238	23,070	93,447	45.47			
Oct	20,745		18,605					
Nov	19,296		15,869					
Dec	13,255	53,296	13,767	48,241	-9.48			
Total	127,881	117,534	253,842	253,842		60,262	60,262	

Visitor figures to date show the popularity of the park continues to improve and that despite a wet winter visitor numbers were still up 55% on the previous year, demonstrating the popularity of the new zoo play area. Total numbers for the year to the end of April are 255,193.

Elephant House Mural

The artist Suzie Dafforn is due to begin the Elephant house mural shortly. This is a series of paintings illustrating some of the animals that lived at the old Cobtree zoo.

Cobtree Visitor Centre

The Cobtree Visitor Centre is going through the final detailing and the tender package is hoped to go out at the end of June. It is hoped to begin work on site in October ready for completion for Easter 2015. Once the tenders are returned these will be brought before the committee for the appointment of the main contractor.

Cobtree golf course

Routine maintenance carried on across the course over the winter this included works to improve the drainage on the course. The number of rounds played over the first quarter has increased on the same period last year. Trolley hire, Green fees, society fees and food and beverage sales also increased slightly. There was a small decrease in retail sales.

Following a promotional event at Mote Park two new Get Active in Golf Classes are running, other promotional events are to follow. In addition to this a number of Music tribute nights and a Comedy evening have been held in the club house.

Work on the tender package for the golf course is progressing. It is likely an extension to the existing lease will be required to enable this process to be completed as the current lease expires in January.

Estate properties

Over the winter tree works were undertaken to the rear of white cottages to ensure the safety of the woodland area. The previous tenants have left 4 Stream Cottages and new tenants are due to move in on 28th June. The property has been let on a 22 year lease.

Kent Life

The attraction continues to work to improve its offer with weddings and events being a key part of the business. A meeting has been held with the main stakeholders in the site to improve the way the various groups work together and get to know those involved. A follow up meeting was held with the Friends of Kent Life and a meeting is planned with Cobtree Young Farmers, both are voluntary groups which support the work of the site. Improving the way these groups work together will be important in helping to secure the attraction in the long term.

Visitor numbers for 2013-14 were: 123,715 (previous year was 116,940). 2012-13 was the first year for the attraction showing a small profit and this was much improved in 2013-14.

When Kent Life was taken back under the direct control of the Charity in November 2013 a sum of money was given by Kent County Council as part of the dilapidations agreement to enable the Charity to work on the repair and maintenance of infrastructure in the year following the hand over. The first stage of these works, mainly decorations, has begun. The second stage consisting of improvements to the car park and play area surfacing is due to begin shortly. The aim is to complete as much of the works as possible prior to the school summer holidays which is the busiest time of the year.

The dilapidations works did not cover works to improve the former craft workshops to the rear of the site in an area closed to the general public. This consisted of 4 wooden chalet huts which previously had been part of the attraction but were more recently used as storage. In an effort to get the buildings useable again a £15,000 grant was obtained and the charity Future for Heroes, which helps former servicemen, was engaged to refurbish the buildings. Once finished it was thought that they could be used by charitable groups in return for work across the estate. The two refurbished huts were completed at the start of June 2014. Unfortunately overnight on the 9th/10th June the two refurbished huts were burnt down in a suspected arson attack. This is clearly a great shame for the many volunteers who had worked on the site. Reports are being obtained from the fire officer and police and quotes for replacement are to be obtained for the loss adjuster. Replacement of the buildings and proposals for their use will be brought before this committee once an accurate cost of replacement has been obtained.

Work to plan for the future management of the site following the completion of the current lease in November 2015 has begun.

Summary

Work continues across the estate with improvements over the period of the report to Cobtree Manor Park, Cobtree Manor Park Golf course and Kent Life.