

# AMENDED AGENDA

## COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE MEETING



Date: Wednesday 23 March 2016  
Time: 4.30 p.m.  
Venue: Town Hall, High Street,  
Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Mrs Blackmore, McLoughlin  
(Chairman), Perry, Paterson and  
Mrs Wilson

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Page No.

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Notification of Substitute Members
3. Notification of Visiting Members
4. Disclosures by Members and Officers
5. Disclosures of Lobbying
6. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.

**Continued Over/:**

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**Issued on 21 March 2016**

The reports included in Part I of this agenda can be made available in **alternative formats**. For further information about this service, or to arrange for special facilities to be provided at the meeting, **please contact Debbie Snook on 01622 602030**. To find out more about the work of the Committee, please visit [www.maidstone.gov.uk](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk)

**Alison Broom, Chief Executive, Maidstone Borough Council,  
Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6JQ**

7. Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2016
8. Report of the Head of Finance and Resources - Management Letter 2014/15 - Update Report
9. Report of the Head of Finance and Resources - Appointment of External Auditors
10. Report of the Cobtree Officer - Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report 82 - 95

## **PART II**

**To move that the public be excluded for the items set out in Part II of the Agenda 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**

- |     |   |                                |
|-----|---|--------------------------------|
| 11. | Report of the Head of Commercial and Economic Development - Cobtree Manor Park Finances | 3 – Financial/Business Affairs |
| 12. | Report of the Head of Commercial and Economic Development - Cobtree Manor Golf Course   | 3 – Financial/Business Affairs |

<b>Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee</b>	<b>23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016</b>
Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?	<b>Yes</b>

## Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Head of Commercial and Economic Development
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Cobtree Officer
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	Boxley

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee that: -**

1. The contents of Appendix I to the report are noted.
2. The charges for the draft events list ('the Draft Events Charges') are approved.
3. The Head of Mid Kent Legal Services by delegated to negotiate and enter into a short term lease of the Forstal Field with Friningham Manor Enterprises on behalf of the Cobtree Manor Estate Trust.
4. The Kent Wildlife Trust is permitted to install a wildlife trail between Tyland Barn and Cobtree Manor Park and run 9 schools workshops subject to a successful funding bid.

**This report relates to the following corporate priorities:**

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all -  
Ensuring there are good leisure and culture facilities.

<b>Timetable</b>	
<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Cobtree Manor Estate Committee	23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2016

# Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The information in the report is intended to give the Committee an understanding of the day-to-day work of the Estate and the issues that affect its management. It also provides a record of all that is achieved across the different parts of the Estate.
  - 1.2 The work of the Estate for the autumn and winter period is set out in Appendix I. The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report, and consider the letting of the Forstal Field and the proposal by Kent Wildlife Trust, set out in Appendix I.
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## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Cobtree Manor Estate covers a large area of land which was left in trust to the people of Maidstone. The Cobtree Charity Trust holds the freehold to the estate and the Cobtree Manor Estate Trust (CMET) has a 999 year lease. The land is administered on behalf of CMET by Maidstone Borough Council.

### **Cobtree Manor Estate Charity - Governing Object**

The governing object of the Charity remains that defined in the lease of the Cobtree Estate dated 13 July 1971 between the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited (the lessor) and the Maidstone Borough Council (the lessee). The governing object is stated as:

"To hold Cobtree Manor and Cobtree Manor Estate for the benefit of the inhabitants of Maidstone and other members of the general public in one or other or all of the following ways:

- i) By maintaining the Cobtree Manor Estate as an open space as defined by the Open Spaces Act 1906 and if the lessees think fit providing thereat facilities for organised games and other sports".
  - ii) With the consent in writing of ...[the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited and the Kent County Council]... in such other way for the benefit of the inhabitants of Maidstone and other members of the general public as the Council shall from time to time think appropriate."
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## 3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Committee could choose to reject the regular update on the Estate's progress; however this would not be in the interest of best management practice.

- 3.2 The Committee could choose not to charge for events however the current charges cover costs and ensure that events are able to run at no cost to the charity.
  - 3.3 The Committee could continue to leave the Forstal field fallow. However, this would result in scrub developing over time and increase costs if, in the future, it were to be brought back into use either for agriculture or events.
  - 3.4 The Committee could choose to have animal grazing on the field however this would result in high expense as most of the fencing is in need of repair.
  - 3.5 The Committee could choose not to allow the Kent Wildlife Trust to install interpretation and run schools projects on the estate walk. However the project aims are in line with those of the charity and the new usage could bring further visitors to the park.
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#### **4. PREFERRED OPTIONS AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 It is recommended that the Estate updates information in Appendix I to the report is noted in order to ensure an accurate record of work across the Estate is maintained.
  - 4.2 It is recommended that the Draft Events Charges be approved.
  - 4.3 It is recommended that the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services be delegated to enter into a short term lease of the Forstal Field with Friningham Manor Enterprises on behalf of the CMET. The Forstal Field is currently unmaintained. The regular cultivation of the field will assist in ensuring it is maintained in a usable state and reduce future maintenance costs. The lease should be drafted to include a break clause for CMET each year in the event that an alternative use for the field is found.
  - 4.4 The Committee has been advised of the aspirations of the Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT) to install a wildlife trail between Tyland Barn and Cobtree Manor Park, and to run 9 schools workshops (subject to a successful funding bid). The Committee is asked now formally to approve the installation of the trail and the running of the workshops subject to the following provisos;
    - KWT is made aware that in winter the path is very muddy and can at times be un-walkable, CMET would not therefore be expected to keep it in a passable condition at all times.
    - KWT would be responsible for the upkeep of any interpretation and would need to liaise with the Cobtree Manager for suitable days to book workshops on.
    - The path is open access and during workshops this would need to be maintained and appropriate risk assessments to deal with horses, cyclists, dogs etc. would need to be in place.
    - CMET would like local poets and authors to be included in the project.
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## 5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 The Committee has previously resolved to receive regular updates on the ongoing work across the Estate. All tasks where specific decisions are required are brought separately to the Committee.
- 5.2 The Forstal Field proposal has not yet been consulted on. Forstal Field is not currently accessible to the local public and the proposed lease to Friningham Manor Enterprises would need to be agreed with Kent Life if access via the Kent Life site were required.
- 5.3 The Kent Wildlife Trust proposal has been raised with the Committee informally for initial feedback.

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## 6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 Any comments from the Committee will be passed on to the relevant parties.

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## 7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Sign-off</b>
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objects and the corporate priorities of the Council.	Head of Commercial and Economic Development
<b>Risk Management</b>	Risks to running the estate are dealt with in the annual Estate Risk Management Report.	
<b>Financial</b>	Financial risks are considered in the ongoing finance updates.	Cobtree Finance Officer
<b>Staffing</b>	No implications.	
<b>Legal</b>	A lease for the use of Forstal field will be required.	John Scarborough, Head of Legal Partnership, MKLS
<b>Equality Impact Needs Assessment</b>	No implications.	
<b>Environmental/Sustainable Development</b>	No implications.	
<b>Community Safety</b>	No implications.	
<b>Human Rights Act</b>	No implications.	

<b>Procurement</b>	No implications.	
<b>Asset Management</b>	No implications – normal ongoing works.	Parks and Leisure Manager

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## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Cobtree Estate Progress Report March 2016
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## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

There are none.

## **Appendix I**

### **Cobtree Estate Progress Report January 2016**

#### **Introduction**

This report sets out the work of the Estate and covers the period from September 2015 to March 2016.

#### **Cobtree Manor Park**

##### **Park works**

Maintenance work for this period in the park was general autumnal works. The *Catalpa* (Indian Bean Tree) was felled due to a large split. Work has continued on improvements to shrubberies and works have been undertaken to reclaim ornamental planting and arboretum specimens.

The Ranger's post has been re-graded to Grade 5 and a new Ranger has now been appointed. This allows for a full time post and (cost depending) an additional part time Ranger post. The Cobtree Manager is currently working on a review of all of the park staff.

The Men in Sheds Project is establishing and increasing membership. The Elephant House has power and water supplies and is gradually being fitted out with workshop equipment to produce worked items for sale and to contribute to works in the park.

A soakaway has been added to relieve the flooded approach to the Visitor Centre and the path has been widened. Repair works have been undertaken to the path along the Hornbeam Avenue.

##### **Events**

Children's birthday parties have been introduced at the weekends and 5 bookings were made in December 2015. Parties are to be promoted in collaboration with the Museum with new themes appropriate to the park setting introduced.

A well-attended event on birds in the winter including making bird feeders was held during October half-term. A natural Christmas decorations event was run in partnership with the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2015 which sold out very quickly.

The following table contains a list of events planned for 2016 so far. A full programme and leaflet will be brought to the Committee once completed. Charges for events vary to ensure that costs are covered where an external facilitator or equipment/materials is required.



Event	Date	Time	Age	Price	Description
Bird House Making	17/02/2016	10am-12noon	Children	£5 each	Short bird walk talking about the importance of UK birds. Bird box making at the visitor centre.
Easter Egg Hunt	26/03/2016	10am-12noon	Children	£3 each	Visitors collect Easter trail sheet from the Visitor Centre. Trail through the park finding clues. Prize at the end.
Dawn Chorus	17/04/2016	5:30am-7:30am	Adults	£10 each	Breakfast role and hot drink included at 7am. £10 charge.
Wildlife Walk	06/04/2016	10am-12noon	Children	£3 each	Children will be led on a walk around the park where they will learn about the history and the wildlife that lives there now. Activities along the way.
Mini-Beast Safari	03/08/2016	10am-12noon, 1pm-3pm	Children	£3 each	Short talk about what mini-beasts are and why they are important. Followed by a mini-beast hunt where the children get to explore the mini-beasts world.
Craft in the Park	10/08/2016	10am-2pm	Children	£3 each	Families are encouraged to have a picnic in the park. Craft stools will be set up for the children to take part in craft activities at their leisure.
The Pollinators	17/08/2016	10am-12noon, 1pm-3pm	Children	£3 each	Children will learn about the different pollinators found the in UK. They will get the chance to make their own pollinators and play some interactive games.

The Secrets in Trees	24/08/2016	10am-12noon, 1pm-3pm	Children	£3 each	A led walk around the park discovering the secret lives of trees why they are so important and how they support so many animals. Games along the way.
Bush Craft	25/10/2016	10am - 3pm	8years +	£5 each	Participants will be shown the art of making their own fire, shelter building and learn some important skills when out in the wild.
Christmas Decorations	22/12/2016	10am-12noon	Children	£3 each	Children will be able to make their own personalised Christmas decorations.

## Visitor centre/cafe

The building is functioning well; all necessary technical issues have been resolved with the kitchen and equipment. IT equipment has been installed and the card payments system is due to be connected in early March. MBC wi-fi provision is being rolled out during March and the Cobtree Visitor Centre is included in this provision.

Storage areas of the building are being rearranged to function more efficiently, with ventilation systems being installed as necessary. A screen and sound system, an area for retail sales and a community notice board is to be installed shortly. The partitioning system has worked well to allow private business meetings to take place while the café continues to carry out business.

The opening ceremony with the mayor in attendance and Christopher Biggins as special guest was held on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015 as a celebration of the completion of the project. There was press coverage from the Kent Messenger and Downs Mail. The catering team provided the buffet. Two benches were presented to the two retiring Trustees and these have been installed in the park.



The Cafe has established a weekend and school holiday trade and has started to build a weekday trade with customers visiting specifically to eat at the cafe. There has been a refinement of the menu following sales analysis and the introduction of more freshly prepared food such as cakes, soups and sauces.

A bank of casual Catering Assistants has been recruited for the cafe. The Catering Assistant was successful in being appointed to the post of Catering Supervisor making it now necessary to re-recruit to the Assistant's post.

A summary of trading for the park to include the visitor centre and car parking is dealt with in a separate report. Now that the cafe is open and staffed the Cobtree Manager will be working with the new Catering Supervisor to increase margins, and ensure good quality customer service is maintained. Staff training is to be introduced to improve customer service skills and a mystery shopper scheme will be brought in to provide impartial feedback.

### **Car parking**

Car parking has been introduced with the majority of motorists complying with charges. Enforcement has started and contraventions have been identified and penalized. One hundred and thirty one season tickets at £40 have been sold giving an income of £5,240. The main car park has a capacity of 125 spaces. Weekly average car park income to latest figures is £509.28 from the start of charging (£7.76 per space). The income so far has paid for the machines and will over time assist in making up some of the shortfall in income from the changes to the golf course contract.

### **Footfall**

Footfall in the park shows a continued gradual increase in numbers. The improvements in the park continue to be popular with visitor numbers continuing to rise. The table on the next page shows footfall up until 8<sup>th</sup> October 2015.

**Footfall in Cobtree Manor Park** (figures are based on 2 people per car, January 16 figure is up to 6/1/16)

	2012	Quarterly	2013	Quarterly	% on previous year	2014	Quarterly	% on previous year	2015	Quarterly	% on previous year	2016	Quarterly
Jan			14675			18133			26326			4430	
Feb			12092			17626			34948				
Mar			12144	38911		24503	60262	54.87	39782	103002	70.92		4430
Apr			19012			28012			54186				
May			26325			24733			46508				
Jun	10347		27906	73243		25971	78716	7.47	40944	141638	79.94		0
Jul	18509		32277			No available figures due to faulty equipment			54218				
Aug	25461		38100						57034				
Sep	20268	64238	23070	93447	45.47				44854	156106			
Oct	20745		18605						21162				
Nov	19296		15869						25036				
Dec	13255	53296	13767	48241	-9.48				28082	74280			
<b>Total</b>	<b>127881</b>	<b>117534</b>	<b>253842</b>	<b>253842</b>		<b>138978</b>	<b>138978</b>		<b>473080</b>	<b>475026</b>		<b>4430</b>	<b>4430</b>

## **Golf course**

The results of the PIN have been received and are dealt with in a separate report. Rounds of golf booked at the Cobtree Golf Course for the Calendar year of 2015 saw a 9.97% increase compared to 2014, and was the first increase since 2011. A total of 38,987 rounds of golf were played in 2015.

## **Kent Life**

Kent Life reopened to the public at the beginning of February, and it has been reported that business has been good. We do not have any actual details yet regarding figures etc as it has not yet been open a full month under Planning Solutions. The Kent Life and Young Farmers leases are with KCC and the Cobtree Trust for appropriate consents.

## **Estate – Forstal Field**

Friningham Manor Enterprises who run a sustainable agriculture farm at Detling are interested in leasing the Forstal Field, between Cobtree Manor Park and Kent Life, to grow crops. In the first year they would sow oats and then move on to wheat, barley and other crops in subsequent years. It is suggested that while there is no clear use for the field a short term lease with annual break clause is considered to prevent it lying fallow. Further information on zero tillage sustainable agriculture can be found at on their website at [www.fmeagri.co.uk](http://www.fmeagri.co.uk).

## **Estate - Kent Wildlife Trust**

Kent Wildlife Trust would like permission (subject to them obtaining funding) to set up a wildlife trail between Tyland Barn and Cobtree Manor Park. They have applied for funding for the project and are seeking the permission of the Cobtree Manor Estate Trust to install the trail and run 9 schools workshops using it, if their funding bid is successful.

An overview of the project is given on the next two pages.



# *Wonderful 'Wordicular' Wildlife Word Trail*

## Creating a Wildlife 'Wordscape' Between Tyland Barn and Cobtree Manor Park

### Project Summary

There are few things more inspiring than the sound of birdsong or the scent of wild flowers; from William Wordsworth to Roald Dahl, generations of writers have been captivated by the natural world. Kent Wildlife Trust's (KWT) 'Wonderful 'Wordicular' Wildlife Word Trail' project seeks to similarly inspire local young people and the wider community, through the creation of a wildlife-themed literary trail or "wordscape". Working alongside the Trust and a professional writer, local children will actively take part in the design of a walking trail which, once in place, will enliven the existing footpath which links Tyland Barn Visitor Centre and Nature Park with Cobtree Manor Park. The creative trail will encourage local people, families and visitors from further afield to explore the natural spaces on their doorstep, and will enhance the experience for visitors to both sites.

### Project Detail

Funding will enable Kent Wildlife Trust to engage a professional writer to deliver wildlife-themed literary workshops to groups of children from three local Primary Schools. The Trust is in discussions with writer and poet John Rice (<http://poetjohnrice.com/>) who lived in Kent for 40 years, as well as three local Primary schools: Sandling Primary School; North Borough Junior School and St. Paul's Infant School.

Up to 90 Students will work with the writer – over a number of workshops – to explore the wonders of the natural world through literature. Initial sessions delivered by KWT staff and the professional writer will introduce young people to a host of local wildlife habitats and species, and children will walk the route of the trail, learning about woodland wildlife along the way. During subsequent sessions pupils will explore a diverse range of wildlife-inspired literature – including for example, the work of poets such as Ted Hughes, Pie Corbett, Seamus Heaney and Michael Rosen - before undertaking creative writing activities which will draw on their observations and experiences of the natural world around them.

The project will culminate in the creation of short poems or literary pieces which will then be incorporated into the design of the wildlife wordscape. The proposed trail will follow the route of the existing footpath linking Tyland Barn with Cobtree Manor Park (see





accompanying map). Whilst the exact nature of features included within the trail will be designed in collaboration with young people over the course of the workshops, we anticipate that they might include carved mobiles or paddles displayed within trees, way-marking posts and audio installations, which will showcase the children's work and feature creative descriptions of creatures that individuals and families walking the trail, might discover along the way. The creation of a small storytelling area within a clearing of the woodland section will further provide a setting for family use or future education and community activities. We are also keen to include interactive elements – for example an area which features willow structures and encourages young people to create their own mini-beast homes – which will ensure that the trail is continually adapting, and changing with the seasons.

Interpretation boards will also be installed at either end of the route – both at Tyland Barn and Cobtree Manor Park – to introduce and welcome visitors to the trail. Accompanying leaflets will be created and made available at Tyland Barn, Cobtree Manor Park and other local venues, advertising the route and encouraging individuals and families to walk the trail and visit both centres.

Once in place, a community event will be hosted to launch the Wonderful 'Wordicular' Wildlife Word Trail to the public.

### Aims and Objectives

KWT is keen to creatively build upon the close connection between our Tyland Barn Visitor Centre and the neighbouring Cobtree Manor Park, encouraging visitors to explore the wild ways that link these sites and to better utilise local footpaths and public rights of way. Key Project aims include:

-  To inspire young people and the wider community to creatively engage with, and enjoy the natural world.
-  To encourage greater use of local public footpaths and rights of way and to inspire visitors to both centres to explore more of the Cobtree estate.
-  To promote a life-long love of wildlife within young minds, helping to create future wildlife ambassadors for its protection.
-  To offer an enhanced experience for visitors to both Tyland Barn and Cobtree Manor Park.