

AMENDED AGENDA

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE MEETING



Date: Monday 26 April 2010
Time: 9.00 a.m.
Venue: Town Hall, High Street,
Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Garland (Chairman), Ash, Greer and
Mrs Ring

Page No.

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Notification of Visiting Members
3. Disclosures by Members and Officers
4. Disclosures of Lobbying
5. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.
6. Minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2010

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Continued Over/:

Issued on 21 April 2010

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.digitalmaidstone.co.uk

**David Petford, Chief Executive, Maidstone Borough Council,
Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6JQ**

7.	Report of the Head of Finance - Financial Position 2009/10	4 - 7
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9.	Report of the Cobtree Officer - Park Ranger - Progress Report	10 - 16
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12.	Report of the Cobtree Officer - Cobtree Manor Estate - Risk Management	24 - 40
13.	Report of the Cobtree Officer - Cobtree Manor Park - Master Plan	41 - 63

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 reasons specified having applied the Public Interest Test.

	Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description	
14.	Exempt Appendix to the Report of the Cobtree Officer - Cobtree Manor Estate - Gate Opening and Closing	3 – Financial/Business Affairs 64 - 65

THE CHARITY KNOWN AS COBTREE MANOR ESTATE

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

26 APRIL 2010

URGENT REPORT OF THE COBTREE OFFICER

Report Prepared by: Brian Latimer – Cobtree Officer

1. COBTREE MANOR PARK – MASTER PLAN

1.1 Reason for the Urgency

- 1.1.1 In seeking the agreement of the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited to the draft proposals plan as agreed at the last meeting, this delayed the start of the consultation period. To allow a sufficient time for the consultation resulted in the closing date falling after the distribution of the initial agenda for this meeting. However, final instruction to the consultant is required before the next meeting of the Committee.

1.2 Issue for Decision

- 1.2.1 To consider the results from the public consultation exercise and to give final instruction to the appointed consultant.

1.3 Recommendation of the Cobtree Officer

- 1.3.1 It is recommended that Members endorse the draft master plan with the following amendments:
- (i) Deletion of the proposed overspill car parking area, and investigation of appropriate improvements to the existing car parking area and surfacing,
 - (ii) Deletion of the cycle route and deferred consideration of the fitness trail until the need has been proven,
 - (iii) Incorporation of the Dog Agility area in a linear form rather than the present concentrated area,
 - (iv) Noting of the concerns expressed about existing maintenance standards, particularly for the existing pond, and to continue to support the current general

improvements to the park,

- (v) The inclusion of a more interesting play area catering for a wider age range of children,
- (vi) That officers be instructed to investigate further the feasibility of providing the proposed new lake,
- (vii) The inclusion of suggestions for the North West corner of the site; for the Animal Cemetery; and for a tree top walk, and

1.3.2 It is further recommended that officers be authorised to approach the Charity Commission, in liaison with the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited, to seek approval to the use part of the Charity's Permanent Endowment Fund to implement the enhancements set out in the agreed master plan.

1.4 Reasons for Recommendation

1.4.1 At the meeting of the Committee on 26 February 2010 Members received a presentation from the appointed consultant and endorsed the draft master plan for use in public consultation.

1.4.2 Members further agreed the format for the consultation exercise with a request that it be well advertised and good use made of the Council's website, the press and perhaps having a stand in The Mall Chequers, as well as the Gateway and Cobtree Manor Park itself.

1.4.3 Members were advised that although the proposals shown in the draft plan were broadly in line with the requirements set out in the initial brief, one area where the plan did not achieve this fully related to the children's play area; which was not "significantly different from similar facilities found in the area."

1.4.4 Members did make a number of additional comments about the submitted plan, but felt that many of these would be repeated during the consultation exercise.

1.4.5 Where Members did feel that further consideration might be warranted was in the following areas:

- (i) The northwest corner of the site (shown on sheet CPO6) where the bridle path is not shown to link with the path which goes around the perimeter of the golf course.

- (ii) The animal cemetery (the site of which is shown on sheet CPO2) no proposals were indicated for this area.
 - (iii) The possibility of a "tree top walk" which was a suggestion by previous consultants; this was not shown.
 - (iv) Reference to the previous use of the site as a zoo; there appears to be no reference, but this may be covered in the proposed information boards; and this needed to be confirmed.
- 1.4.6 Members also resolved that views of the Trustees to the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited should be sought prior to the public consultation being initiated. The Trustees made a number of comments which they wished to see incorporated into the master plan before it was released to the public. However, by way of a compromise, it was agreed that the plan be released on condition that the comments of the Trustees be published at the same time, and that it be made clear that the inclusion of the lake proposal was subject to a further technical feasibility study.
- 1.4.7 The consultation period was announced through a press release published on Friday 19th March with a closing date for return of responses of Friday 16th April 2010.
- 1.4.8 In seeking responses from the general public and other interested parties an attempt was made to identify an order of desired priority. A copy of the consultation questionnaire is attached at **Appendix A** for information.
- 1.4.9 The response from the Cobtree Charity Trust limited is attached at **Appendix B**. A summary of the questionnaire responses received is attached at **Appendix C**.
- 1.5 Consultation Results
- 1.5.1 From the 85 responses received there appears to be general acceptance of the proposals shown in the draft plan. The most support is given to the proposals for specimen trees and improvements to the woodland area. Strong support is also given to pathway improvements and the proposed new café. The least support is given to the provision of the dog agility area and teaching areas.
- 1.5.2 Only 53 of the respondents gave a priority order for their top three choices; those that did indicated that the provision of a new café and a children's play area were the most popular

proposals, with the new lake and pathways also featuring highly.

- 1.5.3 As Members might expect, the comments from individuals varies enormously; with each wishing to protect their particular interest. The most significant number of replies came from existing park users whose primary interests lie in dog walking and use of the existing café provision. It is not surprising that the comments strongly reflect maintenance of the status quo.
- 1.5.4 There appears to be a general consensus that there is little need for overspill car parking which will most likely be necessary only during the summer months and could, therefore, be accommodated on the grassed areas. As a consequence it is recommended that the overspill car parking area be deleted from the master plan and that the existing car park be improved and re-surfaced.
- 1.5.5 Neither the cycle route nor the fitness trail featured highly among the most desirable elements within the proposal. It is not sure if the respondents appreciated the style of cycle route intended as the proposed route includes some very steep gradients and will only be suitable for experienced riders; this being the case, it is a comparatively short circuit which may not attract much interest. Of further concern is that in places it is very close to walking paths following a decent down a steep incline. It is recommended that the cycle route be deleted from the master plan, and that the fitness trail be subject to further investigation to prove a need.
- 1.5.6 Concern has been expressed by the Council's Senior Warden whose responsibilities include the control of dogs; he suggests that it would be inappropriate to congregate a number of strange dogs in the confined area proposed for the Dog Agility facility. It is recommended that the Dog Agility facility be provided in a linear form elsewhere in the park.
- 1.5.7 The concept of a children's play area received strong support from those consulted. Members desired a form of play area not found locally. It is recommended that the consultant be requested to bring forward suggestions for a larger more interesting play area catering for a wider age range of children.
- 1.5.8 There are reservations about the provision of a new lake, but it is considered by many to be a desirable feature to include. It is recommended that Members instruct further investigation into the feasibility of this element.

- 1.5.9 Members expressed a number of concerns which have not been commented on in the consultation. It is recommended that Members confirm their comments from the previous meeting: namely that the consultant bring forward suggestions for the North West corner of the site; bring forward proposals for the Animal Cemetery; and bring forward proposals for the inclusion of a tree top walk.
- 1.6 Approach to the Charity Commission
- 1.7 Once the master plan has been agreed it was always the intention of the Charity to approach the Charity Commission, in liaison with the Cobtree charity Trust Limited, to seek consent to use part of the monies held in the Permanent Endowment Fund to help implement the proposed enhancements. It is requested that Officers be granted authority to make that approach to the Charity Commission.
- 1.8 Alternative Action and why not Recommended
- 1.8.1 The alternative course of action is to reconsider the basic proposals contained in the master plan. This is not recommended as the process to arrive at the existing proposals has been thorough and extensive.
- 1.9 Impact on Charity Objects
- 1.9.1 The intention of the master plan is to identify a number of enhancements to increase the attractiveness of the Cobtree Manor Park and thus better meet the objects of the Charity through greater public benefit.
- 1.10 Risk Management
- 1.10.1 Each individual enhancement will be risk assessed prior and during implementation. The greatest risk to the Charity is that the enhancements, once completed, do not have the desired effect of increasing visitor numbers.
- 1.11 Other Implications
- 1.11.1
- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Financial | <input checked="checked" type="checkbox"/> |
| Staffing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Legal | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Social Inclusion | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Considerations for Disabled Persons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental/Sustainable Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Rights Act	<input type="checkbox"/>
Procurement	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 1.11.2 No specific funding has been identified to implement the agreed enhancements. Sources of external funding will be assessed and approached in addition to the recommended approach to the Charity Commission for use of part of the Charity's Permanent Endowment Fund.

Background Documents

NO REPORT WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT THIS BOX BEING COMPLETED

Is this a Key Decision? Yes ☐ No ☒

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

Is this an Urgent Key Decision? Yes ☐ No ☒

Reason for Urgency

APPENDIX A

COBTREE MANOR PARK - QUESTIONNAIRE

Element in Master Plan	Do you agree? Yes or No	Please indicate your top three priorities 1, 2 & 3	Comment/importance to you:
Network of pathways			
Café and exhibition space			
Increased Car parking			
Children's play area			
Fitness Trail			
Lake and circular walk			
Enhanced teaching areas			
Dog agility area			
Viewing platform			
Specimen trees and features			
Woodland improvements			
Use of the Elephant House			
Meadow planting			
Woodland Sculptures			
Woodland Cycle route			
Part re-routing of horse-ride			

Name: (optional)

Contact Tel:(optional).....

Post Code:

General comments (please continue on separate sheet if necessary):

Thank you for time and consideration.

Please return to: Cobtree Officer, Maidstone Borough Council, King Street, Maidstone, Kent ME15 6JQ by noon on **Friday 16th April 2010**. Or, place in the container provided.

APPENDIX B

RESPONSE BY THE TRUSTEES OF THE COBTREE CHARITY TRUST LIMITED TO THE COBTREE MANOR PARK MASTERPLAN PROPOSAL BY ADAM BAILEY

The Trustees are grateful for the opportunity afforded by the Cobtree Manor Estate Charity committee to comment on the proposals for the master plan for the Park drawn up by Adam Bailey, the landscape contractor retained by Maidstone Borough Council. There is general acceptance of the majority of the ideas contained in the proposal, but particular comments are given below.

1. New pathway network

Agreed, but the horse bridleway should be renovated but left on its present route so as not to damage other routes. The bike trail should be enlarged and improved to pass through the woodland area and should cover a complete circuit around the Park and back to the starting point at the café. It would not prove sufficiently attractive to potential users as currently envisaged.

2. New café and exhibition space

Agreed. However, the outdoor café seating needs to be improved. The Mote Park café area is cited as an unattractive example of not being well designed. It is noted that no cost of building is contained within the plan; perhaps a figure in excess of £250,000 is required.

3. Increased car park facilities

Not thought necessary at this stage to provide for an overflow car park, though the area suggested should be earmarked for parking expansion in due course.

4. New play areas and fitness activities

New play areas should become the major attraction in the Park; the areas suggested seem too small. A larger and very exciting play area is suggested which would become the best in the area and on its own account attract great interest. In addition to a trim trail for adults, provision should be made for the fitness and wellbeing of the elderly and physically less able.

5. New lake and circulatory walk

Not agreed, as there is no natural source of water for this and it would only attract vermin and scavenging water birds. The ongoing cost of cleaning, etc

would be prohibitive, and the lake may well dry out in summer leaving a muddy and dangerous area.

6. Enhanced teaching areas

Agreed, though the cost of provision of the proposed facilities in the Elephant House seems excessive.

7. Dog agility area

Agreed only if the public survey feels this is appropriate.

8. Viewing platform

Agreed.

9. Improved enjoyment of the woodland and arboretum

Agreed.

10. Key signage

Agreed.

Further points

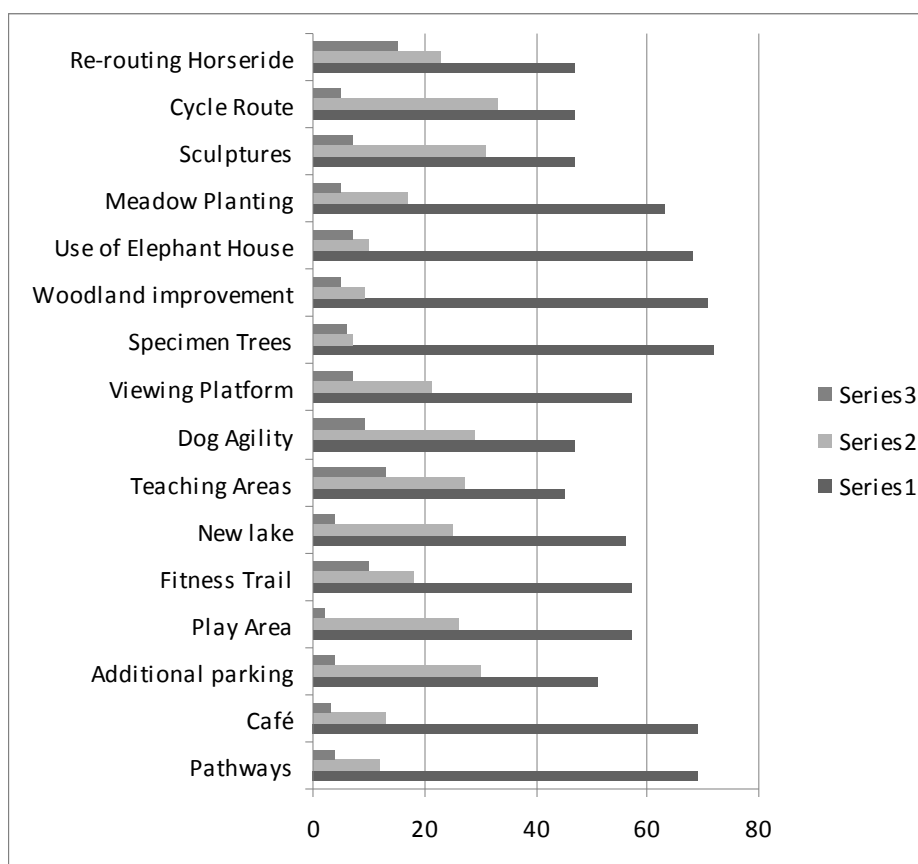
Concern was expressed with the lack of safety and security topics in the proposals. It was felt that this may add substantially to the ongoing costs of running the Park.

The Trustees suggest a link between the Park and the Museum of Kent Life to provide greater entertainment for families (especially) on days out. Perhaps this could take the form of tractor pulled wagons between the sites.

There is no present intention within the plan of proceeding with the hoped for railway; therefore the need to attract visitors with another 'pulling point', such as a greatly improved play area, is essential. The Park's benefactors were both keen animal lovers, so perhaps future plans could include the provision of an aviary bringing more exotic species of birds to the attention of visitors.

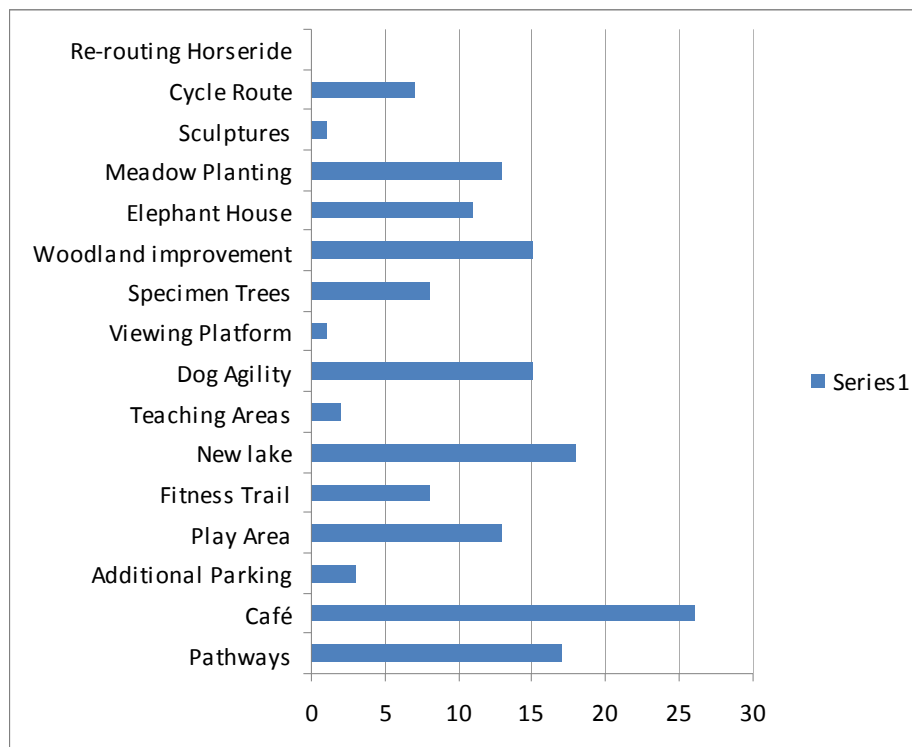
APPENDIX C

Masterplan Element	Yes	No	No response to this question
Pathways	69	12	4
Café	69	13	3
Additional parking	51	30	4
Play Area	57	26	2
Fitness Trail	57	18	10
New lake	56	25	4
Teaching Areas	45	27	13
Dog Agility	47	29	9
Viewing Platform	57	21	7
Specimen Trees	72	7	6
Woodland improvement	71	9	5
Use of Elephant House	68	10	7
Meadow Planting	63	17	5
Sculptures	47	31	7
Cycle Route	47	33	5
Re-routing Horseride	47	23	15



Master Plan Element	Priority			Prioritised at the top	Points Total
	First	Second	Third		
Pathways	10	3	4	17	40
Café	10	11	5	26	57
Additional Parking	1	0	2	3	5
Play Area	9	1	3	13	32
Fitness Trail	0	7	1	8	15
New lake	4	8	6	18	34
Teaching Areas	0	1	1	2	3
Dog Agility	4	7	4	15	30
Viewing Platform	0	1	0	1	2
Specimen Trees	5	2	1	8	20
Woodland improvement	5	4	6	15	29
Elephant House	1	3	7	11	16
Meadow Planting	2	4	7	13	21
Sculptures	0	0	1	1	1
Cycle Route	2	2	3	7	13
Re-routing Horseride	0	0	0	0	0

Analysis based on 53 questionnaires



Summary of comments from the general public

Master Plan Element	Comments - favourable	Comments - unfavourable	Comments - neutral/undecided
Pathways	Helps children and disabled to access. Helpful to keep people off plants. Helpful, I get lost! Yes, would improve access. Yes, for dog walkers on and off lead. Yes, with adequate dog bins and seating. Gravel rather than mud. Disability paths. Yes, we need more pathways, it can get very muddy. Yes, if not too many. Unnecessary.	Existing pathways ideal. Existing pathways are adequate. Not needed, keep it natural, will encourage yobs on bikes.	Wheelchair friendly?
Café and Exhibition Space	Good idea as long as the menu stays. Very important. The café is excellent but could be bigger - good attraction; could be open all day. Good socialising place.	Café fit for purpose and does not need to be changed, always busy and deliver excellent services. What will happen to the staff, doesn't need improvements. No, existing café excellent. No, this will incur parking charges and café prices will increase. Existing facility is fine. Cafe is great, don't really need an exhibition. Existing cafe is unique and very good for what purpose it serves now.	Café is awesome! Café excellent now. Please keep current café staff. Please keep current staff, they are excellent. Café a main reason to walk here. Fabulous facility. Café so good. Hope the existing choice of food remains - esp. vegetarian option!

Additional Parking	Also disabled near Café. Yes, if really needed. Only if you develop site + free. May be needed if use increases. Unfortunate but necessary. Yes, surfaced properly. Yes, certainly improved car parking.	Not needed, waste of money. Not needed, unless a large event was staged here. Car park rarely full - free. No, fill in potholes. Improve the car park surface. Resurfacing necessary. Tarmac it!! Car park is big enough but needs resurfacing. No, existing car park needs complete resurfacing though. Not needed. No but renew car park surface. No, could be added later if necessary. Too many cars will make it too busy.	No doubt eventually car park fees will apply.
Play Area	Yes because I am a child. Excellent idea - dog free. The only thing missing from a great place. Helpful to have a dog-free area. Good, but area to sit if you have a dog. Would be good for families. As long as it is confined to one area. Yes but not too big. Yes but very separate from open areas, tucked away. Yes but it is too close to lake; lake should be fenced in. As long as it isn't too big.	Let children enjoy walking. You can't have a play area where there are still bad element in the park. Keep it a quiet place to go, natural place. This is a natural area not a kindergarden. Unless supervised probably this park will be spoilt. No need for play area, most people use park for dog walking. Why - what is wrong with families who visit making their own fun in nature. Will encourage families who have no respect for the park. No bikes and no children, cater for the ratepayers. Unnecessary.	See Shorne play area, very good and away from café, perfect.

Fitness Trail	Yes, only if it is kept separate from the peaceful walking areas. To be fit.	A luxury, not a necessity. I cannot see that it would add much. Not required by everyday walkers. All parks who have these already find that they are never used. No, put one in at Mote Park. Unnecessary.	As long as it is away from where dogs walk.
New Lake	Lake a great idea, it's what's missing from the park. Water is a must for relaxing. Would be lovely. Yes, with adequate dog bins and seating. Brilliant! Lake if poss. Could be OK for wheelchair users. Will add to park.	Look after existing first. No - with no natural water source could be difficult to maintain. This would create a large maintenance problem. Feel strongly not needed. Not required. Make use of existing pond before making a new one!! Not needed - big lake at Mote Park. The lake is a worry for kids and dogs - can go to Capstone. No, lake in wrong position.	As long as it does not end up like the other pond, it is disgusting.
Teaching Areas	Good. Keep children interested.	Not necessary - could be provided in conjunction with Sandling centre. There is space at Tyland Barn, does not seem to be needed. Not required.	Teaching what? What about?

Dog Agility	Excellent idea, needs to be a large area. To train my dog. Look forward to this. Would be fun! Looking forward to using. Would be lovely + well used. As long as dogs are allowed to walk elsewhere as well. As long as it was free to use it. It would attract lots of people, very sociable. Not too big.	Not needed, waste of money. Strongly disagreeable and I am a dog owner. Let's not attract any more dogs. Good as is. No, the whole park is mainly used by dog walkers. No, the dogs should be allowed all over the park. Strongly disagree, waste of money, I am a dog owner too. No, why?	Polite invitation for better training? No strong opinion (yes).
Viewing Platform	Great idea, perfect position. Very pleasant - need information on trees/birds. Could be good if maintained. With information.	Not necessary.	
Specimen Trees	Would be pleasant. Very interesting. Existing ones are a source of delight. Yes and let's improve the ones here by pruning. Replace old dead trees with new indigenous species. Yes, keep these, its why we love the park. Essential to park.	No more required.	Some trees are numbered, good to learn more about them.

Woodland Improvements	Yes, please. Great to coppice and get wild flowers in spring. Yes, it's overgrown and uncared for. Yes if it is routine maintenance to enhance natural growth. Some, but keep it natural. At present I don't feel the woodlands are safe because they are a known homosexual meeting place. Yes but not decimation!	No, stop altering existing.	
Use of Elephant House	Better to put it to good use than to have it go to ruin. As long as still recognisable. Important to keep historical interest. Good idea - make use of the past. Great idea. Yes, teaching facility? Use of building good idea.	Not needed.	What would you use this for?
Meadow Planting	Bring back nature and butterflies. Good idea. Fantastic if managed well. Good idea.	Nice as it is. Will get vandalised.	
Sculptures	These always add interest, why not. Splendid, interesting - biodegradable. Yes, very interesting.	Not needed, waste of money. Not natural. Don't need them, the trees are enough. Natural growth is sufficient. No, encourages trampling.	Maybe if tasteful.

Cycle Route	Would add to the area for kids - all uphill! Yes, race days?	Walking and meeting is more social. It gets too muddy in the winter. They don't slow for people, i.e. Leybourne Lakes. Will there be conflict with dog/family walkers? Not big enough to achieve anything. H&S hazard for small children walking. As a dog walker, cycles can be a hazard. A hazard to family walks and dog walkers. Would not be used. This will hinder elderly or wheelchair people unless controlled. Downright dangerous to dog walkers and others. No, will encourage yobs. No, destroys habitat.	Yes/no, only if does not compromise walkers.
Re-routing Horseride	Yes, have had dogs gallop behind me and my dogs.	Not if it means not big enough ride as no areas for horses as it is.	No strong opinion.

Summary of "general comments" (with number of people who said this):

- The park is very good as it is, no need to change anything, stop spoiling our park, leave it alone. X9
- Don't make it too commercial, or like a funfair, or a theme park, or sophisticated, keep it simple and natural. X6
- Before changing anything in the park, address the problem of 'male activities'. X5
- With more people you will get more litter and vandalism, like at Mote Park.
- More bins for dog mess. X7
- More seats around park area.
- Do not restrict off-lead dog walking. X2
- Keep horses off walkers' paths - damage to ground and can be a danger to walkers. X3
- More maintenance needed, shrubs are overgrown.
- Raise barrier to sensible height.
- Would like to know the outcome of consultation.
- Would like special events, outdoor theatre, music, no aviary.
- Would like a garden area with seating.
- Bird hides, bird feeders and nest boxes in the woods.
- Info display on the old zoo. X2
- Viable bird or animal enclosure.
- Occasional mountain bike races on the Horse Ride with facilities in the park?
- We love it here. X2
- Looking forward to the improvements ("spend the money, please"). X2

From emails from park users:

You are going to spoil a thing of natural beauty with play areas and goodness knows what; you will cause further damage to nature.

Too much clearance has been done in the park and it will badly affect the wildlife. The clearance by the Old Metal Gates may be detrimental to the Tuberous Comfrey growing there. The re-routed bridle path will damage the habitat of great crested newts in the pond. Local Dog-Walking Area badly placed on steep slope with badger or fox habitation (*the plans mis-interpreted*). Lake near the cafe will bring flies; consider making a lake on the main drainage ditch. No access to Cycle Path for ambulances. Contain the children and keep the area beyond the metal gates for restful walking and people in wheelchairs.

From letters from park users:

With more car parking and visitors the park will lose its peacefulness. The park should be kept as open space and woodland, to enjoy peace and quiet; extra parking and cycle routes will take it away. Cobtree was left to local people to enjoy and we have already lost a large amount of it to a golf course.

Much clearance has already been done in the woodland with little regard for wildlife: small mammals, hibernating insects etc. The badger sett has had some clearance (*not correct-Eva*). All this has made the park noisy from road traffic, cold and windy. The cycle path will bring even more destruction as youngsters ride through the park to reach allocated area.

Comments from other interested parties

Medway Valley Countryside Partnership:

Provide access on footpaths and off footpaths for different levels of experience.

Café and exhibition space agreed - provide interpretation in this area.

Increased parking agreed if sympathetic to the site.

Play area agreed - consider equipment similar to that at Manor Park (KCC).

Fitness trail - only if the need confirmed; mixed success in other country parks.

No' to the lake - likely maintenance problems, the park has many equally good habitats; consider improving the parkland pond for wildlife and for education (a dipping platform).

Enhanced teaching areas agreed.

Dog agility area - only if the need confirmed; consider moving further away from the Elephant House and the bridleway (conflict of interests).

No objection to the removal of the Leylandii hedge - low wildlife value; the loss can be mitigated by allowing more scrub to remain.

Use of Elephant House agreed but investigate the possible presence of bats.

Meadow planting agreed but low nutrient levels in soil must be maintained.

Woodland sculptures agreed if local artists and materials are used.

Cycle route - too short for serious cyclists; may put families off visiting the woodland if they expect larger bikes

Give high priority to the safety and security of the site.

Ensure that the park's high value in terms of wildlife and educational potential is retained.

Include references to wildlife in the interpretation material. Provide interpretation panels.

Include 'footprints' of native species e.g. badgers.

Consider re-introducing heath land plants - gorse, broom, heather.

Consider a more relaxed mowing regime to encourage native flora and fauna.

Kent Wildlife Trust:

The proposals make practically no references to the wildlife value of the site, which is likely to be considerable. Any enhancements to the park should be based on appropriate ecological assessments such as species surveys and surveys to establish presence of protected species. The felling and chipping of trees as described could reduce the available insect habitat and could theoretically disturb roosting bats.

We would welcome enhancements that would enrich biodiversity and strengthen linkages with other important habitats in the local area.

The British Horse Society:

The bridle path must be continuous through the park, on the plan it seems to have ends (*designer's mistake*) Park visitors seem to enjoy seeing horses; occasional conflicts with other users are usually due to unruly dogs.

Consider moving Trim Trail feature TT7 away from the bridle path as unusual movements may startle some horses.

Hardwood mulch must be laid on well drained ground; otherwise it turns to soft mud.

Mr and Mrs Wyatt, Cobtree Cabin:

A strong objection to the proposal to build a large catering building and the introduction of the catering style that this would require; this would change and ruin the existing business. There is no need to build a new high status cafeteria at considerable cost. With some additional space (larger kitchen, some indoor seating) the existing business could easily cater for the increased visitor numbers in what is basically a sound and pleasant looking building.

Eva Girling, Cobtree Park Ranger, MBC:

Car parking - currently no need for overflow parking but earmark an area for the future; existing car park is in need of resurfacing and cars should be prevented from driving into the shrubberies; existing knee rail needs replacing.

Paths and trails - provide a medium-length suitably surfaced circular route accessible to wheelchairs (consult local disability access advisors) ; consider installing steps up banks on popular desire lines where ground becomes very slippery in winter. Reduce the number of hard paths between the cafeteria and the woodland. Reconsider the need for a hard path from the Llama House northwards - the ground drains well there and mown grass paths may be sufficient.

New Café etc - consider moving the outdoor seating north of the building for better screening from traffic noise. Provide a garage and good access for the utility vehicle as well as staff office/mess-room; or relocate staff to the Elephant House.

Arboretum etc - consider reducing the size of animal footprints from 1 metre across.

Woodland routes and sculpture - the cycle circuit seems rather short for serious cyclists and on the lower part the cyclists will be in conflict with walkers and dogs; it will cause damage to the woodland and may invite motorcycles; it is too steep in places to be used by smaller children. The sculptures may become vandalised; consider creating a woodland sensory trail instead.

The lake - there are many possible problems and disadvantages so carry out a comprehensive feasibility study before embarking on this project.

Elephant House and teaching areas - consider reducing the number of seating areas in this part of the park from three to two; consider the building for staff use as well for school parties in bad weather.

Bridle path - consider removing the link to the car park altogether, or running it up the Hornbeam Avenue.

Play area - consider moving it further uphill but ensure coverage by the CCTV camera.

Dog agility area - distribute the equipment along a dog walking circuit on the Elephant Hill.

Viewing platform - agreed.

Trim trail - confirm the need, provide more interesting, unusual equipment, suitable for children as well as adults (if possible).

Jeff Pedrick, Senior Warden, MBC:

The council are looking to reduce the numbers of dog-litter bins rather than installing more, because of the cost of emptying them.

Dog agility equipment would be better placed along a route to stop strange dogs congregating in one place; possible H&S problems: loose dogs, dog fights, conflicts with children.

Dog paths can become smelly in summer but there are solutions to this problem.

An aviary would require a license and staff.

Vronni Ward, Public Relations Officer, MBC:

Convert the Elephant House to use by local artists (The Scarlet Pimpernel Art Collective) as a space for exhibitions and workshops for the community, and providing income. The Scarlet Pimpernels have received a Lottery grant for projects within the community and are actively looking for a suitable venue.