

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Thursday 4 November 2021
Time: 2.00 p.m.
Venue: Town Hall, High Street, Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Cox, Garten (Chairman), Harper, Perry (Vice-Chairman) and Springett

The Chairman will assume that all Members will read the reports before attending the meeting. Officers are asked to assume the same when introducing reports.

AGENDA

Page No.

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Notification of Substitute Members
3. Urgent Items
4. Notification of Visiting Members
5. Disclosures by Members and Officers
6. Disclosures of Lobbying
7. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.
8. Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2021 1 - 5
9. Presentation of Petitions (if any)
10. Question and answer session for members of the public (if any)
11. Questions from Members to the Chairman (if any)
12. Cobtree Manor Estate Financial Position 6 - 12
13. Cobtree Estate Update 13 - 18

Issued on Wednesday 27 October 2021
Over/:

Continued

Alison Broom

Alison Broom, Chief Executive

PART II

To move that the public be excluded for the item 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	
14. Estate Investment	3 – Financial/Business Affairs	19 - 33

PUBLIC SPEAKING AND ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

In order to ask a question at this meeting in person or by remote means, please call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. by 5 p.m. on Tuesday 2 November 2021). You will need to provide the full text in writing.

If your question is accepted, you will be provided with instructions as to how you can access the meeting.

In order to make a statement in relation to an item on the agenda, please call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. by 5 p.m. on Tuesday 2 November 2021). You will need to tell us which agenda item you wish to speak on.

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MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 SEPTEMBER 2021

Present: Councillor Perry (in the Chair) and
Councillors Cox, Hinder, McKay and Springett

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from the Chairman (Councillor Garten) and Councillor Harper.

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman (Councillor Perry) chaired the meeting.

18. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

Councillor Hinder for Councillor Garten
Councillor McKay for Councillor Harper

19. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

20. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

21. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

22. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

23. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

24. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 JULY 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

25. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

26. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

27. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

28. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION

The Senior Finance Manager (Client) introduced his report summarising the financial position of the Cobtree Manor Estate as at 31 July 2021. The report covered the Golf Course, Kent Life, the Manor Park and the residential properties.

The Senior Finance Manager (Client) advised the Committee that:

- The position as at 31 July 2021 was an underspend of £29,774 against the profiled budget, with a targeted surplus of £50,000 at the end of the financial year.
- Mytime had now settled all their outstanding debts in respect of the Golf Course contract.
- There had been a higher than anticipated level of spend against the parks hard landscaping budget due to the need for a new door at the Visitor Centre and the construction of a new parking area. The Officers would review the budgets to identify funding for any further hard landscaping works that might be needed.
- Car parking income continued to exceed the budgeted figure as visitor numbers to the Manor Park remained high.
- Repairs and maintenance budgets for Kent Life and the residential properties were currently unspent.
- An updated cashflow projection would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee when the opportunity had been taken by the Officers to review proposals for future capital expenditure. The receipt of the outstanding sums from Mytime had alleviated the potential pressure on the cashflow and the bank account balance was now at a healthy level. This meant that it would be possible to make further loan repayments to the Borough Council for the car park capital works.
- The value of the Charity's investment in Charifund was continuing to recover and now stood at £867,762 compared to the value of £866,198 in July 2021. However, this was still lower than the value of

£930,938 in January 2020. Further updates would be provided at future meetings of the Committee.

In response to questions, the Senior Finance Manager (Client) advised the Committee that:

- Charifund was a specialist investment fund for charities which tended to focus on less risky investments and was widely used within the charity sector. The value of the Charity's investment had been impacted by the pandemic but was continuing to recover.
- The repairs and maintenance budgets for Kent Life and the residential properties were contingency budgets in case any repair and maintenance work for which the Charity was responsible was required. The works to Garden Cottage were being funded separately.

During the discussion, reference was made to the need to raise with the operator of Kent Life the issue of drainage at the site to prevent damage to the buildings and historic farm machinery and equipment.

RESOLVED: That the financial position of the Cobtree Manor Estate as at 31 July 2021 be noted.

29. COBTREE ESTATE UPDATE

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development presented the report of the Leisure Manager providing an update on activities at the Cobtree Manor Estate since the last meeting of the Committee in July 2021. It was noted that:

Cobtree Manor Park

Car park income for the year to 1 August 2021 was £53,817, which was a positive variance of £18,000.

There had been two outdoor theatre performances of Alice in Wonderland in the Park on 3 and 4 September 2021 and a winter lights trail for the period 15 December 2021 to 31 December 2021 had been confirmed.

A recent monthly play area inspection report had identified that repairs were required to play equipment at the Manor Park. The Officers would report back to the Committee with further details including costs.

Cobtree Golf Course

The Golf Course had been performing well despite the poor weather and some of the increased footfall experienced in 2020 had been retained.

With the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions, it was hoped that more society and group bookings would continue this positive trend.

Kent Life

Kent Life was also recovering well from the pandemic. Events and functions had resumed on site with a return to the full events programme anticipated.

As part of their tour of the Cobtree Manor Estate in August 2021, Members had visited the Kent Life archive store which contained thousands of artifacts. A report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee with options for cataloguing and managing the collections. The report would address the origins of the artifacts and any obligations in relation to their retention and display.

Cobtree Café

The Cobtree Café had continued to trade well throughout the summer. Repairs to the shutters had been carried out and drains and gullies had been cleared. The increased footfall at the Manor Park had resulted in repairs and redecoration being required in the Visitor Centre toilets, and these were being arranged by the Café operator.

Cobtree Shed Group

There had been some additions to the Elephant House which did not comply with building regulations and the Officers were looking into the cost of restoring the building. The Cobtree Shed Group was keen to find alternative premises to meet its needs and the Officers were trying to help with this.

In response to comments and questions, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development advised the Committee that:

- Options for the future use of the Elephant House were being investigated. Currently, a large metal container near to the Café was being used as a store for parks equipment and as a park office. Relocating the office to the Visitor Centre and using the Elephant House as a store for the equipment and a small vehicle would provide the opportunity to remove the container from an area used by the public.
- The Officers would investigate the drainage issues at Kent Life and report back to a future meeting.
- The proposals by Mytime in relation to the Golf Course had been put on hold temporarily, but a report would be submitted to the next meeting with options going forward.

During the discussion, it was pointed out that the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Leisure Manager had met with representatives of the

Cobtree Charity Trust Limited. At that meeting the Trustees had indicated that they might be interested in investing in a display area for some of the carriages currently housed in the Carriage Museum as its collection was gifted to it by Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake. This could tie in with the work to be undertaken in relation to the artifacts contained in the Kent Life archive.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development was keen for the Committee to consider other options for the Trust's investment and undertook to bring a report to the Committee about potential investment in the Cobtree Manor Estate.

RESOLVED: That subject to the points raised in the discussion, the update on activities at the Cobtree Manor Estate since the last meeting of the Committee in July 2021 be noted.

30. DURATION OF MEETING

2.00 p.m. to 2.45 p.m.

Agenda Item 12

Cobtree Manor Estate Committee

4 November 2021

Cobtree Manor Estate Financial Position

Final Decision-Maker	Cobtree Manor Estate Committee
Lead Head of Service	Director of Finance & Business Improvement – Mark Green
Lead Officer and Report Author	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Boxley

Executive Summary

The report summarises the current financial position of the Estate covering the activities at the golf course, Kent Life, the Manor Park and the residential properties.

Purpose of Report

To update the Committee on the current financial position and any other relevant matters that may impact the financial position of the Trust.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the current financial position and cashflow projection be noted.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Cobtree Manor Estate Committee	4 November 2021

Cobtree Manor Estate Financial Position

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The operation of the Estate directly supports the objects of the Trust as set out when the Council became the Corporate Trustee	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development
Cross Cutting Objectives	The operation of the Estate supports the Council's strategic objective to ensure there are good leisure and cultural attractions in the Borough.	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development
Risk Management	There is a potential reputational risk if the facilities are operated poorly. This is addressed in the annual risk management report.	Leisure Manager
Financial	There is a financial risk to the Trust if the operations cost more than predicted or fail to generate sufficient income to cover the costs of running the estate. This risk is currently heightened by the impact of the ongoing Covid-19 situation on the operations of the estate, particularly in relation to the various contractors.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Staffing	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	Leisure Manager
Legal	<p>Under the Council's Constitution the Committee as Corporate Trustee is responsible for all matters relating to the Charity with the exception of daily management.</p> <p>Law applicable to charities in England and Wales requires the trustee to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the Charity's financial activities during the year and of its financial position at the end of the year. This update report assists in meeting those requirements</p> <p>There are no further implications arising from this report.</p>	Contracts and Commissioning Team Leader, Mid Kent Legal Services

Privacy and Data Protection	There are no specific privacy or data protection issues to address.	Policy and Information Manager
Equalities	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	Policy and Information Manager
Public Health	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development
Procurement	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development
Biodiversity & Climate Change	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and there are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This is a regular update report on the financial position of the Estate, which enables the Committee to see how the various areas of activity are performing. Covid-19 has presented a significant risk to the finances and operations of the estate, emphasising the need for robust management and monitoring of the budget.

3. CURRENT FINANCIAL POSITION

- 3.1 The table below summarises the financial position of the Estate as at 30th September 2021. **Appendix 1** provides a more detailed breakdown of the figures.

3.1.1 Overall Summary Position:

SUMMARY TOTALS

	Approved Budget for Year 2021/22	Profiled Budget as at 30th September 2021	Actuals as at 31st September 2021	Variance
Golf Course	-£116,730	-£58,271	-£55,434	-£2,837
Manor Park	£94,740	£56,764	£37,890	£18,874
Kent Life	-£47,410	-£23,705	-£29,450	£5,745
Residential Properties	-£9,910	-£4,955	-£6,908	£1,953
Operational Total	-£79,310	-£30,167	-£53,902	£23,735
Investment Income	-£40,000	-£20,000	-£22,138	£2,138
Car Park Repayment	£69,650	£0	£0	£0
Total for the Year	-£49,660	-£50,167	-£76,040	£25,873

3.2 The current position shows a surplus of £25,873 for the year to date. There are no significant issues to report, but the following points should be noted:

- As advised at the last meeting there has been a higher than anticipated level of spend against the parks hard landscaping budget, due to the need for a new door at the visitor centre and the creation of a new parking area. Officers will review the budgets to identify funding for any further hard landscaping works may be needed. This will form part of the budget proposals report that will come to the next meeting of the Committee.
- Car parking income continues to exceed the budgeted figure as visitor numbers to the park remain high.
- Fencing repairs were undertaken at the golf course. Although this shows as an overspend against the profiled budget the costs of the works are within the total budget for repairs and maintenance.
- Rental income for the residential properties is under budget due to Garden Cottage being vacant whilst the major refurbishment works were undertaken.

3.3 Members have also requested an ongoing update on the Charifund investment. The value of the investment currently stands at £860,945, compared to the value of £867,762 in July. However, this is still lower than the value of £930,938 in January 2020. Updates will continue to be provided to future meetings as part of this report.

3.4 An updated cashflow projection for the Estate is included as part of the exempt Estate Investment report elsewhere on this agenda.

4. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

4.1 Section 3 is for noting only.

5. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Section 3 is for noting only.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

6.1 Officers will continue to monitor the financial position and take appropriate action where necessary.

7. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Financial Position
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8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Provisional Outturn 2020/21	Cobtree Manor Estate	Approved Budget 2021/22	Profiled Budget as at 30th September 2021	Actual as at 30th September 2021	Variance at end of September 2021
	GOLF COURSE				
£3,946	Repairs & Maintenance	£5,110	£2,555	£4,921	-£2,366
£1,330	Premises Insurance	£3,820	£1,910	£1,910	£0
£2,400	Professional Services	£0	£0	£0	£0
£0	General Expenses - VAT	£2,500	£1,250	£0	£1,250
£7,676	Controlled Running Costs	£11,430	£5,715	£6,831	-£1,116
-£138,995	Contract Income	-£173,890	-£86,945	-£84,413	-£2,532
£0	Rent Income	-£240	£0	£0	£0
-£138,995	Controlled Income	-£174,130	-£86,945	-£84,413	-£2,532
£14,210	MBC Staff Recharges	£12,620	£6,310	£6,310	£0
£14,210	Rechargeable Costs	£12,620	£6,310	£6,310	£0
-£117,109	Cobtree Golf Course	-£150,080	-£74,920	-£71,272	-£3,648
£26,024	MBC 2/9ths share	£33,350	£16,649	£15,838	£811
-£91,085	CMET Total	-£116,730	-£58,271	-£55,434	-£2,837
	MANOR PARK				
£68,958	Salaries	£0		-£10	£10
£392	Overtime	£4,000	£2,000	£0	£2,000
£5,924	Employers NI	£0		£0	£0
£12,184	Employers Superannuation	£0		£0	£0
£770	Employee Insurances	£0		£0	£0
£88,228	Employee Costs	£4,000	£2,000	-£10	£2,010
£43,371	Hard Landscaping	£15,000	£7,500	£18,694	-£11,194
£0	Covid Recovery Fund	£20,000	£0	£0	£0
£1,411	Gas	£2,000	£1,000	£575	£425
£7,367	Electricity	£11,800	£5,900	£7,076	-£1,176
£0	Water Metered	£1,200	£600	£108	£492
£0	Sewerage & Env Services	£1,100	£550	£0	£550
£8,009	Trade Refuse Collection (Internal)	£8,000	£4,000	£4,014	-£14
£1,830	Premises Insurance	£1,930	£965	£965	£0
£25,303	Equipment Purchase	£0	£0	£1,200	-£1,200
£4,500	Equipment Maintenance	£0	£0	£0	£0
£0	Equipment Hire	£530	£265	£0	£265
£5,517	Vehicle Leasing & Running Costs	£2,550	£1,275	£0	£1,275
£0	Vehicle Insurance	£810	£405	£0	£405
£0	Cash Collection	£2,420	£1,210	£1,210	£0
£2,314	Computers and Software	£0	£0	£75	-£75
£0	Protective Clothes	£530	£265	£703	-£438
£193	Photocopying	£530	£265	£0	£265
£1,441	General Expenses	£4,000	£2,000	£168	£1,832
£5,048	General Expenses - VAT	£6,000	£3,000	£1,500	£1,500
£5,410	Audit Fee	£5,330	£0	£0	£0
£14,693	Professional Services Security	£1,000	£500	£1,120	-£620
£4,126	Professional Services Consultancy	£3,060	£1,530	£0	£1,530
£0	Direct Telephones	£210	£105	£0	£105
£29	Mobile Telephones	£110	£55	£0	£55
£0	General Insurances	£140	£70	£70	£0
£0	External Print & Graphics	£170	£85	£0	£85
£130,561	Controlled Running Costs	£88,420	£31,545	£37,478	-£5,933
-£137,404	Fees & Charges - Car Parking	-£100,000	-£50,481	-£73,890	£23,409
-£39,358	Other Income - Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd	-£40,000	£0	£0	£0
-£5,342	Other Income	-£5,000	£0	£0	£0
£0	Licences	-£80	£0	£0	£0
-£34,556	Rent Income (Café)	-£34,000	-£17,000	-£16,731	-£269
-£216,660	Controlled Income	-£179,080	-£67,481	-£90,621	£23,140
£48,560	MBC Staff Recharges	£51,400	£25,700	£25,700	£0
£0	MBC Parks Management	£130,000	£65,000	£65,343	-£343
£48,560	Rechargeable Costs	£181,400	£90,700	£91,043	-£343
£50,689	Cobtree Manor Park	£94,740	£56,764	£37,890	£18,874

Provisional Outturn 2020/21	Cobtree Manor Estate	Approved Budget 2021/22	Profiled Budget as at 30th September 2021	Actual as at 30th September 2021	Variance at end of September 2021
	KENT LIFE				
£5,258	Repairs & Maintenance of Premises	£10,720	£5,360	£361	£4,999
£6,980	Premises Insurance	£4,850	£2,425	£2,425	£0
£0	General Expenses - VAT	£1,500	£750	£0	£750
£12,238	Controlled Running Costs	£17,070	£8,535	£2,786	£5,749
-£53,660	Contract Income	-£73,600	-£36,800	-£36,800	£0
-£53,660	Controlled Income	-£73,600	-£36,800	-£36,800	£0
£9,640	MBC Staff Recharges	£9,120	£4,560	£4,564	-£4
£9,640	Rechargeable Costs	£9,120	£4,560	£4,564	-£4
-£31,781	Kent Life	-£47,410	-£23,705	-£29,450	£5,745
	RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES				
£854	Repairs & Maintenance	£13,010	£6,505	£170	£6,335
	Non-Domestic Rates			£3,391	-£3,391
£1,935	Professional Services	£0	£0	£0	£0
£460	Premises Insurance	£540	£270	£270	£0
£3,249	Controlled Running Costs	£13,550	£6,775	£3,831	£2,944
-£21,193	Rent Income	-£26,000	-£13,000	-£9,464	-£3,536
-£21,193	Controlled Income	-£26,000	-£13,000	-£9,464	-£3,536
£2,410	MBC Staff Recharges	£2,540	£1,270	-£1,275	£2,545
£2,410	Rechargeable Costs	£2,540	£1,270	-£1,275	£2,545
-£15,534	Residential Properties	-£9,910	-£4,955	-£6,908	£1,953
-£87,712	OVERALL TOTALS	-£79,310	-£30,167	-£53,902	£23,735
-£36,157	Investment Income	-£40,000	-£20,000	-£22,138	£2,138
-£123,869	Net (surplus)/deficit for operational & investment activities	-£119,310	-£50,167	-£76,040	£25,873
£34,823	Repayment of car park construction costs	£69,650	£0	£0	£0
-£89,045	Net (surplus)/deficit after repayment	-£49,660	-£50,167	-£76,040	£25,873

Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	4 November 2021
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Cobtree Estate Update

Final Decision-Maker	Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee
Lead Head of Service	John Foster, Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Mike Evans, Leisure Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Boxley

Executive Summary
An update report on the Cobtree Estate and its constituent venues and facilities.
Purpose of Report
Noting

This report makes the following recommendation to this Committee:
1. That the contents of the report are noted.

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	4 November 2021

Cobtree Estate Update

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objectives and the corporate priorities for the council.	Leisure Manager
Cross Cutting Objectives	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objectives and the cross-cutting objectives of the council.	Leisure Manager
Risk Management	There are no risk management implications in this report.	Leisure Manager
Financial	Financial implications from this update are managed day-to-day in line with council procedures and policies.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Staffing	Staffing implications are managed day-to-day in line with council procedures and policies.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Legal	There are no specific legal implications at present as this report is presented for noting only.	Team Leader Contracts and Commissioning
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no new implications as a result of this update report and recommendation.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	No impact identified as a result of this update report and recommendation. An EqIA will be required for the project phase.	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	The Cobtree Estate works towards improving the health of our community and residents through its day-to-day operations.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Crime and Disorder	Crime and disorder implications are managed day-to-day in line with council procedures and policies	Leisure Manager
Procurement	Procurement implications are managed day-	Head of

	to-day in line with council procedures and policies.	Regeneration and Economic Development & Section 151 Officer
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and there are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As agreed at the 8 July meeting, the members of this committee attended a tour of the golf course, the park and Kent Life on Monday 9 August. The tour was used to explain more about the estate to new members, and was a chance for existing committee members to see the venues post-Covid.
- 2.2 Also since the last meeting, the Chair, Vice Chair and Leisure Manager attended a meeting of the Cobtree Charity Trust.

Cobtree Manor Park

- 2.3 The park has once again achieved Green Flag status, further validation of its recognition as a destination park for Maidstone and the local area. The park's management plan, which was submitted as part of the application, will be presented to the next meeting of this committee.
- 2.4 Car park income for the period of Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 is £67,363, which gives a positive variance of more than £26,000.
- 2.5 The Hazlitt Theatre held two sell-out performances of Alice in Wonderland in the park on 3 and 4 September 2021. There were a total of 500 visitors who came to the performances and the debrief from the event indicated that many more could be accommodated next year. The winter lights trail planned for the period of 15 December to 31 December is selling well.
- 2.6 Repairs have been completed recently on the sheep dip feature in the park.
- 2.7 Boundary and fencing work has progressed, with fencing restored between a key junction of the park, the private road and the golf course. The park manager has agreed a donation and a volunteer workforce that is facilitating the creation of new hedgerows along the bridleway in the park, around some of the park's other boundaries with the golf course, and some of the boundaries of the wider bridleway that surrounds the estate. The hedgerows will be planted in areas where they have the highest chance of good growth and becoming established. They will provide good natural habitat in the park and will also preserve boundaries where they need to be preserved. In time the established hedgerows will be a natural replacement to the ageing fencing.

2.8 The Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager has identified areas of the Cobtree estate as being suitable for additional tree planting and some natural flood prevention work. Areas and opportunities have been identified using aerial maps and a visit in early November with the park manager and some of the tenant organisations will be used to understand the practicalities and management requirements associated with planting additional trees on the estate. The areas identified as possible locations are:

- The perimeter of Forstal Field including the boundary with the M20
- The Kent Life boundary with the M20
- The north west corner of the estate beyond the golf course

Golf Course

2.9 Summer trading at the golf course has continued to recover after the Covid-19 pandemic. Membership numbers are now above 2019 levels as are green fees and casual visitor numbers. The uplift in golf participation seen during the Covid-19 pandemic has subsided slightly, but Cobtree continues to trade above pre-pandemic levels.

2.10 Societies, group bookings and social functions are also returning to pre-pandemic numbers and staffing issues and vacancies, common across the hospitality sector at present, are being resolved by the operator.

2.11 A drainage project to improve the playing conditions on the 1st, 9th, 12th and 18th holes will begin soon. This project will create better waterflows between two ponds and will also improve the ecology of the pond by the 12th and 18th holes.

Kent Life

2.12 Kent Life continues to recover post-pandemic. School trip numbers are increasing and events planning for Halloween and Christmas is in full flow.

2.13 Two new bee hives have been placed on site and the Kent Life team is working in conjunction with a local beekeeping business. There is potential for this to develop to include educational activities on site and for items to be sold in the Kent Life shop.

2.14 Some areas of Kent Life have been updated, making them more friendly for visitors in wheelchairs, and through consultation with wheelchair users other areas where further improvements can be made are also being identified.

2.15 Work to catalogue the Kent Life inventory has progressed. Meetings have been held with colleagues at Maidstone Museum and some external heritage organisations specialising in farms and rural life have been engaged. The Leisure Manager will bring a report with recommendations to a future meeting when plans are sufficiently developed.

Cobtree Café

2.16 Cobtree Café has continued to trade well throughout the summer. Repairs to the flooring in the centre toilets have been completed.

Cobtree Shed Group

2.17 The Cobtree Shed Group has arranged alternative accommodation at Kent Life. The new accommodation is much closer to a concrete parking area and welfare facilities making it more suitable for the shed group. The Kent Life site also has opportunities for small craft projects. There is currently no timeline for the group's switch from the park to Kent Life but the Leisure Manager will ensure a smooth transition and will keep committee members informed.

2.18 The vacant elephant house building will be made good and other uses for it will be considered. In the short term it will relieve storage pressures that the park manager and park ranger have, which should mean that the metal container box can be removed from the park eventually.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Committee can note the information in this report.

3.2 Committee can choose not to note the information in this report, however the Committee has requested regular updates on the operations of the Estate.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 It is recommended that the information in this report is noted.

5. RISK

5.1 This report is presented for information only and has no risk management implications.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 No consultation has taken place since the last update report.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 Any comments from the Committee will be passed on to the relevant party.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- None
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None

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