

AGENDA

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE MEETING



Date: Monday 14 April 2014
Time: 9.00 a.m.
Venue: Meeting Rooms 1A and 1B,
The Gateway, King Street,
Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Garland, Greer, Moss and J.A. Wilson
(Chairman)

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.

Continued Over/:

Issued on 3 April 2014

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

Alison Broom

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

6.	Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2014	1 - 2
7.	Report of the Cobtree Officer - Cobtree Estate Progress Report	3 - 11
8.	Report of the Head of Finance and Resources - Reappointment of External Auditors	12 - 13

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2014

Present: Councillor J.A. Wilson (Chairman) and
Councillors Garland, Greer and Moss

Also Present: Mr R Corben - Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

38. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

39. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

40. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

41. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the exempt Appendix to the report of the Cobtree Officer relating to staffing at Cobtree Manor Park be taken in public, but the information contained therein should remain private.

42. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 NOVEMBER 2013

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed.

43. CHARITY KNOWN AS THE COBTREE MANOR ESTATE - ACCOUNTS 2012/13

DECISION MADE:

1. That the Report and Financial Statements for the financial year 2012/13, including the Schedule of Adjustments and the Letter of Representation, all attached as Appendix A to the report of the Head of Finance and Resources, be approved; and
2. That the proposed response to the Management Letter from the external auditors, as set out in paragraph 1.4.5 of the report of the

Head of Finance and Resources and reproduced in italics below, be approved.

To view full details of this decision, please follow this link:

<http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Id=21848>

44. STAFFING AT COBTREE MANOR PARK

DECISION MADE:

1. That agreement be given to additional members of staff being employed at Cobtree Manor Park during the busiest periods of 2014 to cover times when the staff currently employed in the Park are not scheduled to work;
2. That, as during the summer of 2013, additional members of agency staff be employed to cover periods when the Park is unmanned from the last weekend in March to the last weekend in September 2014, to include all school days from 3-8pm (or closing time if earlier) and weekends and bank holidays from 11am to 6.30pm;
3. That, in addition, Maidstone Borough Services' staff be employed on overtime to undertake littering duties at weekends during this period for 2 hours per visit; and
4. That the future staffing requirements of the Manor Park be reviewed at the end of the year, taking into consideration the requirements of the Visitor Centre, when completed, and the future operational needs of the Park having regard to the outcome of the retendering exercise in respect of the operation of the Golf Course, which will provide a clearer picture of the resources available to the Charity.

To view full details of this decision, please follow this link:

<http://services.maidstone.gov.uk/meetings/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Id=21772&Opt=0>

45. DURATION OF MEETING

5.30 p.m. to 5.40 p.m.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE COMMITTEE

14th April 2014

REPORT OF THE COBTREE OFFICER

Report prepared by Joanna Joyce

1. Estate Progress Report

1.1 Issue for Decision

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

and

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

1.2 Recommendation of the Cobtree Officer

It is recommended that the Committee:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

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

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

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

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

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

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

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

1.6 Risk Management

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

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

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

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

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

Appendix A Estate Progress Report

1.8.2 Background Documents

Cobtree Manor Estate Master Plan

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

No

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

.....

This is a Key Decision because:

.....

Wards/Parishes affected:

.....

Cobtree Estate Progress Update

April 2014

Introduction

This update sets out the work of the estate for the period between October 2013 and April 2014.

Cobtree Manor Park

Maintenance of the park over the winter months has focussed predominantly on continuing the regeneration of shrub borders in the main parkland. The following tasks have been undertaken over winter:

- Rejuvenation of the Shrub Borders from the pond to the hornbeam avenue.
- Removal of the Eucalyptus Trees to the rear of the elephant house that fell due to high winds.
- Attachment of Wire Mesh to the existing Wooden Fencing (parallel to Forstal Road) to prevent dogs and other animals from entering the public highway.
- Coppicing of some trees within the woodland which have been damaged due to the inclement weather over winter.
- Installation of wire mesh fencing around the coppiced stools in order to prevent rabbits from damaging the vegetation.
- Planting of three Sorbus acuparia trees near to the sheep dip to replace two trees which earlier in the year had to be felled.
- Crown lifting of some of the parkland trees within or near the play area.
- Coppicing of some dilapidated Willow trees located opposite the pond.

In addition to the above a new 5K running route, part of an initiative by Run England, has been installed following the main path and the horse ride.

Visitor Numbers

A comparison of footfall from the last six months of 2012 with 2013 shows an increase of 20.55% over the six month period.

July 2012 – Dec 2012 117,534

July 2013 – Dec 2013 141,688

From January 2013 to December 2013 the park received 253,842 visits with 126,919 vehicles to site being recorded.

Visitor figures are set out in the table on the next page.

Cobtree Monthly and Quarterly footfall figures

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

Cobtree Manor Park Events Programme 2014

It is proposed that the events programme for 2014 is kept similar to the successful programme of 2013. This will include a selection of walks with the ranger, historical walks and conservation activities for families.

It is proposed that a charge of £3 per person is made for events. This is discussed in detail in the report.

The budget for the programme will remain at £2,000.

Proposed event programme

Event Date	Event Title
Sunday 4th May	Walk with the ranger Blue bells and other spring flowers
Sunday 11th May	Dawn Chorus walk
Wednesday 28th May	Minibeast Safari
Wednesday 28th May	Minibeast Safari
Friday 30th May	Nature detectives hi tech trail
Friday 30th May	Nature detectives hi tech trail
Friday 30th May	Nature detectives hi tech trail
Friday 30th May	Nature detectives hi tech trail
Sunday 22nd June	Gert and Daisy, The History of Maidstone Zoo
Thursday 26th June	Walk with the ranger, Cobtree arboretum
Thursday 10th July	Walk with the ranger Cobtree Arboretum walk
Sunday 13th July	Walk with the ranger Cobtree Arboretum walk
Sunday 20th July	Gert and Daisy, The History of Maidstone Zoo
Sunday 27th July	Walk with the ranger-park walk at Cobtree
Friday 8th August	Nature detectives-Minibeast Hunt

Friday 8th August	Nature detectives-Minibeast Hunt
Sunday 10th August	Gert and Daisy, The History of Maidstone Zoo
Friday 22nd August	Night time walk
Wednesday 27th August	Go wild at Cobtree
Wednesday 27th August	Go wild at Cobtree
Sunday 7th September	Gert and Daisy, The History of Maidstone Zoo
Thursday 18th September	Walk with the ranger Cobtree Arboretum walk
Sunday 21st September	Berried treasures of late summer
Sunday 28th September	Wildlife wander at Cobtree
Sunday 28th September	Wildlife wander at Cobtree
Sunday 5th October	Fungi walk
Sunday 5th October	Fungi walk

Cobtree Manor Park Project



The project is progressing on schedule. Phase 2 is complete with the planting of trees to enhance the arboretum being undertaken over the winter. The sculpture trail is in the process of being installed ready for an opening event on 25th April (left; *leaf*).

The Visitor Centre application is awaiting planning permission. Interim improvements to car parking are being developed to give additional space for summer. A longer term solution involving car parking on old hard stand across Forstal Road is being developed in consultation with Kent Highways but is unlikely to be ready by the summer holidays.

Cobtree Golf Course

Mytime have been offered a 1 year extension to their current lease. In terms of rounds played there was a month on month improvement on the same period last year. An increase of 563 rounds during October 13 to January 14 – 8,591 rounds played in total.

The re-tender of the Golf Course is being investigated and further recommendations will be brought to the Committee shortly.

Estate properties

Residents have requested some work to the woodland to the rear of White Cottages. On inspection it was found many of the trees were covered in ivy, some were in poor condition and required felling and there was a substantial quantity of fly tipping. The fly tip has been removed and the work to the trees undertaken as recommended.

South East Water are looking to undertake works in the field south of Forstal road under their current easement, negotiations are ongoing with regard to access agreements.

The Cobtree Young Farmers have a contact who is able to improve the grazing on Forstal Field in return for the hay crop. This is to be investigated further as it could result in improvements to the sward however a substantial improvement in fencing would be required if they were to graze there.

Kent Life

Continuum have been granted an extension to their lease for two years. Dilapidations works are currently out to tender and will be brought before the Committee for a decision once tenders are returned. A meeting of stakeholders for the site was held on 19th March 2014 to discuss the way forward and the future of the site. It has been agreed to hold additional meetings with both the Friends of Kent Life and Cobtree Young Farmers to discuss things further. The operation of Kent Life will need to be re-tendered ready for the end of the current lease.

Agenda Item 8

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE COMMITTEE

14TH APRIL 2014

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCE & RESOURCES

Report prepared by: Paul Holland (Senior Accountant)

1 APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITORS

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the appointment of external auditors for the Trust for the financial years 2013/14 and 2014/15.

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Finance & Resources

1.2.1 That the Committee reappoints King & Taylor as external auditors for the financial years 2013/14 and 2014/15.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 The Committee had previously agreed the appointment of King & Taylor for the financial years 2011/12 and 2012/13, so it is now necessary to reappoint auditors.

1.3.2 King & Taylor have been the auditors for a number of years, and there is a good working relationship between their staff and Council staff. In addition King & Taylor are experienced auditors of charity accounts and have a good working knowledge of the Cobtree Trust from their previous audit work.

1.4 Alternative Actions and Why Not Recommended

1.4.1 The Committee could seek to appoint a different auditor, however for the reasons outlined at 1.3.2 it is recommended that King & Taylor continue in their current role. In addition the Charity Commission guidance on Independent Examination of Charity Accounts does not appear to place any requirement upon Trustees to change auditors after any specified time period.

1.5 Impact on the Charity's Objectives

1.5.1 An independent examination of the accounts provides assurance to Trustees and stakeholders of the financial standing of the Trust.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 Assurance of the quality of the financial information is a key element of risk management.

1.7 Other Implications

Financial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Staffing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social Inclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental/Sustainable Development	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human Rights Act	<input type="checkbox"/>
Procurement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Asset Management	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.8 Financial Implications

1.8.1 A fee is payable to the Auditors for their services. In 2012/13 this was £4,320.

<u>NO REPORT WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT THIS BOX BEING COMPLETED</u>			
Is this a Key Decision?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If yes, when did it appear in the Forward Plan? _____			
Is this an Urgent Key Decision?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<u>Reason for Urgency</u>			
Not applicable			