

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

Decision Made: 3 October 2014

COBTREE ESTATE PROGRESS REPORT

Issue for Decision

- (a) To consider the work being undertaken across the Cobtree Estate as set out in the progress report attached as Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer;
- (b) To consider the potential re-letting of Garden Cottage.

Decision Made

1. That the progress report on work being undertaken across the Cobtree Estate, attached as Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer, be noted.
2. That the Head of Legal Services be authorised to re-let Garden Cottage on a long term tenancy at market rent (and on such other terms as may be agreed by the Cobtree Officer) at such time that the existing tenant gives notice.

Reasons for Decision

The Committee has asked to be provided with a progress report on the work being carried out across the Estate at each meeting. The report for the most recent period is attached as Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer.

The tenant of Garden Cottage has expressed a wish to seek alternative sheltered accommodation and is waiting for a suitable place to become available. It is proposed that as with 4 Stream Cottages the Cottage is re-let on a long term tenancy at the appropriate market rate. It is important that the re-letting occurs as quickly as possible to ensure a continuity of income from the property. Currently the rent is £5,682.88 per annum, and it is thought that when re-let the property could achieve at least £9,000 per annum.

Alternatives Considered and Why Rejected

An alternative course of action would be not to endorse the works ongoing across the Estate. This is not considered appropriate as the works are in the best interests of the Estate and it is important that the Committee is aware of ongoing actions.

The Committee could have chosen to delay a decision on the re-letting of Garden Cottage until it becomes vacant. This is not considered appropriate as income would be lost in the period between the Cottage becoming vacant and the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee could have chosen to sell the property. This is not considered appropriate as, although there would be a short term capital gain, the revenue from the tenancy would be lost. Following the success of the Cobtree Manor Park project, ongoing revenue for operations is tight due to increased use from higher visitor numbers and additional maintenance costs in respect of the play area. As such it would not be in the best interests of the Charity to reduce the annual income generated through letting the property.

Background Papers

Cobtree Manor Estate Master Plan

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Policy and Communications by: 14 October 2014.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

Decision Made: 3 October 2014

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE VISITOR CENTRE

Issue for Decision

- (a) To consider the design of the Cobtree Manor Estate Visitor Centre as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer;
- (b) To consider the appointment of the contractor to build the new Visitor Centre as set out in exempt Appendix B to the report of the Cobtree Officer;
- (c) To consider the final cost for phase 3 of the project; and
- (d) To consider the additional costs for fixtures, fittings and equipment, the fitting of the kitchen and the cost of interpretation shown in Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer.

Decision Made

- 1. That the final design of the Cobtree Manor Estate Visitor Centre as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Cobtree Officer be approved.
- 2. That G.A. Harpers Ltd. (Harpers), the winning tenderer under the tendering process conducted by the Council, as set out in exempt Appendix B to the report of the Cobtree Officer, be appointed to build the Visitor Centre.
- 3. That the Head of Legal Services be authorised to complete an agreement with Harpers to this effect, and that the Cobtree Officer be given delegated authority to agree further details of the contract if needed in consultation with the Chairman of the Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee.
- 4. That phase 3 (i.e. the Visitor Centre) of the Cobtree Master Plan Project be approved to commence and that the final amount of money (£371,226) be released for this purpose.

It should be noted that of this sum £300,000 is grant money received from the Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd (CCTL). The £300,000 originally identified by Council Officers from the permanent endowment for the Master Plan project for the Visitor Centre will not be drawn down consequent on this grant from CCTL, subject to paragraph 5 below.

5. That the following money from the original Visitor Centre budget of £300,000 be allocated to this the final phase of the project as additional items of expenditure:
 - £25,125 as a 7.5% contingency against the contract sum;
 - £12,000 to be spent on furniture for the café including new tables for inside and outside;
 - £22,000 for the kitchen fit out;
 - £10,000 for high quality interpretation, including new signage, with the design of the interpretation being developed in consultation with CCTL;
 - £10,000 for additional security including new CCTV; and
 - £15,000 for surfacing to extend the car park within Cobtree Manor Park to accommodate 60 extra spaces.
6. That arrangements be made for Members to receive regular progress reports on the delivery of this project.

Reasons for Decision

The final design is a detailed and costed plan for the Visitor Centre and following on from the concept design already approved by the Committee. Approval of this detailed design is consistent with decisions already taken by the Committee.

Harpers were recommended as the main contractor following the tender process which was overseen by Stephen Trigg, Procurement Manager and Simon Logan, Procurement Officer. The assessment criteria aimed to ensure that both price and quality were considered. The top two contractors were interviewed to confirm that they were happy with their bids and to answer any questions; the prices and scoring were then finalised resulting in the final recommendation. A full tender process was followed. Details of this process and the scoring are set out in exempt Appendix B to the report of the Cobtree Officer.

It is proposed that some of the money remaining from the original project budget prior to the offer from CCTL to fund the Visitor Centre be allocated to the project in order to enable the project to be completed to a high standard.

The budget figures show that the building can be built on budget. The £4,774 difference between the budget remaining and the current commitments will be found as part of the value engineering exercise that will happen once the contractor is appointed. The budget does not however leave room for a contingency. It is proposed that money for a contingency be allocated to the project to ensure there are sufficient funds for any minor changes to the project or cost of items.

It is proposed that money be spent on furniture for the Visitor Centre. By purchasing these a level of continuity of style and design will be able to be followed through both the interior and the exterior matching with the styles already used in the Park. Any items that would need to be replaced

over time such as tables and chairs could be recharged over time to the successful contractor for the management of the Visitor Centre.

It is proposed that funding be set aside for the kitchen design and fit. This will enable a greater return to be charged for the lease of the facility than if it were let empty and the successful contractor was required to bring in equipment. This is particularly important given the uncertainty of income in the future from the Golf Course.

The provision of good quality interpretation will be important for ensuring that the public understand the history of the site and the role of Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake and subsequently CCTL in the history of Cobtree Manor Park. It was one of the requests of CCTL which is now funding the Visitor Centre that good quality interpretation be installed.

It is proposed that funding be allocated for CCTV to ensure the security of the Visitor Centre. Given recent problems elsewhere on the Estate it is considered important to provide as much protection as possible for the new Visitor Centre.

The car park extension on grass areas within the Park has worked well over the summer. It is important that this area is made suitable for use in all weathers as the Park is also now popular through the winter. The addition of indoor seating in the Visitor Centre is also likely to increase winter use meaning the car parking requirement when the ground is wet is likely to be greater than it is at present.

Alternatives Considered and Why Rejected

The alternative would be to reject the final design or to request changes to it. This is not considered appropriate as the design meets the concept design previously approved by the Committee. Redesign would be very costly and would lead to a building different to that already approved which would then have to go through the planning process again.

The Committee could choose to award the contract to another contractor from the list; however the scoring process has been carefully followed to ensure both a fair process and that the successful contractor has both the capability and availability to complete the work to a high standard at a fair price.

The Committee could have chosen not to take additional funding from the original budget for a contingency fund. This would result in the building having to be re-designed to ensure a contingency is included, reducing the quality of the build.

The Committee could have chosen not to provide furniture for the Visitor Centre or to fit the kitchen; however this would mean the facility would be let for a considerably lower rate. Given the current uncertainty of income due to the Golf Course re-letting, it is considered prudent to maximise income from the facility wherever possible.

It has already been decided to partner with CCTL in providing interpretation for the Visitor Centre outlining the history of the Park. For

this to be of a high quality it will be important to provide sufficient funding. The Committee could have chosen not to fund this from the original budget, but this would result in savings having to be found from the main building and a subsequent reduction in the quality of it.

CCTV is proposed to improve the security of the site surrounding the Visitor Centre. The Committee could have chosen not to install it, but this would leave the site very vulnerable to vandalism and other more expensive deterrents would be required.

The alternative to providing funding for car park surfacing improvements is to leave the existing car parks as they are. This would cause problems in the winter as cars would not be able to use grass parking areas and would end up having to use the road. The opening of the Visitor Centre will make it more likely that the Park is used in poor weather increasing the need for all weather parking.

Background Papers

Cobtree Manor Park Master Plan.

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