

AGENDA

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE MEETING



Date: Thursday 26 January 2017

Time: 2.30 p.m.

Venue: Town Hall, High Street,
Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors Cox, Mrs Gooch, McLoughlin
(Chairman), Perry and Mrs Wilson

Page No.

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Notification of Substitute Members
3. Notification of Visiting Members
4. Disclosures by Members and Officers
5. Disclosures of Lobbying

Continued Over/:

Issued on Wednesday 18 January 2017

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

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| 6. | To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information. | |
| 7. | Minutes (Part I) of the meeting held on 3 August 2016 | 1 - 6 |
| 8. | Report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development - Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report | 7 - 13 |
| 9. | Report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development - Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre Update | 14 - 25 |

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	
10.	Minutes (Part II) of the meeting held on 3 August 2016	3 – Financial/Business Affairs	26 - 28
11.	Exempt Report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development - Cobtree Manor Estate Financial Position	3 – Financial/Business Affairs	29 - 35

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES (PART I) OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 3 AUGUST 2016

Present: Councillor McLoughlin (Chairman), and
Councillors Mrs Gooch, Harvey, Perry and Mrs Wilson

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Cox.

2. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Harvey was substituting for Councillor Cox.

3. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

4. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor McLoughlin be elected Chairman of the committee for the municipal year 2016-17.

5. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor Cox be elected Vice-Chairman of the committee for the municipal year 2016-17.

6. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

7. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

8. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE
BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION.

RESOLVED: That the items on part II of the agenda be taken in private as proposed.

9. MINUTES (PART I) OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 MARCH 2016

With regard to minute 148. Report of Commercial and Economic Development – Cobtree Manor Golf Course, Members noted that recommendation 7 should make reference to 'Cobtree Manor Estate Trust'.

RESOLVED: That the minutes (part I) of the meeting held on 23 March 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed.

10. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Minute 145. Report of the Cobtree Officer – Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report

It was noted that Members had requested a report back to Members outside of the meeting on the Tree Replacement Policy, but this had not been circulated. The Cobtree Officer confirmed that this would be circulated in advance of the next meeting.

11. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL PARTNERSHIP - ADVICE ON THE STATUS OF MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

The Deputy Head of the Legal Partnership presented the report which clarified that individual Members of the committee were not individual trustees of the charity and had no liability. The Council as the corporate trustee was liable.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

12. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE MANOR ESTATE UPDATE REPORT

The Cobtree Officer presented the report updating committee on the operation of the estate. Members were advised that the park had enjoyed good Green Flag results, and that the Men in Sheds group was successful and had attracted new members.

In response to questions regarding the Cobtree café it was explained that:

- There was a single point of sale in the café due to spatial constraints, and this could lead to queues. A new initiative would create a better takeaway service featuring ready prepared items which was expected to reduce queues, and two additional serving points for ice cream had been established, but it was recognised that a second till point was also required.
- Due to visitor numbers to the café the presentation standards declined throughout the day. Focus was required on restocking during busy times to ensure a consistent offer.
- MBC procedures were used except where these had become prohibitive to the function of Cobtree business. In these instances work had been undertaken to simplify procedures.

- Toys such as bats and balls were sold at the café till point due to customer demand. These were considered an upsell on food and drink purchases rather than a primary offer.
- Staff at the café were employed on a mixture of zero hour and 6 month contracts, and all received rota hours each week.

During discussion it was raised that:

- The CCTV installed in the car park had not been operating, and would require relocation due to trees blocking the camera. Had the CCTV been functional it would not have recorded the theft of the zip wire equipment.
- Options for further sustainability such as increased parking charges would be considered after the first year review.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the recommended actions from the initial café business review be implemented subject to the points raised by Members, and a further full review of the café operate be undertaken once these have been implemented, with the results and action plan brought to the next meeting of the committee.
3. That an update on the financial performance of the café be presented to each meeting of the committee.

13. **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE CYCLE PATH AND CROSSING**

The Cobtree Officer introduced Colin Finch, KCC Senior Projects Officer Public Rights of Way, who had provided information for the report.

The Cobtree Officer explained that KCC and MBC were working jointly on a scheme to widen the River Medway towpath and develop a sustainable route along the river. One of the options included a Toucan road crossing to facilitate pedestrian and cyclist access to Cobtree County Park.

It response to questions the Committee was advised that:

- The proposed Toucan crossing would be sited near to the entrance of the park, which would necessitate the removal of a currently situated bus stop. It was stated that a bus stop in the vicinity of the park was important for visitor access by public transport.
- KCC was seeking a match funding contribution of £30,000 towards the proposed highways works and improvements to the riverside

towpath on Kent Life land. The Cobtree Manor Estate Charity did not have the required funds due to the change in golf course income. The funding would therefore need to be sought from other grant awarding bodies. If the match funding was not achieved then the pedestrian crossing works could not be progressed.

RESOLVED:

1. That approval be given to the proposed Towpath changes detailed in the drawings appended to the report;
2. That approval be given to the proposed Toucan Crossing design dependent upon the retention of a bus stop;
3. That Officers seek additional funding to contribute towards this scheme and bring a further report back to committee in the event that there is a short fall in funding.

14. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE MANOR PARK VISITOR CENTRE CLOSURE REPORT

The Parks and Leisure Manager presented a closure report detailing the implementation of the Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake Visitor Centre in Cobtree Manor Park.

It was highlighted that the project came in on budget utilising the 10% contingency, and it was stated that a closure report for the whole project would be presented to a future meeting of the committee.

In response to a question it was confirmed that maintenance of the facility was undertaken in house by MBC.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

15. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business 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
Item 14. Minutes (Part II) of the meeting held on 23 March 2016	3 – Financial/Business Affairs
Item 15. Exempt Report of the Head of Commercial and Economic Development – Cobtree Manor Estate Financial Position	3 – Financial/Business Affairs

Item 16. Exempt Report of the Head of Commercial and Economic Development – Cobtree Manor Park Golf Course Tender Update Report

3 – Financial/Business Affairs

16. MINUTES (PART II) OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 MARCH 2016

RESOLVED: That the Minutes (Part II) of the meeting held on 23 March 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed.

17. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED: That item 16 – Cobtree Manor Park Golf Course Tender Update Report be taken in advance of item 15 due to Mike Marsh of MMA Limited being in attendance to speak to the item.

18. EXEMPT REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE MANOR PARK GOLF COURSE TENDER UPDATE REPORT

The Parks and Leisure Manager presented the report updating committee on the progress of the Cobtree Manor Golf Course Tender. Mike Marsh of MMA Limited (MMA) was in attendance to speak to the item as MMA was managing the procurement exercise on behalf of CMET.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted;
2. That the Director of Finance and Business Improvement be given delegated authority to award the contract to the successful bidder;
3. That the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services be given delegated authority to enter into a lease and a management agreement with the successful bidder;
4. That the Invitation to Tender document be circulated to Members outside of the meeting;
5. That the appointed contractor be invited to meet the committee at a suitable date.

19. EXEMPT REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION

The Senior Finance Manager presented the report summarising the current financial position of the Estate as of 30 June 2016, including the activities at the golf course, Kent Life, the Manor Park and the Café/Visitor Centre.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted;
2. That, at the conclusion of the golf tender process, Officers be requested to commence the work to present options for a new operational model of the Cobtree Manor Estate Trust;
3. That a report proposing aspirations to build up to a minimum contingency fund be presented to committee in the report at year end.

20. VOTE OF THANKS

The Committee noted that it would be Cobtree Officer Joanna Joyce's last meeting of the Committee before leaving the Council later in the year.

The Chairman thanked Ms Joyce for all her hard work and wished her well for the future. This was agreed by the Committee.

21. DURATION OF MEETING

2.00 p.m. to 4.55 p.m.

Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	26th January 2017
Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?	Yes

Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report

Final Decision-Maker	Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee
Lead Head of Service	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jason Taylor – Parks and Leisure Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Boxley

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. The Committee is asked to note the contents of the Estate Update.
2. The Committee is asked to authorise funding of £30,000 for a Toucan Crossing over Forstal Road to enable the River Medway Cycle Path Scheme to link up with Cobtree Manor Park.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

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

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	26 th January 2017

Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The information in the report is intended to give the Committee an understanding of the day to day work of the Estate and the issues that affect its management. It also provides a record of all that is achieved across the different parts of the estate.
- 1.2 The estate update covers the period from when the Committee last met in August 2016.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Cobtree Manor Estate covers a large area of land left in trust to the people of Maidstone. The Cobtree Trust hold the freehold to the estate whilst the Cobtree Manor Estate Trust (CMET) have a 999 year lease. Maidstone Borough Council is the Corporate Trustee of CMET.

Cobtree Manor Estate Charity - Governing Object

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

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

i) By maintaining the Cobtree Manor Estate as an open space as defined by the Open Spaces Act 1906 and if the lessees think fit providing thereat facilities for organised games and other sports".

ii) With the consent of ...[the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited and the Kent County Council]... in such other way for the benefit of the inhabitants of Maidstone and other members of the general public as the Council shall from time to time think appropriate."

- 2.2 The estate update outlines the workings of the estate since the previous report and updates the committee on this.

- 2.3 As requested by Committee at the last meeting additional information regarding the Cobtree Café/Visitor Centre will be supplied in a separate report.

- 2.4 Committee received a presentation on 3rd August 2016 regarding the River Medway Cycle Path Scheme, which set out the need for a Toucan Crossing over Forstal Road in order for the cycle path to connect to Cobtree Manor Park. Funding for this is not included in the budget for the project. Officers were asked to seek other sources of funding and to return to Committee if this was

unsuccessful. As detailed in Appendix I it has not been possible to secure other sources of funding.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 To note the contents of the report.

3.2 The committee could choose not to note the information contained in the appendix I, and do nothing, however receiving regular reports is in the best interest of good estate management.

3.3 To authorise the funding of £30,000 for a Toucan Crossing over Forstal Road to connect the River Medway Cycle Path Scheme with Cobtree Manor Park.

3.4 To decline to fund a Toucan Crossing over Forstal Road. This will mean that the cycle path will end at the river and will not come across Forstal Field as there would not be a safe road crossing.

PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.5 It is recommended that the information in Appendix I to the report is noted in order to ensure an accurate record of work across the estate is maintained

4. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

4.1 The committee has previously resolved to receive regular updates on the ongoing work across the Estate.

5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

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

6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objects and the corporate priorities of the Council.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Risk Management	Risks to running the estate are dealt with in the annual Estate Risk Management Report.	
Financial	Financial risks are considered in the ongoing finance updates.	Cobtree Finance Officer

Staffing	No implications.	
Legal	No implications.	Deputy Head of the Legal Partnership
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	No implications.	
Environmental/Sustainable Development	No implications.	
Community Safety	No implications.	
Human Rights Act	No implications.	
Procurement	No implications.	
Asset Management	No implications.	

7. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix I: Cobtree Manor Park Update Report January 2017

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report January 2017

The report covers the period from August 2016 to January 2017

Cobtree Park

Maintenance of the park over this period covers Summer, Autumn and Winter Works to the park includes:

Continuing renovation to shrubbery areas;

Invasive species removal from meadow and woodland areas;

Removal of accumulated rubble and arisings;

An ongoing assessment of the Arboretum trees being undertaken to inform an Arboretum Management Plan, improved curation, documentation, labelling and interpretation.

Park Incidents

A break in in November left damage to the Ranger's container and to the office door and shutter with the theft of power tools and hand tools. Damage to the building has been repaired and improved security measures introduced. CCTV coverage of the incident was not sufficient for the Police to identify suspects. An insurance claim is in process to recover losses.

In December, a car struck the park fencing on Forstal Road causing damage to a tree and section of fencing. A Police investigation is ongoing.

Park Events

MVCP run events including Mini-Beast Safari, Pollinators, Bush Craft and Rustic Christmas Decorations were fully subscribed

Half term Craft in the Park –free drop in sessions with a Halloween theme attracted more than 100 participants over 4 days

Gert and Daisy, the story of Maidstone Zoo was oversubscribed, 25 visitors joined the two hour walk and talk.

An Autumn Arboretum walk with the Park Manager and Ranger attracted 8 participants.

Six themed summer family trails and a half term Halloween trail saw total of 184 children participate at £3 per trail.

Café

Staffing: the Catering Supervisor and Assistant are now established in their roles with a pool of 10 Casual staff recruited and retained.

The card payment system is functioning correctly and accounts for an average of 28% of business.

Leaflets promoting the café's breakfast offer are being distributed to the surrounding industrial estate. Telephone orders for food are now being taken regularly.

Repeat customers are regularly visiting the café specifically for food, especially breakfasts, and not using any of the other park facilities.

In this period the café has hosted business meetings with catering supplied including the Kent Parks Managers Forum, a Christmas lunch for 36 MVCP staff and volunteers and three children's birthday parties

'Breakfast with Santa' catered for 25 children over 3 sessions

Visitor Centre

The building continues to function well given the volume of visitors. Harpers Construction are completing the Year 1 building rectifications, predominantly superficial decorative work with some replacements of fixtures and fittings, which are due to be completed by 20th January.

In order to improve the outside seating area, 5 trees not thriving due to damage and or disease are to be felled to allow the area to be re-landscaped and planters installed.

Community

The Men In Sheds project continues to increase membership. Improved lighting has been installed in the Elephant House and the group have continued to improve and decorate the space and increase the range of tools and machinery available. The group have constructed 10 benches and 5 planters for the park and have undertaken fencing repair work in the park.

SHED's Green Shoots therapeutic Garden Project, started in January with 3 volunteers working on clearing and establishing a community garden in the 'secret garden' by Dingly Dell cottage to allow the more vulnerable or socially isolated to volunteer to in a supported environment This project will run for 10 weeks with volunteer support from MVCP funded externally.

Marketing and Publicity

A website www.cobtreemanorpark.co.uk has been designed and the content written. It is due to go live by the end of January.

Cobtree Manor Park now features in the 'Best Places in Kent' website.

Coverage of the half-term craft activities appeared in the Kent Messenger.

Kent Life Attraction

There have been some issues regarding the pumps that control sewerage on the site, these are currently being investigated with by Planning Solutions the operators of the site.

The operators had a good summer and continued to install new elements at the site including Hawk and Meercat displays, a land train and refitting the marque

to allow for a greater variety of undercover events. As well as this they have resurfaced paths and roadway to allow for better access, cleared further areas of the car park and installed heating into the oast house all of which help the site to operate more efficiently.

Cobtree Manor Golf Course

The Golf Course saw a 14% increase in roundage in the third quarter of the year compared to the same period in 2016.

The tender process has been completed for the golf course, as per the email sent to Committee members on 10th October 2016. The tender resulted in Mytime winning the 20 plus 5 year contract. This contract will start in April 2017. To allow for this a six month extension was negotiated with the current contractor at a cost of £50,000 as per committees previous decision.

The first draft of the management agreement has been sent to Mytime and further meetings to finalise this agreement are scheduled to take place.

Cycle Path Update

At the last meeting it was reported that it was agreed that the cycle path project would be extended along the River Medway from Allington Lock and across the Forstal Road Field, and join Forstal Road opposite Cobtree Manor Park. This would enable the park to be the start of this cycle trail which will go along the River Medway to Barming Bridge, and will result in increased visitors to the park and visitor centre. It was agreed that the cost of extending the path from Allington Lock to Forstal Road would be met by the project but there was no budget for the Forstal Road crossing which had been costed at £30,000. At the last CMET meeting it was agreed that the Cobtree Trust would be approached about funding.

Cllr McLoughlin and Jason Taylor have met with the Cobtree Trust and they have indicated that they are not interested in contributing towards the road crossing, as they have larger aspirations for a railway on the Cobtree Estate and that this would deal with the issue of crossing the road.

Jason Taylor also approached Maidstone Leisure Trust, who run Maidstone Leisure Centre, but this also met with a negative response.

Works to the cycle path along the river to Forstal Field is now nearing completion and there is a risk that the path will not be extended further until the road crossing is in place.

Agenda Item 9

Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee

26th January 2017

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Café Update

Final Decision-Maker	Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee
Lead Head of Service	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jason Taylor – Parks and Leisure Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Boxley

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. The Committee is asked to note the contents of Visitor Centre/Café Update.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

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

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	26 th January 2017

Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Café Update

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The information in the report is to update the committee on the performance of the Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre as agreed at the Committees 3rd August 2016 meeting.

1.2 Within this report is a table which shows the financial performance of the Visitor Centre/ Café since it opened in August 2015.

1.3 Appendix 1 gives an update of the Cobtree Manor Park Café Business Review which initially took place in July 2016. It details the perceived problems at the time and the remedial action taken.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The Cobtree Manor Visitor Centre/ Café opened in August 2015, and has been operational for 18 months.

2.2 The financial performance of the café and visitor centre is included in the report on the Cobtree Manor Estate Financial Position elsewhere on this agenda. The table below is taken from that report shows the full year budget net expenditure for the café/visitor centre of £72,940, but the forecast outturn is now predicting a net expenditure of £94,670, which is £21,370 greater than the budget.

Cobtree Visitor Centre / Café	Budget Year to Date	Actual Year to Date	Variance	Budget Full Year	Forecast Outturn Year End	Variance	2015/16 Outturn
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Employee costs	73,280	97,413	-24,133	98,710	120,000	-21,290	93,183
Running Costs	118,050	126,394	-8,344	159,560	170,000	-10,440	63,180
Set-up Costs	0	0	0	0	0	0	33,515
Income from sales	-180,530	-196,505	15,975	-220,000	-230,000	10,000	-98,662
Rechargeable costs	26,000	26,000	0	34,670	34,670	0	1,450
Total	36,800	53,302	-16,502	72,940	94,670	-21,730	92,666

2.3 Below is a breakdown of the month on month café/ visitor centre costs and income from when the facility opened to the current time

	Salaries	Agency Staff costs	Total Staff costs	Catering Provision costs	Staff & Catering Provision costs	Average Service costs	Total costs	Sales (Income)	Outcome
Aug-15	2392	5719	8111	4709	12820	2844	15664	-13591	2073
Sep-15	3822	6485	10307	6562	16869	2844	19713	-16349	3364
Oct-15	3179	9883	13062	8766	21828	2844	24672	-18972	5700
Nov-15	2768	7725	10493	8471	18964	2844	21808	-8729	13079
Dec-15	3159	7779	10938	3949	14887	2844	17731	-9730	8001
Jan-16	2205	6344	8549	1314	9863	2844	12707	-8367	4340
Feb-16	3584	7727	11311	5029	16340	2844	19184	-12392	6792
Mar-16	6064	5191	11255	2625	13880	2844	16724	-14082	2642
	27173	56853	84026	41425	125451	22752	148203	-102212	45991
Apr-16	6185	5314	11499	8393	19892	3286	23178	-21027	2151
May-16	6403	2850	9253	6464	15717	3286	19003	-19805	-802
Jun-16	8024	2403	10427	11493	21920	3286	25206	-19818	5388
Jul-16	9632	854	10486	11704	22190	3286	25476	-39893	-14418
Aug-16	10674	3526	14200	7535	21735	3286	25021	-32848	-7827
Sep-16	12667	1348	14015	17293	31308	3286	34594	-21179	13415
Oct-16	10672	453	11126	15058	26184	3286	29470	-21605	7864
Nov-16	9726	47	9773	10162	19935	3286	23221	-10942	12279
Dec-16	7287	0	7287	3409	10696	3286	13982	-11888	2094
	81271	16795	98066	91511	189577	29574	219151	-199005	20145

2.4 Observations from this table are:

2.5 There is now less reliance on employment agency staff, which has resulted in a reduction in total staffing costs. Agency staff are now only used as a last resort to cover staff sickness.

2.6 Sales (income) has continually increased. Particularly when compared to the same months in 2015.

2.7 Service costs include utilities, waste disposal, cleaning, building maintenance, IT and equipment servicing. These are costs of running the whole visitor centre building not just the café.

2.8 The café is now attracting customers who only come to the park to eat. This not only results in café income but also increases car parking income.

2.9 Currently we are looking at ways to improve the speed that customers are served at busy times, by increasing the counter space to allow for self-service and a second till. It is hoped that this will include an outdoor serving hatch to reduce queuing inside the building.

2.10 Enclosed as Appendix 1 is the update of the Cobtree Café Business Review previously brought to this Committee for information.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 The committee could choose not to note the information contained in this report and Appendix 1, and do nothing, however the committee has requested regular updates on the Visitor Centre/ Café performance.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 It is recommended that the information in this report and Appendix 1 regarding the performance of the Café/ Visitor Centre is noted.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

5.1 The committee has previously resolved to receive regular updates on performance of the Café/ Visitor Centre.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

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

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objects and the corporate priorities of the Council.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Risk Management	Risks to running the estate are dealt with in the annual Estate Risk Management Report.	
Financial	Financial risks are considered in the ongoing finance updates.	Cobtree Finance Officer
Staffing	No implications.	
Legal	No implications.	Deputy Head of the Legal Partnership
Equality Impact Needs	No implications.	

Assessment		
Environmental/Sustainable Development	No implications.	
Community Safety	No implications.	
Human Rights Act	No implications.	
Procurement	No implications.	
Asset Management	No implications.	

8. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix 1: Cobtree Manor Park Update Report January 2017

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

Appendix 1
Cobtree Manor Park Café Business Review January 2017 Update

Problem Area	Detail	Solution	Action taken	Further action	January 2017 update
1. Limited opening hours	Not enough staff to rota later closure, missing out on early evening trade.	Build pool of casual staff on contract and open later when weather is good.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplified recruitment process agreed with HR. • Continuous recruitment process with adverts in window. • Opening hours increased from 4pm to 5pm since mid-June. • Weather dependent opening until 6pm during summer holidays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular advert in local paper and Jobs in Kent. • Work with Mid Kent College to engage students from their Catering Courses as Casuals and apprentices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous recruitment has resulted in 4 appointments • 2nd recruitment drive in October resulted 2 successful appointments. • Pool of 10 casuals maintained
2. Reliance on agency staff	High cost of agency staff as compared to contracted staff and inconsistency in quality affecting bottom line.	Recruit more directly employed staff.	As 1 above	As 1 above	Decreased reliance month on month on Agency staff as casual pool has increased
3. Staff shortage at busy periods	Unable to cope with demand at	As 1 and 2 See 8	As 1 and 2	As 1 and 2	Second reactive point of sale for ice

Problem Area	Detail	Solution	Action taken	Further action	January 2017 update
	very busy times and losing some customers.		See 8	See 8	creams and soft drinks successfully reduced queues. A permanent second point of sale would allow sales of ice-creams, drinks, pre-packed sandwiches and confectionary to be sold. Extension of existing sales counter currently being investigated.
4. Not able to take card payments	Customers can only pay by cash and as a result a lot of business has been turned away.	Install merchant services machines.	Machines installed 19/07/16	Agreed minimum transaction i.e. £5 or card charge of 50p.	Card machine introduced mid-July 2016, now accounting for an average of 28% of payments
5. Recruitment advertising not effective	Not getting a lot of applications to job adverts.	Review advertising methods and focus adverts in most appropriate place/s.	Advert for Casual Catering Staff displayed in the Visitor Centre with application forms available.	Local papers. Council social media.	Adverts displayed on site has led to enquiries into vacancies

Problem Area	Detail	Solution	Action taken	Further action	January 2017 update
6. Recruitment process too long	Even with a simplified recruitment process staff have not taken up appointments due to the length of time taken to issue contracts	Investigate with HR feasibility of 'subject to references' which is standard in the industry.	As 1 above.	References by email.	Variable results with some staff in post within weeks and some over several months
7. Weather	The daily take correlates to the weather and in 2016 to date this has been poor.	Investigate indoor family activities that could be offered in the Visitor Centre on poor weather days			Discussions with child-minding network identified that the space would be used but would not increase business from this group. Under 5's paid activities eg music, yoga, art being researched.
8. Ice cream points of sale	Customers who wish to make quick purchases of e.g ice cream and soft drinks are being deterred by length of queues at busy periods.	Requires additional staffing and is time consuming.	Additional point of sale is now operational at busy periods.	Ice cream bike to be introduced during the summer holidays	Second point of sale inside the café proved effective but additional items to ice-creams and soft drinks i.e sandwiches, cakes, confectionary required. Extension

Problem Area	Detail	Solution	Action taken	Further action	January 2017 update
					of existing sales counter currently being investigated.
9. Inconsistent mark up on sales	Standard industry mark-up not being achieved on all lines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review pricing structure and increase where appropriate especially on low value items such as water and confectionary. Review portion control. 	Pricing review undertaken. This will be introduced when new EPOS management system is operational – target date 01/08/2016	New menu for school holidays.	Winter menu reduced and price rises calculated. Delays by Spa-EPOS full usability and providing training have led to a delay in implementing. Price increases. This is now close to being dealt with.
10. Menu too long and may not reflect average customer.	At busy times delivering the full menu can be challenging as everything is cooked to order.	Review menu and simplify/shorten to a standard menu with regular changing 'specials'.	Menu review undertaken. This will be introduced when new EPOS management system is operational – target date 01/08/2016	Carry out market research with MPC customers to refine offer.	EPOS analysis identified popular and non-selling items. Streamlining of offer to refine stocking and preparation processes.
11. Some customers unaware of takeaway service.	Takeaway service not promoted or visible as all food made to order.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put up signs to advertise takeaway service internally and externally. 		Consider vending machines from drinks and confectionary.	Takeaway signs and information on menu

Problem Area	Detail	Solution	Action taken	Further action	January 2017 update
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce fliers for local industrial area to increase telephone orders • Introduce pre-made sandwiches, salad boxes and children's packed lunches and an express till for takeaway. 			<p>Fliers produced but telephone fault not repaired until November to allow distribution of fliers.</p> <p>See 3</p>
12.Change float not sufficient	Currently operate with a £200 cash float imposed by Finance. Turning many customers away as don't have change exacerbated by inability to take card payments. Causing a high number of complaints. Staff wasting time going backwards and forwards to the bank for change.	Increase cash float to £1,000	£1,000 float agreed 12 July 17.	Monitor if sufficient once card payments enabled.	Float increased to £575 sufficient for change management. Regular change orders with Lloyd's bank entails one Manager bank visit per week

Problem Area	Detail	Solution	Action taken	Further action	January 2017 update
13.PR and Marketing	The café is not receiving enough exposure outside the park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop dedicated page on Visit Maidstone website. • Step up social media activity around offers and seasons. 			Website created but not yet launched. Marketing activity will increase substantially related to the website

Other ideas to increase trade and monitor trade
A. Free WI-FI for customers This is now operational
B. Add park footfall figures to daily takings record along with weather report Footfall recording 3 monthly therefore currently only delayed analysis possible
C. Introduce loyalty cards In conjunction with website
D. Refund car park ticket on sales over £? – tear off portion required on parking ticket This has not been implemented and is not seen as an issue. Customers are regularly visiting just for food without visiting the park.
E. Develop special offers and marketing campaigns i.e. OAP early dinner fish and chips; parent and toddler offers. In conjunction with website
F. Develop retail sales such as children’s toys, dog food, sun screen, CMP merchandise. Toys successfully sold during summer months
G. Develop catering for parties Several children’s parties catered for profitably, some community and business meetings booked. Catering menu produced and to be promoted on website.

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