

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 19 OCTOBER
2017**

Present: Councillors Cox, Mrs Gooch, McLoughlin (Chairman)
and Mrs Wilson

24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Perry.

25. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

26. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman agreed to take an urgent update to Item 13. Cobtree Visitor Centre Update Oct 2017. The update gave information on the performance of Kent Life, which was part of the Cobtree Estate. The reason for urgency was that the information was not available at the time of the publication of the agenda.

27. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

28. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members and Officers.

29. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

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

RESOLVED: That the items in Part II of the agenda be taken in private due to the possible disclosure of exempt information.

31. MINUTES (PART I) OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JULY 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes (Part I) of the meeting held on 20 July 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed.

32. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

33. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (IF ANY)

There were no questions from members of the public.

34. FINANCIAL POSITION UPDATE

The Senior Finance Manager updated the Committee on the financial position of the trust. It was noted that:

- The Llama house required urgent repairs to a hole in the wall which costed around £5,000, but this cost had been offset by additional car parking revenue.
- Planning Solutions – the operator for Kent Life – were due to pay their fee to the trust at the end of the year as the contract stipulated that fees must be paid yearly in arrears.
- Overall, the trust was progressing well against pessimistic financial projections due to the café performing well. The trust was projected to break even or return a small surplus at the end of the financial year.

The Senior Finance Manager explained that following an audit, a recommendation had been made that the trust implemented its own financial management system, separate from the Council's. Two systems had been evaluated – Sage and Aggresso.

In response to a question from a member of the Committee, the Senior Finance Manager confirmed that Aggresso was the system that was used by the council and was widely used across local government.

The Committee raised concerns about making the decision on the choice of financial management system before further information about recharges, firmer quotes from the software providers and the impact of outsourcing the operation of the café was available. The Committee noted that even with this information available, it may be beneficial to take this decision in 2018 once the outcome of the planned governance review was available.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the current financial position is noted.
- 2) That final approval to progress with a stand alone financial management system is delayed pending reports on re-charges and Service Level Agreements are received at the next meeting.

Voting: Unanimous

35. COBTREE ESTATE UPDATE OCTOBER 2017

The Leisure Manager provided an update to the Committee on the Cobtree Estate. The Committee noted:

- That turnover and footfall at Kent Life had both increased compared to last year.
- There had been two break ins at the Café, one in May and one in August, with £7,000 and £5,200 taken respectively. Both of these break ins happened after busy weekends. This issue would be resolved once DAGT had taken over the contract to run the café as they planned to introduce daily cash collections.
- As a result of the break ins, additional security measures had been introduced including changes to the shutters and safe in the cafe, and additional barriers placed at access points to the park.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Leisure Manager explained that quotes had been received to install a CCTV system in the café. However no results had been received for installing CCTV externally as the requirements depended on the storage that DAGT intended to install on site.

The Committee requested that a further report be brought back for consideration on security at the estate, including the park, car park and café. The report should consider:

- An assessment of current security arrangements in the park.
- An assessment of recommended security upgrades and details of their costs.
- Details of recommended CCTV upgrades, broken down to separate quotes for the different elements of the system (internal, external & car park).

In response to a question from the Committee, the Leisure Manager confirmed that he would request that the Council's Communications Team run a feature on Cobtree in a future edition of Borough Insight.

The Committee noted the improvements made to the Elephant House, which was where the Men in Sheds project was based. The Committee asked the Leisure Manager to circulate a costed list of improvements to the Elephant House that the Men in Sheds project had requested.

The Committee asked to place on record their appreciation to the staff that worked at Cobtree for their hard work in contributing to the positive reviews received for the Park on Tripadvisor.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the Cobtree Estate update are noted.

36. COBTREE VISITOR CENTRE UPDATE OCT 2017

The Leisure Manager presented an update to the Committee on the performance of the visitor centre. It was noted that the financial performance had been positive since April, and that the Café had retained its five star food hygiene rating.

The Committee expressed its thanks to Lizzie Buckingham and Helen Adolphus for their hard work at the Café.

The Committee requested that they meet with DAGT on site once they had taken over operation of the café. The purpose of this meeting would be for DAGT to inform the Committee of their future plans for the Café.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the visitor centre update are noted.

37. MINUTES (PART II) OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JULY 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes (Part II) of the meeting held on 20 July 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed.

38. DURATION OF MEETING

2.04 p.m. to 3.14 p.m.