

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Thursday 19 October 2017
Time: 2.00 pm
Venue: Cobtree Manor Golf Course, Sandling Road, Maidstone

Membership:

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

<u>AGENDA</u>	<u>Page No.</u>
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 (Part I) of the meeting held on 20 July 2017	1 - 6
9. Presentation of Petitions (if any)	
10. Questions and answer session for members of the public (if any)	
11. Financial Position Update	7 - 12
12. Cobtree Estate Update October 2017	13 - 22
13. Cobtree Visitor Centre Update Oct 2017	23 - 26

Issued on Wednesday 11 October 2017

**Continued
Over/:**

Alison Broom

Alison Broom, Chief Executive

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	
14. Minutes (Part II) of the Meeting held on 20 July 2017	Paragraph 3 – Financial/ Business Affairs	27

PUBLIC SPEAKING

In order to book a slot to speak at this meeting of the Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Trust Committee, please contact on 01622 602743 or by email to committeeservices@maidstone.gov.uk by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting. If asking a question, you will need to provide the full text in writing. If making a statement, you will need to tell us which agenda item you wish to speak on. Please note that slots will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

The reports included in Part I of this agenda can be available in **alternative formats**. For further information about this service, or to arrange for special facilities to be provided at the meeting, **please contact** committeeservices@maidstone.gov.uk or **01622 602743**. To find out more about the work of the Committee, please visit www.maidstone.gov.uk

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

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

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

6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

7. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

8. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There no Visiting Members.

9. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

10. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

11. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the item contained in Part II of the agenda be taken in private as proposed.

12. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 APRIL 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed.

13. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 MAY 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2017 be approved a correct record and signed.

14. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

15. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

16. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - CONTINGENCIES & RESERVES REPORT

The Senior Finance Manager (Client) presented a report on Contingencies and Reserves of the Trust.

The Committee noted that this was a follow up report from March 2017 which outlined the background to the current financial position and set out a future projection of resources that were likely to be available.

It was noted that the projection set aside £421,000 in the first five years to meet the costs of the proposed capital programme for the Café.

The Senior Finance Manager advised that in his opinion the current reserves of £150,000 were sufficient but the level would continue to be monitored.

The Committee were mindful that costs were continuing to rise and felt that they would prefer to see the contingency for unexpected events topped up to ensure that sufficient funds were maintained.

RESOLVED: That the allocation of future surpluses as outlined in Section 4 of the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement be approved.

Voting: For: unanimous

17. REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - STAFF RECHARGES REPORT

The Senior Finance Manager presented a report on Staff Recharges.

The Committee noted that the report set out details of the current recharges from the Council to the Trust for 2017/18 and the methodology used to calculate them.

The Senior Finance Manager advised that:-

- The figures set out in Appendix A to the report represented staff salaries along with an allocation of associated overheads such as office accommodation, telephones and computer charges.
- The charges would be reviewed in the Autumn as part of the Council's budget setting process and would be adjusted at the end of the year to reflect outturn figures.
- A separate financial management system was proposed for the accounts of the Trust. This would impact on the recharges as they would need to be taken out of the Council system and dealt with

separately.

- A further report would be brought forward once agreement had been reached on how the finances of the Trust would be dealt with.
- It was proposed that some form of Service Level Agreement should be set up to ensure any recharges to the Trust were accurate and reflected the level of service provided by the Council.

RESOLVED: That

1. The current recharges be noted and that the Committee requests that a further report be brought detailing how the increases have occurred.
2. That Officers be requested to work on a service level agreement to be progressed and completed by March 2018.

Voting: For: unanimous

18. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION

The Senior Finance Manager presented a report which summarised the 2016/17 year end outturn and the current financial position of the Estate as at 31st May 2017 which covered the activities at the golf course, Kent Life, the Manor Park and the Café/Visitor Centre.

It was noted that:-

- The accounts for 2016/17 stated that there was a net operating deficit of £77k which was mainly attributed to difficulties around the golf course contract.
- The accounts for 2017/18 forecasted a small surplus.
- Officers had looked at a standalone financial system for the Trust but it was not felt to be viable. However, it was felt that to set up a separate company on the Council's existing financial system would be the way forward.

RESOLVED: That the current financial position be noted.

19. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE MANOR ESTATE UPDATE JULY 2017

The Cobtree Manager presented the report updating the Committee on the operation of the estate.

The Committee noted that:-

- The Estate had been awarded the Green Flag.

- New security measures had been put in place following the break-in of the Visitor Centre/Café during the May bank holiday weekend.
- Two students from Hadlow College studying horticulture and conservation had been working with the Cobtree Ranger over May/June.
- Events in the park had been fully booked.
- The EPOS system in the Café was now working properly and an additional point of sale has been introduced.
- The Men in Sheds project continued to thrive with more Members joining. The problems with condensation in the Elephant House had led to them seeking funding for works to the roof from the Trust.
- The Communications Team were working on a redesign of the visitors survey for the café in readiness for the summer holidays.
- Car parking income continued to flourish.
- The new design for the car park was presented.
- The new management agreement and lease for the operation of the golf course had still not been completed. Officers were hopeful that the remaining issues would be resolved in the near future.
- The members of CMET were very keen to see a train on the estate and initial enquiries had been made with Kent Highways to look at the feasibility of going under the highway. Planning permission would also need to be sought.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the Estate Update be noted.
2. That the plans for the car park resurfacing be progressed.

Voting: For: unanimous

20. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE MANOR PARKS VISITOR CENTRE/CAFE UPDATE- JULY 2017

The Leisure Manager presented a report on the Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Café Update.

The Committee noted that:-

- There had been an increase in prices of 15% from 1st April 2017

- The staff rotas had been streamlined and agency staff were only used to cover emergencies such as staff sickness
- Staff had negotiated more competitive prices for goods
- The opening of a second point of sale at peak times had increased sales and reduced customer waiting times
- The menu had been refined
- The introduction of disposable plates, cups and cutlery at peak times had been successful

The Committee asked for their thanks to be conveyed to the staff at the Cafe for all their hard work.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Visitor Centre/Café Update be noted.

21. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reason specified, having applied the Public Interest Test:-

**Head of Schedule 12A
& Brief Description**

Exempt Report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development – External Café Tender Result – Cobtree Manor Country Park

Para 3 - Information re financial or business affairs

22. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT - EXTERNAL CAFÉ TENDER RESULT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development which provided a summary of the tender process undertaken in consideration of the appointment of an external catering operator at Cobtree Manor Country Park.

RESOLVED:

1. That a five year contract be awarded to the contractor as detailed in the exempt report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development for the operation of the Cobtree Manor Country Park Café.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement to negotiate the terms of the contract with the contractor as detailed in the exempt report.
3. That delegated authority be given to the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services to enter into the necessary contracts with the contractor as

detailed in the exempt report.

Voting: For: unanimous

23. DURATION OF MEETING

2.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.

**Cobtree Manor Estate
Committee**

19 October 2017

Cobtree Manor Estate Financial Position

Final Decision-Maker	Cobtree Manor Estate Committee
Lead Head of Service	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development
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 as at 30th September 2017 covering the activities at the golf course, Kent Life, the Manor Park and the Café/Visitor Centre, and updates the Committee on the progress made in establishing a separate financial management system.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the current financial position is noted.
2. That final approval to progress with a stand-alone financial management system is delegated to the Chairman in consultation with the Director of Finance & Business Improvement.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Cobtree Manor Estate Committee	19 October 2017

Cobtree Manor Estate Financial Position

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 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. The last few years have seen a number of significant financial pressures and issues, and it is important for the future of the Estate that these are addressed and monitored.
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2. CURRENT FINANCIAL POSITION

- 2.1 **Appendix A** shows a summary of the current financial position as at 30th September 2017, along with the full year budgets, and this section outlines the position for each of the areas of activity:
- 2.1.1 **Cobtree Golf Course** –The new contract with Mytime commenced on 1st April 2017. Responsibility for utility payments now rests with Mytime, as reflected in the reduction in running costs. Mytime have been invoiced for the contract sum due for 2017/18.
- 2.1.2 **Cobtree Manor Park** – Car parking income is continuing to exceed the forecasted sums, although there have been some additional maintenance costs incurred. There are no other issues to report at this stage.
- 2.1.3 **Kent Life** - There are no issues with regards to the Kent Life attraction.
- 2.1.4 **Café/Visitor Centre** –The current operational position discussed in more detail in the Cobtree Visitor Centre Report elsewhere on this agenda. However the café is currently performing significantly better than the budgeted figures.
- 2.2 **Overall position** - The current budget forecast for the end of the year is forecasting that the estate activities would show an overall deficit position of £43,680 for the year. Taking into account the forecast estimated investment income of £50,000 it would project resources increasing by £6,320 for 2017/18. However it should be noted that with the café currently performing better than the budgeted figures then the forecast deficit position for the estate activities should be reduced and could possibly show a surplus. As Members will be aware management of the café will shortly be passed to an external contractor so the budgets will need to be adjusted to reflect this.
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3. COBTREE ACCOUNTING SYSTEM

- 3.1 Members were updated at the July meeting on the progress made on establishing a separate financial management system for the Trust as

recommended by the external auditors.

- 3.2 An indicative quotation of £12,000 has been received to set up a separate system for Cobtree within the Council's existing financial management system (Agresso). The quote covers installation and set-up of both the system and associated invoicing and payment systems that need to run alongside it. There would then be an annual maintenance cost of £1,400 per annum for the invoicing and payment systems.
- 3.3 An alternative stand-alone system (Sage) was considered. This is a cloud-based system hosted by Sage. The cost of this system is £1,500 per annum, with training costs of £345. The system can be set up in-house, but if external assistance was required this would be at a cost of £1,195.
- 3.4 Whilst it provides similar functionality the main disadvantage of Sage is that in comparison to Agresso it does not provide an ideal solution for authorising and retaining copies of invoices.
- 3.5 The cost of the Agresso solution could be reduced by reducing the functionality of the system, for example leaving out the facility to make payments via the BACS system. However this would increase the amount of time finance staff would have to spend processing Cobtree payments, and this would be reflected in an increased recharge to the Trust.
- 3.6 It is proposed at this stage that the set-up of the Agresso system is progressed, subject to a firm quotation being received. It is recommended that final approval to progress be delegated to the Chairman in consultation with the Director of Finance & Business Improvement.
- 3.7 Whilst this is a significant cost it would provide a robust ongoing solution to the problems encountered using the current arrangements. Given that the financial position of the Trust going forward is more certain the cost would not impact adversely on the operations of the Trust.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 It is recommended that:

- i) The Committee note the contents of this report as this is good financial management practice.
- ii) The set-up of the Agresso system is progressed, with the final decision on proceeding delegated to the Chairman in consultation with the Director of Finance & Business Improvement. The establishment of a stand-alone financial management system would enable the finances of the Trust be managed in a more efficient and effective way.

5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

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

6. 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 and 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 new operations cost more than predicted or fail to generate sufficient income to cover the costs of running them estate.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Staffing	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	
Legal	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	Team Leader (Contracts and Commissioning)
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	
Equalities	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	
Crime and Disorder	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	
Procurement	There are no additional implications arising from this report.	

7. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix 1: Financial Position Summary 2017/18
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8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

APPENDIX 1

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE - FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 30TH SEPTEMBER 2017

Cobtree Golf Course	Budget for Year	Budget Year to Date	Actual Year to Date	Variance	2016/17 Outturn
	£	£	£	£	£
Running Costs	8,190	4,095	7,139	(3,044)	61,232
Additional Contract Charge	0	0	0	0	50,000
MBC Staff Recharges	25,950	12,975	12,975	0	27,579
Expenditure	34,140	17,070	20,114	(3,044)	138,811
Contract Income	100,000	100,000	100,000	0	103,750
Other Income	5,250	5,250	5,250	0	28,494
Income	105,250	105,250	105,250	0	132,244
Net Income/(Expenditure)	71,110	88,180	85,136	(3,044)	(6,567)
Payment to MBC (2/9ths of net figure)	15,800	19,600	18,920	(680)	(1,459)
Adjusted Net Income/(Expenditure)	55,310	68,580	66,216	(2,364)	(5,108)

Cobtree Manor Park	Budget for Year	Budget Year to Date	Actual Year to Date	Variance	2016/17 Outturn
	£	£	£	£	£
Employee costs	70,350	35,175	37,892	(2,717)	64,998
Running Costs	107,810	40,094	53,008	(12,914)	66,525
MBC Staff Recharges	37,980	18,990	18,990	(0)	67,056
Expenditure	216,140	94,259	109,889	(15,631)	198,579
Income - Car Parking	72,140	43,002	56,119	13,117	90,474
Income - Other	77,620	13,810	12,655	(1,155)	67,761
Income	149,760	56,812	68,774	11,962	158,235
Net Income/(Expenditure)	(66,380)	(37,447)	(41,115)	(3,669)	(40,344)

Kent Life	Budget for Year	Budget Year to Date	Actual Year to Date	Variance	2016/17 Outturn
	£	£	£	£	£
Running Costs	12,740	6,370	11,030	(4,660)	7,854
MBC Staff Recharges	7,120	3,560	3,560	0	3,533
Expenditure	19,860	9,930	14,590	(4,660)	11,387
Contract Income	50,000	0	0	0	55,451
Net Income/(Expenditure)	30,140	(9,930)	(14,590)	(4,660)	44,064

Cobtree Visitor Centre / Café	Budget for Year	Budget Year to Date	Actual Year to Date	Variance	2016/17 Outturn
	£	£	£	£	£
Employee costs	80,310	77,200	57,657	19,543	144,446
Running Costs	163,620	89,659	71,013	18,647	154,256
MBC Staff Recharges	16,920	8,460	8,460	0	14,291
Expenditure	260,850	175,319	137,130	38,189	312,993
Income from sales	198,100	128,488	167,164	38,676	237,127
Net Income/(Expenditure)	(62,750)	(46,832)	30,033	76,865	(75,866)

Surplus/(Deficit) on Estate activities	(43,680)	(25,628)	40,544	66,172	(77,254)
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Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee

17th October 2017

Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report October 2017

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

Executive Summary

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.

The estate update covers the period from when the Committee last met in July 2017.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. Note the contents of this Visitor Centre/Café update report.

Timetable

<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	17 th October 2017

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Cobtree Manor Visitor Centre/ Café first opened in August 2015.
- 1.2 The report covers the period from July 2017 to October 2017

Park

- 1.3 Maintenance of the park over this period covers summer and early autumn Works to the park include:
 - Shrubbery maintenance
 - Weed management
 - Tree works to dangerous and diseased treesA 'mystery shop' judging for the Green Flag Award took place in April and the park was awarded the flag for 2017/18.

Incidents

- 1.4 A break-in occurred in the early hours of Tuesday 15th August. The Visitor Centre was broken into via the office door. The safe and contents were dragged out by vehicle and taken from site. The building alarm activated and Police were in attendance within half an hour. A dog handling team tracked two vehicles to the Golf Course. Forensics attended the following morning. CCTV coverage of the incident has been reviewed by the Police.
- 1.5 It has been ascertained that entry to the park was not via the Cottage driveway adjacent to the Golf Course where boulders have been installed following the previous burglary and not via the main gates which remained locked. A means of entering the park via the Golf Course driveway through the woods has been identified.
- 1.6 Repairs to secure the building were undertaken the same day. An insurance claim is progressing to recover losses.
- 1.7 Additional security measures are being implemented these include:
 - A metal door and an electric metal shutter are to be installed over the office door.
 - The replacement safe will be repositioned within the building. The manufacturer has agreed to provide a replacement safe with only the cost of delivery and installation to be charged.
 - Selecta DNA has been applied to all equipment and notices and warning stickers applied.
 - Theft deterrent signs to be installed on the outside of the building.
 - The window shutter fixings are to be strengthened.
 - Further alarm trigger contacts are to be installed.
 - Vehicle deterrent measures will be installed in conjunction with the siting of the new compound for the new café contractor.
 - Bollards are to be installed on the Golf Course driveway path to prevent further vehicular access by that route.

A further assessment of CCTV provision has been undertaken with the recommendation that the system should be upgraded to an HD system and one camera should be repositioned. Further options have been examined and await quotations.

Events

- 1.8 Love Parks Week – there was enthusiastic uptake of the games and equipment provided for public use during the week. Two free drop-in arts and crafts sessions attracted about 30 participants for each activity. Five MVCP nature and wildlife events were all oversubscribed. Three drop-in arts and crafts sessions attracted between 18 and 32 participants per activity. Four different summer trails around the park attracted a total of 121 participants.

Community

- 1.9 The Men in Sheds project continues to thrive with increased membership. They are hoping to improve the building by seeking funding for:
- a) Roof insulation installation.
This is required in order to remedy the current roof condensation problem during the winter months.
 - b) Septic tank installation.
This is required to complete the installation of the flushing toilet facilities which the Shed members have been working on over the summer as part of the new rest room area.
 - c) Wood Store.
To stand alongside the Elephant House to contain donations of wood for future projects.

Marketing and Publicity

- 1.10 MBC Communications and Marketing are producing a design for interpretation panels for the corridor including a timeline and interactive nature themed panels. The Cobtree website is generating regular enquiries about the park facilities and events.

Visitor Numbers

- 1.11 The table below shows that in the first 3 quarters of 2017, there has been a 22.12% increase in visitor numbers compared to the same period in 2016.

2015	% on Quarterly previous year		2016	% on Quarterly previous year		2017	% on Quarterly previous year	
13163			15923			21652		
17474			15798			19574		
19891	50528	-16.15	18227	49948	-1.15	25676	66902	33.94
27093			22144			30554		
23254			29076			24952		
20472	70819	-10.03	22031	73251	3.43	25694	81200	10.85
27109			21043			31187		
28517			33192			37491		
22427	78053		19468	73703	-5.57	23675	92353	25.03
10581			15124			792		
12518			17460					
14041	37140	0	18138	50722	36.57			
236540	236540		247624	247624		241247	240455	
up till 2/10/2017								

Car park

1.12 Car park income is at £13,934 above target to 30/09/17.

The tender to get prices for the improvements to the car park are currently out to, this closes on 12th November 2017. Once tenders have been returned these will be brought back to this committee.

Café

1.13 The café was busy throughout the school summer holiday period taking an average of £1,599 per day over 45 days.

Refinements to operations saw queuing times minimised so that the second point of sale did not have to be operated frequently. Staffing levels were at a maximum of 5 staff at busy times.

Social Media Feedback

1.14 Through July and August there have been 41 reviews on Google. These range from 25 x 5 stars, 15 x 4 stars, 2 x 3 stars, 0 x 2 stars and 1 x 1 star.

An example of the comments left are shown below:

- Great park for the kids lots of different things to do. I find it pretty accessible for adults to help them. The service in the cafe is painful slow at times.
- Can't wait for the fantastic autumnal colours.
- Great place to take to the kids but recommend parking somewhere else and walking because the parking charges are quite high. Decent café and visitor centre.

- Good parking nice tea but more than that so much lovely space to enjoy
- Good for young and old.
- Reasonable price to park. Great picnic areas. Cafe. Play areas. Nice spot for the family.
- Very nice and peaceful place to contemplate life. Foods good.
- Lovely day out for all the family.
- Really nice park. Lovely play areas and great café.
- Our families favourite park.
- Parking charge a bit steep but park is nice for a walk or play.
- Lovely big park for kids and for dog walk in and around woods.
- Good park and café.
- Beware of overzealous civil enforcement officers with no common sense, giving out parking tickets..... Won't be visiting again.
- Ideal for children of all ages plenty to keep them occupied good food and coffee
- Affectionately known by my family as the park with the curly slide. Very good play area with a woodland area to explore when the kids are done playing. Good facilities on site, a small cafe, clean toilets and plenty of places to picnic. A firm family favourite. Just be sure to bring £1.50 for parking, flat rate lasts the day. Can get busy at the weekends and holidays.
- Plenty for children to do. Well maintained. Small car parking fee.
- Great for the family great for the dogs. Cheap parking. An amazing day out all round. Wish I'd found it before.
- Lovely park for good walks.
- A beautiful park so much to see and do. The kids park is fun for all ages. All in all a great day out for all ages.
- Lovely place. Great play ground and lovely grounds to walk around.
- There is the main area with a playground with a very nice cafe, and also a few path you can take into the woods at the back, overall, it's good for anybody.
- Plenty for the kids to do, recommended.
- Family love it here. Great for walks, games & picnics.

Between August and September there have been 21 reviews on Trip Advisor – 11 x 5*, 8 x 4*, 1 x 3*, 1 x 1*

- Although we live 200miles away, we visit Cobtree Manor Park regularly when visiting our 6yr old granddaughter. Its her favourite place for a picnic and to run off some steam!. Free entry, parking reasonable. Always visit the cafe, clean, spacioius and good value for money. Local people, you are lucky to have this amenity.

- The Cafe is in Cobtree Manor Park and has recently been rebuilt and improved. You can now sit inside. Can get a bit manic with only 1 till when busy but the staff are very helpful. Food looked OK.
- Yummy coffee and amazing hot chocolate
- My little ones love the chocolate and my coffee is super too. We come here a lot and love it here. Lots to do and walk and play and then have lovely drinks too. Great place School Holidays
- Love the cafe, fairly reasonably priced,
- I think my only criticism would be that the opening hours are not long enough during peak times. Sometimes I'd like to get dinner before heading home and putting the kids to bed.
- Other than that, food is good and good choices. Easy visit
- Lovely grounds loads of space easy parking though there is a charge .Cafeteria available. Lots of playgrounds to enjoy and woodland walks with little hides for the kids , ours love this bit , going on a bear hunt . Some very old trees and the site has an interesting history
- Took our Chocolate Labrador for a walk.
- We were told about Cobtree park & gardens so decided to take our 11 year old chocolate Labrador William there. Easy to park & it only costs £1.50 to park for the day. There's a adventure playground for children & a cafe that serves tasty hot chocolate. Couldn't believe how many dogs we met. William had a great time & made lots of new dog friends. Highly recommend.
- So peaceful
- We went to this lovely, peaceful park several times in the past few years. It was always a family picnic with ages from 90+ to 5 yrs. On each occasion the park has been litter free, with clean toilet facilities and sturdy picnic tables. As a family we all enjoyed the days we spent there. Last visited in Sept 2017 and as good as ever. Totally recommended for a family day out. Lots of space for ball games Tec. Hope you enjoy as much as we have over the years.
- Fun Day Out
- Really good day out for the children lots o fun things to play on and plenty of room to run around. Food selection good, my only concern was that the young lady preparing the food didn't wear gloves, I thought that was mandatory nowadays
- Oh I am addicted to their coffee !!!

- I go here so much with my mum ...its my favourite place for a coffee and a cake and a chat. Good prices ,lovely staff,lovely park. Lovely everything actually Thank you
- Nice setting
- Visited with my children this week and it was extremely busy, the play areas were heaving with children. This shows it's a popular place but it was off putting for myself. We took a short walk around and the area is really lovely. We will come back again when it's not school holidays to enjoy things more
- Re-visit confirmed how good this is for Families
- WE enjoyed our visit so much on the first occasion that we went back with our children and grandchildren.
- The whole area is lovely and is kept really well with even someone from Maidstone Council there all the time ensuring litter and bins are kept clear. The children's play equipment is excellent and suitable for youngsters to enjoy in a safe yet parkland environment.
- There is a good cafe and plenty of permanent picnic tables.
- Families take outside chairs etc and have plenty of room to sit and enjoy the park. There is a good walk marked out and a large car park (Small charge).
- Why on earth would you spend a fortune on expensive theme parks when Maidstone has such a lovely area for children and families?
- Pleasantly surprised, Great for dog walking and they don't rip you off for a cuppa in the cafe
- Came here on Sunday morning with my partner, his daughter and her dog. It was a nice day and there were lots of people about. Parking is £1.50 for the day which is clearly spent on the upkeep of the park as it was immaculate. There are a few different walks to follow and we went out of the park and walked along the river for a bit too. Plaques tell you the story of Maidstone zoo which was once part of this site and the old elephant house still remains. There is a big children's play area and enough grass to play your own games if you wanted to. There is also a café which sells a range of food and drink at reasonable prices. Come here with a group of friends and children with a picnic as a nice cheap morning or afternoon out and alternative to Mote park
- Weather was good , nice clean park
- The weather was good so we wanted to be outside today and somewhere new.

- Arrived here and the parking was good at £1.50 for the whole day. The cafe was a good price to which again was nice to see where a coffee , tea and ice cream cost £3.50 so very reasonable.
- The park was very clean and there was a nice walk round that you could do . The play park is a nice size and modelled on the zoo apparently, but enough to keep the kids occupied.
- All in all a nice park that we would return to lovely park
- This park is surprisingly big and a great place to have a walk around, some links to the old zoo remain and a very nice café
- Very impressed
- Looking after 3 grandchildren teenager 14, a 10 year old and an 8 year old, they played in 'The Maidstone Zoo' (play area looks like an old fort) we looked for a bench available, so many, but we wanted to stay near the play area so put a blanket down . Lots for the kids to do around the park. The trails were also enjoyed, they found the elephant house, the lion,etc lots of sculptures, also identifying trees, and then of course an ice cream from the clean cafe, well organised, plenty of tables if you fancy something to eat, which looking at the menu, I wouldn't bother doing a picnic next time! Very fair pricing.
- Really Good
- Great Facilities although the Children's playgrounds could be bigger, lovely walks and great surroundings, a nice venue for a family afternoon out.
- Rubbish cafe
- Just had a coffee here but to wait 15 mins to be served with just 2 people in front only one person on counter on a busy Sunday afternoon looked at food prep area where someone was making ham salads handled meat then the salad stuff straight from packets and did not was toms or cucumber. no food hygiene gloves on either if you want food poisoning this is the place to come
- Busy busy
- Family and friends love it here! Great for everything! Dog walking, picnic, playground, restaurant! We visit frequently, nightmare to park sometimes as so busy!! Cheap a great way to entertain family though!
- Great countryside walks
- A great countryside space for walking, cycling, Horse riding, sculpture trail and nature trail. Good cafe, toilets and parking. Childrens play area and a Golf club Lovely place to spend some

time with plenty of open spaces. Good walks and play areas for the youngsters. The History that relates to the old Maidstone Zoo is very interesting.

Cobtree Manor Golf Course

1.15 The contract with the Mytime Active has now been completed and signed. Mytime are currently working on the final designs for the new club house, driving range and alterations to the golf course and will be presenting these at this committee meeting.

Kent Life Farm Attraction

1.16 Planning Solutions, the operators of Kent Life have had a very successful summer. Further information will be presented at the meeting.

2 AVAILABLE OPTIONS

The report is to note only.

3 PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

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

4 RISK

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

5 CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

Other than through social media no consultation has taken place since the last report.

6 NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

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.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Financial	Financial risks are considered in the ongoing finance updates.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Equalities	No Implications	

8 REPORT APPENDICES

None

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

**Cobtree Manor Estate Charity
Committee**

17th October 2017

Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Café Update. October 2017

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

Executive Summary

The information in this report is to update the committee on the performance of the Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Cafe as agreed at the Committee Meeting on 3rd August 2016 meeting.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That it notes the contents of this Visitor Centre/Café Update.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	17 th October 2017

Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Café Update. October 2017

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 The Cobtree Manor Visitor Centre/ Café first opened in August 2015.

1.2 Below is a breakdown of the month on month costs and income from opening to 30 September 2017.

1.3

	Salaries	Agency	Staff Total	Cater Prov	Staff+Prov	Av. Servs	Total Costs	Sales	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	4118	10521	6464	16985	3286	20271	-19805	466
Jun-16	8024	2403	10427	11493	21920	3286	25206	-19818	5388
Jul-16	9632	854	10486	11704	22190	3286	25476	-36492	-11016
Aug-16	10674	3526	14200	7535	21735	3286	25021	-32848	-7827
Sep-16	12667	2133	14800	17293	32093	3286	35379	-21179	14200
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	3081	10368	3286	13654	-11888	1766
Jan-17	10828	0	10828	1151	11979	3286	15265	-10100	5165
Feb-17	6303	0	6303	5894	12197	3286	15483	-13935	1548
Mar-17	8424	0	8424	5171	13395	3286	16881	-14485	2396
	106826	18849	125674	103399	229073	39432	268505	-234124	34381
Apr-17	11498	0	11498	14595	26093	2389	28482	34384	-5902
May-17	7837	389	8226	8950	17176	2389	19565	22599	-3034
Jun-17	7881	118	7999	8237	16236	2389	18625	21724	-3099
Jul-17	9763	0	9763	8591	18354	2389	20743	27467	-6724
Aug-17	12952	210	13162	17595	30757	2389	33146	42536	-9390
Sep-17	7009	0	7009	7171	14180	2389	16569	18454	-1885
	56940	717	57657	65139	122796	14334	137130	167164	-30034

1.4 For clarity in the total column in the right hand column of the table positive figures are shown in black and negatives in red.

1.5 The café was busy throughout the school summer holiday period taking an average of £1,599 per day over 45 days.

1.6 Lizzie, Helen and the team have worked extremely hard to keep the café running effectively, without their passion and dedication the café could not have performed anywhere near the level that it has.

- 1.7 Refinements to operations saw queuing times minimised so that the second point of sale did not have to be operated frequently.
- 1.8 Staffing levels were strictly managed with a maximum of 5 staff even at busy times.

Health and Safety

- 1.9 On 8th August the café received an inspection by the Environmental Health Food and Safety team. Food hygiene and safety practices and procedures, good order of the building and equipment, management procedures and compliance were all assessed and the café received the highest 5* rating.

Café Contractor

- 1.10 As the Committee is aware the catering at Cobtree Manor Park is being externalised from 30th October 2017 to DAGT, along with Mote Park and Maidstone Museum Cafes.
- 1.11 The handover is going well and officers recently visited the café at Alice Holt in Hampshire, which is a Forestry Commission site where DAGT operate the catering offer. The whole catering operation was very well set up and extremely efficiently run.
- 1.12 There will be a delay with the TUPE transfer of staff which cannot take place until February 2018 as this is the earliest that DAGT can be admitted to the KCC pension scheme. Arrangements have been made for the staff affected to remain as MBC employees, seconded to DAGT until this time.
- 1.13 Regular meetings with the staff at all of the cafes are taking place to ensure they are kept updated on the transition arrangements.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The report is to note only.

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the information in this report regarding the performance of the Café/ Visitor Centre is noted.

4. RISK

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

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.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Financial	Financial risks are considered in the ongoing finance updates.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Equalities	No Implications	

8. REPORT APPENDICES

None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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