

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 17 JANUARY  
2019**

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

**Also Present:** Mr Roger Hext, Cobtree Charity Trust  
Ltd

49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies were received by Councillor Cox.

50. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Mrs Wilson was present as a substitute for Councillor Cox.

51. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

52. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

53. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

54. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

55. EXEMPT ITEMS

**RESOLVED:** That all items be taken in public.

56. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 DECEMBER 2018

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the Meeting held on 18 December 2018 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and signed subject to the following amendment to Minute Item 47 (Cobtree Park Car Park Improvement Works):

- Deletion of the words 'the more they could compete on price' and the insertion of 'the higher the overheads'.

57. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

58. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

59. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION REPORT

Mr Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager (Client) presented his report which summarised the current financial position of the Estate as at 30 November 2018.

The Committee noted that there would be a surplus by the end of the financial year.

It was noted that:-

- Planning Solutions had been invoiced for the first instalment of their 2018/19 fee.
- Contractors were providing quotes for the beetle infestation in the Play Barn.
- The Café Contractor, DAGT had paid their second quarter rental but discussions were still ongoing regarding the staff recharges during the transition period. Officers were confident that this would be resolved by the end of the financial year.
- Following concerns raised by the Committee the Chairman was due to meet with the Council's VAT Officer to gain clarity on what the Trust is eligible to pay VAT on.

In response to questions from Members, Mr Holland advised that:-

- Capital costs would remain on the balance sheet as this related to land and would not depreciate.
- Due to the recharges not being finalised, the figures shown in the report were for 17/18 but would be updated for the next meeting of the Committee.
- The Sage accounting system was scheduled to be in use in time for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019.
- The budget for the car parking income included the increase in the car park charges.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. The current financial position be noted.
2. The draft budgets for 2019/20 be agreed and that a revised set to take into account the actual recharges would be produced for the March meeting.
3. The progress to date with the separate financial management system be noted.

Voting: Unanimous

60. ACCOUNTS 2017/18

The Committee considered the report of Mr Paul Holland which summarised the main points from the audit undertaken on the Annual Report and Financial Statements by the UHY Hacker Young, the appointed external auditors to the Trust.

It was noted that:-

- The total funds of the Trust had reduced slightly.
- The Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA) included a deficit of £54,825 which reflected the writing off of the sum due from Mytime, the Golf Course Contractor.
- The SOFA also reflected a small reduction of £17,922 in the value of the Charifund investment and an upward movement of £35,194 in the value of fixed assets held.
- The final value of the write-off of the Mytime debt within the accounts had reduced from £48,125 to £24,062 which reflected the value to the Trust of the in-kind services to be provided by Mytime as part of the settlement of the disputed sum.
- The accounts included a debtor for the VAT due at the end of March 2018.

In response to comments from Members, Officers undertook to:-

- Request that the Auditors remove the reference to Kent County Council under the 'governing object section'.
- Include the 17/18 visitor figures for the Cobtree estate on Page 4 of the accounts.
- Discuss with Planning Solutions the use of 'active greys, recently retired' under target audiences for future visitor offers and request that they reconsider the terminology as Members felt this was

offensive and not meaningful.

- Amend 'Tyland Farm' to 'Tyland Barn' and check why this does not have a valuation figure against it.
- Check whether the Gate Lodge and other properties on the estate are under a repairing lease.
- Request Property Services provide an annual condition survey report to the Committee on the properties that are leased.

In response to an enquiry by a Member, Mr John Foster, the Interim Head of Regeneration and Economic Development advised that the planning application for the new Golf Course buildings was due to be considered by the Planning Committee on 21 February 2019.

**RESOLVED**: That

1. The Report and Financial Statement for 2017/18 be approved and submitted to the Charity Commission subject to the changes identified by the Committee being made.
2. The Letter of Representation, as amended by the Committee, be approved.

Voting: Unanimous

61. MANAGEMENT LETTER 2017/18

Mr Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager (Client) presented his report which brought to the attention of the Committee various matters that had arisen from the external auditor's audit of the Report and Financial Statements.

**RESOLVED**: That the contents of the Management Letter and the proposed course of action from officers be noted.

62. COBTREE ESTATE UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of Ms Lizzie Buckingham, Cobtree Manager which provided an update on the day to day work of the Estate.

Ms Buckingham provided an update on events and maintenance issues that had taken place during the period from November 2018 to January 2019.

The Committee noted that:-

- The Men in Sheds Group continued to grow in numbers.
- The vehicle counter failed to record vehicle movements after 11 November 2018 and the figures recorded up until that date did not

appear to be credible either. The manufacturer had been contacted to see if they could resolve the issue.

- Pre-start meetings had been held with the successful contractor who would be carrying out the car park improvements and a start date had been set for the end of January.
- Another break-in at the Café/Visitor Centre had occurred on 1 December 2018. Officers advised that in an attempt to deter further incidences, an assessment of all potential access points had been undertaken and large boulders had been put in place to prevent vehicular access.
- A number of well-being events were being planned by the Golf Course.
- A third contractor had visited the Play Barn and was confident that the works to treat the beetle infestation could be carried out without the removal of the soft play area equipment. Officers were awaiting a quotation.

Mr Roger Hext, on behalf of the Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd, requested that Members and Officers attend a meeting with members of the Trust to discuss the latest figures that they have obtained for the Cobtree Railway project.

**RESOLVED:** That the contents of the report be noted.

### 63. COBTREE MANOR PARK STAFF RESTRUCTURE

Ms Lizzie Buckingham presented her report on proposals for an increase in the establishment at Cobtree Manor Park.

The Committee noted that the current team consisted of the Cobtree Manager (1 FTE) and a Cobtree Ranger (1 FTE). Staff cover for park keeping, patrolling and visitor assistance during school holidays and evenings was brought in from the Council's grounds maintenance team.

In addition, security services for opening and closing the park were undertaken by an external contractor.

The proposed new structure provided an additional full time Ranger and an Apprentice. The proposals improved the level of service to visitors and provided enhanced landscape management.

As a result of the restructure the services of the external security contractor were no longer required.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. The appointment of one additional Cobtree Ranger be approved.

2. The recruitment of a Cobtree Apprentice be approved.

Voting: Unanimous

64. DURATION OF MEETING

2.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.