

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL
COBTREE MANOR ESTATE COMMITTEE

11th February 2015

REPORT OF THE COBTREE OFFICER

Report prepared by Joanna Joyce

1. Cobtree Manor Park Operational Costs and Car Park charges

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the updated operational costs for Cobtree Manor Park and the management of the car park charging regime within the park.

1.2 Recommendation of the Cobtree Officer

It is recommended that:

1.2.1 The contents of the Cobtree Manor Park Operational Costs as further updated and set out at **Exempt Appendix A** are noted.

1.2.2 That the car park is run in accordance with the proposal as set out in **Appendix B**.

1.2.3 That car parking option A (shown in **Appendix B**) is agreed and the car parking charge is set at £1.50 per day and £40 for an annual season ticket.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 At the December 2014 meeting, the Committee requested further detail of the Cobtree Manor Park Operational Cost. That detail has been added and is set out in **Exempt Appendix A**.

1.3.2 Following discussion with the council's Parking Services Manager the car parking operation proposal was produced, and this is shown in **Appendix B**. Parking services operate car parks in Maidstone Borough giving additional benefits to going with this proposal. Cash collection, machine repairs, maintenance and enforcement can all be brought in with the existing operation giving a saving to the charity. This system is already proven and will therefore be straightforward to introduce.

The council's parking services team is able to provide a service that covers the whole installation and operation of the new car park.

- 1.3.3 A pay and display system with 3 machines ensures there is back up should one fail.
- 1.3.4 The Committee has already resolved that a car parking charge should be introduced. Option A is considered the best as this continues to ensure that the park remains affordable, whilst providing sufficient income to cover the cost of running the park, ensuring it is self sufficient.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

- 1.4.1 The Committee could choose not to note the contents of the operational costs set out at **Exempt Appendix A**. This is not recommended as the Committee have previously resolved to request further detail on this point.
- 1.4.2 Another method of operation for the car park could be chosen. This is not recommended as the proposed option of using the council's Parking Services team means that any future issues can easily be resolved as they will be internal to the council.
- 1.4.3 Option A enables the costs of running the park to break even. Alternatively the Committee could choose to go with Option B and set the charge at £1 with a £30 season ticket. This is not recommended as the park would still be reliant on subsidy from other parts of the estate. Given the financial uncertainty for the golf course this is not considered to be in the best interests of the charity as it would leave it exposed to increased financial risk.

1.5 Impact on Charity Objectives

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.”

1.5.1 It is the object of the Charity to use its assets for the benefit of the people of Maidstone; therefore parking charges should be affordable and not excessive, and should always be reasonably priced when compared with similar facilities locally.

1.5.2 The charity is required to ensure its assets are maintained and that the estate as a whole does not run a loss, it is therefore important that the operational costs of the park are carefully monitored and that income is generated to cover this where possible.

1.5.3 It is considered Option A meets both requirements set out in 1.5.1 and 1.5.2.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 There is a risk that the operational costs of running the park will not be covered by the income generated under the new operational cost model. As the park currently makes a loss any increase in income will decrease the dependency on subsidy from the rest of the estate. It has been agreed that the initial agreement for 5 years will be subject to an annual review by the Committee with an option for the Charity to terminate the agreement if the conditions of the contract are not being met.

1.6.2 There is a risk that the introduction of parking charges could lead to bad publicity amongst park users. In other parks where this has happened there has only been a short term effect. Key to reducing any problems will be ensuring that charges are always proportionate and similar to other local country parks, as well fully advertising that all money raised will go back into the running of the park.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

- 1. Financial
- 2. Staffing
- 3. Legal
- 4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment

x
x
x

- 5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
- 6. Community Safety
- 7. Human Rights Act
- 8. Procurement
- 9. Asset Management

X

1.7.2 The financial implications for the scheme are set out in the appendices.

1.7.3 The committee has already agreed to the additional staffing required to run the park. The implications on staff with reference to the operation of the car park and visitor centre are set out in **Appendix B**.

1.7.4 A parking order will need to be introduced, and the legal team will need to undertake the appropriate arrangements and discussions with the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited (CCTL) as to how best to enact this order given CCTL’s funding of the cost of constructing the visitor centre.

1.7.5 The pay and display machines will have maintenance requirements which are set out in **Appendix B**.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

Exempt **Appendix A** – Cobtree Manor Park Operational Costs.

Appendix B - Cobtree Manor Park Car Parking Proposal.

1.8.2 Background Documents

Record of the decision of the Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee on 22 December 2014 on the future management of Cobtree Manor Park and the Visitor Centre/Café.

IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?

Yes

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

.....9th January 2015.....

This is a Key Decision because: The overall operation of the park could result in income generation greater than £250,000.

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Wards/Parishes affected: Cobtree Manor Park is in Boxley Ward and Parish.