

## Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report October 2017

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

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	17 <sup>th</sup> 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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, spaciou 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.

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## **2 AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

The report is to note only.

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## **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.

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## **4 RISK**

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

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## **5 CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

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

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## **6 NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

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

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## 7 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Sign-off</b>
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objects and the corporate priorities of the Council.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
<b>Risk Management</b>	Risks to running the estate are dealt with in the annual Estate Risk Management Report.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
<b>Financial</b>	Financial risks are considered in the ongoing finance updates.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
<b>Equalities</b>	No Implications	

## 8 REPORT APPENDICES

None

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## 9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None