

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES (PART I) OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 25
JANUARY 2018**

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

Also Present: Mr Bernard Mee, Cobtree Charity Trust
Ltd

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Cox and Mrs Gooch.

40. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

41. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman agreed to take an urgent oral report to be taken in private which related to an uprated power supply at Cobtree Manor Visitor Centre/Café. The reason for urgency was that a decision needed to be made as soon as possible and this information was not available at the time of agenda publication.

42. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

43. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members and Officers.

44. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

45. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

46. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 OCTOBER 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed.

47. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

48. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

49. ACCOUNTS 2016/17

Mr Paul Holland, the Senior Finance Manager presented the Annual Report and Financial Statement which included the independent auditor's report.

The Committee noted:-

- The balance sheet as at 31 March 2017 showed net assets of £4.3m which had reduced from £4.5m previously and was a result of a number of movements, the most significant being the downward revaluation of the value of the golf course. The golf course had since been re-let and as a result of that the valuation was expected to increase.
- The current cash position of £100k was expected to rise to £215k.

Members were minded that they had previously undertook to start to repay some of monies back. Mr Holland stated that it would seem prudent to wait until the final trading figures were available at year end and then assess the situation.

Mr Holland highlighted a couple of changes that would be made to Page 6 of the accounts, which were as follows:-

Under Financial Review

- Under Financial Review and Investment Policy – the balance sheet shows net assets at 31 March 2016 – this should read **2017**
- The words 'Golf Course' should be inserted after Cobtree Manor Park in the last sentence of that section.
- Under Plans for Future Periods – in the last sentence it referred to a master plan, this should be 'capital programme'.

There had been an assumption made by the auditors that a disputed sum incurred by the contractor would be paid but it had not been entered into the debtors section. Mr Holland was requested to ask for an explanation

from the auditors as to why it had been handled in that way.

RESOLVED: That the report and financial statement for 2016/17 be approved and submitted to the Charity Commission subject to the Chairman being satisfied that the Committee's comments and alterations have been incorporated.

Voting: Unanimous

50. EXTERNAL AUDIT MANAGEMENT LETTER 2016/17

Mr Paul Holland, the Senior Finance Manager presented a report on the External Auditor's Management Letter. The purpose of the letter was to bring matters of interest to the Trustees. However, it was noted that there had been no new recommendations made as a result of the 2016/17 audit.

However, the Committee noted that the External Auditors had continued to strongly recommend that the Council set up the charity's own accounting records. Mr Holland advised that this would be a relatively easy process to undertake.

Members were concerned after reading the comments under Item 6 – Status of Audit Issues Raised in Prior Years about the legal status of the Committee and requested Mr Holland to seek legal advice in relation to the Members' limited liability and bring a report back.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Committee noted the contents of the Management Letter and the proposed courses of action from Officers.
- 2) That the Senior Finance Officer be requested to seek legal advice in relation to the Members' limited liability and bring a report back.

Voting: Unanimous

51. REAPPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

Mr Paul Holland presented a report on the re-appointment of external auditors to the Charity.

RESOLVED: That UHY Hacker Young be appointed external auditors to the Charity for the financial years 2017/18 and 2018/19.

Voting: Unanimous

52. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION

Mr Paul Holland, the Senior Finance Manager, presented a report on the current financial position of the Estate as at 30 November 2017.

The Committee noted that the overall budget forecast for the estate activities would show an overall deficit position of £27,250 for the year. However, taking into account the estimated investment income of £50,000, it would project resources increasing by £22,750 for 2017/18.

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

- Income for the estate would remain about the same even though the Café would be operated by a private Contractor as the Council would receive 8% of their turnover.
- Mytime, the Contractor for the Golf Course, would be invoiced quarterly in advance rather than annually. Mr Holland committed to confirming with Members once this arrangement was in place.
- He would investigate whether it would be feasible to move invoicing Kent Life to quarterly rather than a year in arrears and would advise Members what sums had been paid to date.

RESOLVED: That the current financial position be noted.

53. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE UPDATE JANUARY 2018

Mrs Elizabeth Buckingham updated the Committee on the day to day work on the Estate and the issues that affected its management.

Cobtree Manor Park

Maintenance of the park over the autumn and winter period included shrubbery maintenance and tree works. An application had been submitted for Green Flag status for 2018/19.

Various events had been organised including three Autumn and Halloween themed drop in craft sessions and a Santa 5km course.

The Men in Sheds project continued to thrive and was looking to improve the building and facilities by seeking funding for the roof insulation and septic tank installation.

The Committee was keen for work to progress on the Elephant House and requested that Mrs Buckingham obtain copies of the quotations for works from the Men in Sheds Group in order that a decision could be made on a contribution to the work from the Cobtree Manor Estate Trust Committee.

Visitor Numbers – There had been a healthy increase in visitors in 2017 in the Park but a slight decrease in numbers at the Golf Course due to the wet weather.

Car Park – The car park income remained healthy, being above target at year end.

Incidents – There had been a number of break-ins at the Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre and the Elephant House.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report be noted.

54. COBTREE CAFE VISITOR CENTRE UPDATE JANUARY 2018

Mr Jason Taylor, the Leisure Manager, presented a report which updated the Committee on the performance of the Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Café.

The Committee noted that whilst the visitor figures for the Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Café were down in December, income had risen.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the report be noted.

55. COBTREE MANOR PARK CAR PARKING IMPROVEMENTS AND CHARGING

Mr Jason Taylor, the Leisure Manager, presented a report which set out the proposed improvements to the car park at Cobtree Manor Park.

The Committee noted that the car park was very wet in the winter and very dusty in the summer and marking out of the bays had proved difficult.

Mr Taylor drew attention to the Exempt Appendix to the report which contained details of the successful bid for the car park improvement works. He emphasised that an additional £10,000 had been included to carry out the extra works to the bottom car park and another £10,000 to appoint a Project Manager to oversee the works.

The Committee was asked to consider increasing the car park charges following the completion of the car park improvement works. It was felt that the charges should be increased consistently and that the Council should be encouraged to align Mote Park car parking charges at the appropriate time.

Members expressed concern that should the improvement works be approved, the Charity's reserves would be low. However, Mr Holland suggested that the capital payments to the Council could be made in instalments rather than all at once. Mr Holland was requested to provide a cash flow statement to all Members of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Car Park Improvement works to proceed at a cost of £214,500 be agreed, including £10,000 to carry out the extra works to the bottom car park and £10,000 to appoint a project manager to oversee the works.
- 2) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance and

Business Improvement to award the contract to the successful contractor detailed in Exempt Appendix 3 to the report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development.

- 3) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services to enter in the necessary contracts with the contractor.
- 4) That the daily car parking charge be increased from £1.50 to £2, and the annual residents season ticket price from £40 to £50 upon the completion of the car park improvement works.

Voting: Unanimous

56. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That the 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 and
Brief Description**

Cobtree Manor Park Visitor
Centre/Cafe Security Review

7 – Information re Crime

Cobtree Manor Park Visitor
Centre/Café – Power Supply

3 – Information re business/
financial affairs

57. COBTREE MANOR PARK VISITOR CENTRE SECURITY REVIEW

Mr Jason Taylor, the Leisure Manager, presented an exempt report on the actions taken and proposed to improve the security at Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre following a number of break-ins.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the works as detailed in the exempt report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development be approved at a cost of £9,800.
- 2) That the installation of measures to protect the vulnerable access points around the Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre, as detailed in the exempt report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development be approved at a cost of £7,506.

Voting: Unanimous

58. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE VISITOR CENTRE/CAFE - POWER SUPPLY

The Committee considered the urgent oral update of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development which related to commercially

sensitive information and should be taken in private.

RESOLVED: That a capital cost be authorised of £23,000 to fund the installation of an uprated power supply for Cobtree Manor Park Café as detailed in Part II of the minutes.

Voting: Unanimous

59. DURATION OF MEETING

2.30 p.m. to 4.45 p.m.