

Kent Life Play Barn Timber Treatment Work

Final Decision-Maker	Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	Head of Regeneration & Economic Development - Dawn Hudd
Lead Officer and Report Author	Leisure Manager - Mike Evans
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Boxley

Executive Summary

This report provides the Committee with information on a beetle infestation in the Play Barn building at the Kent Life visitor attraction and seeks approval for budgetary spend to treat the timbers, which will protect the structure and the children and adults who use it.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. Budgetary spend of £8,995 + VAT = £10,794 is approved for works in the Kent Life Play Barn to treat the timbers and remove wood boring beetle
2. Budgetary spend of up to £1,000 + VAT is approved to cover the cost of any storage of equipment required whilst the works are carried out.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	7 November 2018

Kent Life Play Barn Timber Treatment Work

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Kent Life, the rural farm life attraction on the Cobtree Manor Estate, is operated by Planning Solutions on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council. It has seen increased visitor numbers in recent years. Kent Life features a number of historic and listed buildings, for which the Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee is responsible as set out in the lease agreement.
- 1.2 The Play Barn at Kent Life is an old, timber-framed former aisled barn with weather-boarded external walls and a thatched roof. It houses a soft play climbing frame, which fills the available space, a café kiosk and a small seating area.
- 1.3 The Play Barn is a key feature of the Kent Life visitor attraction. The soft play climbing frame is a popular aspect of the Kent Life site as it can be used in all weathers. Its café serves drinks and snacks to visitors.
- 1.4 Kent Life, which is open seven days a week in November and December, is expecting high visitor numbers for the remainder of 2018. In January 2019 Kent Life closes between Monday and Friday and operates at weekends only. The staff use this time to plan in winter maintenance works before re-opening on weekdays at the end of February, to coincide with the half term holiday.

Beetle infestation

- 1.5 The presence of beetles in the Play Barn's timber frame was reported in summer 2018 by the Kent Life operators. There were visible holes in the wooden timbers and dust being produced by beetle activity.
- 1.6 Property Services commissioned replacement timbers be installed in place of badly-damaged timbers. This work was carried out earlier this year by Anglian Tectonics. Anglian Tectonics reported some other timbers which were showing signs of insect damage and recommended an investigatory survey be carried out on the whole barn. This survey was carried out by Anglian Tectonics and their timber report is available as Appendix 1.
- 1.7 Anglian Tectonics' timber report concludes the presence of two types of beetle which need to be treated by the application of aqueous insecticide and the application of a paste in to the timbers. The report recommends this as the best course of action given the use of the barn and the number of users it has.
- 1.8 Anglian Tectonics have provided a quote for the treatment works of this infestation, which is necessary to protect the Play Barn and the health of the children and adults who use it.

- 1.9 The quotation for works from Anglian Tectonics is attached as Appendix 2. The estimated cost is £8,995 + VAT and it is envisaged the total works will take three to four weeks.
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2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

Do nothing

- 2.1 Committee could decide to do nothing and not treat the timbers for the infestation. Doing so would save treatment costs, prevent disruptive work from being carried out and keep the Play Barn in continuous use through the winter months when indoor activities at Kent Life are vital for its weekend operation. Doing nothing is likely to result in the problem worsening which increases the risk of illness and suffering to Play Barn users and irreparable damage to the Play Barn structure. **This option is not recommended.**

Delay the treatment works and complete them at a later date

- 2.2 Committee could decide to complete the treatment works at a later date, for example in the 2019/2020 financial year. This course of action would keep the Play Barn in operation during the winter period and limit current spending. Delaying the treatment works could lead to the problem worsening in the meantime and increase the risk of health being negatively affected. Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee could also suffer reputational damage for not acting sooner.
- 2.3 Delaying the works beyond February 2019 will cause greater disruption to Kent Life. The venue returns to a seven days per week operation in late February 2019. From that point onwards the expected four-week closure will have a much greater impact on visitors and key performance indicator targets. Kent Life will operate seven days per week throughout 2019. The next time it operates a weekend-only pattern will be January 2020. **This option is not recommended.**

Authorise budgetary spend for treatment works to be carried out in January 2019

- 2.4 Treatment works are going to cause disruption to the Kent Life attraction and its visitors and will result in the Play Barn being closed for up to four weeks. The lengthy closure includes the removal of the soft play structure to access the timbers and time for the ambient chemical levels to subside to safe levels for barn users. This disruption is a necessary measure to keep visitors safe and to protect assets.
- 2.5 Completing these works in January 2019 addresses the problems caused by the beetle infestation, keeps people and assets safe and has the smallest possible impact on venue operations. **This is the recommended option.**

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that budgetary spend of £8,995 + VAT be approved for the treatment works to be carried out in January 2019.

3.2 This recommendation is made so that:

- Structural damage to the barn can be addressed and limited
- Structural damage is not exacerbated
- The cause of the problem can be eradicated
- Safety of visitors is protected
- Health of visitors is protected
- Disruption to the popular visitor attraction is minimised

Schedule of works

3.3 The Play Barn at Kent Life will be closed to visitors from Wednesday 2 January 2019 for a period of approximately three to four weeks. Works will include:

- Removal of the soft play structure and its storage
- Installation of scaffolding and equipment
- Chemical application and treatment
- Rest time for ambient chemical levels to subside
- Reconfiguration of the soft play structure

Outcomes

3.4 The Play Barn will be treated for the immediate infestation and protected against future infestations currently lying dormant. The Play Barn will be safe to use and operational again at the start of February 2019, in time for the half term holiday.

Financial impact

3.5 A closure including four weekends in January 2019 equates to a loss of eight business days. Under the terms of the current contract Maidstone Borough Council/Cobtree Manor Estate Committee is not liable for compensation of these costs and we are working closely with the Kent Life operators to minimise financial impact.

3.6 In addition to the quoted cost of £8,995 + VAT there may be additional costs for providing safe storage for the soft play structure and equipment once it is removed from the barn. Due to the VAT status of the charity the VAT payable of £1,799 cannot be reclaimed and will have to be borne by the Trust.

4. RISK

- 4.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. That consideration is shown in this report at paragraph 2.1 to 2.5. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 No formal consultation with user groups has taken place but conversations with the Kent Life operator's operations manager, Natalie Cox, indicate that January is the best time for these works to be carried out, despite the reliance on indoor activities at an attraction which is largely based outdoors.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 If Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee agrees to proceed with the recommended option the Leisure Manager, in conjunction with Property Services will proceed with this work.
- 6.2 Property Services will oversee the work and its successful completion. The contractor will work with the Kent Life operator to programme the exact start dates and monitor the completion of the works towards the agreed completion date.
- 6.3 Public communications regarding Play Barn closures made to attraction visitors will be co-ordinated by the Kent Life operators.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve the following corporate priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respecting the character and heritage of our borough• Providing a clean and safe environment• Ensuring there are good	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development

	leisure and cultural attractions	
Risk Management	The risks of the preferred option and the not preferred options are covered in sections 2.1 to 2.5.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Financial	Accepting the recommendations will demand new spending of £8,995 + VAT. Not progressing with this option increases the risks of a greater capital spend being required to address structural issues in the future	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Staffing	Accepting the recommendations will not have an impact on staffing	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Legal	Failure to accept the recommendations without agreeing suitable alternatives may place the Council in breach of the lease contract with the operator.	Leisure Manager
Privacy and Data Protection	No additional data will be held	Leisure Manager
Equalities	This will have no equality implications	[Policy & Information Manager]
Crime and Disorder	This will have no impact on crime and disorder	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Procurement	On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then follow procurement exercises for timber treatment works and repairs. We will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development & [Section 151 Officer]

8. REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix 1: Kent Life Play Barn Timber Report
 - Appendix 2: Kent Life Play Barn Timber Treatment Work Quotation
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