

Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee

Cobtree Manor Park Staff Restructure Report

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| Final Decision-Maker | Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee |
| Lead Head of Service/Lead Director | Head of Regeneration and Economic Development |
| Lead Officer and Report Author | Cobtree Manager -Elizabeth Buckingham |
| Classification | Public Private – Exempt Appendix |
| Wards affected | Boxley |

Executive Summary

Cobtree Manor Park has seen a year-on-year increase in visitor numbers since the completion of the improvement Masterplan in 2015 with a total of over 300,000 projected for 2018/19.

Current staffing levels of a team of two are now insufficient to provide the highest quality service to the volume of visitors and meet ambitious performance standards. This report outlines the current challenges faced by the team and proposes changes to the team structure to address these.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

- 1) To approve the appointment of one additional Cobtree Ranger.
- 2) To approve the recruitment of a Cobtree Apprentice

Timetable

| Meeting | Date |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee | 17 th December 2018 |

Cobtree Manor Park Staff Restructure Report

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The implementation of the three phase Master Plan of enhancements to Cobtree Manor Park between 2012 and 2015 has resulted in an increase in visitor numbers of 40,000 in 2011 to a projected 300,000 in 2018.
- 1.2 By increasing the attractiveness of the park and thus increasing the number of visitors, the objectives of the charity to enhance the public benefit of the park to the inhabitants of Maidstone and the surrounding areas have been met.
- 1.3 The current Cobtree Team consists of the Cobtree Manager (1 FTE) and the Cobtree Ranger (1 FTE).

The manager's role encompasses

- Management and maintenance of the park including budget management
- Management development plans, progress reports, Green Flag applications
- Staff management
- Event management
- Enquiry and complaint handling
- Income generation
- Promotion and marketing
- Additional duties relating to the wider Cobtree Estate

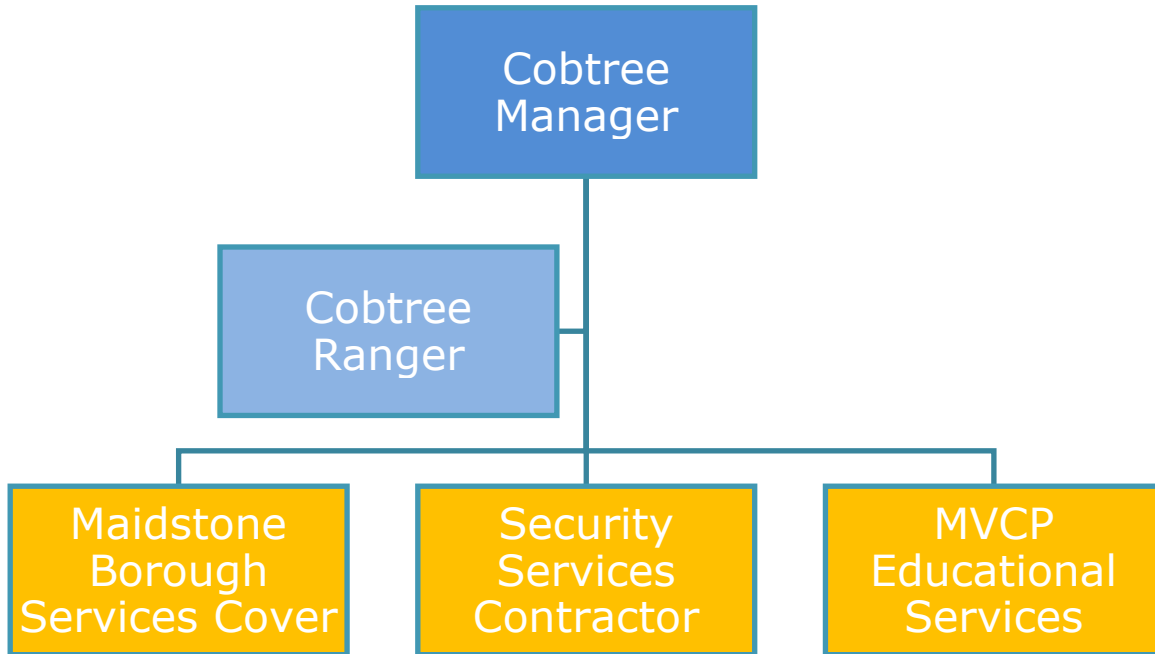
The ranger's role covers

- Practical tasks -horticultural maintenance, habitat management and conservation, waste management, playground inspections
- Site safety and security
- Visitor services- information and assistance including First Aid
- Undertaking preparation of risk assessments, COSHH records etc.
- Working alongside and supporting volunteers in planning and carrying out practical landscaping tasks
- Actively contributing to team work programme planning
- Preparation, organisation and delivery of events and activities in the park

Staff cover for park keeping, patrolling and visitor assistance during school holidays and evenings is bought in from Maidstone Borough Services Grounds Maintenance team.

Security services for park opening and closing are provided by an external contractor.

Cobtree Manor Park Current Staff and Services Structure



1.4 A review of the current structure has identified the following service issues.

The current staffing structure is insufficient to deliver a consistently excellent service for the increased visitor numbers during park opening hours and restricts the team's ability to:

- undertake projects, activities and events to generate income and make progress towards the park becoming financially self-sustaining
- facilitate wider community involvement
- invest fully in the natural resource assets of the park
- maintain resilience and cover for unexpected events
- explore opportunities for improvement and development

There is no staff presence during some park opening hours, particularly summer evenings therefore:

- there is no identifiable point of contact providing visitor information and assistance,
- an immediate reactive response to issues and incidences is not possible
- monitoring of the site and site security does not take place
- first aid cover is not provided to visitors

Maintenance of standards of horticulture and conservation to meet Green Flag criteria is currently being met, but the staff capacity is insufficient to improve the horticultural aesthetic and amenity value of the landscape, and

to increase biodiversity through more complex habitat management, creation and protection. There is a danger of decreasing standards and attrition through an increasing workload due to rising visitor numbers.

Security company operatives attend site twice a day but are present for a few minutes only and have no connection with other park operations. Locking the park gates is subject to the company's round so can occur up to two hours later than the designated time, leaving a potential opportunity for anti-social behaviour to return to the park. There have been some reliability issues with the company failing to lock the park on occasions. Security company logs show that 35% of the time closing occurs more than one hour after the scheduled time.

A programme of events aimed at families and children is currently mostly delivered by an external partner (Medway Valley Countryside) during school holidays. The cost constraints of this arrangement do not allow for a fuller, more inclusive programme to cater for a wider audience to be offered throughout the year.

Cover provided by Maidstone Borough Services is proficient and reliable but the scope of duties is limited to park keeping, waste management and patrolling.

1.5 Cost analysis of current staff structure and external services

| | 2018/19 (£) |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Cobtree Manager Grade 9 SP3 | 36,720 (with on-costs) |
| Cobtree Ranger Grade 5 SP3 | 23,847 (with on-costs) |
| Maidstone Borough Services Cover | 17,006 |
| S&S Security | 11,250 |
| Medway Valley Countryside | 1,800 |
| Total | 90,173 |

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

1. Do nothing

This would be a missed opportunity leaving little capacity for improvement and to meet increasing service demand. This leaves the risk that standards of visitor services, park maintenance and landscape management could decline. The quality of the park environment is a factor in the popularity of

the park. Any decline could result in fewer visitors with the subsequent loss of income from parking and catering.

2. Appoint a seasonal ranger

This post would provide an alternative to Maidstone Borough Services cover from April to September. This option would cost £11,304 including on-costs and provide 900 hours of staff time compared to the 715 hours provided by Maidstone Borough Services for £17,006 in 2018. With the additional skills input there would be greater capacity to facilitate community participation and tackle habitat management tasks. However, due to these months seeing the highest visitor numbers and longer opening hours to cover, the objective of undertaking desired tasks may not be realised. This option would not provide sufficient in-house staff hours cover throughout the year to undertake security and opening/closing.

Recruitment to a seasonal post may prove problematic and require an annual recruitment campaign and a seasonal employee may use the skills gained in post to seek full time employment elsewhere.

3. Appoint an additional full time ranger and an apprentice.

This option would enable services to be maintained and improved, a full, in-house programme of volunteering, educational, recreational, environmental and health promoting activities to be developed and opportunities for income generation to be realised to progress towards financial sustainability for the park.

This is the recommended option.

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Option 3. In order to maintain and improve the level of service to visitors and of landscape management, it is proposed to appoint a second full-time ranger and to recruit an apprentice

3.2 An additional ranger would make a full-time team of three. The staff hours to be worked – 5,340 hours – would exceed park opening hours of 4,288 hours, therefore allowing a rota that would encompass the park opening and closing operations. Both the Manager's and Ranger's post job descriptions allow for seven day a week working patterns.

The services of the external contractor for park locking and unlocking would no longer be necessary. Cover would no longer be required to be bought in for weekends and evening. Redirecting the budget currently allocated to these services would adequately fund the new post.

The additional skilled hours provided would enable:

- Capacity to support, lead and supervise community input and volunteering in the park

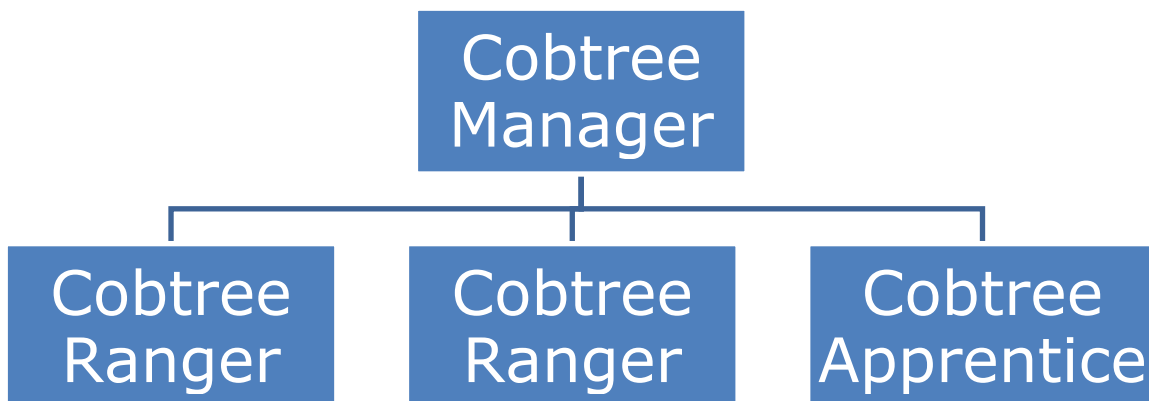
- A targeted work programme to be implemented to raise horticultural standards and improve habitat management for biodiversity. Development and interpretation of the Arboretum collection to achieve accredited status
- New initiatives e.g. a recycling and waste education project which would see benefits such as reduced waste services costs, less litter and fewer hours spent picking it, and increased sustainability.
- Activities to encourage good health and wellbeing and support efforts to improve health inequality.
- More income-generating events to be feasibly planned and delivered.
- Educational, family and children's school holiday activities to be run in-house.

3.3 It is proposed to further augment the team by recruiting an apprentice.

A team of two rangers would be able to support an apprentice in horticulture and/or conservation providing a local learning and employment opportunity. This would have multiple benefits for the park with approximately 30 hours per week skilled and knowledgeable input. This would be a contribution to addressing the current nationwide skills shortage in these fields and would equip the apprentice with the skills and learning for future employability and progression.

The full cost of the apprentice's training and assessment should be met from the Apprentice Levy Fund. In line with the council's other apprentices, the National Minimum Wage would be payable.

3.4 Cobtree Manor Park proposed staff structure and costs



| Current structure | £ with on-costs | Proposed structure | £ with on-costs |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Cobtree Manager Grade 9 SP3 | 36,720 | Cobtree Manager Grade 9 SP3 | 36,720 |
| Cobtree Ranger Grade 5 SP3 | 23,847 | Cobtree Ranger Grade 5 SP3 | 23,847 |
| Maidstone Borough Services Cover | 17,006 | Cobtree Ranger Grade 5 SP1 | 22,608 |
| S&S Security | 11,250 | Cobtree Apprentice | 11,513 max |
| Medway Valley Countryside | 1,800 | | |
| TOTAL £ | 90,173 | | 94,688 |

Timetable

| Action | Date |
|---|----------------|
| New posts/changes to roles evaluated | September 2018 |
| Restructure report taken to CMET | December 2018 |
| Staff consulted on proposed changes | December 2018 |
| Deadline for applications for new posts | January 2019 |
| Interviews/selection process completed | February 2019 |
| New structure operational | April 2019 |

4. RISK

If the park remains understaffed to deal with increasing visitor numbers, the standard of services to visitors and the state of the natural environment and infrastructure may decline leading to a decline in visitor numbers with a subsequent reduction in income from car park and catering revenue.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

No formal consultation has been carried out.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

If the appointments are approved, recruitment will start in January with the aim to have staff in post by Easter.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

| Issue | Implications | Sign-off |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Impact on Corporate Priorities | <p>The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objects and the corporate priorities of the Council.</p> <p>Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all -</p> <p>Promoting a range of employment opportunities and skills required across the borough</p> <p>Providing a clean, safe and green environment</p> <p>Ensuring that there are good leisure and culture facilities</p> | Head of Regeneration and Economic Development |
| Risk Management | Already covered in the risk section | Head of Regeneration and Economic Development |
| Financial | <p>Resources are available for the recruitment of a ranger through savings on the security contract and by removing the need to buy in staff cover.</p> <p>Funding for an apprentice, (if an over 17 year old is recruited), £1756 - £4515 pa will be met from the existing budget</p> | Senior Finance Manager – Client |
| Equalities | None identified | |
| Staffing | Staff resource to increase by 1 FTE and 1 apprentice | |
| Legal | None identified | |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Privacy and Data Protection | None identified | |
| Crime and Disorder | None identified | |
| Procurement | None identified | |

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Exempt Appendix
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None