

Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report

Final Decision-Maker	Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	John Foster-Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Elizabeth Buckingham - Cobtree Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	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 received an Estate update in July 2019.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the contents of this report be noted.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	6 th November 2019

Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objects and the corporate priorities for the council.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Risk Management	Risks to running the estate are dealt with in the annual Estate Risk Management Report.	Leisure Manager
Financial	Financial risks are considered in the ongoing updates.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Equalities	No impact identified as a result of this update.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 This report covers the period from July 2019 to November 2019.

Cobtree Manor Park

2.2 Maintenance of the park over this period covers late summer and autumn works.

Works to the park include:

- Seasonal shrub pruning
- Further tree works following survey recommendations
- Detailed work on the shrubbery areas to create a shrub planting plan to be carried out during winter 2019/2020
- Establishing the newly planted areas of the car park

2.3 The second ranger has been in post for six months enabling improved visitor services and increased horticultural works. The rangers have been supporting work placements and volunteers. A Hadlow College conservation

degree student has commenced a work placement and will be carrying out practical work and conducting a bird survey.

- 2.4 The Cobtree Manager will be leaving the post at the end of November. Recruitment is underway for a replacement with interviews scheduled for 14 November.
- 2.5 The qualification framework for the Cobtree apprentice is being finalised with Hadlow College. Recruitment will be undertaken to appoint an apprentice before the course start date in January.

Events

- 2.6 Summer trails and craft activities were well received.
- 2.7 A zoo memory day took place on 4 October with information about the zoo, crafts and stalls and a visit from the Kent Owl Academy. In collaboration with Maidstone Museum, memories of working at the zoo and visits to the zoo were recorded with the aim of producing an audio trail and interpretation.

Community

- 2.8 The Men's Shed Group continues with healthy numbers. The group have constructed eight bat boxes for siting around the park.
- 2.9 A cohort of National Citizenship Scheme students worked with the park team to research children's health and wellbeing activities in the park setting, carried out fundraising projects in Maidstone and used the proceeds to deliver a fun day during the summer holidays. The surplus from their fundraising has been donated to the park for the purchase of a tree.

Visitor numbers

- 2.10 The vehicle counter has been functioning but recording erratic results. Despite analysis with the manufacturer's assistance there are too many anomalous figures to now rely on the vehicle data as accurate.
- 2.11 Car park prices increased in July to £2 per day and £50 for an annual pass. Car park income for the second quarter was £33,715, compared to £28,077 for the same period in 2018. This period included the price increase, so the number of tickets sold saw a slight decrease.
- 2.12 Following complaints and concerns raised about the catering contractor's standard of management of the toilet facilities, officers have been working with the contractors to improve and maintain standards.

Cobtree Manor Golf Course

- 2.13 MyTime Active had a pre-app meeting with MBC Planning to advance the extension and refurb project at Cobtree Golf Course. The discussions included which elements of the project need to be included in a new

planning application, which can continue under the existing planning consent and which require no planning.

2.14 MyTime Active are working on a programme of a new planning application being submitted in the next month with work starting in the new year.

2.15 Visitor numbers at the golf course have been steady in 2019, but memberships and events bookings have suffered because of the lack of clarity over when the work will commence and when disruption on site will begin.

Kent Life Farm Attraction

2.16 Kent Life has been shortlisted for the Visit Kent Award for Best Large Attraction. The results are announced in December. Hops and Harvest Festival achieved record numbers this year. Education visits for the year will be close to the record number, which was set in 2018.

2.17 Santa's grotto tickets are 50% sold out for 2019 already. New for 2019 is a SEN Santa's Grotto Day which is already sold out. The day, tailored to children with SEN and their families, has been welcomed by local schools and community groups, attracted local press and will be expanded in 2020.

2.18 Planning Solutions have explored the sewage pipe issue with a camera and identified the extent of the task that the pumps on site need to complete each day. Working with contractors they have identified three options. The most dramatic is the construction of a new pumping house, but a more pragmatic solution costing under £10k has been identified. Planning Solutions are completing some due diligence on the amount of maintenance work the new solution will require before committing to that as their preferred option.

Cobtree Railway

2.19 A progress update will be given at the meeting.

Forstal Field

2.20 An update and proposal are contained in a separate report.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Committee could choose not to note the information contained in this report, however the committee has requested regular updates on the operations of the estate.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 It is recommended that the information in this report is noted.

5. RISK

- 5.1 This report is presented for information only and has no risk management implications.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 No consultation has taken place since the last report.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 Any comments from the committee will be passed on to the relevant parties.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

- None
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None