

Cobtree Manor Park Maidstone

Master Plan (Update)

March 2012

Introduction

This master plan document is an update of the one original produced on behalf of the Cobtree Estate Committee by Adam S Bailey Garden Design in January 2010. As such some information has been taken directly from Adams original document but this document provides an update to this original document.

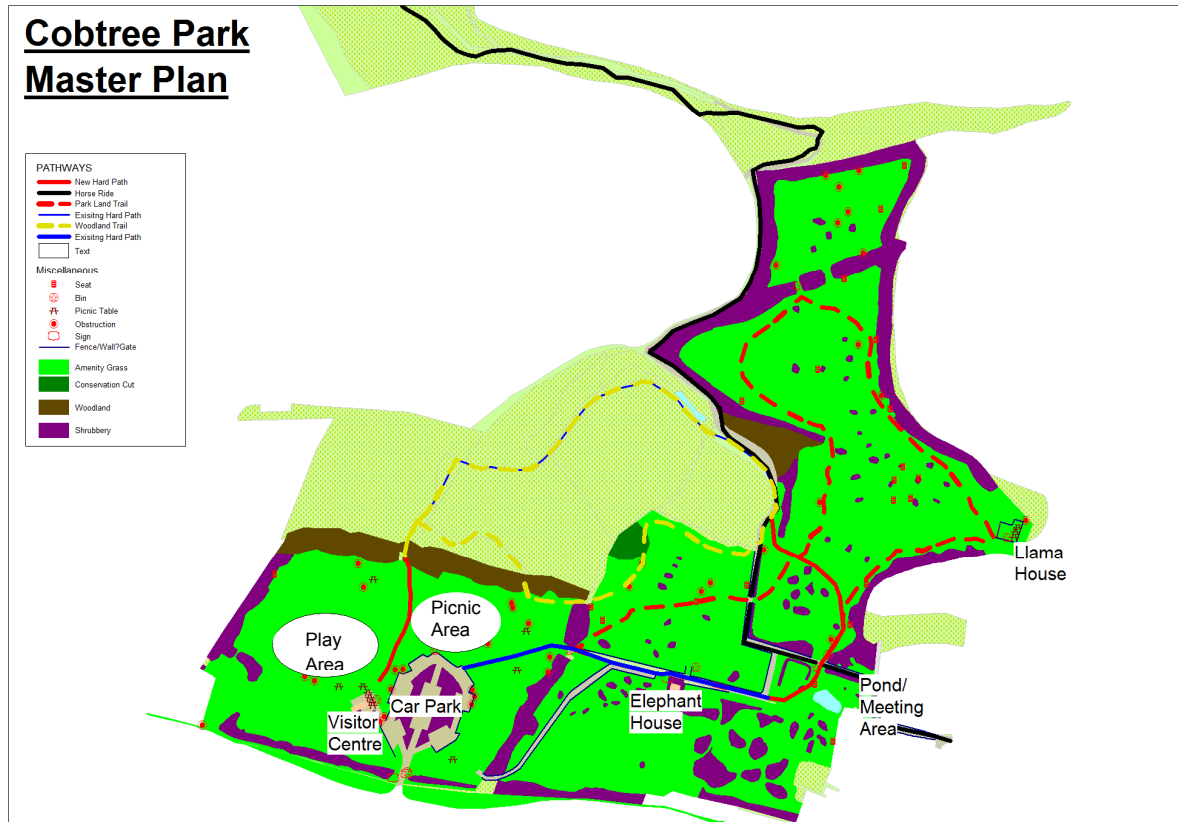
The key emphasis for the design from the start has been to attract visitors to explore and enjoy the full extent of the park at all times of the year. This requires the design to draw visitors up through the park on a series of routes designed with different users in mind, whilst offering a range of attractions which are both sympathetic to the feel of the park and to its past history as a private zoo. Any heavy bias towards seeing the park as having a zoo 'theme' has been avoided as it is felt that this would not sit well with the natural feel of the park and instead the design draws in more subtle elements which are intended to educate and stimulate children and adults of all ages. Another major consideration has been the necessity to retain and manage the existing impressive tree collection, effectively reducing the impact of the new design on the existing trees by weaving the design around them rather than requiring their extensive removal in order to install the new scheme.

Main benefits of the new design

The new design will aim to increase the number of visitors to the park by a number of key proposals. These proposals will also seek to remedy a number of on-site problems which currently detract from the quality of the park. The major key benefit of the whole scheme is that the new design has a minimal impact on the existing tree stock and wildlife habitats, enhancing and improving rather than removing long-established features in order to install the new scheme.

Master Plan

This updated map of the site, gives a rough guide as to where the new elements of the park will be located. The exact locations of these elements will be finalised following further consideration and site visits.



Elements of the Improvement Plan

1. Play Area

It was identified very early on that families particularly those with children rarely visited the park apart from walking around the park there was not a great deal on offer. If visitor numbers from this group were going to be encouraged to use the park it will be important that facilities appropriate to this were provided, one of the most important reason that families visits parks is to use the play area. Very early on in the project the committee expressed a wish for Cobtree to not just have an off the shelf play area as often provided in parks but to have a bespoke play area which must have a “wow factor”.

The council uses the Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) Framework agreement for the purchase and installation of play equipment and the appropriate organisations we contacted with a brief to provide designs to provide a bespoke play area, with the “wow factor” which must be relevant to the park, it’s surrounding and history. Following this a number of designs have been submitted to the council, these have now been through the tender process, and been presented to the Committee.

The preferred supplier has new been chosen and these designs will be shown to the committee at their March meeting.

The chosen design is based around the theme of Cobtree Zoo and will be totally unique to Cobtree Manor Park.

2. Picnic Area

This is another feature that families look for when the visit parks. It is proposed that this is located at the bottom of the park to allow school groups using the visitors centre to eat packed lunches. Visitors may also wish to eat food purchased in the café in the picnic area.

Barbeques are now a feature of many parks, although not currently in Maidstone, advice would be taken from police and Community Safety Team as to whether this should be considered as an option.

As the park grows in popularity it is likely in the future that an additional picnic area may be required and this could be located further into the park.

The following would be required of this are:

- In keeping with the rest of the park.
- Accessible to all park users
- Be maintained within existing park resources.

- Fit for purpose.

3. Hard Path network

This hard path will allow families with push chairs and small children to get out into the park and to the new play area, whatever the conditions. The current hard path limits the areas that families can access for some months of the year. This can be seen on the Master Plan Map. Final locations of this path will be decided following further consideration and site visits.

The brief for the path design would include the following:

- Provide adequate stability to enable pushchairs, wheelchairs, etc to use at all times of the year.
- Fit in aesthetically in the park.
- Be able to be mechanically swept and cleaned.

4. Nature Trails

The Woodland and Parkland trails will provide circular walks for visitors taking in interesting features around the park such as the Llama House and Arboretum. Information will be provided on these features by signage. The surface of these paths will be less structured and boots will be needed at certain times of the year. These paths will be clearly marked to make them identifiable to users. There would also be a map available in the park and on the Park website.

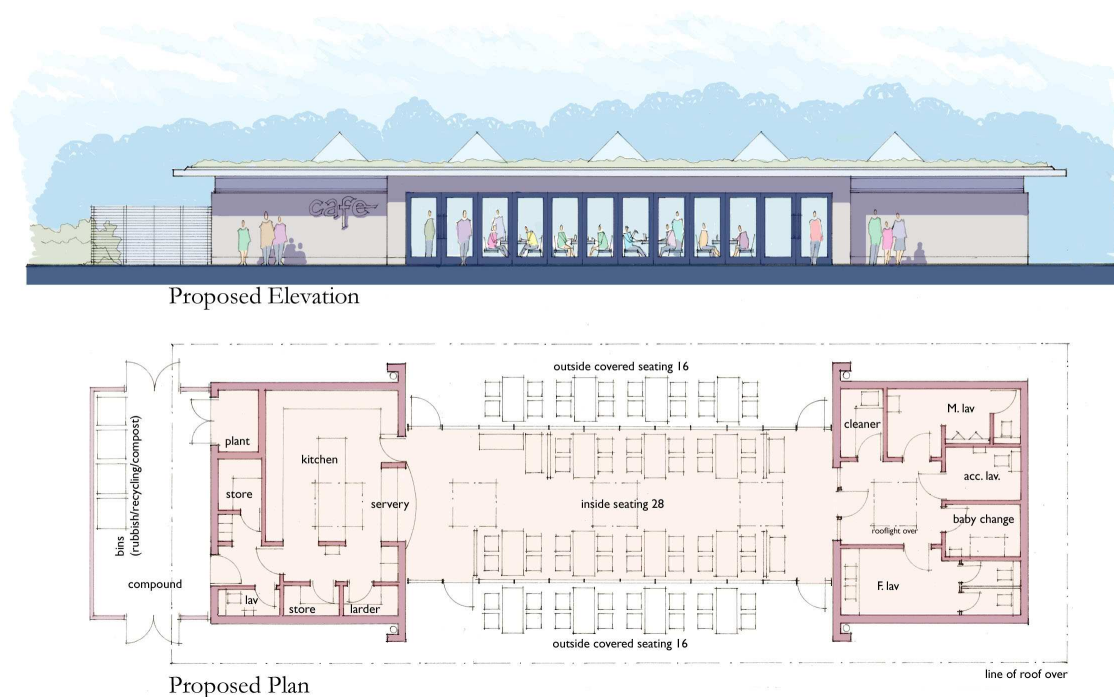
The brief for the park would include:

- Enable access by pedestrians wearing appropriate footwear, without getting muddy.
- Fit aesthetically in the park.
- To be able to be resurfaced within existing park resources.

5. Café/ Visitors Centre

The original proposal was to have a café/visitor centre and a separate education building located in the Elephant House. Because school groups tend to visit during the daytime on week days and the busiest time for a café would be weekends, evening and in school holidays it is now proposed to combine the two facilities. As well as making the building more economical to run also make staffing considerably easier.

This building would need to be designed by an architect but below is an example of a similar type of dual use building to be constructed in Derby at a cost of £270,000. Following advice we shall budget £350,000 for the building.



The specification below shows what we would be looking to be included in the design of the Visitor Centre in Cobtree Park:

- Café with Kitchen
- Indoor seating area that can be used for café at weekends, evenings and holidays and indoor education area at school time.
- Indoor and Outdoor Toilets
- Out door covered seating area as above
- Rangers Office
- Rangers/Staff Mess Room
- Storage for Buggy and Tools
- Education area with interpretation/interactive features
- Touch screen panels – containing more in-depth information about the park – history, Sir Garrard, etc
- Sustainable features

- The building will have the potential to be extended in future
- It will contain facilities that meet current legislation for provision for disabled access including toilets etc.
- The building will be sympathetic to its environment and could look something like this similar building at Trosley Country Park.



6. Viewing Platform Feature

It is proposed to have viewing platform at the edge of the pond. As this are is some distance it is proposed to incorporate some sort of meeting area and focal point, where people could sit and where information could be provided. This type of feature is also ideal for school groups that visit the park.

The brief for this feature is:

- Provide a meeting place/focal point and feature within the park.
- Enable access to pond area for education purposes.
- Fit in aesthetically with park

7. Car Park

The existing car park will remain the same size but does need to be resurfaced and the boundary clearly defined to stop cars entering the park. It has been proposed that the car park be surface in a Kentish Ragstone material with larger boulders defining the edges. The car park will incorporate cycle stands to provide secure parking for visitors that cycle to the park.

The brief for the car park is as follows:

- Surface to be easily maintained using existing resources
- Perimeters to be marked possibly using local stone.
- Cycle stands
- Fit in aesthetically with the park

8. Woodland Management

As well as improving the Arboretum by introducing new trees it is also proposed to carry out works to any trees in that park that require it to ensure that trees are in the best possible condition. Some areas of the park including the car park and some boundaries require additional planting and fencing to improve definition.

9. Trim Trail

This equipment would be incorporated in the Nature trails and path network. It would provide a course around the park for users to carry out various activities such as pull ups, sit ups and climbing. The equipment is very rustic and will fit in with the surrounding. Trim trails have been very popular in other “country” type parks and attract a different type of user to the park.

The brief for the trim trail is as follows:

- Provide items/equipment for exercise activities.
- Be maintained within existing park resources.
- Fit for purpose.
- Uniform design used.
- Information on how to use.

10.Outdoor Seating and Bins

There are currently a large number of different types of park furniture and bins in the park. As some of these are in a poor state of repair a review will take place. It is highly likely that with the new features in the park that bins and benches will need to be replaced, relocated and new items purchased. Existing items will be restored and recycled where possible, especially commemorative benches.

11.Interpretational Signage

It is important that visitors, particularly schools have the opportunity to learn about what they are seeing in the park. A series of interpretational signage will teach visitors the significance not only of what they see today but also some of the history of the park as well as the natural environment.

12. Elephant House

An approach has recently been made by a local art group looking at the possibility of using the Elephant house as a work shop and gallery. As there are currently no services in the building a sum has been added to the budget to investigate this option further.

13.Sculptures in the Park

One of the things which could really make the park different from other similar parks is to have sculptures hidden around the park. These could be linked to the parks history and the play area has included sculptures based on the Zoo theme. These could be hidden in the park for visitors to find, this should be particularly popular with school groups. Local artists could be approached and this would be an opportunity to showcase their work.



Example of sculpture in Shorne Country Park

An initial brief for the sculptures in the park is:

- Provide interest to visitors
- To be linked with an activity for visitors
- Have relevance to the surroundings
- Feature the work of local artists

14.Llama House Repairs

This original feature in the park needs some work to make sure that it is in top condition. As one of the surviving enclosures from the original zoo it is likely that there will be a considerable amount of interest from visitors.

Project Costs

The table below has been put together using information from other projects, existing specifications, estimates provided by suppliers and respected sources. The overall project would need to be tendered which mean that prices could fluctuate.

	Item			Total Phase Cost
PHASE 1	1	Play area inc equipment	£225,000	£225,000
PHASE 2	2	Picnic Area including benches, surfacing and possibly BBQ's	£15,750	
	3	Hard Path network, as shown on map.	£117,000	
	4	Nature Trail Paths, as shown on map	£10,800	
	5	Way finding posts and maps	£5,400	
	6	Viewing platform and pond clearance	£9,000	
	7	Car Park Resurfacing and Edging	£9,000	
	8	Woodland management and park tree works	£20,700	
	9	Boundary Planting	£4,500	
	10	New Arboretum trees	£3,600	
	11	Car park replanting	£4,500	
	12	Improved boundary fencing around estate/bridle path	£9,000	
	13	Trim trail	£19,800	
	14	Outdoor seating and bins	£12,600	
	15	Sculptures	£22,500	
	16	Bridle path rerouting and resurfacing	£4,500	
	17	Llama house renovation	£3,600	£272,250
PHASE 3	1	Café Building/Visitor Centre	£315,000	
	8	Interactive information boards	£9,000	
	19	Cycle Stands	£2,250	
	20	Interpretational Signage	£10,800	
	21	Elephant house	£9,000	£346,050
ADDITIONAL	22	Project Manager (est.)	£13,500	
	23	Engineer	£4,500	

COSTS	24	Landscape Architect designs and drawings (est.)	£4,500	
	25	Planning Fees (est.)	£2,700	£25,200
TOTAL	26	Cost of all works	£868,500	
	27	Contingency (10%)	£96,500	
	28	TOTAL COST	£965,000	

Project Plan/Time Scales

A project plan is enclosed with this document as **Appendix B**. This document gives timescales to carry out the various stages of the work, but the start dates shown are dependant on finances being approved.

Depending on how the work is phased time scales may alter. The installation of the play area which is currently shown as Phase 1 has now been tendered so is ready to progress when approval is given.

Heritage and Bid Lottery Parks for People Programme

It was brought to the attention of officers that Lottery funding was still available for Parks and that applications seemed to be reduced due to the current financial climate. As this could be a good opportunity to maximise the funding available for Cobtree Park this was investigated further.

Currently the Parks for People program can provide up to 95% funding for projects, however it is likely that the higher the match funding the higher the chance of a bid being successful.

The Parks for People Program has three main priorities which applicants must meet, these are:

- a. The community must value the park as part of their heritage.
- b. The parks must meet social, economic and environmental needs of the community.
- c. The park actively involves local people

Extensive guidance notes are provided for the scheme and these can be found at the following link: http://www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/programmes/Documents/PFP_Intro_and_Help_Notes.pdf

Having read these the HLF (Heritage Lottery Fund) were contacted for a pre application discussion. The result of these discussion with the HLF Development Manager were that Cobtree Manor Park could well be eligible to make an application for Lottery funding and a visit from the HLF will probably follow if this is a path that the Cobtree Committee would like to explore.

However the following points do need to be considered:

- The Parks for People is for “whole park projects” this would mean that if the play area was installed as Phase 1 in Cobtree Park, the cost of this could not be used as match funding towards a lottery bid.
- The lottery application process could take over 2 years which will delay the project and as this is a competitive bidding process could result in no offer of funding from HLF.
- The Lottery would want an input into the project and may want to influence the over all scheme and its outcomes.

The HLF Development Manager suggested that more of an indication of how likely Cobtree Manor Park would be to receive a lottery grant could be gauged after a visit to the Park in April. This could be a good opportunity and initial investigation in the short term could be progressed.