

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**COBTREE MANOR ESTATE COMMITTEE**

**17<sup>TH</sup> December 2014**

**REPORT OF THE COBTREE OFFICER**

**Report prepared by Joanna Joyce**

**1. Cobtree Estate Progress Report and 2015 Events Programme**

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the work being undertaken across the Cobtree Estate as set out in the attached progress report, plus the arrangements for the 2015 Events Programme.

1.2 Recommendations of the Cobtree Officer

It is recommended that:

1.2.1 The Committee note the contents of the progress report attached at **Appendix A**.

1.2.2 Approval is given for the lower insurance sum of £12,500.00 offered by the Council's insurers in lieu of replacement of the sheds damaged by the fire last year to be accepted.

1.2.3 The Cobtree Officer be authorised to investigate options for improving the sewerage system at Kent Life, and in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee to assess those options choosing the most appropriate recommendation. Having made that choice to use the sum of £12,500.00 plus a further sum, up to a maximum of £30,000.00, drawn from the operating surplus generated by the Kent Life attraction towards the improvement of the sewerage system serving Kent Life.

1.2.4 Consent is given for the 2015 events programme for Cobtree Manor Park to be made up of those events that can be delivered by the Park Ranger or with volunteers to enable a programme to go ahead at minimal cost to the charity.

1.2.5 That the Cobtree Officer be authorised;

- 1.2.5.1 to acquire up to three quotes for the appointment of a specialist consultant to investigate and advise on the range of options relating to the future re-tendering of Kent Life on a long term basis; to produce the tender document and manage the tender process,
- 1.2.5.2 in consultation with the chairman of the Committee to then choose and proceed with the appointment of a consultant up to a maximum consultancy fee of £10,000.00,
- 1.2.5.3 and, that the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services be authorised to enter into a professional services contract with the chosen consultant to give effect to the decisions made under paragraph 1.2.5.2.

### 1.3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 1.3.1 The Committee previously resolved to receive a progress report on the work across the estate at each meeting. Attached at **Appendix A** is the report for the most recent period.

#### **Sheds**

- 1.3.2 The fire at the sheds at Kent Life last year completely destroyed 2 of the Chalet/sheds and one covered low barn/wood shed. Following a meeting with the charity Futures for Heroes and Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (who have hosted a Kent Sheds group) both groups felt that whilst they are still very interested in a project with the Cobtree Manor Estate, a more public site would be preferable. This would help them to publicise their work as well as being more secure.
- 1.3.3 Following the fire security has been increased at Kent Life and there is now provision for CCTV at the site of the remaining sheds if required.
- 1.3.4 The remaining sheds are currently used for storage. As the voluntary groups who had been interested are now no longer looking at using the sheds site there is no need to replace these burnt out buildings. The remaining sheds give sufficient storage space for the whole site, as used by Continuum.
- 1.3.5 The cost of replacing the sheds was valued at £26,128.00 with an insurance excess of £10,000.00 so if the sheds were to be replaced there would be an insurance value of £16,128.00 paid with the charity having to meet the excess. If the sheds are not replaced the insurance value of £12,500.00 will be paid to Cobtree Manor Estate Trust to then spend on the Kent Life site as it decides.

- 1.3.6 The tight finances of the charity currently and uncertainty of income from the golf course would make paying the £10,000.00 excess difficult at the present time. With no clear reason to retain the sheds it is difficult to justify the expenditure of this money.

### **Sewage**

- 1.3.7 It is suggested money from the insurance cover for the sheds could be invested in improving the sewerage system from the main Kent Life site. The current system is insufficient for the number of visitors the site now receives and requires regular repairs and pumping out. Between August 2011 and August 2014 £13288.00 was spent on using Denton pumps and a further £8622.00 was paid out to CSG pumping the sump when the pumps fail. This being a total of £21,910.00 or on average £7,303.00 per year.
- 1.3.8 Continuum Kent Life has obtained some quotes and guidance over improving the sewerage over the past five years, with solutions ranging in price from £12,000.00 to £39,000.00. It is recommended that up to date quotes and advice are received and discussed with the Committee Chairman, that the preferred solution is authorised, and the £12,500.00 is put towards this. Any additional funding required can be sourced from the surplus moneys produced by the attraction this year.

### **Events**

- 1.3.9 The events programme at Cobtree Manor Park normally costs the charity £2,000.00 each year, plus officer time. Because of the tight financial circumstances this year it is recommended that no budget is allocated but that an events programme is offered that can be undertaken by staff, volunteers or partner organisations at minimal cost to the charity.

### **Kent Life**

- 1.3.10 It is recommended that a consultant is appointed to advise on and deliver the procurement of a new Kent Life contract and to ensure its long term future. Council officers do not have the specialist industry expertise to prepare an options plan for the long term future of Kent Life to include investment in the site, thereby ensuring its continued development and improvement.
- 1.3.11 Instructing the consultant will result in a robust procurement process that will lead to the selection of an operator with a strong business plan with ideas which will provide a sustainable business model for the long term future and being good value for money.

#### 1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

- 1.4.1 The alternative is for the Committee not to endorse the content of the report set out at **Appendix A**. This is not recommended as the Committee has previously resolved to receive regular updates on the work of the estate.
- 1.4.2 The Committee could decide to rebuild the sheds. This is not recommended as there is no requirement for those sheds and there is not currently the £10,000.00 available to the charity that would be required to cover the insurance excess.
- 1.4.3 The Committee could choose not to allocate the funds from the insurance towards the sewerage at Kent Life; however this is considered to be the most urgent requirement on site for expenditure of funds and currently costs the attraction a considerable sum of money each year in servicing repair and maintenance problems.
- 1.4.4 Money could be allocated to the events programme as in previous years; however at present the operating costs of the park are over budget and this would require money to be spent that the charity does not have.
- 1.4.5 The Committee could choose not to appoint a consultant to investigate procurement options for the Kent Life site. However it is a complex facility that is improving year on year but requires stable long term management and investment to ensure its success continues. This requires an expert understanding of the environment in which it operates that Council officers do not have. If a consultant were not appointed a procurement exercise could still be undertaken but it is uncertain that the best outcome for the facility in terms of investment and operational management would arise.

#### 1.5 Impact on Charity Objectives

The governing object is stated as;

“To hold Cobtree Manor and Cobtree Manor Estate for the benefit of the inhabitants of Maidstone and other members of the general public in one or other or all of the following ways:

- i) By maintaining the Cobtree Manor Estate as an open space as defined by the Open Spaces Act 1906 and if the lessees think fit providing thereat facilities for organised games and other sports”.

- ii) With the consent of ...[the Cobtree Charity Trust Limited and the Kent County Council]... in such other way for the benefit of the inhabitants of Maidstone and other members of the general public as the Council shall from time to time think appropriate.”

The ongoing improvements set out in the progress report, the 2015 Events Programme, and the proposed improvements to and long term procurement of the Kent Life attraction directly support the charitable objects of the charity.

## 1.6 Risk Management

- 1.6.1 There is a risk that if the Committee chose to replace the sheds the additional £10,000.00 that would need to be found could result in having to make cuts elsewhere in the estate budget to finance it.
- 1.6.2 Failure to improve the sewerage at Kent Life risks potentially high outgoings of thousands of pounds on repairs, and no toilet facilities during peak visitor periods.
- 1.6.3 Not appointing an experienced consultant could risk a procurement process that does not ensure the best future for Kent Life.
- 1.6.4 There is a risk that finding several consultants with the experience needed to quote could be difficult.

## 1.7 Other Implications

### 1.7.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	
3.	Legal	X
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	X
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	X
9.	Asset Management	

1.7.2 There are financial implications as outlined in the report relating to the potential for money needing to be spent on the insurance excess, sewerage repairs and maintenance and events.

1.7.3 There will be a requirement for legal documentation to be drawn up.

1.7.4 Failure to address the sewerage issues on the Kent Life site could have environmental and cost implications if overflowing sewage were to leak into a water course or cause health problems for members of staff or visitors to Kent Life (this has not yet happened).

1.7.5 There are procurement implications for both the consultant and the re-tender of Kent Life outlined in the report.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

**Appendix A** Cobtree Estate Progress report for the period of October to December 2014

1.8.2 Background Documents

None.

**IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?**

Yes

No

If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?

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This is a Key Decision because: .....

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Wards/Parishes affected: .....

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