

Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report

Final Decision-Maker	Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	Dawn Hudd - Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jason Taylor – Leisure 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 on 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 met in October 2017.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

To note the contents of the Cobtree Estate Update.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	25 th January 2018

Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 This report covers the period from October 2017 to January 2018.

1.2 Cobtree Manor Park

Maintenance of the park over this period covers autumn and winter works.

Works to the park include:

- Shrubbery maintenance – a winter shrubbery renovation plan is being undertaken by MBS.
- The Forstal Road border to the east of the park – removal of dead shrubs, self-sown saplings and historic accumulations of green waste and fencing to allow planting of shrubs.
- Border between the upper meadow and Golf Course, reduction of shrubs to allow space for the growth of Arboretum species
- A large swathe of Laurel to the north of the woodland is to be reduced to improve sightlines and views of Arboretum trees.
- Weed management
- Tree works to dangerous and diseased trees - three native specimens lost to high winds.
- A Green Flag application for 2018/19 is to be submitted by 31st January

1.3 Events

- During half term three Autumn and Halloween themed drop in craft sessions attracted 56 participants.
- 25 children enjoyed a taster Bush Craft morning led by MVCP.
- 20 children participated in making rustic and natural Christmas decorations
- 350 runners dressed as Santa ran a 5km course around the park in early December accompanied by enthusiastic supporters and festively dressed dogs. Organised by Beginners to Runners, the event which also featured craft and Christmas stalls received two pages of coverage in the Kent Messenger.

1.4 Community

The Men in Sheds project continues to thrive with increased membership now standing at over twenty men and women.

On 12th December a delegation of more than a dozen staff members (social workers & volunteers) of Kent County Council, other authorities and a French organisation ACSW - Wattrelos Association of Community Centres, visited the Cobtree Shed to observe the set-up and good practice.

The Men in Sheds group is hoping to improve the building and facilities and are currently seeking funding for:

- a) Roof insulation installation c.£3500
This is required in order to remedy the current roof condensation problem during the winter months.
- b) Septic tank installation c.£7000
This is required to complete the installation of the flushing toilet facilities which the Shed members have been working on over the summer as part of the new rest room area.
Wood Store c. £1,000
To stand alongside the Elephant House to contain donations of wood for future projects.

1.5 Marketing and Publicity

- MBC Communications and Marketing have produced a new interpretation panel for the corridor in the visitor centre featuring a timeline of the landscape.
- The Cobtree website is generating regular enquiries about the park facilities and events.
Cobtree Manor Park is now a member of the Association of Tourist Attractions in Kent.
- The Park will feature in the 'Visit Maidstone' pocket guide for 2018.
- Social media continues to generate positive comments about the park and café.

1.6 Visitor Numbers

There was an increase in visitor numbers of 18.87% in 2017 compared to 2016. Quarterly comparison figures can be seen below and show significant increases in visitor numbers of 34% in the first quarter and 25% in the third quarter.

	% on			% on			% on		
	2015	Quarterly	previous	2016	Quarterly	previous	2017	Quarterly	previous
		year	year		year	year		year	year
Jan	13163			15923			21652		
Feb	17474			15798			19574		
Mar	19891	50528	-16.15	18227	49948	-1.15	25676	66902	33.94
Apr	27093			22144			30554		
May	23254			29076			24952		
Jun	20472	70819	-10.03	22031	73251	3.43	25694	81200	10.85
Jul	27109			21043			31187		
Aug	28517			33192			37491		
Sep	22427	78053		19468	73703	-5.57	23675	92353	25.3
Oct	10581			15124			24995		
Nov	12518			17460			12290		
Dec	14041	37140		18138	50722	36.57	16623	53908	6.28
	236540	236540		247624	247624		294363	294363	

1.7 Car Park

Car park income is £16,325 above target to 31/12/17.
Average weekly income stands at £1,816 to date.

1.8 Café and Visitor Centre Update

This update is contained in a separate report.

1.9 Cobtree Manor Golf Course

There were 7,580 rounds played in the last 3 months of the year 2017 at the golf course. This is a drop of 682 rounds compared to the same period in 2016. The course is currently very wet following the recent wet weather. This not only affects the roundage but also has a knock on effect on buggy hire and catering. The team at the golf course have worked hard to organise a number of successful events which have increased community participation as well as generating revenue for the site. Some of the events that took place during the quarter are:

- Dementia/Vulnerable adults footgolf day with lunch
- Tribute nights
- Dementia/Vulnerable adults footgolf day with lunch
- Fireworks Night
- Carvery Night
- 1st Dec shotgun start golf day for charity
- Christmas lunches and party nights
- Dementia/Vulnerable adults footgolf day with lunch
- Cinema evening
- Big screen sports evenings/afternoons
- Society and Charity Golf Daysays

The plans for the new club house and alterations to the golf course are still progressing, with Mytimes project group meeting fortnightly. Pre-application advice with planners will happen in March, and is currently being arranged

1.10 Kent Life Farm Attraction

Kent Life had a total of 38,257 visitors between October and December 2017. For the full year the visitor numbers were ahead of last year, with School visits up 10% on the previous year.

Kent Life was re-awarded with Visit England's Visitor Attraction Quality Scheme rose.

1.11 Incidents

1.11.1 Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre Break in November 7th 2017.

The Visitor Centre was broken into at approximately 11:20pm on 7th November. The alarms were activated and Police attended. Calls were made by the alarm company to key holders and Jason Taylor, Leisure Manager attended.

Extensive damage was caused to the building:

- All external lights removed or smashed,
- Alarm ringer box smashed
- Office door lock levered off and damaged and the door opened.
- Office window shutter lock was cut off but the shutter did not sustain further damage
- Plant Room and external Storeroom doors had been rammed by, probably, a 4x4 vehicle in reverse, destroying the doors and causing extensive damage to blockwork, piers, frames lintels and thresholds.
- Power supply was partially disrupted causing stock loss from one freezer
- The immersion tank was rammed, causing damage to the heating system.

The alarm company were able to track the access of the perpetrators to the rest of the building following the alarm being triggered. It is likely that the location of the safe was therefore discovered but its new location prevented it from being either opened or removed. The external hard drive was stolen from the CCTV system located in the plant room. Visible tracks showed that the vehicle had driven through the park and across the golf course.

The main gate to the park was open when the police arrived after 11.30pm. Sight and Sound Security' who lock the gates at night confirmed that the gate had not been locked as their security guard had been called out. The gate should have been locked at dusk around 5pm. A security guard was sent to protect the building overnight until it could be made secure the following morning.

The morning after the incident the Police CSI team visited the site but as it had rained it was not possible for them to collect any evidence. The building was made secure and the café opened for business on 8th November.

Photos of the damage are shown in Appendix 1 and will be provided at the committee meeting.

1.11.2 Repairs

The exterior block work and cladding to the building have now been repaired. All electrics have been made good but problems in sourcing a component for the heating system left the building with only temporary portable heaters throughout November and December. Single leaf steel doors with anti-jemmy bolts are to be fitted to the store room and power room.

A new CCTV recording device has been ordered and is being installed with a secure box to stop access. A further quote has been obtained to update the existing cameras to HD and to add further cameras to include the car park. A new external alarm box is to be fitted.

Upgraded lighting has been installed around the building. An insurance claim for loss and damage has been submitted and is in process.

1.11.3 Elephant House Break in – 24th December 2017

The Elephant House/Cobtree Mens' Shed suffered a break in over the Christmas period. The side door and the locks were forced and entry gained.

A number of power tools including drills, saws and grinders, batteries and hand tools were loaded into a wheelie bin and stolen. It is not thought that a vehicle was involved.

The Police were on-site on Christmas Day morning after being alerted by a dog-walker. They contacted the Shed Chairman and a member attended to secure the building.

The Police Forensics Team visited the site on 28th December to dust for prints, check for tool marks on the damaged locks, etc. but their investigation did not produce any useful evidence.

The Shed group have now battened the wooden side door internally and fitted industrial locks to the main metal doors.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

This report is to note only.

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the information in this report regarding the performance of the Café/ Visitor Centre is noted.

4. RISK

This report is presented for information only and has no risk management implications.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

Other than through social media no consultation has taken place since the last report.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

Any comments from the Committee will be passed on to the relevant parties.

7. 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 of 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.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Financial	Financial risks are considered in the ongoing finance updates.	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager – Client
Equalities	No Implications	

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 – Shows damage sustained to the visitor centre in the break in of November 7th 2017.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None