

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 9 APRIL 2019

Present: Councillor McLoughlin (Chairman), and
Councillors Cox, Daley, Mrs Gooch and Perry

Also Present: Mr Roger Hext, Cobtree Charity Trust
Ltd

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

2. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members.

3. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had decided to include an update on the Cobtree Railway Project, following a recent meeting, as part of the report on the Cobtree Manor Estate Trust Committee Update.

4. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no visiting members.

5. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

6. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

7. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public, as proposed.

8. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JANUARY 2019

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Meeting held on 17 January 2019 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and signed subject to the following insertion, as shown in bold, to Minute Item 59 (Cobtree Manor Estate Financial Position Report):-

- Capital costs of **£11,750 in respect of work on the car park resurfacing** would remain on the balance sheet as this related to land and would not depreciate.

9. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

10. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

11. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION

The Committee considered the report of Mr Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager (Client) which summarised the current financial position of the Estate as at 28th February 2019.

Mr Holland highlighted that:-

- The summary position as at 28th February 2019 returned a positive variance of £36,000.
- There were no issues to report in regard to Cobtree Golf Course, Cobtree Manor Park or Kent Life.
- Capital costs of £25,000 had been incurred for additional works and project management costs for the car park resurfacing works.
- There was potential to minimise the VAT on recharges and a report would be brought to the next meeting.
- The implementation for the financial management system had been delayed due to staff absence but would be brought in for 1st June 2019, with all transactions being transferred to it from the 1st April 2019.
- The recharges, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, would be revisited at year end.

In response to questions from Members, Mr Holland advised that:-

- He would speak to the Auditors about putting money aside in a separate fund to use when the car park required works.
- The Charity Commission had already provided funding for the Visitor Centre but it was quite a long process.
- Recharges for Procurement and Property Services included the monitoring of the various contracts (Golf Course, Café and Visitor Centre and Kent Life).

- The term under Controlled Running Costs for Other Income – Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd should be changed to 'Income from the Will – Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd'.

The Chairman updated Members on the meeting he had with Mr John Owen, Finance Manager on VAT recharges. He had advised that the Council had taken the decision not to include VAT on the income from the Kent Life and Golf Course. Consequently VAT would be charged and not be recoverable on the outgoings. However, Cobtree Park and the Visitor Centre were VAT registered and VAT was rechargeable on outgoings. Most recharges should relate to Cobtree Park and VAT should be rechargeable.

It was noted that there would be a VAT charge on car parking income and rental on the Visitor Centre, against which the VAT on recharges could be offset.

Mr Hext confirmed that the amount from the Charity Will was £40,663 this year.

The Committee expressed their thanks to Mr Holland for providing the detail on the recharges.

RESOLVED: That

1. The current financial position be noted.
2. The budgets (including recharges from the Council to the Trust) for 2019/20 be agreed.
3. The progress to date with the Service Level Agreement and the separate financial management system be noted.

Voting: Unanimous

12. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE TRUST COMMITTEE UPDATE - APRIL 2019

The Committee considered the report of Ms Lizzie Buckingham, Cobtree Manager which provided an update on events and maintenance issues that had taken place during the period from January 2019 to April 2019.

Ms Buckingham highlighted that:-

- Works to the paths had progressed which included management of the vegetation, removal of fallen trees, pruning of shrubs and undertaking further tree works following survey recommendations
- A new Ranger had been appointed and would start soon.
- A recruitment process for an Apprentice was underway.

- An events programme for the Spring and early Summer had been completed.
- A volunteers' gardening session had taken place on the bund of earth around the Visitor Centre to create a wildflower bank.
- Three students studying conservation at Hadlow College would be carrying out three weeks of work experience during April.
- There had been difficulties accessing the visitor numbers for 2019 but the system was now working correctly and the figures would be circulated to the Committee via email.
- A document setting out the Trust's liabilities on the car park had now been obtained.
- A digger belonging to the car park construction contractor had been stolen from the works compound while they were working on site on the night of Tuesday, 26th March.
- The boulders that were displaced during the theft of the digger had now been replaced and Officers were investigating replacing the gate on the driveway to the Manor House and cottages on Forstal Road.
- The alarm for the Café/Visitor Centre had now been extended to the storage unit.
- The well attended health and wellbeing event had been held at the golf course on 22nd February 2019.
- Works to the timbers of the Kent Life play barn had been deferred to January 2020.

The Chairman provided an update on the meeting held with the Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd on the proposals for a Cobtree Railway.

It was noted that Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd had commissioned an initial feasibility study by COWI, an Engineering Consultant. Their estimate of the project cost was between £1.4-1.5m.

The Chairman explained that although a representative from Planning Solutions was present at the meeting, they did not have decision making powers. Therefore it was necessary to arrange a meeting with Mike Stickland to firm up on the likely contribution from Planning Solutions.

Mr Hext was asked how he saw the proportions of spend on the project. He said that the Trust would match fund whatever the Council provided.

The Committee commented as follows:-

- Need to think about other ways of funding, e.g. sponsorship, borrowing from Maidstone Borough Council or use of charity funds which would require permission of the charity commission
- Projections had been made on current footfall with 15% of visitors using the train
- That the location of the line was not within the boundary of Kent Life's Entrance so visitors could turn up and ride on the train without going into Kent Life
- £60,000 investment would be needed upfront, this could be a 50/50 split between the Council and the Trust
- KCC Highways would look at the feasibility of the railway running under the road

RESOLVED: That

1. The contents of the report be noted.
2. A report detailing funding options and next steps for the Cobtree Railway Project be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.
3. A meeting be held with Planning Solutions, Cobtree Charity Ltd and the Council to firm up on their contributions to the project.

13. DURATION OF MEETING

10 a.m. to 11.10 a.m.