

Appendix I

Cobtree Estate Progress Report August 2016

Introduction

This report sets out the work of the estate and covers the period from March 2016 to August 2016.

Cobtree Manor Park

Green Flag

Green flag results were very good with the final scores being:

Desk Assessment :20-24

Field Assessment: 50-54

Overall Mark: 70-74

The overall mark of 70-74 is very good and means the park will be mystery shopped rather than judged next year. The Cobtree Manager will be looking at the judge's recommendations in preparation for next year's application. The feedback from the judging is included at Appendix II.

Maintenance

A schedule of maintenance works in the park for the year has been completed and new infrastructure checklists to monitor daily, weekly and monthly checks have also been introduced.

The timber bin store is finished and operational.

It became apparent that the CCTV had ceased to operate and transmit to the Medway Control Centre. Investigations have been carried out and an assessment of current provision and potential reconfiguration is underway.

The entire cable, mechanism and seats from the zip wires were stolen from the park on 31st May during the night. This theft was reported to the Police. The replacement will cost in the region of £5,000. Insurance quotations for the play equipment are being sought.

Men in Sheds

The Men in Sheds group has continued to grow in numbers and has elected a committee to enable further funding bids. They continue to liaise closely with the Cobtree Team. Along with another MCVP led group, they have constructed 8 sturdy timber picnic benches for use outside the café. They will construct 2 further benches and 5 planters to be planted up by 'Communigrow' a community horticulture project.

Events

- During the Easter holidays, Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP) ran a wildlife themed Easter Trail session with 20 children participating.
- An Easter Egg Hunt Trail run from the Visitor Centre throughout Easter week attracted 125 participants.

- A planned MVCP Dawn Chorus walk with breakfast did not attract sufficient bookings for it to proceed so this will be rescheduled as a Dusk Chorus walk.
- During half-term, a Pirate treasure trail attracted 30 participants.
- A 'decorate a mole-hill competition' attracted 11 entries. A drop-in art workshop offered children the chance to create pictures and decorations from natural objects found in the park.
- MVCP launched their art competition at the Visitor Centre which will remain on display throughout the summer.
- Other events included a 'History of Maidstone Zoo' walk and talk and for a Father's Day lunch in the café.

Car Park

Income from car-parking for 2015/16 (from 6/10/15) was £25,950.86

Income for the first quarter of the financial year 16/17 (to the end of June) was £22,384 (an 8% increase on target).

Visitor footfall numbers show 98,636 for the first quarter of 2016, a 4.24% decrease on the same period from 2015, which is likely to be due to poorer weather than the same period last year. The second period to the end of June gives 146,502 visitors, a 3.43% increase on the previous year. Random sampling is being undertaken to check the accuracy of the counters and to enable verification of the system.

Café

The café performance is showing that it is predicted only to break even for the year. At this stage it is difficult to be accurate as it is hard to predict income over the summer which will be the busiest period. Finances are discussed in greater detail in the report of the Finance Officer. Officers will conduct a full review of the café operation in order to reduce costs where possible and increase turn over and surplus. An initial review has brought a number of recommendations which can be implemented straight away. The full review will include staffing levels, menus, pricing, margins, suppliers and opening hours. If necessary professional advice will be sought on how to improve the situation. The management of the café is under an agreement with Maidstone Borough Council for two years from opening in 2015. An update for the Committee on the outcome of the review and the on-going café performance will be brought to each meeting so that progress can be monitored.

A number of actions have already been taken to improve the situation:

- The catering offer and menu has recently been adjusted to reflect popular sales and improve margin and turnover.
- Later opening is proposed for the summer holidays.
- A 'picnic' menu has been devised to improve the offer of cold food throughout opening hours.
- Card payment machines have now been installed which will increase sales as to date customers have only been able to pay by cash.

- Children's birthday parties have been held in conjunction with the Maidstone Museum's party program in the Visitor Centre during off-peak months.
- Bookings have been taken for catering for outdoor summer parties.
- A number of retail items such as children's outdoor toys are now offered for sale.
- An additional point of sale for ice-creams and soft drinks has been established and an ice-cream bicycle will be used for another fixed point of sale outdoors in the park over the summer. A staffing review is to be undertaken for both the café and the park.

Visitor Centre Building

The building was with the contractor's first year of fault rectification until 17/07/16. Some minor issues have arisen with the finish of the building such as floor joints, locks, skirting and roof integrity. A final inspection and rectification will be completed following year one end.

- Maintenance contracts have been set up to follow the one year handover.
- Upgraded ventilation has been installed to allow sufficient freezer storage for volume of sales to operate efficiently.
- Percussive taps have been fitted to increase efficiency as the standard taps were frequently left running.
- An alarm system has been fitted.

Golf course

The golf course continues to perform well and returned a surplus over the last financial year. Further information on the tender process for a new contract is provided in the separate report by the Parks and Leisure Manager.

Kent Life

The Parks and Leisure Manager met with the new contractor Planning Solution on 30th June to discuss progress since they took over. Visitor numbers are up on the same period last year, Kent Life and Cobtree Manor Park are to look at joint working and promotion.



- Planning Solutions have so far:
- Bought a land train (left),
- Building a Meerkat display,
- Have refurbished cafes and improved play barn area,
- Introduced big top for events functions,
- Have bought a new horse,
- Have an in house falconry display team.

Wider Estate

No matters to update on.