

Cobtree Manor Estate Update Report January 2017

The report covers the period from August 2016 to January 2017

Cobtree Park

Maintenance of the park over this period covers Summer, Autumn and Winter Works to the park includes:

Continuing renovation to shrubbery areas;

Invasive species removal from meadow and woodland areas;

Removal of accumulated rubble and arisings;

An ongoing assessment of the Arboretum trees being undertaken to inform an Arboretum Management Plan, improved curation, documentation, labelling and interpretation.

Park Incidents

A break in in November left damage to the Ranger's container and to the office door and shutter with the theft of power tools and hand tools. Damage to the building has been repaired and improved security measures introduced. CCTV coverage of the incident was not sufficient for the Police to identify suspects. An insurance claim is in process to recover losses.

In December, a car struck the park fencing on Forstal Road causing damage to a tree and section of fencing. A Police investigation is ongoing.

Park Events

MVCP run events including Mini-Beast Safari, Pollinators, Bush Craft and Rustic Christmas Decorations were fully subscribed

Half term Craft in the Park –free drop in sessions with a Halloween theme attracted more than 100 participants over 4 days

Gert and Daisy, the story of Maidstone Zoo was oversubscribed, 25 visitors joined the two hour walk and talk.

An Autumn Arboretum walk with the Park Manager and Ranger attracted 8 participants.

Six themed summer family trails and a half term Halloween trail saw total of 184 children participate at £3 per trail.

Café

Staffing: the Catering Supervisor and Assistant are now established in their roles with a pool of 10 Casual staff recruited and retained.

The card payment system is functioning correctly and accounts for an average of 28% of business.

Leaflets promoting the café's breakfast offer are being distributed to the surrounding industrial estate. Telephone orders for food are now being taken regularly.

Repeat customers are regularly visiting the café specifically for food, especially breakfasts, and not using any of the other park facilities.

In this period the café has hosted business meetings with catering supplied including the Kent Parks Managers Forum, a Christmas lunch for 36 MVCP staff and volunteers and three children's birthday parties

'Breakfast with Santa' catered for 25 children over 3 sessions

Visitor Centre

The building continues to function well given the volume of visitors. Harpers Construction are completing the Year 1 building rectifications, predominantly superficial decorative work with some replacements of fixtures and fittings, which are due to be completed by 20th January.

In order to improve the outside seating area, 5 trees not thriving due to damage and or disease are to be felled to allow the area to be re-landscaped and planters installed.

Community

The Men In Sheds project continues to increase membership. Improved lighting has been installed in the Elephant House and the group have continued to improve and decorate the space and increase the range of tools and machinery available. The group have constructed 10 benches and 5 planters for the park and have undertaken fencing repair work in the park.

SHED's Green Shoots therapeutic Garden Project, started in January with 3 volunteers working on clearing and establishing a community garden in the 'secret garden' by Dingly Dell cottage to allow the more vulnerable or socially isolated to volunteer to in a supported environment This project will run for 10 weeks with volunteer support from MVCP funded externally.

Marketing and Publicity

A website www.cobtreemanorpark.co.uk has been designed and the content written. It is due to go live by the end of January.

Cobtree Manor Park now features in the 'Best Places in Kent' website.

Coverage of the half-term craft activities appeared in the Kent Messenger.

Kent Life Attraction

There have been some issues regarding the pumps that control sewerage on the site, these are currently being investigated with by Planning Solutions the operators of the site.

The operators had a good summer and continued to install new elements at the site including Hawk and Meercat displays, a land train and refitting the marque

to allow for a greater variety of undercover events. As well as this they have resurfaced paths and roadway to allow for better access, cleared further areas of the car park and installed heating into the oast house all of which help the site to operate more efficiently.

Cobtree Manor Golf Course

The Golf Course saw a 14% increase in roundage in the third quarter of the year compared to the same period in 2016.

The tender process has been completed for the golf course, as per the email sent to Committee members on 10th October 2016. The tender resulted in Mytime winning the 20 plus 5 year contract. This contract will start in April 2017. To allow for this a six month extension was negotiated with the current contractor at a cost of £50,000 as per committees previous decision.

The first draft of the management agreement has been sent to Mytime and further meetings to finalise this agreement are scheduled to take place.

Cycle Path Update

At the last meeting it was reported that it was agreed that the cycle path project would be extended along the River Medway from Allington Lock and across the Forstal Road Field, and join Forstal Road opposite Cobtree Manor Park. This would enable the park to be the start of this cycle trail which will go along the River Medway to Barming Bridge, and will result in increased visitors to the park and visitor centre. It was agreed that the cost of extending the path from Allington Lock to Forstal Road would be met by the project but there was no budget for the Forstal Road crossing which had been costed at £30,000. At the last CMET meeting it was agreed that the Cobtree Trust would be approached about funding.

Cllr McLoughlin and Jason Taylor have met with the Cobtree Trust and they have indicated that they are not interested in contributing towards the road crossing, as they have larger aspirations for a railway on the Cobtree Estate and that this would deal with the issue of crossing the road.

Jason Taylor also approached Maidstone Leisure Trust, who run Maidstone Leisure Centre, but this also met with a negative response.

Works to the cycle path along the river to Forstal Field is now nearing completion and there is a risk that the path will not be extended further until the road crossing is in place.