

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL
COBTREE MANOR ESTATE COMMITTEE

3rd October 2014

REPORT OF THE COBTREE OFFICER

Report prepared by Joanna Joyce

1. Cobtree Manor Estate Visitor Centre

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the design of the visitor centre as set out in **Appendix A**.

1.1.2 To consider the appointment of the contractor to build the new visitor centre as set out in exempt **Appendix B**.

1.1.3 To consider the final cost for phase 3 of the project.

1.1.4 To consider the additional costs for fixtures, fittings and equipment, the fitting of the kitchen and the cost of interpretation shown in **Appendix A**.

1.2 Recommendation of the Cobtree Officer

It is the recommendation of the Cobtree Officer;

1.2.1 That the final design of the visitor centre as set out in **Appendix A** is approved.

1.2.2 That the recommendation of G.A. Harpers Ltd. (Harpers) as the winning tenderer, under the tendering process conducted by the Council as set out in exempt **Appendix B**, is appointed to build the Visitor Centre. That the Head of Legal Services is authorized to complete an agreement with Harpers to this effect, and that the Cobtree Officer is given the authority to agree further details of the contract if needed, in consultation with the Chairman of the Cobtree Manor Estate Committee.

1.2.3 That the Committee approves phase 3 (i.e. the Visitor Centre) of the Cobtree Master Plan Project to begin and agrees for the final amount of money £371,226 to be released for this purpose. It

should be noted that of this sum £300,000 is grant money received from the Cobtree Charity Trust Ltd. (CCTL). The £300,000 originally identified by council officers from the permanent endowment for the Master Plan project for the Visitor Centre will not be drawn down consequent on this grant from CCTL, amounts subject to paragraph 1.2.4.

1.2.4 That the Committee approve the following money from this original visitor centre budget of £300,000 to be allocated to this the final phase of the project as additional items of expenditure:

- a) £25,125 as a 7.5% contingency against the contract sum;
- b) £12,000 to be spent on furniture for the café including new tables for inside and outside;
- c) £22,000 for the kitchen fit out;
- d) £10,000 for high quality interpretation, including new signage, with the design of the interpretation being developed in consultation with CCTL;
- e) £10,000 for additional security including new CCTV;
- f) £15,000 for surfacing to extend the car park within Cobtree Manor Park to accommodate 60 extra spaces.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 The final design is a detailed and costed plan for the visitor centre and following on from the concept design already approved by the Committee. Approval of this detailed design is consistent with decisions already taken by the Committee.

1.3.2 Harpers have been recommended as the main contractor following the tender process which was overseen by Stephen Trigg, Procurement Manager and Simon Logan, Procurement Officer. The assessment criteria were to ensure that both price and quality were considered. The top two contractors were interviewed to confirm that they were happy with their bids and answer any questions, the prices and scoring was then finalised resulting in the final recommendation. A full tender process was followed. Details of this process and the scoring can be found in exempt **Appendix B**.

1.3.3 It is recommended that some of the money remaining from the original project budget prior to the offer from CCTL to fund the visitor centre, be allocated to the project in order to enable the project to be completed to a high standard.

1.3.4 The budget figures show that the building can be built on budget. The £4774 difference between the budget remaining and the current commitments will be found as part of the value engineering

exercise that will happen once the contractor is appointed. The budget does not however leave room for a contingency. It is requested that money for a contingency is allocated to the project to ensure there are sufficient funds for any minor changes to the project or cost of items.

- 1.3.5 It is requested that money is spent on furniture for the Visitor Centre. By purchasing these a level of continuity of style and design will be able to be followed through both the interior and the exterior matching with the styles already used in the park. Any items that would need to be replaced over time such as tables and chairs could be recharged over time to the successful contractor for the management of the Visitor Centre.
- 1.3.6 It is recommended that funding is set aside for the kitchen design and fit. This will enable a greater return to be charged for the lease of the facility than if it were let empty and the successful contractor was required to bring in equipment. This is particularly important given the uncertainty of income in the future from the golf course.
- 1.3.7 The provision of good quality interpretation will be important for ensuring that the public understand the history of the site and the role of Sir Garrard and subsequently CCTL in the history of Cobtree Manor Park. It was one of the requests of CCTL which is now funding the Visitor Centre that good quality interpretation be installed.
- 1.3.8 It is recommended that funding is allocated for CCTV to ensure the security of the Visitor Centre. Given recent problems elsewhere on the estate it is considered important to provide as much protection as possible for the new Visitor Centre.
- 1.3.9 The car park extension on grass areas within the park has worked well over the summer. It is important that this area is made suitable for use in all weathers as the park is also now popular through the winter. The addition of indoor seating in the Visitor Centre is also likely to increase winter use meaning the car parking requirement when the ground is wet is likely to be greater than it is at present.
- 1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended
 - 1.4.1 The alternative would be to reject the final design or to request changes to it. This is not recommended as the design meets the concept design previously approved by the Committee. Redesign would be very costly and would lead to a building different to that

already approved which would then have to go through the planning process again.

- 1.4.2 The Committee could choose to award the contract to another contractor from the list, however the scoring process has been carefully followed to ensure both a fair process and that the successful contractor has both the capability and availability to complete the work to a high standard at a fair price.
- 1.4.3 The Committee could choose not to take additional funding from the original budget for a contingency fund. This would result in the building having to be re-designed to ensure a contingency was included, reducing the quality of the build.
- 1.4.4 The Committee could choose not to provide furniture for the Visitor Centre or to fit the kitchen; however this would mean the facility would be let for a considerably lower rate. Given the current uncertainty of income due to the golf course re-letting, it is considered prudent to maximise income from the facility wherever possible.
- 1.4.5 It has already been decided to partner with CCTL in providing interpretation for the Visitor Centre outlining the history of the park. For this to be of a high quality it will be important to provide sufficient funding. The Committee could choose not to fund this from the original budget however this would result in savings having to be found from the main building and a subsequent reduction in the quality of it.
- 1.4.6 CCTV is recommended to improve the security of the site surrounding the Visitor Centre. The Committee could choose not to install it however this would leave the site very vulnerable to vandalism and other more expensive deterrents would be required.
- 1.4.7 The alternative to providing funding for car park surfacing improvements is to leave the existing car parks as they are. This would cause problems in the winter as cars would not be able to use grass parking areas and would end up having to use the road. The opening of the visitor centre will make it more likely that the park is used in poor weather increasing the need for all weather parking.

1.5 Impact on Charity Objectives

- 1.5.1 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:

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”.

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.”

1.5.1 The building of the Visitor Centre and the associated works as set out in this report will directly support the objects of the charity by maintaining visitor numbers and adding to the attraction of the park to the general public.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 There are no additional risks arising from this report as the Committee has already taken the decision to build the Visitor Centre.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

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

1.7.2 The financial implications of the capital project are set out in Appendix A. The new Visitor Centre will potentially have staffing and financial implications. These will be dealt with in a future report into the running of the centre. The financial implications should be positive and the new facility should provide an income to cover its running costs, including staff with any surplus being spent in the park.

1.7.3 Asset management implications will be minimal as there is already a facility (the kiosk and the toilets) to manage. Although the Visitor Centre will be larger because it will be newer there should be fewer repairs required.

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

Appendix A The visitor centre final design and budget position.
Exempt Appendix B The results from the tender process.

1.8.2 Background Documents

Cobtree Manor Park Master Plan

<u>IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?</u>			
Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, when did it first appear in the Forward Plan?			
.....3/9/2014.....			
This is a Key Decision because:It involves a spend greater £250,000.....			
.....			
Wards/Parishes affected:Boxley,			
.....			