

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 SEPTEMBER 2021

Present: Councillor Perry (in the Chair) and
Councillors Cox, Hinder, McKay and Springett

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from the Chairman (Councillor Garten) and Councillor Harper.

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman (Councillor Perry) chaired the meeting.

18. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

Councillor Hinder for Councillor Garten
Councillor McKay for Councillor Harper

19. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

20. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

21. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

22. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

23. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

24. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 JULY 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

25. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

26. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

27. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

28. COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION

The Senior Finance Manager (Client) introduced his report summarising the financial position of the Cobtree Manor Estate as at 31 July 2021. The report covered the Golf Course, Kent Life, the Manor Park and the residential properties.

The Senior Finance Manager (Client) advised the Committee that:

- The position as at 31 July 2021 was an underspend of £29,774 against the profiled budget, with a targeted surplus of £50,000 at the end of the financial year.
- Mytime had now settled all their outstanding debts in respect of the Golf Course contract.
- There had been a higher than anticipated level of spend against the parks hard landscaping budget due to the need for a new door at the Visitor Centre and the construction of a new parking area. The Officers would review the budgets to identify funding for any further hard landscaping works that might be needed.
- Car parking income continued to exceed the budgeted figure as visitor numbers to the Manor Park remained high.
- Repairs and maintenance budgets for Kent Life and the residential properties were currently unspent.
- An updated cashflow projection would be reported to the next meeting of the Committee when the opportunity had been taken by the Officers to review proposals for future capital expenditure. The receipt of the outstanding sums from Mytime had alleviated the potential pressure on the cashflow and the bank account balance was now at a healthy level. This meant that it would be possible to make further loan repayments to the Borough Council for the car park capital works.
- The value of the Charity's investment in Charifund was continuing to recover and now stood at £867,762 compared to the value of £866,198 in July 2021. However, this was still lower than the value of

£930,938 in January 2020. Further updates would be provided at future meetings of the Committee.

In response to questions, the Senior Finance Manager (Client) advised the Committee that:

- Charifund was a specialist investment fund for charities which tended to focus on less risky investments and was widely used within the charity sector. The value of the Charity's investment had been impacted by the pandemic but was continuing to recover.
- The repairs and maintenance budgets for Kent Life and the residential properties were contingency budgets in case any repair and maintenance work for which the Charity was responsible was required. The works to Garden Cottage were being funded separately.

During the discussion, reference was made to the need to raise with the operator of Kent Life the issue of drainage at the site to prevent damage to the buildings and historic farm machinery and equipment.

RESOLVED: That the financial position of the Cobtree Manor Estate as at 31 July 2021 be noted.

29. COBTREE ESTATE UPDATE

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development presented the report of the Leisure Manager providing an update on activities at the Cobtree Manor Estate since the last meeting of the Committee in July 2021. It was noted that:

Cobtree Manor Park

Car park income for the year to 1 August 2021 was £53,817, which was a positive variance of £18,000.

There had been two outdoor theatre performances of Alice in Wonderland in the Park on 3 and 4 September 2021 and a winter lights trail for the period 15 December 2021 to 31 December 2021 had been confirmed.

A recent monthly play area inspection report had identified that repairs were required to play equipment at the Manor Park. The Officers would report back to the Committee with further details including costs.

Cobtree Golf Course

The Golf Course had been performing well despite the poor weather and some of the increased footfall experienced in 2020 had been retained.

With the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions, it was hoped that more society and group bookings would continue this positive trend.

Kent Life

Kent Life was also recovering well from the pandemic. Events and functions had resumed on site with a return to the full events programme anticipated.

As part of their tour of the Cobtree Manor Estate in August 2021, Members had visited the Kent Life archive store which contained thousands of artifacts. A report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee with options for cataloguing and managing the collections. The report would address the origins of the artifacts and any obligations in relation to their retention and display.

Cobtree Café

The Cobtree Café had continued to trade well throughout the summer. Repairs to the shutters had been carried out and drains and gullies had been cleared. The increased footfall at the Manor Park had resulted in repairs and redecoration being required in the Visitor Centre toilets, and these were being arranged by the Café operator.

Cobtree Shed Group

There had been some additions to the Elephant House which did not comply with building regulations and the Officers were looking into the cost of restoring the building. The Cobtree Shed Group was keen to find alternative premises to meet its needs and the Officers were trying to help with this.

In response to comments and questions, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development advised the Committee that:

- Options for the future use of the Elephant House were being investigated. Currently, a large metal container near to the Café was being used as a store for parks equipment and as a park office. Relocating the office to the Visitor Centre and using the Elephant House as a store for the equipment and a small vehicle would provide the opportunity to remove the container from an area used by the public.
- The Officers would investigate the drainage issues at Kent Life and report back to a future meeting.
- The proposals by Mytime in relation to the Golf Course had been put on hold temporarily, but a report would be submitted to the next meeting with options going forward.

During the discussion, it was pointed out that the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Leisure Manager had met with representatives of the

Cobtree Charity Trust Limited. At that meeting the Trustees had indicated that they might be interested in investing in a display area for some of the carriages currently housed in the Carriage Museum as its collection was gifted to it by Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake. This could tie in with the work to be undertaken in relation to the artifacts contained in the Kent Life archive.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development was keen for the Committee to consider other options for the Trust's investment and undertook to bring a report to the Committee about potential investment in the Cobtree Manor Estate.

RESOLVED: That subject to the points raised in the discussion, the update on activities at the Cobtree Manor Estate since the last meeting of the Committee in July 2021 be noted.

30. DURATION OF MEETING

2.00 p.m. to 2.45 p.m.