Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee   25 January 2022

Kent Life Artefacts

Final Decision-Maker	Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee
Lead Head of Service	John Foster, Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Mike Evans, Leisure Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	Boxley

Executive Summary
A report on the current arrangements of the Kent Life artefacts and options for possible new arrangements.
Purpose of Report
Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:
1. That no full cataloguing project or inventory project is undertaken on the accessioned artefacts at Kent Life.
2. That the existing inventory list of items is shared with the identified rural heritage organisations to assess if it contains any items of potential significance.

Timetable	
Meeting	*Date*
Cobtree Manor Estate Charity Committee	25 January 2022

Kent Life Artefacts

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objectives and the corporate priorities for the council.	Leisure Manager
Cross-Cutting Objectives	The work of the charity links directly to its charitable objectives and the cross-cutting objectives of the council.	Leisure Manager
Risk Management	Not following some of the options in this report could expose the charity to financial and reputational risks and could expose the charity's assets to greater costs also. The recommendation provides an appropriate level of risk management response.	Leisure Manager
Financial	Following the recommendations in this report will ensure the charity directs its resources to its biggest priorities.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Staffing	Staffing implications are managed day-to-day in line with council procedures and policies.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Legal	There are no specific legal implications at present.	Team Leader, Contracts and Commissioning
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no new implications as a result of this report and recommendation.	Policy and Information Manager
Equalities	There is no impact on Equalities as a result of the recommendations in this report. An EqIA would be carried out as part of a policy or service change, should one be identified.	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	The Cobtree Estate works towards improving the health of our communities and residents through its day-to-day operations.	Leisure Manager

Crime and Disorder	Crime and disorder implications are managed day-to-day in line with council procedures and policies.	Leisure Manager
Procurement	Procurement implications are managed day-to-day in line with council procedures and policies.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Biodiversity and Climate Change	The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and there are no implications on biodiversity and climate change.	Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 Kent Life, formerly the Museum of Kent Life, is leased to and managed by Planning Solutions. Part of that agreement is the stewardship of the accessioned artefacts. The accessioned artefacts are kept in the store building at Kent Life along with other items.

2.2 CMEC and Planning Solutions share a hard copy list of all the items, but that list does not include photographs of the items. It is a long list of descriptions totalling more than 150 pages comprising approximately 6,400 items. The list is coded and the items in the store are labelled to match the list. Beyond that, very little information on the artefacts is held. The significance, the age, the historic value, the source or the ownership of the items is all unknown.

2.3 Following a request from this committee, officers have been seeking to identify ways in which the list of artefacts can be converted into a digital format and ways in which more information can be learnt about the artefacts.

2.4 Officers have also been monitoring the storage conditions at Kent Life and are pleased to report that the leak in the store room is fixed and planned maintenance has also been undertaken on the building to prevent future water ingress also.

2.5 The store is an old farm store building. It comprises three adjacent open plan spaces and is not temperature or humidity controlled. A cataloguing project and more information on the artefacts would provide knowledge of how best to store them.

Cataloguing

2.6 Officers have been working with colleagues at Maidstone Museum to design a cataloguing project. An ideal project would catalogue every item in a searchable database that includes a photograph of every item, some historic or significant information on each item and links in the database to similar items. The options available are presented in section 3.

2.7 Officers have also been seeking to work with historic organisations and educational organisations to assist with understanding the historic significance of the items. Officers have contacted The Collections Trust, The Museum of English Rural Life, Agricultural Museum at Brook, and the Social History Curators Group but have not had a positive response from any organisation wishing to work on this project either as part of a volunteer study project or as a contracted piece of work.

3.   AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 The table below shows the options that CMEC has to take forward the cataloguing project.

Option	Benefits	Considerations
Full catalogue	- A huge, museum level database developed including assessment of historical/social value, - Full photographic record for each item including historical significance, provenance, ownership, links to other collections of historical importance, categorisation and sub-categorisation for cross referencing with other items and databases. - Significant database that could be made accessible to interested historical organisations and individuals - Leads to appropriate storage of artefacts - Identification of social value and historical interest - Digital catalogue would be easy to interrogate and update - Enable links to existing Maidstone Museum artefact catalogue - Positive promotion of Trust and MBC as custodians of artefacts	- Time consuming to develop (project could take several years to fully research and complete) - Cost of producing the catalogue - Cost of providing appropriate storage conditions for any key artefacts - High level of expertise and insight required to produce a catalogue with necessary detail - Accessing expertise to the required level for the duration of the project - Catalogue software licences would also need to be purchased.
Basic Inventory	Inventory developed to log artefacts and note their condition and storage location	- A basic list developed - Provide indications of social value that would require deeper assessment

	• Provide an up-to-date list of artefacts and discuss/confirm ownership • Identify location of 'on loan' items • Opportunity to identify items with potentially high social value and historical interest • Provide initial records as a prelude to developing a full catalogue at a later date • Searchable inventory would be easy to interrogate and update • Cost of providing appropriate storage conditions for any key artefacts would be identified • Enable links to existing Maidstone Museum artefact catalogue • Positive promotion of Trust and MBC as custodians of artefacts	• Project may take a year to complete • Cost of producing the inventory • Requires some degree of insight and ability to research
Status quo inventory	• This is the do nothing option • No change to cataloguing requirements. The items continue to be recorded in written inventory format • No change to storage costs or techniques	• Potentially out of date list with no check on condition or location of items • Inability to check on status of items 'on loan' • Risk of ruin or loss of socially/historically important artefacts • Risk of ruin of artefacts due to inappropriate storage processes • Risk of reputational damage to CMEC and MBC resulting from loss of important artefacts.

Table 1. The benefits and considerations of different cataloguing approaches for the Kent Life artefacts

3.2 **Full catalogue option**

As shown in table 1 this is the most detailed option. It would require the involvement of a suitably knowledgeable historian working through the artefacts and adding information on each item as they were recorded. It would be stored in cataloguing software and linked to other historical databases. Based on what we know about the basic inventory option described in paragraph 3.3 this is likely to beyond the cost capabilities of CMEC at this time. **Based on the costs in table 2 and paragraph 3.7 below, this option is not recommended.**

3.3 **Basic inventory option**
This option creates an up-to-date, stand-alone inventory of the artefacts and informs CMEC of the current condition and location of items in the store room. These up-to-date records can be shared with historical groups, if they are interested in working with Cobtree and Kent Life, and information of significance can be added to some of the records. The historical information can be used to inform decisions on future storage conditions.

3.4 Maidstone Museum does not have capacity or the right historical knowledge to take on this work but colleagues there have been helpful with providing insight into the cataloguing process. Each item needs to be logged using the Collections Trust's inventory standard method, which requires around 15 minutes per item. For the Kent Life artefacts this equates to four items per hour, or at least 1,600 hours. This will require at least a temporary appointment at the real living wage of £10 per hour, with oversight from a collections officer or equivalent.

3.5 Working full-time the cataloguing will take 10 months. Working fewer days per week to reduce the supervision commitments will draw out the cataloguing exercise and take it beyond a 10-month duration. A historian with suitable rural knowledge will also need to be engaged to comment on the inventory, providing more information on any artefacts of note.

3.6 The total cost of this as a comparison is shown in the following table:

Item	Calculation	Cost
Temporary staff for cataloguing, with on costs	£16,000 x 1.3	£20,800
Supervision costs, based on two hours per week at grade 9, plus on costs	[(£16.75 x 2) x 43] + 30%	£1,873
Historical support	Estimated at 10%	£2,270
Total		**£24,943**

3.7 If CMEC seeks a third party organisation to quote for this work then quotes in excess of £25,000 can be expected. **This option is not recommended.**

3.8 **Status quo option**
This option is the most cost-effective as it is based on the existing inventory list document. The list document can be sent again to historical organisations mentioned in paragraph 2.7 to see if they can comment on the items via a desktop exercise. If any items of interest emerge from this, other options can then be considered. **This is the recommended option.**

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Because of the costs of a cataloguing exercise, the full catalogue option and the basic inventory option cannot be recommended at this time. The basic inventory is expected to cost upwards of £25,000 and those funds are better applied to the estate's other priority projects at this time.

4.2 As part of the status quo option the inventory list of 6,400 items can be sent to the rural history organisations included in this report for their observation and comment as a list of items. If any items trigger any comments of historic or social value, or any comments of specific storage conditions then the full catalogue option and basic inventory option can be reassessed.

5. RISK

5.1 The risk of not cataloguing the artefacts is that any items of specific historic value or significance are under appreciated or deteriorate. Sharing the list of items with historic organisations for them to possibly view and comment is one solution to this. However, there is a risk that these organisations choose again not to engage in this project.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

6.1 Maidstone Museum colleagues have been consulted on the options available to CMEC.

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

7.1 With agreement from CMEC the inventory list of accessioned artefacts will be sent to the organisations previously contacted, to see if they want to comment on any items of note that may be contained within the list. The outcome of this will be given to this committee in a future report or update.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None