

STONEHAVEN TOWN PARTNERSHIP
AGM
TUESDAY 25th NOVEMBER 2014
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The report which follows reflects STP's SCIO status in that I will comment on the achievements of STP over the past year, particularly in relation to our projects, by linking what has been done to our Charitable Objectives which are:

to advance citizenship and community development by

1. encouraging voluntary activity and increasing the involvement of individuals in community activity by assisting voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises to develop their skills in e.g. managing and operating a community asset;
2. assisting in the regeneration of the area through the improvement of the physical, social and economic environment in order to: manage community land and associated assets for the benefit of the community and the public in general;
3. providing or assisting in providing, recreational facilities, and/or organising recreational activities, which will be available to members of the community and public at large with the object of improving the conditions of life of the community;
4. advancing community development, including urban or rural regeneration within the community;
5. advancing the education of the community of its environmental, cultural, heritage and/or history;
6. advancing environmental protection or improvement including preservation, sustainable development and conservation of the natural environment, the maintenance, improvement or provision of environmental amenities for the community and/or the preservation or buildings or sites of architectural, historic or other importance to the community.

Each project or activity undertaken by STP in 2013/14 will be taken in turn and matched to the Objectives using the numbering above before being commented on in more detail.

The Queen Elizabeth II Caravan Site (1, 2 and 6) – the caravan site, which is of economic and historic importance to the Town, continues to bring many visitors to Stonehaven. It will remain open until after the Festive period, closing on the 4th of January 2015 for its winter break. The money STP has received in rent since the site re-opened in June 2013 on completion of a £1.9M refurbishment programme will be redistributed as per our Disbursement Policy which was agreed this year and can be viewed on our website. Mark Kummerer, the consultant we have commissioned in the past, has been involved with others in developing a bespoke model to measure economic impact locally and regionally across various segments of the economy and locations, and we believe the Caravan Site was part of the study that resulted in that model which will be outlined in a forthcoming report. It would be our

intention to examine the possibility of using this model to assess the economic impact to Stonehaven of our projects where relevant. This is David Fleming's project and I thank him for the hard work he has put in over the past year dealing with what might be termed "snagging" issues which are all but resolved. Our thanks also go to the wardens Richard and Maggie Walker who are doing a splendid job in making the site a welcoming place.

You will recall that in last year's report I mentioned that an STP sub group had produced a report based on STP's experience with the transfer of the caravan site from Aberdeenshire Council to the Caravan club via STP. The resulting document offered advice on community asset transfer to community voluntary groups and others. In June, David Fleming and I were asked to give a presentation on our experience at a training day for community councillors from Aberdeenshire. Judging from the interest generated and the questions we were asked after the presentation, what we had to say and the report itself were well received.

All Weather Facility (1,2 and 3) – working with others (mostly sporting) groups within the Town and the SDCC, STP has helped get this important project to the stage where the contract to build an all-weather playing surface and two basketball/netball courts at Mineralwell is about to be awarded. The Stonehaven Community All Weather Sports Facility Committee which has two STP representatives, John Robson and me, has become a company limited by guarantee and negotiations with Aberdeenshire Council to agree a lease are well advanced. Plans to establish a community based group to manage the facility once it is built are well under way. If all goes as expected and weather permitting, Stonehaven will have its long awaited all weather playing surface by May next year. Getting to where we are now with this project has developed the skills of the local people who are members of the SCAWSF Committee, and those who will be involved in managing the facility will also learn from the experience. Hopefully these people will use these skills and pass on their experience to others in the future.

Town Hall Trust (1) – STP continued its support for the Stonehaven Town Hall Trust. In particular, we wrote in May to the Chief Executive of Aberdeenshire Council urging him to ensure that the Trust gets the support it requires in order for it to attract volunteers to continue the impressive work it does in providing and delivering services to the people of Stonehaven as well as developing this valuable asset for the town.

The Land Train/Bervie Braes Road (1, 4 and 5) – official confirmation from the Big Lottery's Coastal Communities Fund (CCF) that we had been granted the money to purchase and operate the land train was received in March, about four months after the original date and some time since our stage 2 application had been submitted. In the meantime the train we had originally intended to purchase was no longer available and the prices of these vehicles had inevitably gone up. After negotiations with CCF, a different, slightly heavier train was purchased but with only one carriage. Our original intention had been to have the train running for the start of the summer holiday season at the latest but these delays prevent this from happening. It arrived from Italy in July but problems outwith our control to do with registering the vehicle delayed its introduction still further.

During this time negotiations with Aberdeenshire Council regarding the train travelling down the Bervie Braes continued. The Stonehaven Visitor Survey Report commissioned from MKA Economics and published in December which clearly indicated the economic advantage of the road, and evidence from George Strang and others challenging the Council's position regarding the risk of land slip were used by STP at the June meeting of the P&R Committee to get the Council to reconsider its position on the Bervie Braes road. Michelle Ward and I argued for a review of the weight, speed and width restrictions imposed by the council in response to the perceived safety risks and a balancing of these concerns against the significant economic advantages to the town of having the road open all year round. We also suggested that something should be done about the unsightly orange and white barriers. Our pleas appeared to fall on deaf ears. However and thanks to the efforts on our behalf of our local councillors, it was agreed in April that there be a special dispensation for the Land Train to use the road. Negotiations between STP and council officials have taken place in good faith but so far it has not proved possible for the two parties to arrive at an accommodation, with the weight of the train being the main stumbling block. Efforts to get the Land Train to use the Bervie Braes road will continue.

One of the reasons behind the CCF grant was that the Land Train would create employment. It is pleasing to report that three part-time drivers and eight conductor jobs were created. They have all done an excellent job and have been impressive ambassadors for Stonehaven and for STP. Thanks also go to the volunteer conductors who stepped in when necessary especially after some of the original appointees who were students went back to their studies. Also contributing to the success was the support of Les Clark and his team at Stagecoach's Spurryhillock depot for storing the train and generally looking after it, and David Weston of Survival Craft Inspectorate (SCI) which supplied the diesel. Our thanks go to both for their assistance and to Emily Telford and Wendy Sylvester of Dunecht Estates for their support.

At the end of the season a thank you event for the drivers, conductors and supporters of the train was hosted thanks to the generosity of Michelle at Number 44. Those attending were asked for suggestions as to how the attraction could be improved. Many useful and imaginative ideas were put forward and will be taken forward. Feedback generally has, among other things, highlighted the need for another carriage but these are expensive.

Prior to its first run we organised a competition for primary pupils to design the posters containing information about times etc to be attached to the bus stop signs. The task required the pupils to undertake some research before beginning the design process. We had an excellent response.

The Land Train began operating on Monday 18th August and was an instant success. Its last run was on Sunday 26th October although it will be involved in the Stonehaven Business Association's Christmas Extravaganza this coming Saturday and will run during the Festive Season. Plans for next year are well advanced.

Project Development Co-ordinator (1,2,3,4,5 and 6) – As mentioned above, part of the grant from CCF was to enable STP to employ a Project Development Co-ordinator (PDC) for two years with the intention of the post becoming self-financing thereafter. After undertaking a rigorous appointment process, STP was very fortunate to engage the services of Isabel Munn who very quickly proved to be

extremely effective, efficient and competent in supporting STP, its trustees and others in the work they do on behalf of the people of Stonehaven. She is a very valuable asset to STP and the town and we would not have managed to achieve what we have done this past year in progressing our numerous projects without her hard work and dedication particularly in relation to the Land Train.

Harbour Development Feasibility Study (2,3,4 and 6) – The original application to the CCF mentioned above included a request for money to fund a feasibility study for the harbour. CCF was unable to support this part of our application because it did not directly lead to job creation. They did however accept that the Project Development Co-ordinator (PDC) could assist STP in accessing grants etc to enable us to fulfil our commitment to Aberdeenshire Council to undertake a study to ascertain what sort of development might be possible at the harbour. With support from Aberdeenshire Council, a grant was obtained from the European Fisheries Fund Axis 4 fund. A Steering Group consisting of representatives of those organisations funding the feasibility study has been formed and, after due process, one of the bids to carry out the work to determine what options may - but equally may not - be possible has been accepted. Prior to this, comments were sought from those the Steering Group thought might be directly affected by any development of the harbour. These comments will be passed to the consultants who will be conducting the feasibility study. Within the process of undertaking the Feasibility Study, any and all individuals or organisations wishing to comment or make relevant suggestions, will have the opportunity to do so. Also, before any decisions are taken, the entire matter will go out to full public consultation when the people of Stonehaven will be able to comment and submit their views and opinions. The ultimate aim is to ensure that Stonehaven harbour is sustainable for future generations, no matter what the financial climate, and it is the sincere wish of STP that a viable solution is found which has the general support of the people of Stonehaven is found. Wynne Edwards, Michelle Ward and Isabel Munn are to be thanked for their efforts to ensure that this important feasibility study is undertaken and that relevant individuals and organisations are involved and included in the process.

Gas Works Car Park (2 and 4) – Initially the site owners were sympathetic to our approach to agree a deal to either buy or lease the land with a view to it becoming a car park although our attempts to pursue the matter met with a fair degree of “radio silence”. But when it was put up for sale some months ago, STP redoubled its efforts to persuade SSE to engage in meaningful dialogue with Aberdeenshire Council and us. STP through project leader Michelle Ward will continue to push for this piece of land to be used for the benefit of the community.

Court House (1,2 and 4) – this building was also put up for sale by its owners, Scottish Court Services (SCS), earlier this year. Along with many others in the town STP would prefer if some form of community use could be found for the building rather than have it lie empty or be sold for some other purpose. STP contacted SCS and they have given us until the end of March to come up with plans to use the building for community benefit. Project leader David Fleming then asked for people to come up with suggestions as to how the building might be used and a number of possible uses were suggested. These are under consideration and we hope shortly

to bring forward a proposal or proposals. Given the nature of this listed building, the challenge is huge, but the potential rewards for us all of seeing this iconic building return to the heart of the community will make the effort worthwhile.

Former Model Lodging House/Cowie Lane (1,2 and 4) – like the preceding two projects this also involves the possible regeneration of a community asset. In this case STP is proposing to redevelop the Cowie Lane building as a backpackers' hostel or bunkhouse that will bring jobs and extra income to the town. The intention is for the asset to be transferred from council control to STP under the council's Community Asset Transfer policy with a view to turning it into a bunkhouse once funding from such sources as grants has been accessed. To that end, project leader Michelle Ward has already lodged a CAT 1 application with Aberdeenshire Council. STP is aware that the Furniture Lodge group has also applied for the building to be transferred to them for use as a furniture exchange where people in need can acquire good furniture in an economically and environmentally beneficial and sustainable way. Volunteering and possible job creation is also involved. The Furniture Lodge group has very recently become a member of STP and as such will be supported in their bid to have this asset transferred to them. Assuming the building is suitable for both these uses, STP trustees will soon have to decide how to proceed with these two CAT proposals.

Town House/Auld Toon Clock Tower (1,2,5 and 6) – STP has maintained a watching brief with this development and has offered support and assistance as the project has progressed. Aberdeenshire Council - and Brian Watt in particular - is to be congratulated for what has been achieved so far with the renovation and redevelopment of this important and historic High Street building. STP has sympathy for the unforeseen circumstances associated with the plans to develop the inside of the building as a tourist resource which have taken time to sort out. STP welcomes the participation of the Fireballs Association in the project and the Stonehaven Tolbooth Association's involvement in the renovated ground floor display and video exhibition that will be of interest to locals and tourists alike is welcomed by STP.

Planning for Real/Improving Our Town Centre (2) – Although the three Planning for Real public consultation exercises which covered the north, central and harbour areas of Stonehaven, were carried out a couple of years ago and the results assembled into a large spreadsheet with the identified actions allocated to a wide range of organisations, STP is reluctant to call an end to this project even though the task, undertaken by STP at the specific request of Aberdeenshire Council, is complete and many of the ideas have already been put in place. The original spreadsheet is being finalised and updated to recognise the many actions that have actually taken place as a result of the townsfolk's suggestions, but highlighting those that remain. The intention is that this work will be available for discussion at the AGM. It will also be placed on the STP website with hard copies placed in the Library, Resource Centre, Leisure Centre, Community Centre and Viewmount. David Fleming leads this project and he is to be congratulated for his hard work and perseverance in ensuring that as many of the improvements suggested by residents as possible are brought to fruition.

An offshoot of Pfor is Improving Our Town Centre (IOTC). The aim of this project is to bring together those who live, work or have responsibility for the town centre, or

those such as the Horizon Group who just want to see Stonehaven look as pleasing and inviting as possible and, by the power of communal effort, tackle some of the little (or not so little) things which could make such a difference. The two public meetings held in 2012 and 2013 produced an improvement plan which Jim Stephen who has recently taken this on as project leader is working to implement.

Linked to this is STP's attempt to improve the finger signs around the town. This came about as the result of a letter from local resident Kathleen Smith to the Mearns Leader. With the help of David Dobbie and Willem Hermanns, the existing signs were surveyed and a couple of issues reported to the relevant Council official. Kathleen also highlighted the need for more signs especially at the Harbour and on the Bervie Braes road directing people to and from Dunnottar Castle. STP is pursuing this matter with Aberdeenshire Council.

Energy Initiative (6) – the first phase of this much larger and ambitious project which it is hoped will eventually lead to Stonehaven being a net exporter of energy is the setting up by STP of a sub group to establish a group buying scheme with the aim of improving the energy efficiency of the current housing stock of the town. By promoting the scheme, STP would receive a small payment for each house signed up to the scheme and this money would be reinvested in the community through our recently agreed disbursement policy (available on our website). It is expected that the scheme will also create jobs for local people. The original first phase was to help people reduce energy costs by encouraging residents to club together so that an approach could be made to energy providers with a view to negotiating lower rates but this had to be abandoned because of UK government legislation relating to tariffs these companies could offer their customers. Wynne Edwards is pushing ahead with this project which will be of economic and environmental benefit to the people of Stonehaven.

QR Codes (1 and 5) – an approach was made to STP in August by Alan Craig requesting support for his attempts to develop the original QR code project which at the moment does not work very well in Stonehaven because signals for mobile phones are not very strong and there is no public Wi-Fi generally available. STP has taken on the challenge of assisting Alan in overcoming the challenges of improving access and expanding the good quality content making it worthwhile for visitors and residents alike to use the service. We are at the stage of scoping the project and working out how best to fund it. STP is seeking the assistance of individuals or groups to assist us with this project and anyone who is interested should contact either Alan Craig or project leader David Fleming.

Plan B (2,3,4 and 6) – in 2012 the board heard presentations from David Strang Steel on the New Mains of Ury proposals, and Richard Milne on the FM Ury planning application. In January this year representatives from Barrett North of Scotland and Drum Property gave a presentation to the trustees on their proposed development at the Toucks. STP was represented at a presentation by the council's Piers Blaxter on the bids and plans relating to the supermarket developments that formed part of the council's draft Main Issues Report (MIR), a key element in the process of formulating the Local Development Plan (LDP). Because of problems mainly related to compliance with Scottish Government Planning policy in relation to these sites, the pros and cons of other possible locations that were not the subject of bids or plans

were considered. As a result of this and the fact that the location, CC1 at Spurryhillock, already identified in the existing LDP for retail development, had not attracted a potential developer, STP had serious concerns about the detrimental effect any edge of town supermarket development was likely to have on the vitality and viability of the town centre. An economic critique of retail proposals in Stonehaven was commissioned from MKA Economics by STP which confirmed these concerns and indicated potentially less economically damaging sites (copy sent to all K&M Area councillors prior to their meeting on the MIR/LDP in May). STP therefore felt that the Recreation Grounds should at least be considered by the council as a possible site for retail development. John Agnew representing the trustees of the Recreation Grounds was invited to address the STP trustees. A submission in the name of STP was made in response to the draft MIR.

A little later a sub group was formed to draw up a proposal for engaging the Stonehaven public in a major consultation exercise on the future development in terms of leisure, recreation, retail and residential opportunities of the north of the town that would include the Recreation Grounds. The project was given the title Plan B and the task was to create a vision for that area which was to form the centrepiece of a display in the Town Hall, which in turn was to be followed by a public meeting to discuss the proposal. After an extensive publicity campaign the aim of which was to encourage as many residents as possible to attend the event and comment on the proposal by completing a questionnaire, the Plan B event took place in the afternoon and evening of Wednesday 27th August. Many people did indeed take the opportunity to view the exhibition. The reverend Rosslyn Duncan chaired the packed meeting, and our thanks go to her for agreeing to take on this important role and for her skilful chairing of the meeting. Her input was crucial to the success of the event. After a variety of speakers had made presentations, there was a lively question and answer session. The responses to the Plan B proposals have since been analysed. It was made clear at the time and should be stressed again here that the Plan B vision was intended to give people something to consider, a stimulus to their thinking, a possible way in which the area might be developed, a starter for ten. It was never meant to be something that might form all or part of a planning application. Significantly, the vast majority of the feedback came from those who understood this and had actually seen the proposals. It was clear from these responses that people recognise that there is a need for change and that this area of the town has significant potential which, if managed carefully and sensitively, could have long term sustainable benefits for Stonehaven and its residents. In consultation with others, STP will now examine what can be done to meet the aspirations as communicated to us in the feedback from the Plan B event. All trustees including newly co-opted Mandy Murray were involved in Plan B and I thank them for their invaluable contributions to this major project which has the potential to provide significant future benefit for Stonehaven.

Cruise Ships (1,5) – this is our newest project and is led by John Robson who came up with the idea of attracting cruise ships to Stonehaven. The cruise ships would anchor in the bay and tender passengers to the harbour where coaches would be waiting to take them on various excursions to, for example, Dunnottar, Crathes or Balmoral castle(s), distilleries, Fowlsheugh, Trump Golf Resort. There would also be opportunities for disembarking passengers to visit the town's shops, pubs, restaurants, open air pool. STP would derive financial benefit from the promotion of the excursions, which in turn would be added to the funds to be dispersed via the

disbursement policy. The first steps are to ascertain the viability of Stonehaven Bay as an anchorage and the interest of the cruise ship operators by costing and putting together a brochure of what Stonehaven has to offer, including possible excursions.

In the past year STP also undertook the following items which are not directly related to our Charitable Objectives but are relevant as regards our SCIO status were. Firstly, a communications strategy was developed with the help of Clark Communications and is in the process of implementation. Also in relation to our efforts to improve communications and raise the profile of STP was the decision to take a stall at the Feein' Market in June. Similarly, a newsletter was produced in October and we plan to issue four of these per year at agreed times. The need for such a strategy was highlighted by last year's Health Check process. Secondly, an update of our membership records was undertaken. Thirdly, STP was represented at a consultation exercise held in September in the Town Hall and organised by the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator. Those present representing SCIOs and charities in Aberdeenshire were consulted on OSCR's proposals on annual accounting, the publishing of accounts, the setting up of a trustee database and serious incident reporting. Fourthly, STP is pursuing with Aberdeenshire Council the issue of funding as Kincardine and Mearns in general and STP in particular have not benefitted from money provided by the council to fund rural partnerships last year and this. Although the establishment of KMAP's successor, KDP, should resolve the problem in the future, STP feels that Aberdeenshire Council has not recognised the work STP has done which comes under the ambit of that expected of a rural partnership. David Fleming and I attended the meeting in September arranged to facilitate the winding up of KMAP and establish the KDP. STP was one of the first non community council groups to join KDP. Four further items should be mentioned: STP participated in Community Learning and Development's Town Profile survey; a letter was sent to Transport Scotland requesting that the current design of the Stonehaven junction of the AWPR be reconsidered; support was given to those engaged in tidying up the harbour and beach areas; and concerns about the poor state of the leisure centre were recognised and efforts to tackle the issue supported.

STP is grateful for the support and encouragement it has received and continues to receive from our four Stonehaven councillors in particular and the Ward 18 councillors in general. The help and advice provided by Willie Munro and Karen McWilliam is also very much appreciated.

At the beginning of my report to last year's AGM - and the previous one - I commented that STP was going from strength to strength as an organisation that gets things done and has the best interests of the people of the town at heart. It is once again very pleasing for me to report that the reputation of the STP as an effective community based voluntary organisation continues to grow and its ability to identify projects which will benefit the people of Stonehaven and take them through to fruition is recognised widely throughout the town and beyond. This success is in no small part due to the commitment of able volunteers giving up their time for the benefit of the people of Stonehaven: the more people become involved, the more we can achieve.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow trustees for their invaluable assistance and advice over the past year. It is reassuring to me that the other seven elected trustees have indicated that they are willing to continue for at least another year because that continuity will help STP serve its members and the people of Stonehaven. I hope that co-opted trustee Mandy Murray will put herself forward for election. This would leave three vacancies and I hope these will be filled because, although STP has achieved a great deal, much remains still to do.

Douglas Samways
Chair, Stonehaven Town Partnership
November 2014