



Stonehaven Sheriff Court Building Reduction of Options

1. Purpose

This is the second of a series of documents setting out the decisions that need to be made to set up a successful project for the recreation of the Stonehaven Court House.

Following the first, the Option Appraisal, this document will set down the logic behind the final recommendation as to the use of the Court Building.

2. Large Scheme - School adaptation

This option (which was one of the results of the first Option Appraisal) can be described as the desire to use the space that the empty Court Building represents as a way of resolving known issues with the accommodation of Dunnottar Primary School, which is located immediately east of the Court Building/Police Station, across the small street called Bogwell.

This option arose as a result of three sources

First, when the suggestion was raised that the Court Building needs to be 'recreated', a number of people responded to the consultation by suggesting that the building could be used to resolve some of the issues surrounding Dunnottar Primary School. At the time, no specific plan was suggested, nor were any of the specific issues identified.

The Head Teacher was amongst those who contributed to this response, and she kindly agreed to a meeting, including a tour of the site, to explain her views on the issues.

Secondly, and later, a number of Dunnottar parents contacted STP to express their support for the suggestion, and offered some ideas as to implementation including

- Bridging across Bogwell to provide safe access between the two sites
- Re-locating the Nursery (currently at Carronhill) back close to the main site
- Identifying which facilities could be 'offsite' (e.g. storage) and relocating them

We are grateful to all who got in touch.

Thirdly, as a result of Education Committee report in December 2104, it became public that the Dunnottar Primary School was rated as a 'D' for suitability. What this means is that, whilst the academic performance rating is NOT affected and remains high, the building itself has been judged 'D' – unsuitable. It is the only school in Aberdeenshire Council so rated.

In response to this, some conversations and a meeting have been held with the Education Service architects and property managers. They explained in detail about the functionality

rating. We are grateful for their time. The rating is done in a very comprehensive manner, looking in considerable detail at five areas of the building's condition. Some the key points are:

1. Functionality - poor - because
 - the classroom sizes, which are slightly below the modern recommendation
 - Lack of a suitable large assembly space – the current space is too small and has to 'treble' as a gymnasium and a computer room
 - Too many situations where offsite facilities (e.g. St Bridget's Hall, Town Hall) have to be used (and even they are not ideal premises for school use)
2. Access – poor because
 - The main entrance leads to stairs and is therefore not DDA compliant
 - From those stairs, there is access to the ground floor, although this not normally permitted
 - Parking for staff is limited
 - Pick-up arrangements are directly on to a thoroughfare and are congested
3. Environment (i.e. heating/ventilation) - classed as B
4. Safety & Security - poor because
 - The main entrance entry control requires close supervision at all times
 - Much storage is open shelves, and there appears to be not enough of it
5. Furniture - classed as B

On some of these (and some other) issues, action is now being taken. For example, storage be being pruned and re-organised, more cupboards procured, and specialised storage (to reduce duplication) being introduced.

Before looking to see whether the Court Building could address some of the other weaknesses, we have examined what might be involved.

First, a school nowadays has to be secure. That is, ALL other potential users of a common building have to be kept physically separate from the school areas. Given the layout of the Court building, it is very difficult to see how this separation could be organised. Even selecting the whole upper floor would be difficult because of the three flights of stairs and the lift that would need control.

Secondly, whilst the room sizes in the Court building are reasonable, they are not (with the exception of the Court Room No1 – of which more later) so large as to constitute a new classroom for 30 pupils. They are certainly not big enough to act as an assembly hall.

Thirdly, part of the listing of the Court building includes the considerable amount of fine woodwork. It would be a requirement that we would have to be able to restore these features at a later date. That would be a difficult requirement to fulfil if the rooms were adapted and used over some time for school uses.

So the first conclusion and recommendation is that using the Court Building as a contribution to a solution of Dunnottar School's issues and without major reconstruction has features which ought to be seen as 'show-stoppers'.

The question then arose as to whether the Police Station premises could be brought into the discussion. In the same vein, discussions and meeting have been held with the Police Scotland Estates Department, and we are grateful for their time and efforts.

The public position is that Police Scotland have no plans to alter their arrangements in Stonehaven. Whilst, as with any building, there are areas which could be improved, and, as with any organisation, their requirements change over time, they have neither the plans nor the budget to make any changes.

There are two other factors. First, the whole site (that is, the Dunnottar School site plus the Bogwell plus any spare are that the Police might be able to release) still makes for a very closely bounded site, with much less room than is required to solve the problems. Secondly, if the Police were asked to give up their premises, an additional sum of between £½m and £1m would needed to be fund for any form of replacement.

So even if a radical re-building on the south side of the site was to be considered in order to address the current deficiencies of Dunnottar School, it would almost certainly land up costing far more than could be justified. It is certain that they are not within the capabilities of existing budgets.

The conclusion of this analysis is that, as things stand, and within the immediate future countenanced by the current offer of community transfer made by the Scottish Courts Service, there is little chance this 'Large Scheme' being implemented. It therefore should not be further developed by STP.

3. Potential Users (Small Scheme)

This overall option was the second output of the First Option Appraisal.

- **Factors in reducing the options**

Before considering the requirements and the desirability of the range of activities that have been put forward for occupancy of the Court Building, there are a number of factors which should be taken into account.

An inspection of the building has been undertaken, accompanied by the Historic Building Adviser to Aberdeenshire Council. We are grateful for her advice. The historical listing does mean that, throughout the building all alterations have to be justified, that the preference is wherever possible to manage to use any part of the building without making alterations, and that, if modifications are to be made, they have to be made in a manner that allows restoration to the original at some future date. If this is all achievable, then we should strive to build a business plan based on the lowest level of alteration possible. This has led to the following draft conclusions.

Court Room No. 1

The Court Room No. 1 (Room 20 on the diagram in Appendix 1) in the Upper Floor contains a considerable number of listed items. If it were required to consider altering or removing them, an extremely strong business case would have to be made. In essence, this is interpreted to mean that, if we conclude that the whole building could be sustainable if and

only if such work were undertaken, then the necessary permission might be forthcoming. It is not believed we are anywhere near that stage yet. So the alternative possibility has to be explored, namely that the Court Room No. 1 is preserved more or less intact – and indeed might even be enhanced or restored. The possible uses that it then could be put to include:

- A mock trial room for use by schools and colleges and other local organisations;
- A debating chamber for a similar 'market';
- A form of museum and/or visitor centre to display the not inconsiderable volume of artefacts associated with criminal and civil justice in Kincardineshire, together with their interpretation;
- For hire as a film set.

So it is recommended that the next stage is that these opportunities, and any other similar ones, are investigated, and some income value is forecast.

First Floor Rooms (See Appendix for the room numbering)

Disabled Access

It was noted that the two toilets beside Rooms 12 and 13 at the east end of the building (on the left of the drawing in Appendix 1) have been modified since the drawing was made to become a disabled toilet. This toilet is, of course, currently accessible to all, as access to the first floor can be made via the lift in the front hall. This means however that Rooms 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 cannot be used by organisations requiring their own overall security. Access past them must be kept public for disabled access. Individual rooms could be locked and private, but not the corridor area. These rooms therefore have to be used by an occupant who allows public access.

Other public access issues

In similar vein, if the Court Room No. 1 is used as described above, that necessarily is for public access. Therefore Room 16 falls into the same category as above.

It should be noted that Rooms 14 and 15 have a connecting door (so one could be locked off, and access only gained through the other. Similarly Rooms 16 and 17 have a connecting door.

It might be possible to seal off the access to Rooms 17 and 18 together, (possible with the addition of Room 16 via Room 17) but that would mean making the west stair (on the right in the diagram) private. Before that is done, the Fire Officer would have to be consulted, and it is assumed for the moment that he would object to the reduction in the means of public escape.

Rooms 19 and 10 are somewhat off the 'beaten track'. Room 19 can only be reached from the first floor, and then going down a half flight of stairs. Room 10 can only be accessed from Court Room No.1. It would therefore be appropriate to allocate them for purposes for which are unlikely to require any significant public access.

The conclusion of this analysis of the First Floor accommodation is that the availability is as follows:

- **There are eight rooms (Rooms 11 to 18) which are each lockable but otherwise have to be used for public access.**
- **There are two rooms (10 and 19) which are essentially 'back-office' rooms.**

Ground Floor

Rooms 1, 5 and 6 (together with the Boiler Room in the centre of the building) are the remains of the old jail, and are not really suitable for general use involving public access. They have been used as storage rooms for Court records. They are more likely to be used as part of any visitor experience or for storage. Room 1 has no windows, and would be unsuitable as a working room.

Rooms 2, 3 and 4 on the other hand could easily be used as public access rooms, but as with the First Floor it is very difficult to see how they could cordoned off as a unit. It might be possible to create a secure unit involving Rooms 3 and 4 (and possibly 2) together Rooms 17 and 18 (and possibly 16) upstairs, but that secure area would have to include the west stairway. In this, again, the Fire Officer would need to be consulted.

The conclusion of this analysis of the Ground Floor accommodation is that the availability is as follows:

- **There are three rooms (Rooms 2, 3 and 4) which are each lockable but otherwise have to be used for public access.**
- **There are two rooms (5 and 6) which are essentially 'back-office' rooms.**

Conclusion

In total there are eleven lettable, lockable, separate rooms suitable for specific or public access. It might be possible to create a four-, five- or six-room secure area, leaving the balance as lockable but individual rooms.

None of this analysis takes into account the possibility of dividing an existing room using partitioning carefully constructed to maintain the historical features.

4. Next Steps

If the above conclusions are supported, the next part of the process is to decide which potential tenants should be chosen. As a result of the public consultation, a number of organisations have enquired about occupancy. They have already been asked to set down their needs, and in a number of cases have responded. The information they provide will then feed into the Business Plan – to calculate the financial feasibility of the re-creation, and into the Conservation Management Plan – to determine what changes to the building need to be considered, costed, approved and planned.

The Board of STP are asked to approve this report.

David Fleming
Trustee, Stonehaven Town Partnership
March 2015

Appendix 1 – Plans of the building and its surroundings

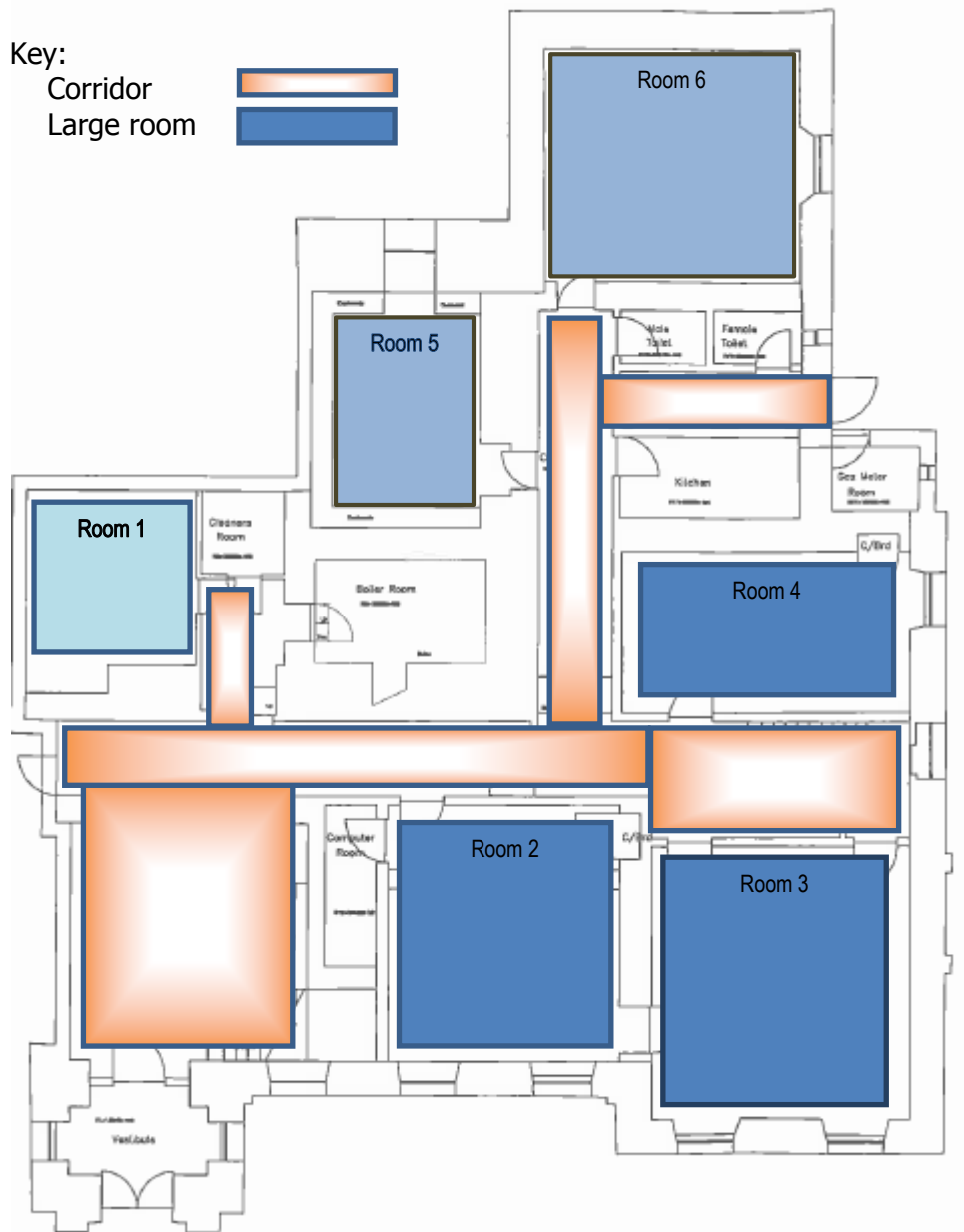
Ground Floor

Key:

Corridor



Large room



First Floor



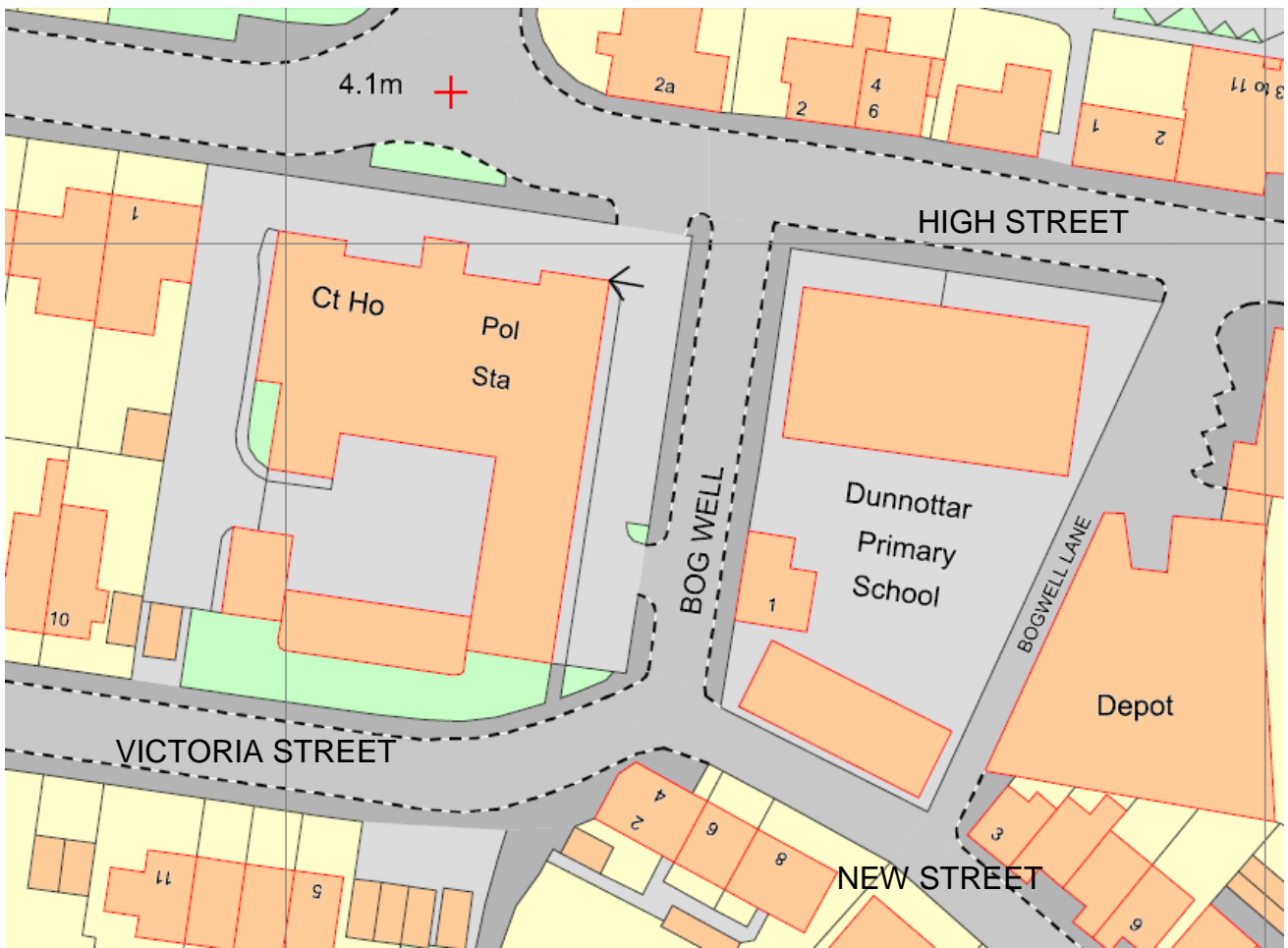
Useful Room Inventory

	Ground Floor	First Floor	Total
Very large room	0	1	1
Large room	4	4	8
Moderate size room	2	6	8
Total	6	11	17

	Ground Floor	First Floor	Total
Court No 1	0	1	1
Usable public rooms	3	8	11
Back office rooms	3	2	5
Total	6	11	17

Greater details of the rooms available of separate spreadsheet.

Surroundings



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