

INTRODUCTION

I've come here today to discuss some thoughts on how we can boost tourism in Stonehaven

Stonehaven's fishing industry has long gone and the oil industry is now in decline, which means that Stonehaven is now largely dependent on tourism. Unfortunately it doesn't have the tourist legacy of the many Victorian resorts which is an automatic draw to many tourists

Currently the focus of tourism in Stonehaven is very much concentrated on the harbour area and Dunnottar Castle, so how can we expand this?

Well, I'd like to present to you some ideas of a man called John Finlay, on how he feels, Stonehaven's sea front could be improved and be made more appealing to tourists

So, who is John Finlay?

John Finlay married into a Stonehaven family 53 years ago and although he now lives in Eastbourne, he has been a regular visitor to the Town throughout the years.

He cares for Stonehaven and in response to Gordon Richie's request for ideas to improve the "drab concrete beach promenade that runs from the River Cowie to the River Carron". He made some proposals which were printed in Stanehyve Magazine (no. 94) and also in the Mearns Leader

He then extended his ideas to cover the area from the River Cowie to Cowie Village; these were published in Stanehyve Magazine (no. 96)

Since then, he's come up with more ideas which effectively cover the area from the Carron Bridge to Dunnottar Castle.

Initially he felt that each small incremental piece that he wrote about might be done as and when funds allowed. However, he has now come to the conclusion that piecemeal will never happen and a big project is the only way

So what is the big project?

John's proposal is to create an all-weather grand promenade which would run from Dunnottar Castle to The Highland Boundary Fault line. He wants to upgrade and link existing areas and unify them into something spectacular.

In putting together this idea – he identified what he felt was wrong with the existing layout and then came up with some ideas that he felt could overcome and resolve these problems

What is wrong?

To recap John's findings - he basically found that from the harbour to Cowie

Seating was inadequate / unsuitable – **expand, not enough, can't see etc.**

- **Add and improve seating in all areas** – disabled, raise existing,? deckchairs
- No shelter – **Scottish summers!!**
- **Shelter** – add shelters that don't interfere with resident's view

- There is inadequate signage – **locals know the area tourists don't**
- **Engage people** boards at key points from Dunnottar Castle to Cowie village and beyond, showing the intermediate distance on a diagrammatic plan. People are interested in how far they have walked/run and may extend their walk to include the less frequented Cowie promenade.

- Nothing really for kids to do – **couple of sculptures, feed the ducks**
- Lay down children's games such as hopscotch, draughts, play equipment, even a sandpit, keep fit equipment etc.

- Boardwalk incredibly popular but too narrow, bottle necks esp Carron Br
- **Boardwalk** – double the width, picnic benches by the bridge beside the ducks

- Unkempt, unattractive grassy areas
- **Unkempt areas** - cut back and utilise, picnic benches. could create sensory aromatic gardens, or noisy water areas for people with disabilities

- Ugly fencing
- **Ugly Fencing** - Replace with attractive rocks & timbers similar to ones used along beside the outdoor pool to maintain a single theme

- Beach 'dirty' – **dogs**
- **Dirty beach** – clean logs, seaweed etc. regularly and enforce the May to September dog ban

- Cowie was very much under visited / under used

Make Cowie a destination by creating new areas of interest such as a natural shrimping / paddling pool, having a beach shop/ café. **signage**

Also, in this area, if we created an all-weather path wide enough and even enough for pushchairs and wheelchairs, it would enable access to Cowie Harbour, Cowie Castle, the kirk and graveyard and the Highland Boundary Fault.

Each of these could be explained by illustrated historical and geological signs supplemented with information on flora and fauna and the effect on agriculture north and south of the Fault. Encourage a wider range of tourists
Also, Simple seating and picnic areas could be provided for quiet contemplation of these features and views of the sea.

- **Name the 3 main beach areas** so that they can be identified and Improve signage along the beach front and in the town using these names. Create associated car parks if possible

Harbour – Carron River = Old Town Beach

Carron River – Cowie River = Central Beach

Cowie River – Cowie = Cowie beach

Looking at the area from the harbour to the castle

The far end of the harbour is underutilised by both locals and tourists & John thought that this could provide another excellent, safe area for the creation of a shrimping or paddling pool for kids. Beach huts, deckchairs and a café could also feature in that area, making it a family friendly, traffic free zone. Again, this area could be named and John's suggested Shorehead Cove

The current path up the Bervie braes could be upgraded to an all-weather footpath and seating or resting points along the way could be added. Unfortunately it's unlikely that this would ever be suitable for pushchairs or wheelchairs

This all-weather path could be extended up past the war memorial to Dunnottar castle thus creating a link from The Highland Boundary fault line to Dunnottar castle – a stretch of approximately 3 miles

Linking the two would be an achievement which would encourage tourists to come into town and hopefully spread tourism all the way along to Cowie. Walking tours could be given from Dun Castle – to St Mary's & fault line

In addition

Consideration should also be given to repaving the central promenade (drab concrete) and its feeder streets to elevate them from plain service accesses into an attractive system of backways which would guide people to the seafront. The paving would need to be durable for service vehicles and easy to keep clean with stylish floor signs so that they act as magnets to the beach. Beach Huts could be introduced also at various points between Cowie and the harbour

New car parks created, named and linked to each of the beach areas would obviously take the pressure of the existing ones and help to spread tourism throughout the whole of the town.

It would of course enhance the area for parents with children if vehicles were restricted to essential access and residents during the summer months

These are the thoughts of John and a few of his friends – since reading them, I've found myself looking at the beachfront differently and I can see how much

improvement can be made, the possibilities are endless, limited only by imagination and of course money!