

In the Town and for the Town

A description of the role and function of STP

STONEHAVEN TOWN PARTNERSHIP

Working together for the benefit of Stonehaven

STP AS AN ORGANISATION

STP is a charity founded by a number of member organisations in Stonehaven, run by a board of trustees, who make major policy decisions on some developments for the town. Ideally the work should be part of a strategy that STP, the Community Council and Aberdeenshire Council all agree. Trustees are there by virtue of being a member of various clubs and organisation in the town. This is in accordance with the constitution of Stonehaven Town Partnership, but it has to be accepted that it does therefore possibly exclude some members of the public who are not in turn members of member organisations of STP. However, through the AGM the board is accountable to the member organisations, and through them to the public to some degree. Anyone who has concerns or an interest in finding out what STP does might find it worthwhile to attend the AGM and/or regular monthly meetings of the STP board of trustees and perhaps look for the opportunity to ask questions. (See also Accountability below).

STATUS OF STP

The Stonehaven Town Partnership (STP) began as a company limited by guarantee which is now in the process of being wound up and is now an independent body, a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation). All the responsibilities of the previous body have been transferred to the SCIO. The Council does not have a role in the Stonehaven Town Partnership now although it did have some representation on the board in the earlier days of the Partnership. It was not created directly by the Council, however its creation was encouraged and facilitated by the Council as part of the Aberdeenshire Towns' Partnership and a subsequent European programme SusSET (Sustaining Small Expanding Towns). Essentially the Stonehaven Town Partnership fulfils the role of a development trust. STP's SCIO constitution is published on the website www.stpweb.org.

FUNCTIONS OF STP

Part of the stated purpose of STP is to manage community land and associated assets for the benefit of the community and the public in general. This is an aim that STP has put in its constitution and this has obviously been acceptable to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR). STP considers that this is an appropriate aim for such an organisation. Development trusts will typically acquire, or been gifted income generating assets, then subsequently reinvest the proceeds to the benefit of the town or community to which the trust relates. An example of how this

has been very successful is that the existence of STP allowed the Council to approach them when it made the decision to dispose of its caravan sites. STP was in turn able to take a lease on the caravan site from the Council and in turn sub-let it to the Caravan Club and enter into an agreement with them for the Caravan Club to invest £1.8 million in the facility and generate an annual income stream for Stonehaven Town Partnership to subsequently spend in Stonehaven and for the benefit for Stonehaven. Some may argue that perhaps the Council could have entered into such an agreement directly with the Caravan Club, and potentially it could have done. However any proceeds would then be part of the overall Council budget and not necessarily spent in Stonehaven. Also, typically a community organisation can make money go further by using it to attract further grants. This solution helps to empower the community of Stonehaven and to allow Stonehaven to benefit from the proceeds of a facility within the town. There is certainly no way that the Council could have invested £1.8 million in the refurbishment and upgrading of the caravan site. Also, it is acknowledged that the Caravan Club of Great Britain is a far better organisation to subsequently run, manage and promote a caravan site. STP's policy for disbursement of these funds is available on the website.

Equally, the potential transfer of Stonehaven Town Hall to a community organisation, a process which has been promoted and facilitated by STP provides potential benefits for all. It provides a potential saving to the Council and therefore the public purse, it will allow the Town Hall to be run in a way which better suits the local community, with programme and pricing set by the community and arrangements put in place for responsive maintenance involving the community. It also allows access to grants that simply are not available to the Council and therefore there is a greater potential for the Town Hall to receive investment and upgrading.

ACCOUNTABILITY

There are two types of formal scrutiny which take place on a regular basis. The first is through the annual report and AGM of Stonehaven Town Partnership where representatives of or members of any of our member organisations can attend and like any other AGM can challenge and ask questions. The second is the scrutiny and accountability to OSCR (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator) where, as a SCIO, there are certain requirements that STP has to meet in order to demonstrate their charitable status and sound governance.

Informal scrutiny by community members takes place regularly. Normal meetings of the STP's board of trustees are open to any member of the public, and if a member of the public were to want to speak at these meetings that is likely to be allowed by the Chair. The STP board of trustees do however, when appropriate, go into private session and there will of course be times when this is appropriate, but the fact that this has happened and the item(s) being considered is recorded in the relevant minute. Further, all trustees are local people, who can be approached to discuss any STP project. The STP web site has details of on-going projects, and the contact details of trustees.

STP'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

In terms of its relationship with the Council, STP endeavours to work with the Council in order to deliver objectives and projects to the benefit of the community. The Council would expect STP to carry out consultation and engagement with the community and to develop a strategy and projects to improve the town and quality of life for its inhabitants, businesses and visitors. As mentioned above, STP was for instance a vehicle for the Council when it made the decision to stop running caravan sites and to dispose of them as a first preference to community organisations, failing which to sell on the open market. STP was also a useful vehicle when the Council made the decision to consolidate its museums into three locations, which essentially meant the closure of the Tolbooth museum. STP worked with other interested parties in the community and from this the Tolbooth Association was formed. Similarly, STP helped to establish the Stonehaven Town Hall Trust which is working towards a long term goal of transferring control and management of Stonehaven Town Hall from the Council to the community. STP along with SDCC, the Council and other mainly sports groups is working to provide an all weather sports surface for the town.

Similar organisations do exist in other towns and these might be known as Development Trusts or Town Partnerships or some similar wording but will essentially have similar aims. The Council does encourage the formation and subsequent partnership with organisations such as Development Trusts as a lot can be achieved and funding can be accessed through such organisations. As an example, Stonehaven Town Partnership has been awarded over £200,000 from the Big Lottery's Coastal Communities Fund for projects which are of benefit to Stonehaven.

The four local councillors for the Stonehaven and Lower Deeside ward of Aberdeenshire Council are invited to attend the regular monthly meetings of STP's board of trustees and are regular attenders. The Area Manager has an ongoing dialogue with STP and attends meetings when he can and when he can't a colleague may attend to provide that link. The Council does not have a formal input to STP but much can and has been achieved by both organisations working together and furthermore there is a link to Stonehaven and District Community Council whereby all three organisations work together for the benefit of the community.

CONSULTATION

It is accepted that all of the projects STP have undertaken are beneficial for the town. Ideally, the projects should emerge through a process of community engagement and assessment of issues and needs. For example, STP undertook a 'Planning for Real' exercise and quite a lot of what STP has done in the last couple of years has stemmed from that exercise. It is acknowledged that some of the projects in which STP are involved have not necessarily evolved through such a process but nonetheless may well be worthwhile in their own right.

For example, the recent suggestion to invite cruise ships to dock at Stonehaven - which is an idea in its infancy - emerged through thinking and comments that exist within the town and it is worthy of some investigation as the potential increase in

tourism for the town should it be possible would be very noticeable. Another such example is the feasibility study into harbour redevelopment which is being conducted in conjunction with Aberdeenshire Council. This initially took forward some findings of a report that the Council commissioned into all of its harbours a few years ago and takes that to its next stage. STP was able to access European funding for the feasibility study and there has been a contribution from two Council's budgets, Economic Development and Harbour budget. Depending on the findings of this study which will be subject of further consultation at the appropriate time, it may well be that STP is a more appropriate vehicle to take forward any proposals rather than the Council. STP may for example be able to access funding which is not available to the Council. This will be subject of ongoing deliberation as the project develops and STP will be working with the Council on this.

STP's Plan B was a consultation exercise. STP took this bold move to generate interest and stimulate debate on the future of Stonehaven and in particular the area between the river Cowie and the Queen Elizabeth II caravan site, including the Recreation Grounds. Plan B asked the people of Stonehaven to consider what developments, including retail, they would like to see in that particular part of the town. It also suggested a way in which Stonehaven might become an all-year-round destination of choice thereby offering an alternative to its present main status as a dormitory to Aberdeen which is at the moment overly reliant on the oil and gas industry. Some people have challenged the process and they are perfectly entitled to do so. Nonetheless it has generated interest, debate and the opportunity to get people talking about and receiving information on the pros and cons of the future development of the town as a whole. This could include a supermarket, to offer choice and challenge the Co-op's virtual monopoly. There have been a number of supermarket proposals none of which are seen to be ideal in terms of land use planning and, in particular, the impact on the town centre. This is a major consideration for Stonehaven as a supermarket's location could make or break the town centre.

Plan B has been misunderstood by some people, because in addition to creating retail opportunities at this location there would be opportunity to see investment in leisure and recreation facilities funded in a way which would not be possible without some form of development. This obviously is a very controversial topic and there are some very strong and polarised opinions within the town but opening that up in a public forum for debate, whatever one's view on the pros and cons, can only be a good thing.

FINALLY

The board of trustees of STP is made up of volunteers, although STP does now have a very good development worker in post. STP is working with the best of intentions and would welcome constructive suggestions about how STP might work with the public and community organisations and to further good work for the community.