



## **Option Appraisal Stonehaven Court Building**

### **1. Background**

In May 2014, the Scottish Courts Service (SCS) closed the Stonehaven Courts, and the building was cleared of immediate artefacts, and closed up. It currently remains vacant. The SCS planned to sell the building but, on application from STP, offered to delay any marketing until March 2015 to allow the creation of a community bid for the building. STP's objectives include the facilitation of developments in the town, and so this project is intended to find a way of ensuring that the Court does not lie empty and derelict, and becomes a useful asset to the town again.

STP advertised the situation, and received about 10 suggestions for the use of the building. These are discussed, and in certain cases explored in more detail in Section 2 below. STP also researched the situation, discussing what might be done with various agencies, and gathering information about the building and its surroundings. These details are summarised in Section 3.

STP then set out an option appraisal exercise, clarifying the options, and setting out appraisal criteria. The Appraisal criteria are set out in Section 4. Neither of these two dimensions are set in stone, and comments of their descriptions, and their use in this exercise are very welcome. The result so far of this Option Appraisal are given in Section 5

The consequences of the Option appraisal discussion in Section 6, and the STP Board is asked to approve the Way Forward that is the consequence of this analysis contained therein.

### **2. Description of the Court House and surrounding Buildings**

The SCS premises occupy the right hand part of the whole building, (as seen from the street) and its facilities in part run underneath and above the Police facilities.

#### **1. The Court House – ground floor**

SCS used to occupy two floors. On the ground floor, there is a large entrance lobby, which included a lift to the first floor, secure access to/from the police station, only two toilets, and connecting corridors. There are four large, high-ceilinged rooms, two lower ceilinged rooms at the back, and a number of cupboards, utility areas and small rooms.

#### **2. The Court House – first floor**

The first floor contains the very large room which used to be Courtroom 1. In addition there are 4 other large rooms, and 6 moderate sized rooms. All the rooms have a good ceiling height. Again there is only one set of toilets.

#### **3. Surroundings**

The whole building sits on a site bounded on the north by Dunnottar Avenue and High Street and the junction with Brickfield, part of the main thoroughfare through Stonehaven. On the east there is a car park used by police visitors, and a normal two carriageway road, Bogwell, the other side of which is Dunnottar Primary School building and playground. On the south side, Victoria Street runs

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into New Street. On the west, there is an entrance into a courtyard, currently used by the Police for parking, and for bringing in/taking out prisoners.

#### 4. State of the building

By and large, the building is in a very good state. There are no known problems affecting the outside, and the building is wind and weather-tight. Internally, the design is clearly purpose built, and any alternative use might require considerable modification. Much of woodwork is of high quality, and it should only be considered for removal after some thought. Some of the plasterwork, particularly around the ceilings on the larger rooms is of high quality. There are some specific fixtures which would need some form of preservation.

#### 5. The building's historical Listing

The building is a category B building and was listed on 18/08/1972, reference 41617. The details of the listing regarding the outside of the building do not concern us at present, as there are no plans to change any items. The details quoted about the inside of the building are:

Room	Detail of Listing
No 1 Courtroom (first floor, south facing)	This courtroom has an open pedimented doorpiece with double-face clock in tympanum. Judge's bench at east with classically-detailed, panelled timber sounding board incorporating large centre pediment with scrolled detail, all flanked by pedimented doorways. Steps leading to judge's bench with square-finialled, stop-chamfered newels. Moulded, decoratively-astragalled oculus window to west wall. Compartmented coomed ceiling with chandeliers, fine decorative cornices, boarded timber dadoes and cast-iron radiators. Some bench seats retained, including jury seats. Raked floor to public benches. Underneath floor is a narrow corridor with fragment of steps leading to the dock.
No 2 Courtroom (first floor north-facing)	Room 2 was refurbished before 1994 and has coomed ceiling with mutuled cornice, panelled reveals and cast-iron radiators.
Entrance Hall (Ground floor)	Double height entrance hall with cantilevered dog-leg staircase with decorative iron balusters. Lift at centre, installed in 2004. Part-glazed panelled timber screen door with flanking lights and semi-circular fanlight
Cells (centre, ground floor)	Vaulted cells at basement (1 now boiler room) incorporating stone flag floors. Original cell door to boiler room with viewing hole and large hinges.
Records room (2 off) (ground floor, south facing)	Vaulted record rooms at ground floor, with flagstone floor. Rooms and circulation spaces characterised by classical detailing including decorative and plain plasterwork cornices; timber shutters; 6-panelled architraved doors.

The implication of the detail here is that, should any specific item mentioned require changing or removal, a justification has to be produced. Historic Scotland have a policy of preserving the original, but allowing changes if that then keeps the building in use, and prevents deterioration or decay.

### **3. Possible Options**

#### **1. Overview**

The possibilities suggested fall into three categories. (Note: If you are reading this, and have other suggestions, there is still time to consider new ideas. Please contact us as soon as you can.)

There are those suggestions which would occupy the building (usually in part) more or less as it is, and with the minimum of alterations. The second group consider involve a far wider look at the site and its surroundings, and a re-thinking of current usages.

#### **2. Smaller suggestions**

One group of suggestions would imply that the building is operated on a shared basis. The suggestions under this category include:

- Extra Health Centre facilities
- Business centre
- Small shops
- Crèche/nursery facilities
- Land train station
- Arts centre
- Tourist information office
- Commercial uses
- Library

#### **3. Single Use suggestions**

Two suggestions effectively imply that the whole of the existing vacant space would be turned over to that use. They are:

- Bunkhouse
- One company for the lot

#### **4. Larger concepts suggestions**

In looking at the building and its surroundings, some people have suggested that a much bigger concept should be explored. The two main ideas in this category are:

- Exchange for other Council Offices, where the other site did not have so many restrictions
- Extension for Dunnottar School with a connection across Bogwell

#### **5. Strategy – a Discussion**

In considering the '**Smaller**' suggestions' above, this route has the merit that one is not dependent on the success of any one idea. Also, some of the suggestions can quite clearly generate an income to fund the running of the building. Indeed, one could consider some cross-subsidy between the various uses.

In order to achieve the immediate objective of establishing whether there is a realistic bid that can be made for community use, each of the suggestions needs to have a mini-business plan written, so that they may be collated into one whole.

One advantage of this route is that different functions can be allocated to those rooms which are most suited to those operations.

In considering the '**Single use**' suggestions, at this stage it is difficult to see how one can make this a low risk route. The bunkhouse suggestion would require a very considerable modification to the building, and significant potential difficulties in dealing with the listing status, plus considerable

cost in the upgrading of the plumbing and toilet facilities, which are currently considered very inadequate for overnight accommodation. At present, the one-company suggestion might well fall at the hurdle of 'community involvement'. The SCS would probably argue that, if a company was willing to take the building over, they should pay the market rate unless there were very extenuating circumstances, in which case they would be considered during any negotiations, not at the initial strategic decision.

We therefore conclude the single use option should be put to one side at this stage.

In considering the '**Larger concept**' suggestions, they all involve inter-linked discussions with various agencies, and are likely to require the sourcing of a large amount of capital. The work required to draw up some form of definitive plan will take much longer than the March 2015 deadline allows. Given that deadline, the most that can be hoped for is that either individually or collectively, they will give a commitment in writing to progress some form of grander plan. The recommendation is that STP should write to them in these terms, and progress discussions with a view to obtaining such written commitments. This process can run alongside the work associated with the 'Smaller suggestions'.

#### **4. Appraisal Criteria (for the Smaller suggestions)**

In assessing these, it is important to describe what factors that are likely to make a success of both the individual venture and the overall concept. We use the term 'venture' to cover all the separate suggestions, whatever basis of organisation may be the best for the particular venture. We have identified the following criteria:

Economic viability	The venture must show that either, it will generate a revenue surplus in itself (including any reasonable rent for the space), or it will be able to attract revenue grant funding over a number of years to ensure a continuing operation. (Note capital requirements are dealt with elsewhere, later)
Community Involvement	The SCS have effectively stated that they would only consider special arrangements if the community involvement was clear. Precisely what criteria the SCS would employ has not been determined yet.
Marketing measure	The venture should be able to show now, or should state a method in the near future, that its income projections are based on some market information, and are not just un-evidenced predictions.
Cross marketing	Ventures need to work with the aim that customers they attract will also move on and be attracted to the other ventures in the building

We have made a first attempt at using the criteria above, using a simplistic 1- 5 grade scale. No attempt has been made to weight the various factors.

## Options Matrix

Scoring 1- low to 5 - high

	Economic viability	Community Involvement	Marketing measure	Cross marketing Local people	Cross marketing Tourists	TOTAL SCORE
Extra Health Centre facilities	4	3	5	5	1	18
Business centre	5	2	5	1	1	14
Small shops	4	3	5	5	5	22
Crèche/nursery facilities	3	4	4	5	1	17
Land train station	5	4	5	5	5	24
Arts centre	2	3	3	4	4	16
Tourist information office	5	2	5	5	5	22
Commercial uses	5	1	4	2	1	13
Library	3	4	3	4	2	16
Totals	36	26	39	36	25	162

On this basis, small shops, the land train base and the tourist information centre come out top.

## 5. Discussions

Discussions have been held with some interested parties. We report as follows:

### **Tourist Information (Visit Scotland).**

They currently occupy a shop in Allardice Street, but do not pay rent. Therefore any extension or expansion into the Court Building is liable to cost them money.

### **Business Centre (comments from Aberdeenshire Council)**

This idea was mooted at the time of the building's closure, but no work was actually done on establishing whether such a proposition could be funded or might be viable.

### **Dunnottar School (Aberdeenshire Council Education Dept)**

Dunnottar School currently has some very severe space constraints, and part of its operations (the nursery) is held off-site, which is far from ideal. No plans currently exist for resolving these difficulties. However, an introductory meeting was held, and it may be that they could see some solutions to their current difficulties. This would, it is assumed, require some sort of feasibility and architectural study.

### **Police Station (Police Scotland Estates Dept.)**

The current police premises is predominantly utilised by the Local Policing Team who cover Stonehaven and the surrounding area, as well as Divisional Roads Policing officers. Officers are supported by a public enquiry and support desk. In addition the Divisional liquor, civic and miscellaneous licensing unit works from this building, along with the Operational Planning team for the entire Aberdeenshire and Moray Division. The building continues to provide ad-hoc office accommodation for a variety of short term, national, functions. Consequently, the current building meets the needs of Police Scotland and there are no current proposals to relocate from this office.

### **Health (Stonehaven Medical Centre)**

There are no plans at present to increase the capacity of the current premises in Ann Street, and the practice would not wish to be considered in the scheme for the Court Building. We are still attempting to find out whether any other community health services are in need of space.

## **6. Conclusion, Recommendation and Way Forward**

It must be remembered that the SCS have given STP a deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 to make some form of commitment. It is clear that there is no obvious solution waiting to be implemented, and that a considerable volume of work over a significant length of time is required before a robust plan can be completed. This will require funding.

It is therefore suggested that the STP Board agree

**First, to request those agencies (mentioned above) that they agree to publish the statements above (or modifications thereof) – because they have so far been obtained in confidence;**

**Secondly, once the first item is complete, to issue this document to the public for consultation, such consultation to be completed by early March 2015;**

**Simultaneously, to explore sources of funding for a series of studies (feasibility, marketing, architectural, business plan generation) to be able to create a robust business plan;**

**Thirdly, once the consultation is complete, for STP to decide whether or not further work on this scheme is viable, such decision to be taken by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, and then communicated to SCS.**

David Fleming  
Trustee, Stonehaven Town Partnership  
12 January 2015

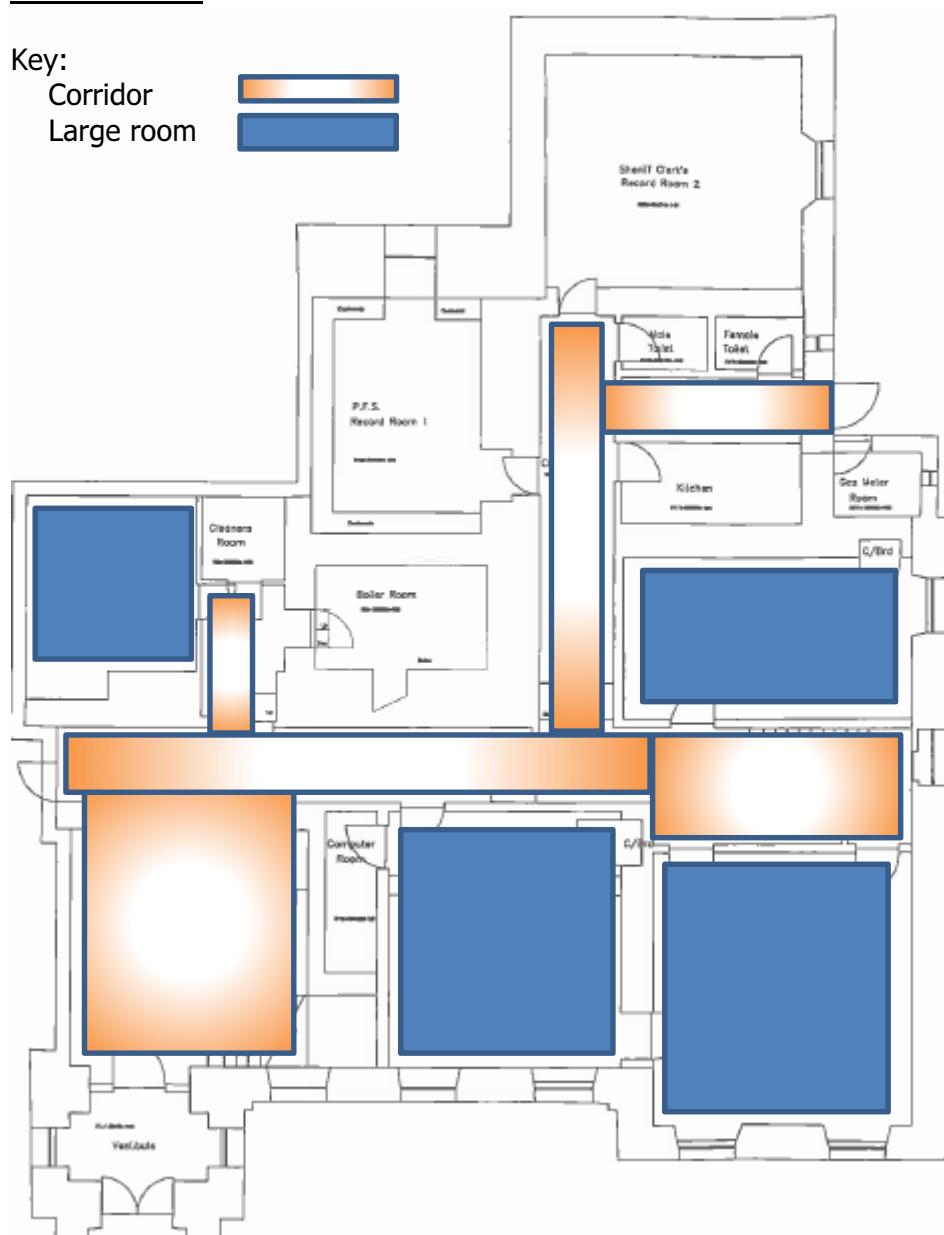
## **Appendix 1 – Plans of the building and its surroundings**

## **Ground Floor**

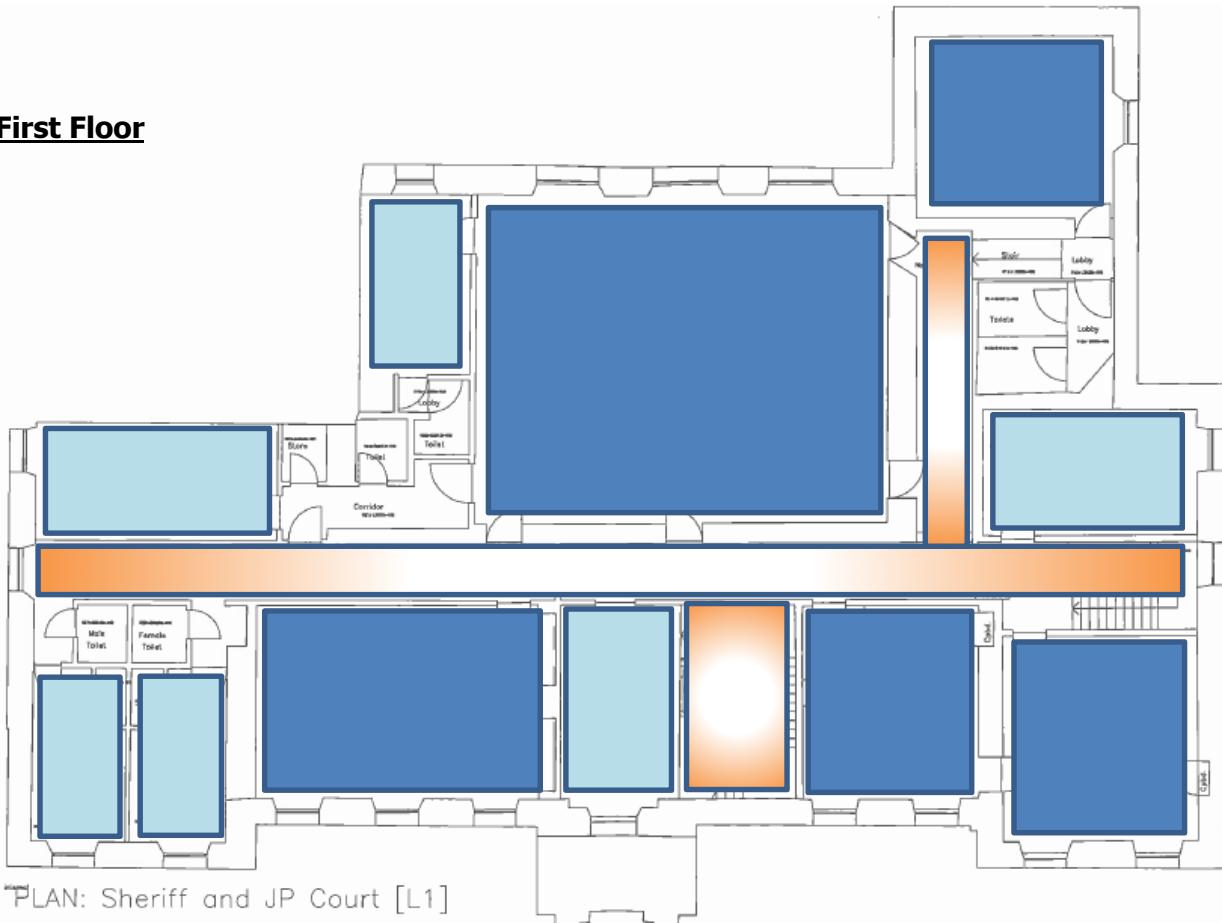
Key:

## 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		6	6
Total	4	11	15

## Surroundings

