

STONEHAVEN TOWN PARTNERSHIP

AGM

TUESDAY 26TH NOVEMBER 2013

Held at the Dunnottar Lounge, Invercarron Resource Centre,

Low Wood Road, Stonehaven, AB39 2LJ

1. PRESENT

OFFICE BEARERS

Douglas Samways

David Fleming

Michelle Ward

MEMBER REPRESENTATIVES

Allan Sutherland

Ian Hunter

Alan McConnachie

Dennis Collie

Wynne Edwards

Andrew Newton

David Lawman

Raymond Milne

Lindsay Verstalen

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCILLORS

Peter Bellarby

Graeme Clark

Raymond Christie

IN ATTENDANCE:

Charles H Sands

APOLOGIES:

Apologies were received from John Robson, Jim Stephen,

2. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chairman welcomed those present and noted the apologies above.

3. MINUTE OF THE 2012 AGM

Minutes of the 2012 AGM were available at the meeting. Approval of the 2012 minute was proposed by Alan McConnachie, seconded by David Lawman and approved by the meeting.

4. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

At the beginning of my report to last year's AGM I commented that the 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. What follows is proof of these claims.

Not long after the 2012 AGM a sub-group was formed with the aim of persuading the council to re-open the Bervie Braes road. It was felt that there had been an over-emphasis on the safety concerns and not enough on the economic benefit of the road to the town. To redress the balance, STP commissioned an economic impact assessment on the value of the road to the town. The resulting report demonstrated emphatically what everyone had suspected, that the road which links the most significant visitor attraction in the area directly to Stonehaven was indeed of huge financial relevance to the town. At the same time, Bervie Braes Sub-group co-opted member George Strang who is also a community councillor and a retired civil engineer, successfully challenged some of the health and safety issues arising from the possibility of soil slippage from the upper slopes of the Bervie Braes by suggesting simple and inexpensive measures which allayed fears by reducing the perceived risk to an acceptable level. As a result of this pressure, council officials prepared an options paper which was debated at the March meeting of the Kincardine and Mearns Area Committee. Sub-group members attended and addressed the meeting and local councillors voted to recommend the option which re-opened the road for six months during the summer with the provision of barriers and a weight and speed limit. Traffic flow was to be monitored, an economic evaluation to be conducted and a review/monitoring exercise was to be carried out once the road was closed for the winter. Results of these evaluations/reviews are to be presented to councillors to enable them to make a decision on the future of the road prior to summer 2014. The Area Committee's recommendation then went to the council's Policy and Resources Committee for ratification because funding of £300,000 was required. Michelle Ward and Frank Budd made a presentation to the P&R committee which backed the K&M decision and agreed the funding. The road opened in May and evidence to date indicates that it is being well used. As the STP had already agreed to conduct a survey of visitors, this went ahead at roughly the same time as the one commissioned by the council and preliminary findings are that the town has benefited financially. One of the STP's objectives is to lead and support key economic development projects in the town and I would contend that in recognising the economic significance of the road and successfully leading moves to get it reopened, proves without doubt that the STP deserves its reputation for getting things done. I would like to thank formally George Strang, Wendy Sylvester of Dunecht Estates and Mark Kummerer of MKA Economics for their part in supporting the directors of STP in getting the Bervie Braes road reopened albeit on a temporary basis.

Another success story in relation to the STP's support of economic development is the caravan site which opened ahead of schedule in June on completion of the Caravan Club of Great Britain's £1.8M refurbishment programme. The site was fully occupied during the summer months and has been busy

this autumn. Initial indications are that many people are staying for three nights or longer which would suggest that the town and surrounding area are clearly benefiting financially and one of our tasks for next year will be to assess that economic impact. Our thanks go to Tony Barnett, head of estates for the Caravan Club, and the site wardens Richard and Maggie Walker for doing such an excellent job. The site will be open for the Christmas and New Year period and it is already fully booked.

Taking time to assess performance is something STP considers very worthwhile and I will say more on this later, but it is pertinent at this point to mention the work of the sub-group established by STP to examine how effective the council's community asset transfer (CAT) policy was in relation to the transfer of the Queen Elizabeth II caravan site to the Caravan Club of Great Britain via STP. The CAT Review Sub-group consisting of two lay members, Alan Bisset and David Dobbie, and three STP directors, Alan McConnachie, Michelle Ward and me, reviewed the transfer of the caravan site by seeking the views and opinions of those directly involved on how useful the CAT policy and its associated procedures had been in relation to this particular asset transfer. The intention was to produce a report which offered advice to anyone such as community voluntary groups considering the transfer of a council asset. I am pleased to report that the sub-group has fulfilled its remit by producing such a report, a copy of which is now on the STP website, and I commend it to you. I wish publicly to thank Alan Bisset and David Dobbie for agreeing to be part of the sub-group and especially for their specialist input which was invaluable. My thanks also go to Alan McConnachie and Michelle Ward for their contribution.

I would like now to mention yet another example of our attempts to support economic development - our plan for a land train to run from the castle to the town. Having demonstrated the economic importance of the Bervie Braes road to the town and realising that there was a huge opportunity to tap into the success of Dunnottar Castle in bringing tens of thousands of visitors to our doorstep every year, we came up with the idea of offering these tourists a novel way of extending their stay and bringing them into the town hopefully to spend money. Various problems prevented the planned trial of the land train this past summer and I acknowledge that issues relating to such things as the precise route have still to be resolved, but the intention is to have it operational by next summer. Michelle Ward is to be congratulated not just for coming up with the idea but for her dogged determination not to be deterred by the obstacles and red tape which have threatened to derail this project.

The land train is related to the next item upon which I wish to comment through the STP's application to the Big Lottery's Coastal Communities Fund (CCF), more of which later. STP was approached by Aberdeenshire Council with a view to developing a marina at the harbour with the STP's commitment in the first instance being to conduct a feasibility study. As we were not in a position to do this ourselves, a bid was made to the CCF. There were two parts to our application. The first was to purchase the land train, the second was to fund for two years the salary of a development worker the main part of whose job was to undertake the harbour development feasibility study. He or she would also take forward some of STP's projects such as our plans to establish an energy saving co-operative and other related but smaller scale initiatives lead by Wynne Edwards. Co-opted director Lindsay Verstralen deserves congratulations for her work in progressing the CCF bid. We hope to hear within the next week or so if our application has been approved.

I wish to stress at this point that STP's success is down to committed and able volunteers giving up their time for the benefit of the people of Stonehaven. It also has to be said that we are arguably a victim of our own success as it appears that more and more is being expected of us. Many of the present board either run their own business or are in full time employment, and they already give up a considerable amount of their own time to take forward STP's projects. A development worker would reduce that workload and stress while at the same time enhance the STP's ability to get things done and take on more. As mentioned, CCF money would enable us to employ a development worker for two years with a view to that post becoming self-funding thereafter. If our CCF bid is unsuccessful

then we will need to consider other ways to fund, perhaps on a part-time basis, someone to act in this capacity.

The final project under the objective of supporting economic development is the former gas works site. Thanks to the tenacity of Michelle Ward, contact was made with the correct department of the site owners and initially it turned out that SSE were willing to consider leasing or selling the site to STP. The advantage to Stonehaven of this derelict site being taken over by STP is that it could then be developed for the benefit of the community rather than being offered for sale on the open market which would inevitably result in it being bought for residential development. Our intention is to turn the site into a car park for much needed extra parking spaces and Michelle continues her efforts to secure this valuable asset for the town.

For the same reasons the STP has been examining possible uses for the court house because at the moment the most likely scenario when the Scottish Court Service eventually puts the building up for sale is that a developer will purchase it with a view to turning it into flats. We feel that if viable alternative options have been considered beforehand then there is a real possibility that the building could be used in a way that benefits the community rather than a commercially motivated developer. Wynne Edwards has already done some work on this and we hope soon to be able to put a proposal to councillors and public alike.

As well as leading and supporting key economic development projects in the town, the STP also has a duty to consult its member organisations and the people of Stonehaven in general in relation to matters in its purview affecting the town's growth, the well-being of the inhabitants and the promotion of the town's attractions. I am pleased to report that the third and final Planning for Real consultation exercise which on this occasion covered the central area of the town was undertaken in May. The outcomes from this have been combined with those from the other two by David Fleming with secretarial assistance from Maureen Newlands. David's way of processing and disseminating the findings has, in my opinion, been imaginative and effective in that it is likely to produce positive results which can then be fed back to the residents of Stonehaven thereby demonstrating that participating in this sort of community engagement is worthwhile. David grouped the responses under headings such as Enhancing the Tourist Potential of the Town, General and Site Specific Improvements, Traffic Management and Dog Fouling. He then identified an "owner" for the comments, noted any plans or identified where they were needed in order for the comments to be actioned, and then recorded any responses. For example: **Issue**—Outdoor all-weather court for basketball, 5-a-side football, volleyball. **Issue Owner**—SCAWSF. **Plan**—Group now constituted. **Outcome**—In progress. The outcomes collated in this manner have been issued to our member organisations for information and comment. It will then be circulated to as large an audience as possible including the council as we hope it will help inform the Community Planning Process. The intention is to update progress on these items at regular intervals and keep our members and the wider public informed as to progress with the issues they have identified as important to them.

Related to PFR has been STP's Improving our Town Centre (IOTC) initiative. This was developed alongside the Business Improvement District (BID) scheme but the latter has proved challenging to progress. However, IOTC under the leadership and drive of David Fleming and Michelle Ward is beginning to gain momentum with the action plan mentioned in last year's chairman's report being implemented.

David Fleming looked around and saw a lot of small things that could be done. The list is quite long, but there have been improvements over the last year. There are still a number that could look better. The people involved have been busy, but Jim Stephen has helped hold a meeting and by spending his time taking this forward. None are difficult but there are three categories. 1 for the owner to do, and we can ask them to do so. 2 for agencies – particularly the council – and we need to get that into the

system. 3 in the middle, but it isn't always sensible to do unless it is a community effort. If we can get the permission of the people involved we can make those things happen.

The so-called street audit was carried out and matters arising from it identified.

A couple of months ago, Jim Stephen organised a public meeting because of his concerns about the general down-at-heel appearance of the town. It was clear from the attendance and comments made that many people shared his views both on how the town looked and what could be done about it. Rather than have two similar initiatives running at the same time with the same aim, it has been agreed that we will hand over our IOTC project to Jim and his team. The official hand over will take place at the AGM.

In relation to promoting the physical well-being of the inhabitants of Stonehaven, the STP has been heavily involved in the project to build an all-weather sports facility in the town. John Robson and I are members of the Stonehaven Community All-weather Sports Facility Committee (SCAWSFC) which has recently held a public consultation on the project, and with the support of the Stonehaven and District Community Council (SDCC) has submitted a planning application to Aberdeenshire Council to build an all-weather surface at Mineralwell Park. An application for funding from SportScotland to match the £320,000 the council has committed to this project has also been made. It is hoped that building can commence in the spring. The next step after putting the project out to tender will be to establish a community based group to manage the facility.

As far as promoting the town's attractions is concerned, STP has worked closely with Open Air in the Square (OAITs) organisers to ensure that this year's event will go ahead as planned with support including financial assistance having been offered. STP is convinced that OAITs 2013 will not only be a resounding success but will bring prestige and money to the town. OAITs is closely linked to Stonehaven's traditional Hogmanay celebration –the world famous fireball ceremony –and STP has worked with the Fireball Committee and the council to refurbish the Town House or auld toon clock tower, work on the exterior of which is progressing at this moment. I wish to thank Raymond Milne for his efforts in this regard, and the councillors for making sure that the money was made available and work carried out. Special mention must go to Brian Watt of Aberdeenshire Council who has overseen this project and has regularly updated us on progress. He has also kept us informed about developments with the coastal paths north and south of the town. We look forward to working with Raymond and Brian on the next phase of the development of the Town House which is the refurbishment of the interior and deciding on the best way to utilise the building for the benefit of the community.

Earlier I made reference to the work of the CAT Review Sub-group in relation to the importance placed by the STP on reviewing performance. Another example of self-evaluation is the "Health Check" we conducted last year which identified two areas of concern: communication and ways of working/organisational efficiency. At the time of my last report we had begun to address both. In relation to the former I am pleased to report that, thanks to the efforts of Wynne Edwards, the new website is up and running, and I have already made reference earlier to the PFR report as an example of the website's use in helping us keep member organisations and others informed about our activities and seeking feedback from them in the process. Improvements to the website and to the ways in which we use it to communicate with member organisations and the public generally are ongoing. As an example of a more hands-on way of communicating with the wider public, STP took a stall at this year's Fein Market and used a multi-media approach to inform people of what we have achieved. I thank Wynne for putting together the video and Allan Sutherland and Alan McConnachie for manning the stall.

In terms of operational efficiency/ways of working, the previous health check identified significant flaws in our constitution, especially shortcomings in the way we defined and identified who our members

were or could be. STP's response to this and other related areas of concern was to apply to become a SCIO and I am very pleased to announce officially that our application to OSCR for incorporation as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation has been approved. Some of the implications of our change of status will be dealt with as a specific item on the AGM agenda.

Further proof of the STP's belief in the value of self evaluation is that we have continued the "Health Check" process and we are once again indebted to Kevin McDermott of Aberdeenshire Council for his advice and guidance in this matter. I am also grateful to Maureen Newlands for the secretarial input. Kevin and I matched STP's performance against the same set of nationally agreed standards and this time, thanks to the steps taken to address the identified shortcomings, there was an obvious improvement in the areas previously identified as being in need of attention. As expected however, the process highlighted new areas of concern such as recruitment and clarification of roles. STP therefore plans to develop an induction process for new members and directors (or trustees as they will now be called), and succession planning to help ensure that we can continue as an effective organisation into the future. The spreadsheet which was the result of the health check update is now on the website. STP will continue regularly to review its performance.

In order to keep us apprised on issues which affect or are likely to affect Stonehaven, a number of individuals, one of whom, Brian Watt, I have mentioned already have accepted our invitation to address the board this past year. I would like to thank Rachael Shanks and Ditta Neumann who spoke on sustainable energy provision, Geoff Runcie who highlighted the problems community groups face accessing sources of information and support, Peter Bellarby who successfully sought our support for Stonehaven becoming a fair trade town, George Cameron who spoke on the council's proposals for the future of the harbour, Mark Skilling who responded to ideas and questions on issues associated with roads and parking, and David Strang Steel and Richard Milne who updated the board on their respective proposals for a new supermarket for the town. The STP is also grateful for the support and encouragement it has received and continues to receive from the four Stonehaven councillors in particular and the Ward 18 councillors in general. Willie Munro's help is also very much appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank all the directors for their support, help and advice over the past year. I would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of Frank Budd who is standing down at this AGM. Frank has served the people of Stonehaven as a director of STP with distinction over a number of years. It is reassuring to me that the other six elected directors have indicated that they are willing to continue for at least another year because that continuity will help the STP serve its members and the people of Stonehaven. As you can see from this report, a great deal has been achieved by the STP this year especially when you consider that we have been at least three directors short of complement for most of that time.

Stonehaven has been described as the small town with the big ideas. I think the STP can be proud of its role in helping to bring many of those big ideas to fruition. Long may it continue to do so.

Douglas Samways
Chair, Stonehaven Town Partnership
November 2013

5. SECRETARY'S REPORT

David Fleming thanked Charles Sands for his firm's backup during the year.

On the matter of STP gaining Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) status, David said this type of organization was invented by the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator (OSCR) because charities had got into difficulties so the idea is twofold: to make certain reporting is quite clear – we report to OSCR; and secondly, why is a charity there. That question is now resolved by reference to our original constitution.

There are two types of member – incorporated bodies (including a SCIO itself) can be members and they need to nominate a representative, and unincorporated bodies which need to nominate an individual to be a member. So STP has to change its membership records, which was why an email was recently sent out to membership groups. The membership records are partly public. STP also has to make some effort to keep membership records as up to date as possible.

STP now has trustees, not directors. The existing directors would become trustees - as of tonight. Also, OSCR requires SCIOs to define the area they represent. David drew the attention of those present to a map. Most of ward 18 is covered but the council border is not quite the same. STP's area is defined by postcodes (see appendix to SCIO constitution). If someone applies for liaison outside that area we should consider finding them somewhere more suitable.

At this point Ian Hunter asked if the STP had decided no longer to be on the Community Planning group. David Fleming replied that he had decided he did not want to be a representative on it. Community planning has two heads. The first was for the services to work together. The secondly was to spread the word and be driven by what the community wants them to do. David felt he had already done 3 years, and none of the other directors wanted to take up the role.

Douglas Samways made the point that the decision does not mean we will not get re-involved at some point in the future.

Raymond Christie said he understood the area to be the town but that he thought the STP's area had been defined as larger than that. Douglas Samways explained that the area had been defined fairly widely so that as many people as possible could be involved.

Finally, David Fleming said that he believed the Stonehaven Business Association would reconsider the BIDs project in the spring, and that he would go back to them by that time. Not all businesses are members of the SBA and so he wanted to hear from non-members interested in becoming involved so that he could speak to them.

6. TREASURER'S REPORT

Michelle Ward advised that the Accounts were approved on 17 September and had since been used to support the SCIO application.

Douglas Samways confirmed that the STP was always very open about how it spent its money.

David Fleming said that a lot had happened since the year end in March. Last summer we employed the caravan park wardens, which explains the wages figure.

Douglas Samways advised that OSCR had not queried these accounts. He thanked Lesley Macdonald who has been a great help to the group.

7. APPROVAL OF THE ACCOUNTS FOR YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2013

The meeting approved the Accounts.

8. APPOINTMENT OF THE EXAMINER

Lesley Macdonald cannot act as examiner for the SCIO, but Charles Sands CA will be able to do so.

9. ELECTION OF TRUSTEES/DIRECTORS

Alan McConnachie has indicated he wants to stand down.

Peter Bellary advised that the rules for company directors and for SCIO trustees are slightly different. Four trustees signed the formation documents and the SCIO says they continue after the 1st AGM. Nominees don't need to be nominated any more. Individuals can be elected, and incorporated groups can nominate someone. So there are 4 who continue, being:

Douglas Samways

David Fleming

Wynne Edwards

Michelle Ward

New trustees were sought and they would also become directors until the Company Limited by Guarantee was dissolved.

The following were nominated and appointed at the meeting:

Allan Sutherland

John Robson (nominated in his absence)

Jim Stephen (nominated in his absence)

Elizabeth Havens (nominated in her absence)

Lindsay Verstalen

Up to 12 trustees are allowed; 9 were appointed.

9 GUEST SPEAKER : MR. TONY BARNETT, ESTATE MANAGER, CARAVAN CLUB OF GREAT BRITAIN.

Thank you for your kind words which I will pass on to the wardens.

These words may not be the Caravan Club's, or indeed my own! I will be controversial and philosophical. However, the Gettysburg Address is less than 300 words, which Lincoln delivered in 4 minutes, and the people in America know it verbatim. He followed the best orator of the age who spoke for 2 hours and no one can remember what he said.

How has the site performed? It opened in June and has performed very well. We expected 14,500 pitch nights by year 3, but now expect to exceed that in the first year. That is good. There was 95% occupancy in July, 99% in August and in September it was 94%. And whilst we would normally close in November, we have broken that rule and will not be closing until January. There are 286 bookings for

December. 58% of those have booked through the website, 15% through the Sussex call centre, and 27% through the wardens – exceptionally high. Average age of visitors is 55-56. The breakdown is:

18,421 adults
2,589 children
632 tiny tots

So there have been 21,500 individuals thus far – that is 2.3 people per pitch.

Offsite spending is estimated at £50 per night to the local economy. The direct expenditure is therefore £725,000. Taking 5 as the “churn”, that is £3.6m per year. That is hopefully what we are bringing in.

The caravanning fraternity is 570,000 caravan, and 170,000 motor caravans – so that is just short of 750,000 people with the kit. The caravan club has 360,000 members – about 49% of the available market. I don't see why we can't get 500,000 members (68%). Caravanning is quite cool!

The baby boomers are getting into that period when they think about caravanning and it is all going our way. We are not going for loads of sites, but we want to use our existing assets more intensively. What difficulties do we have? Planning consent can cost £100,000, and some people can hate caravans and object to planning applications. But we already have 160+ sites plus some affiliates. It would be impossible for anyone else to develop that number of locations.

I would specifically like to mention Aberdeenshire Council's Frances McFarlane who was firm but fair during our application – very enlightened. But it was the STP – the community involvement and local councillors – that were central to our involvement in Stonehaven. If it wasn't for the STP, we wouldn't be here.

We tested our trust to the limit without a “break clause”. So thanks to STP and the Council. Mutual trust can't be underestimated, and it is disappointing that the works to the embankment cost 4 tent pitches. We want that resolved if nothing else to avoid tarnishing the Council's reputation. There would be a lack of enthusiasm to engage in a transaction with the Council until that is resolved. There are opportunities all around the country for us. The shame for me is that Aberdeenshire communities might not now benefit.

We have invested £1.8m in Stonehaven, and £5m on three sites in Scotland. Ayr, the central lowlands, Forfar, and Aberdeen – the golden crescent. This is where we see significant growth potential. Some people claim that our climate is going to be like Mauritius by 2050. This is where people will want to be. Why go abroad? The north east of England and Scotland are the future. Everything points in that direction. Our problem is to get others to share that vision.

The STP has vision and tenacity, and David Fleming and Frank Budd are top of the list. They devoted a lot of time to see this project through. The Councillors too were very supportive and that is fantastic to see. I am convinced the relationship is a strong one and we will resolve the problems.

I expect continued growth and we will focus on touring sites where we are. Looking ahead, we can expect smart cars, motor bikes and so on. We will need storage to keep caravans in. People will arrive on Friday with the warden having set the caravan ready for them, and leave on Sunday for the warden to put it away. That way we can take the pressure off driving to the site. Time is short and some people squander it. I am driven by wanting to leave the world in a better place. If I can add a bit to a community like yours, so much the better.

What I have witnessed here is the most refined version of that I have seen - and I travel a lot. As I go north, local authorities become more pragmatic and open to discussion. In the south, the answer is

often “no” – what is the question? But I have never met the commitment I have met here and it is a privilege to be here. The STP will be a strong influence for years to come and I hope the local community appreciates that.

The first time I went to the site there were 20 people to show support and that was quite exceptional. We are not here by chance – Stonehaven has a lot to offer. My advice: be relevant; play to your strengths. Continued energy and enthusiasm from people in this room are important. You have found an important way to leave legacy and may I pay tribute to you.

10. VOTE OF THANKS AND AOCB

Thanks

Douglas Samways thanked Tony Barnett, adding that the reference to the Gettysberg Address had reminded him that Abraham Lincoln had two books on his desk in the White House when he was president of the United States - the Bible and the complete works of Robert Burns. This was relevant because he represented the Stonehaven (Fatherland) Burns Blub. The statistics quoted by Tony were impressive and show what a huge success that site has been giving £3.6m to the local community and with a positive future. He questioned the statement that people hate caravanners. The people of Cowie like them a lot more than they did before! He concluded by saying that he knew Tony to be a reasonable pragmatic person and his patience was being stretched to the limit by the intransigence of some council officials. But he had no doubt there is a solution there for all involved.

AOCB

Allan Sutherland commented on the Bervie Braes. There was a brief discussion on the original caravan park study, which said it would be worth £600k to the town, so the STP has brought in several times what we estimated.

Douglas Samways concluded that the STP was effective because people give up their time for the good of the town, and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the trustees is on 28 January 2014.