



STONEHAVEN Sustainable Small Town Strategy

DRAFT WORK IN PROGRESS

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Executive Summary

The strategic goal of the Stonehaven Whole Town Strategy is to enable Stonehaven as a small town to remain a sustainable and thriving community into the future. The timing of this strategy is opportune as the local authority, Aberdeenshire Council, is currently developing the Structure Plan which will identify the development needed across the shire over the next 25 years with ensuing implications for Stonehaven. This strategy document needs to help inform that process.

To deliver a sustainable future for Stonehaven requires, most importantly, the following elements to be place and, if possible, enhanced:

- Residents to have a sense of civic pride and belonging to the town
- A sound economic base for the town
- The ongoing provision of key services and facilities in the town
- Protection of the town's environment, built and natural, which make it special

The context for this strategy provides challenges:

- The need for the town to grow in line with Aberdeenshire's needs without damaging its natural heritage and sense of place
- The likely decline of oil industry based employment which is linked to the overall prosperity of the town
- The likely ageing of the population

The strategy highlights a range of measures required to deal with these and other challenges. However, some themes emerge that are central to the forward strategy of the town. These are:

- **The need to create employment for the town**

This is key to delivering

- A sound economic base for the town
- Resources to support a broad base of in-town facilities
- Attracting younger people into the town

The implications are

- The tourism strategy for the town needs to be progressed
- The second supermarket needs to go ahead in a suitable location and subject to the planning constraints outlined below
- The development of the existing base of marketable land for industrial use needs to be encouraged

- **The need to maintain and enhance a vibrant town centre**

This is key to delivering

- A sense of place and belonging centred on the heart of the town
- Employment and tourism
- The resources necessary for the ongoing maintenance of the built heritage

The implications are

- A key focus of community efforts should be on enhancing facilities in and around the town centre
- Suitable infill development which will deliver smaller housing units focussed towards the town centre is preferable to out of town growth focussed on the A90 and Aberdeen
- Local retail needs to be protected from a second supermarket through strict planning conditions on the range of goods the supermarket can sell and the enforcement of those conditions over time

- **The need to foster the volunteer spirit of the town**

This is key to delivering

- A sense of belonging and commitment to the town
- Ongoing support for community led projects and services
- The necessary funds for community facility improvements

The implications are

- Aberdeenshire Council's role is to facilitate and support those groups which are active in contributing to the facilities and services of the town
- The depth and quality of community engagement and dialogue will have to improve
- There need to be visible wins so that the community sees its efforts rewarded and is encouraged to participate

Introduction

Stonehaven is one of three small Aberdeenshire towns to take part in the Sustaining Small Expanding Towns Project (SusSET) within the European INTERREG IIIc programme. As such it has benefited from the links created with nine partner towns in Sweden, Poland and Greece. The aim has been to share best practice in establishing a small town strategy with a view to enabling them to remain vibrant and prosperous in an ever-changing environment. This whole town strategy is, therefore, the result of Stonehaven's participation in the SusSET project.

This strategy document begins with an assessment of the town's current strengths (S) and weaknesses (W) and considers the opportunities (O) and the threats (T) ahead. This SWOT analysis is drawn from the results of recent consultation exercises in the town and, in particular, consultation with local residents undertaken by the Stonehaven & District Community Council in 2006.

It then steps through the eighteen different Small Town Strategy headings. These are grouped within the three overarching segments of social, economic and environmental issues. Under each individual heading, the current situation is established, known future developments are considered and the strategic conclusions are then identified.

Inevitably, across the eighteen headings, there is overlap and repetition of certain points that connect the different segments and issues. This highlights very clearly where there needs to be integration and joined up thinking so that the implications of any one decision on the whole are understood. It also helps to identify the themes that repeatedly emerge and form the basis of a core strategy laid out in the Executive Summary at the front of the document.

STONEHAVEN: An Overview

Stonehaven is a coastal town situated some fifteen miles south of Aberdeen City. It is the principal county town of historic Kincardineshire within the Local Authority of Aberdeenshire and specifically its Kincardine and Mearns Area.

Stonehaven sits in a setting of outstanding natural beauty. To the east is the town's sweeping bay and harbour, to the north and south it is bounded by cliffs and to the west the town is contained currently by the man-made boundary of the A90 trunk road beyond which are green fields, woodland and rolling hills.

It is a town with a rich history. Its historical credentials include, amongst others, its oldest building, the Tolbooth, which dates from the end of the 16th century and, of particular note, the nearby ancient monument of Dunnottar Castle.

The economic centre of Stonehaven, historically, was the old town and harbour with fishing its main local industry. Over the course of the late 18th and 19th centuries, the town expanded towards the current Market Square. However, it is the changing fortunes of Aberdeen City which have had the greatest impact on the town's growth. The town doubled in size from 1971 to 1981 and has grown a further 35% since then to a population today of about 11,000 some 76% of which work in the city of Aberdeen or surrounding areas.

Although many of the town's residents commute to Aberdeen, Stonehaven does offer all the key services and amenities of a small self-contained county town. In addition to its local retail, industrial and commercial businesses, there are the amenities of a local leisure centre, golf course and recreation grounds, primary and secondary schools, local authority services and medical services including the Kincardine Community Hospital.

Its natural setting, history and specific attractions such as its Art Deco Open Air Pool and its many special events have made Stonehaven an attractive place to visit as well as to live.

Stonehaven: A Closer Look

Some of Stonehaven's greatest assets, such as its natural setting, present Stonehaven with its greatest challenges as it tries to balance their protection with ongoing pressure to grow. There are also weaknesses in the town that must be addressed if the town is to fulfil its potential. Detailed below is a summary of the town's strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities and the threats as defined primarily by local residents through a consultation undertaken during 2006 by the local Community Council. The Future of Stonehaven Consultation Report 2006 summarises the methodology and findings of this consultation and can be viewed on the Stonehaven & District Community Council (S&DCC) website at www.stonehavencommunitycouncil.co.uk.

Market Research undertaken in 2005 and 2007 by the Stonehaven...It's Special Tourism Group indicates that many local resident views are echoed by visitors to the town. Similarly, a survey undertaken with members of the Stonehaven Business Association between 2003 and 2005 identifies common themes of concern and interest. This would suggest that there should be strong support for a town strategy that begins to address the identified issues.

STONEHAVEN: Its Strengths

The Geographical Setting

The adjacent table highlights the fundamental value residents place on the local geographical setting and scenery. Its coastal location and harbour combined with the green spaces of its parks, Dunnottar Woods and the readily accessible surrounding countryside feature highly amongst its foremost assets.

These are views also reflected in the market research undertaken with visitors to the town.

Top 12 Strengths	%	Rank
Seaside Location	82	1
The Harbour	71	2
Open Air Pool	70	3
Transport Links	65	4
Green Spaces	61	5
Dunnottar Castle	58	6
Surrounding Countryside	57	7
Proximity to Aberdeen	55	8
Local Schools	53	9
Small Local Shops	52	10=
Dunnottar Woods	52	10=
Local Clubs and Groups	51	12

The local skyline views, whether from within the town looking up towards the cliffs or from the cliffs looking down and across the town, are also identified by the consultation as important strengths.

Although there is room for improvement, many view the town as pretty and attractive as well as benefiting from a strong sense of place.

Stonehaven's situation in relation to Aberdeen is a notable strength. Aberdeen offers a source of jobs, increased retail and commercial choice, the broader range of amenities and cultural opportunities associated with a large city and a transport hub for international and national travel.

Visitor Attractions

Two particular attractions are highlighted here as outstanding, the exceptional Art Deco Open Air Pool and Dunnottar Castle. The harbour itself is also one of the town's most visited sites. Other features of the town which are also viewed as strengths by visitors and local residents include the baywalk, the town's sense of history, its local walks, the golf course and, in particular, the many weekend and special events such as the Hogmanay celebrations and the Fireballs.

The Highland Boundary Fault, which sits to the immediate north of Stonehaven's main bay along Skatie Shore, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest which also draws visitors.

It is notable in the research amongst visitors to the town that many have a long association with the town and choose to visit time and time again. This suggests that Stonehaven's core strengths have endured over time.

Transport Links

Stonehaven benefits from a local railway station, bus services and an easily accessible road link, the A90, north to Aberdeen and south towards Dundee. Travel inland to the Dee Valley is also possible from Stonehaven and, as a result, the town is known as a "gateway" to Royal Deeside. The A92 scenic coastal road south of Stonehaven also ensures a good connection to other coastal towns in the Mearns.

The prospects for Crossrail services to Inverurie and the proposed Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) Stonehaven Fastlink are future developments expected to have a positive impact on travel to and from the town as well.

Given the relatively high percentage of the town's residents who work in Aberdeen or elsewhere in the north east of Scotland, these transport options are of real and significant value for local residents and the surrounding rural communities. Aberdeen's international airport is also part of the valued transport mix.

Local Amenities

Stonehaven's retail centre and local schools are identified in the table as key assets. Residents also identified its local leisure and play park facilities, its library and many different eating establishments as being important to them. Together they all help to reinforce Stonehaven's strong sense of place and identity as a self-reliant town and not just a dormitory for Aberdeen.

Community Spirit

Stonehaven is a town with many local clubs and groups organised by committed volunteers. There is a plethora of recreational and sports groups as well as the volunteer organisations that support the civic and business life of the town. These all speak of a friendly and engaged community with a strong sense of community spirit.

Other

The consultation highlighted other strengths of the town worthy of mention. The town currently has a balanced socio-demographic population including long-established Stonehaven families as well as "incomers". Although many working residents commute out of the town, there is a local job economy. The crime rate is relatively low and this reinforces the perception of Stonehaven as a safe place to live. Safety is also highlighted

in the context of the town being easy and relatively safe to navigate on foot or bike as well as by car. This is linked in turn to the current size of the town as a strength which allows for a range of services and amenities all within accessible distance. Together these strengths also contribute to Stonehaven being viewed as a family friendly community.

STONEHAVEN: Its Weaknesses

Top 12 Weaknesses	%	Rank
Youth-oriented Entertainment/Facilities	78	1
Extent of Retail Diversity	74	2
Lack of Police on the Beat	65	3
Litter	64	4
Vandalism	63	5
Groups of Youths Loitering	59	6
Dog Mess	46	7
Car Parking	43	8
Declining Services	41	9
Unsustainable Development	40	10=
Leisure and Sport Facilities	40	10=
Pressure on School Rolls and Facilities	34	12

Entertainment Facilities

- **Youth**

Stonehaven is viewed by its residents as not offering enough in the way of casual entertainment options for its youth. Although, the town has many organised activities and clubs offering a wide range of sport, leisure and recreational pursuits, there is very little for teenagers and younger people to do otherwise. There is no local cinema, no ten-pin bowling, no casual drop-in centre, no skate park (at present) and no indoor climbing wall and so on.

As a result, young people can often be found loitering on street corners, in the Market Square, parks and other public spaces during the evenings. Their presence can be intimidating to other residents especially if they are gathered in large numbers.

Vandalism is not automatically a boredom problem. However, a lack of amenities for young people does not help.

- **Visitors**

This lack of entertainment for youth is echoed in another way by visitors to the town who frequently remark that there is a lack of bad weather entertainment options. Again, the demand is for a choice of activities that can be taken up on a casual basis rather than needing to belong to a local club or group.

Local Retail Diversity

A town centre with small local shops is viewed as very desirable by residents but, at the moment, there is a lack of variety of shops. Stonehaven is often compared to other towns in the shire unfavourably in this regard. Young people also identify a problem with retail diversity and a lack of local shops selling items that interest them at an affordable price.

Local businesses view the lack of small local shops as a concern with some also suggesting high business rates contribute to the problem.

A linked issue is the lack of a second supermarket in Stonehaven. A want of competition and choice, economic leakage, and the carbon footprint implications of residents travelling out of town to other larger supermarkets are negative factors of the current situation.

Local Policing and Vandalism

Stonehaven is not a high crime area. However, in the past few years there has been an increase in the instance of vandalism. Residents consider the lack of police on the beat to be a serious concern as it is known that high visibility policing does have a positive impact on this problem.

Civic Pride and Community Spirit

There is a clearly identified problem with litter on the streets, chewing gum on the pavements and dog fouling in Stonehaven. These are problems that are not unique to the town but are visible to everyone – resident, visitor and business owner alike.

The town is dependent on a relatively small pool of dedicated volunteers who work hard to maintain and improve the town. The Friends of the Open Air Pool, the Stonehaven Horizon Project, the Stonehaven Business Association, the Adopt-a-Street Litter Scheme and the newly formed Stonehaven Town Partnership are just some of the organisations upon which the town is reliant to address many of its problems. If such efforts are to be sustainable, new volunteers have to be found to step forward and carry on their work which, without voluntary effort, would not happen.

Residents and visitors, especially visitors who have known the town in the past, view the town centre as looking relatively run down and shabby with many shop fronts not maintained to a high standard. The outdoor paddling pool, in a prime location next to the

Open Air Pool, has been identified as being particularly unsightly in its current state. The poor appearance and condition of the access roads also do not do credit to the town.

Although Stonehaven is identified as having a strong sense of place there is not the associated sense of self-confidence. Instead, it was felt by some residents that we do not value or market adequately the town's strengths.

Amenities and Services

There is a strong view amongst many residents that although Stonehaven has a broad *range* of facilities, few, if any of these, have received the necessary investment to enable them to cope with the increased demand placed on them by recent population growth. Unsustainable development impacts many specific amenities and services including:

- **Leisure and Sports Facilities**

Stonehaven has a range of leisure and sporting facilities, including:

- a leisure centre with a multi-purpose gym hall, a 25m swimming pool and small weights room
- Recreation Grounds which provide for outdoor tennis, indoor and outdoor bowling and putting
- a large local park used by the local football and cricket clubs
- local rugby pitches used and maintained by the local rugby club
- a local pavilion and a variety of local halls available for hire by groups
- a number of small playgrounds around the town and a central one including an adventure play area at Queen Elizabeth Park next to the Stonehaven Leisure Centre

However, whilst this list highlights the *range* of facilities, it gives no clue as to their standard or suitability today for purpose. Investment is required across these facilities, and certain specific shortfalls urgently need addressing such as the lack of all-weather pitches and a skate park.

Local visitors also identify a lack of water sport pursuits for enthusiasts which are a missed opportunity for a coastal town with two rivers.

- **Local Schools**

Stonehaven has three primary schools and one secondary school. Dunnottar School, in particular, is known to be under pressure from a high school roll in relation to available space. The facilities of Mackie Academy are patchy with investment in sports facilities, social spaces and classrooms required. Although changing demographic patterns may suggest that the school roll will not continue to increase at the same rate, the investment identified is already needed *today*.

- **The Town Hall**

Stonehaven has a well located Town Hall sitting centrally off the Market Square. However, internally it is run down and in need of major investment and repair to make the most of its significant potential for the town and to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.

- **Car Parking**

Visitors to the town do not highlight a particular problem with parking; indeed they appreciate the central parking location of the Market Square and relatively low cost. However, residents do identify two issues: a general lack of car parking, particularly in the area of the old town, and the suitability of the Market Square as a car park rather than being used in a more creative way. However, if the latter arrangement was to be changed, alternative central parking arrangements would need to be identified.

- **Public Toilets**

Public toilets that are not always open, well maintained or offering suitable disabled access is a matter of visitor and local resident concern. It is noteworthy that young people, in particular, highlighted a problem with the lack of public toilets which is probably linked to the fact that, lacking suitable youth-oriented amenities, they are more dependent on such public amenities when they are out and about.

- **Aberdeenshire Council Services**

Many local residents have some dissatisfaction with the provision of Aberdeenshire Council services. Changes in waste management arrangements, which affected every householder in late 2006, were viewed, in particular, as a decline in service. Other areas of concern include the maintenance of the roads and, especially the access roads, the cleanliness of the streets and public spaces, the provision of public bins and the general upkeep of the town. Declining satisfaction with Aberdeenshire Council services is not unique to Stonehaven. Aberdeenshire Council's 2006 Residents Survey shows that within the Kincardine and Mearns area as a whole there is a similar downward trend in satisfaction, views possibly having been adversely affected by recent changes in service provision.

Housing & Growth

Housing in Stonehaven is less expensive than Aberdeen which combined with other factors has helped to make Stonehaven an attractive place to live whilst working in the city. However, there is nonetheless a lack of affordable housing in Stonehaven for first time and low income buyers.

A linked problem is how Stonehaven can continue to grow within its existing boundaries without damaging some of its most valued topographical features. Growth to date has

been contained within the A90 road boundary to the west and has been fiercely resisted by local residents on the braes to the north and south. Some “in fill” opportunities do still remain but these are inadequate to meet the anticipated ongoing demand. To the west of the A90, a number of major pipelines cross the surrounding fields and impose Health and Safety related constraints on the development options in this area.

Tourism & Accommodation

Stonehaven is short of adequate Bed & Breakfast accommodation and lacks a large quality hotel able to cater for bus parties or large scale events. The Stonehaven Caravan and Camping Site presents problems that need addressing if it is to be attractive to touring visitors.

Transport

Access to a choice of transport options is an identified strength of the town; however, the quality, reliability and affordability of public transport are associated weaknesses.

STONEHAVEN: The Threats

Top 12 Areas to Protect	%	Rank
Green Spaces such as Mineralwell Park	73	1
The Harbour	70	2
Open Air Pool	68	3
Dunnottar Woods	62	4
The Beach	55	5
Leisure and Sport Facilities	48	6
Surrounding Countryside	46	7
Dunnottar Castle	42	8
Skyline View	41	9
Small Local Shops	37	10
Size of Town	34	11
Market Square	33	12

The areas prioritised for protecting reflect quite closely, not surprisingly, those aspects of the town identified as being its strengths.

Insensitive development

Stonehaven’s sense of place is strongly defined by its geography and the fact that it offers the services and amenities that enable it to be more than a dormitory for Aberdeen. The aspects of the town to protect clearly underline this point. The parks and woods, the harbour, beach, surrounding countryside and skyline views define the geography of the

town. Its current size, the Market Square at the heart of the town today, its various retail and recreational facilities are what make it a self-contained town.

Stonehaven will continue to grow. Residents understand that this growth is inevitable but they have consistently resisted insensitive housing or commercial development that threatens any of those aspects that define the beauty and sense of place of the town in particular.

Proximity to Aberdeen

Stonehaven's relative proximity to the city of Aberdeen is a *mixed* blessing. On the one hand, it is the workplace of many Stonehaven residents and it offers a valued increased in choice of amenities and services. On the other hand, the town can lose out on funding for local projects as the need in Stonehaven is not viewed as being as great as for other towns at a greater distance from the city. There is also the risk that if Stonehaven continues to grow for the benefit primarily of Aberdeen, it could develop into a dormitory town with little of its own residual identity.

Perceived prosperity

Stonehaven is a relatively prosperous town, with low crime indicators, high employment and, as already noted, a range of facilities to offer its residents. This perceived prosperity means it is not currently a priority area for funding or resources. However, standards across amenities and services are perceived by residents as in decline.

Over-reliance on a small volunteer base

Many of the projects currently under consideration which might address problem areas in Stonehaven are heavily dependent on voluntary effort. This reliance on volunteers is partly fuelled by funding streams for a wide range of projects that volunteer organisations alone can source. However, this currently places great pressure on a relatively small number of people and, to be sustainable over time, requires new volunteers with the time and commitment to make a difference to be found otherwise projects that could happen simply won't.

A second supermarket

The need for a second supermarket is a matter that can be hotly debated. Many residents would like a second supermarket but recognise that a large development of this nature presents certain risks and difficult choices about location and has implications for the existing retail centre of the town. There are divided views over whether it would keep and attract more shoppers or whether it would, in fact, damage the town's shops.

Further changes in holiday trends

Stonehaven's tourist economy could be adversely affected by a number of variables including cheap international travel which broadens the competition especially for

weekend breaks, changing weather patterns, alternative destinations with a better range of accommodation and indoor/outdoor activities, competition from other spending choices and a loss of identity if the town continues to grow and fails to protect those features that attract visitors.

A lack of vision

The town needs to develop a vision for the future. It needs to identify the balance it intends to strike between development decisions that will ensure the positive benefits of ongoing growth for both resident and visitor and those piecemeal decisions that risk over time undermining it.

STONEHAVEN: The Opportunities

There are many potential opportunities in Stonehaven; however, resident, visitor and business priorities are linked to addressing the problem areas already identified. They include:

- Improving sport and leisure facilities
- Encouraging greater retail diversity including a second supermarket
- Encouraging casual entertainment options which would benefit everyone, but especially youth
- Initiatives to achieve cleaner streets and encourage a better “public face” to the town
- Seeking funding for a Town Hall facility that fulfils its potential
- Better policing with more “bobbies on the beat”
- Investing in the local schools
- Considering how to use the Market Square more creatively
- Increasing investment in and maintenance of the town infrastructures including roads and pathways
- Supporting sustainable development projects only and then only in areas that do not threaten the core strengths of the town
- Encouraging more affordable housing for first time and low income buyers
- Investing in tourism
- Investing in local employment opportunities

SOCIAL

Identity

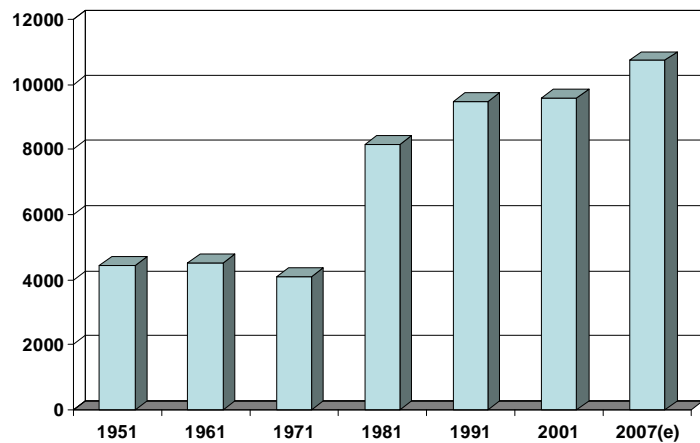
As already noted, Stonehaven has a strong “sense of place” which is reinforced by, at present, very clearly defined town boundaries, three out of four of which are the natural boundaries of sea, brae and cliff, the fourth being the A90 road to the west. Stonehaven sits, as a result, in a bowl facing seawards.

This coastal setting, enhanced by corridors along its two rivers of woodland and parkland, defines Stonehaven. Although the town has grown from the original fishing village set around the harbour and the old town’s High Street by expanding north and west inland, it nonetheless has most of its commercial, retail and leisure amenities still within just a few minutes of the sea. The seascape and coastline, the harbour and attractions found close to the seafront, are the aspects of Stonehaven that tourists first identify when commenting on Stonehaven.

Stonehaven has grown dramatically in the past forty years. The most significant period of growth occurred between 1971 and 1981 as the town population doubled in size. This period coincides with the growth in the north east economy fuelled by North Sea oil exploration. Today, the majority of Stonehaven’s working residents commute out of the town to employment which raises the question, in the context of identity, of whether Stonehaven is just

a dormitory town for Aberdeen. Although this is a risk for Stonehaven, at present, the town continues to be an important centre for administration and services, both commercial and public, for its own residents and those in the surrounding rural communities who look to Stonehaven as their county town.

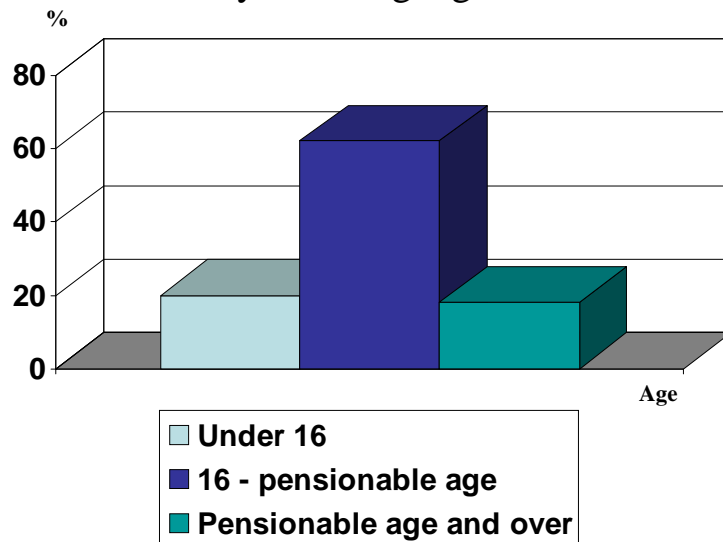
Stonehaven Population Since 1951



Source: GROS Population Data

Local residents consider that Stonehaven currently has a healthy mix of young, working age and older residents.

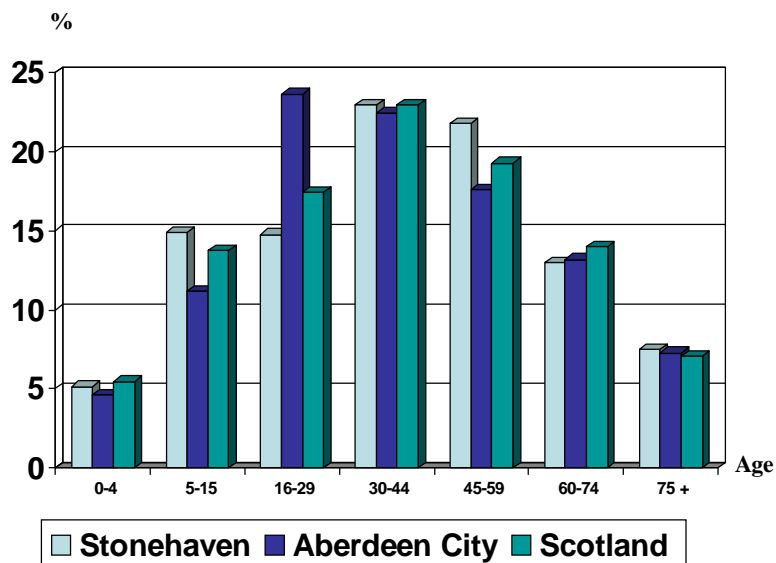
Stonehaven Population Breakdown by Working Age in 2001



Source: SCROL, 2001 Census Population Data

This population chart dating from 2001 reveals that this perception is broadly correct as neither end of the age spectrum dominates the age demographic. However, a closer look at the age figures for Stonehaven in 2001 reveals that this is likely to change over time. The chart below gives a more detailed breakdown by age of the Stonehaven population and compares that with Aberdeen City and Scotland as a whole.

Breakdown of Resident Population by Age in 2001



Source: SCROL, 2001 Census Population Data

Although certain age segments are comparatively equal across Stonehaven, Aberdeen and Scotland, three segments stand out

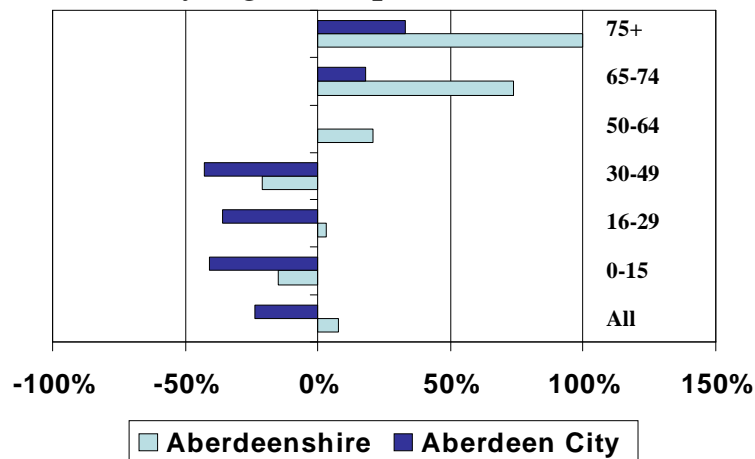
- Stonehaven has more young people aged 5-15
- Stonehaven has significantly fewer 16-29 year olds
- Stonehaven has significantly more 45-59 year olds

This suggests that whilst Stonehaven is an attractive place to raise children, the town is not so attractive to young people once they leave school whereas Aberdeen as a university town has a high percentage of 16 - 29 year olds. Further along the age spectrum, Stonehaven has a comparatively high number of residents who are still working but in the 45-59 age range.

Stonehaven has a low unemployment rate, so this chart with its high numbers of older working residents would indicate that Stonehaven should have a relatively affluent population. However, if the population pattern was to age according to this population snapshot, then the number of older people in the town would significantly increase over time with consequent implications for the town's *future* identity and strategic priorities.

This view of the future is supported by population projections, based on 2004 figures, for Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire, which although not Stonehaven specific, point to a rapidly ageing population in our area.

Projected Change in Population by Age Group 2004 to 2024



Source: GROS 2004-based Population Projections for Scottish Areas

Identity - Strategic Conclusions

- Stonehaven’s identity as a town with boundaries determined by key natural features needs, as a matter of priority, to be protected as these are fundamental to Stonehaven’s sense of place as defined by local residents and visitors. Decision-making relating to Stonehaven’s future needs to refer to and satisfy this priority.
- Stonehaven’s position as a town with its own services and amenities also defines its identity. Maintaining the independent viability of the town is again a key priority for decision-making.
- Although Stonehaven currently has a vibrant working population, demographic trends indicate an ageing population. To counter this future trend would require a strategy to encourage growth and inward migration of younger residents. Alternatively, the town needs to recognise this change to its future demographic identity and prepare for it.

Belonging to Stonehaven means...

“Having a sense of pride in the town. Appreciating living in a town which is close to a large city but which retains its own sense of community and individuality.”

- Sheila Lilley

Belonging to Stonehaven means...

“There is a real sense of community here; people I meet on the street are friendly and speak to you. The sea is just down the road. Station, buses, supermarket, medical centre and shops are close by...”

- Donald MacAulay

Quotes by local residents from the “Sense of Belonging” project

Inclusion

There are national policies and statutory guidelines relating to inclusion which public bodies such as Aberdeenshire Council and other members of the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership must follow.

An inclusive society is founded on promoting understanding and a positive appreciation of the diversity of individuals and groups within it, on removing conscious or unconscious discrimination and eliminating unnecessary barriers to achievement for all its members.

Discrimination can be experienced by many people for a range of reasons and, in particular, on the basis of

- Disability
- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Sexual Orientation
- Education
- Poverty

In the context of a small town such as Stonehaven, the levels of available data on inclusion are patchy. However, it is worth considering for each of the above categories what issues should be addressed or questions asked to ensure the town is inclusive for all its residents.

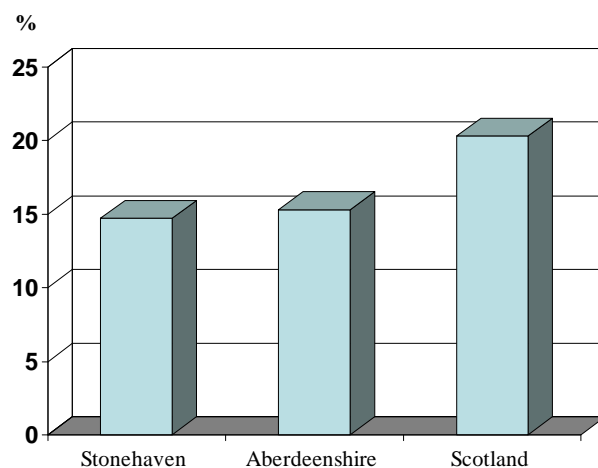
Disability

Disability is a physical or mental impairment which has an effect on people's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. That effect must be:

- substantial (that is, more than minor or trivial), and
- adverse, and
- long term (that is it has lasted or is likely to last a year or for the rest of the life of the person effected).

Some people have hidden disabilities like poor mental health, HIV or cancer.

Percentage of People with a Limiting Long-term Illness



Source: SCROL, 2001 Census Health Data

The graph above shows the percentage of people with limiting long-term illness in Stonehaven and Aberdeenshire is quite similar and lower than the Scottish average. Although, perhaps not a perfect representation of all forms of disability, this would tend to suggest that the policies for promoting disability equality in Aberdeenshire are also appropriate for Stonehaven.

The council's disability equality scheme addresses the council's duties to promote disability equality. The core duties of the scheme are to:

- promote equality of opportunity between people with disabilities and other people
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act
- eliminate harassment of people with disabilities that is related to their disability
- promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities
- encourage participation by people with disabilities in public life
- take steps to meet the needs of people with disabilities, even if this requires more favourable treatment.

On a local level, the Aberdeenshire South Access Panel (ASAP) has a remit to address the needs of disabled people by promoting access to all public buildings and facilities in the district of Aberdeenshire South, which includes Stonehaven. This group participated in the Future of Stonehaven Consultation and, when asked if their aims were being met, responded that they were not as they had no powers to bring about change or make sure their voices were heard.

The ASAP identified a number of specific issues to be addressed in Stonehaven including:

- Poor disabled access to some public buildings including the Town Hall and upper floor of the Viewmount Council offices which includes the Planning Service.
- A lack of accessible hotel facilities
- A lack of accessible meeting facilities
- Disabled car parking spaces in the Market Square that are not set so as to allow for easy access to all sides of the Square
- Narrow and uneven pavements which are difficult to navigate and made more hazardous as a result of pavement furniture such as bins
- The lack of disabled toilets in the town and existing ones which are not in the most suitable places.
- Poor access between the north and southbound railway platforms without having to go out of the railway station
- Shops which have heavy or difficult doors which impede easy access
- Woodland walks that could be more accessible to wheelchair users

The above problems are solely access-related. To gain an understanding of whether disabled residents of Stonehaven experience other problems and types of discrimination, for example in relation to local employment, would require more research.

Disability Equality - Strategic Conclusions

- Further research is required to gain a full picture of the experience of disabled residents in Stonehaven and whether there are matters affecting their inclusion that need attention other than those identified by the Aberdeenshire South Access Panel.
- The most significant comment from the Aberdeenshire South Access Panel is that they did not feel heard or empowered to affect change. Further consultation should be undertaken with the Panel to establish why this is so. Is the lack of empowerment a result of a lack of available budgets to address the issues highlighted or because of an institutional and structural failing to bring these issues to the fore or the result of some other cause?
- The specific access issues highlighted that can be addressed need to be progressed in a timely manner.

Age

Aberdeenshire Council is developing an equality scheme which will include age and set standards for addressing age-related discrimination.

Youth

The Future of Stonehaven Consultation included the participation of young people. In the context of inclusion the most notable results from the youth participants in the online survey were that 43% of them said “Community Spirit” in Stonehaven was a weakness and 57% considered that it should be improved. These two statistics would suggest that many of the youth of Stonehaven do not currently feel themselves to be valued and included members of the town.

This sentiment may in part be fed by a recent increase in vandalism in the town which is often attributed to youth whether this is always justified or not. However, the youth who took part in the consultation identified vandalism as a significant concern to them as well, along with a lack of police on the beat and, most importantly, the intimidating nature of large numbers of youth loitering on the streets. Young people had many common concerns with older residents.

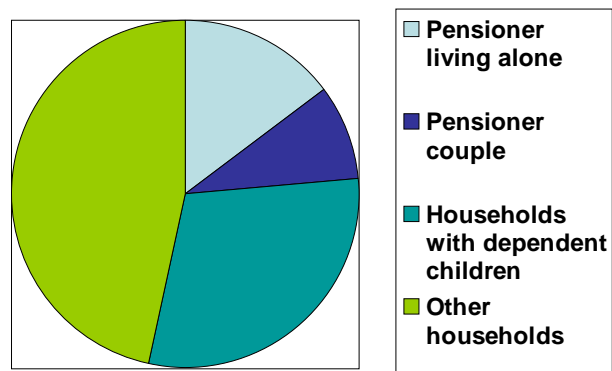
Across the age spectrum, participants in the consultation identified a lack of youth-oriented facilities as the number one weakness at present in the town. However, it is worth noting that, although the town’s youth consider the need for more facilities a very high priority, more shops to suit their needs along with a local cinema are the highest priorities.

Senior Citizens

In 2001, approximately 18% of Stonehaven’s residents were of pensionable age and this number is set to grow rapidly.

Although, many older residents took part in the Future of Stonehaven consultation, it is only those who participated through the online survey who can be identified in this age category. This was a very small number of just four. As a result, there is no significant

Household Distribution by Occupant Type



Source: SCROL, 2001 Census Population Data

data about the views of this specific segment that would enable conclusions to be drawn about their sense of inclusion.

Age - Strategic Conclusions

- There are youth engagement initiatives taking place in Stonehaven (see the Community Dialogue and Engagement section below) which should help to increase younger residents' sense of inclusion in the town. However, inter-age projects that develop mutual respect and understanding should also be explored.
- It is necessary as a matter of priority to address the shortfall of facilities suitable for younger residents.
- Research needs to be undertaken amongst the pensionable age segment of the population to establish their specific views on the town and resulting sense of inclusion.

Gender

Under the Equality Act 2006, Aberdeenshire Council has been required to produce a Gender Equality Scheme and an Education Service Gender Equality Scheme. This has been done and is out for public consultation at the moment.

The 2001 census data indicates that the male/female split of the Stonehaven population is close to equal (52% female, 48% male). The proportion of women is projected to increase slightly over time.

Gender inequalities will tend to be most felt in relation to employment. Approximately 70% of the Stonehaven population was economically active in 2001 in either full or part-time employment of which the majority were working outside Stonehaven. In the employment context, it would be worth asking whether there are enough crèche and after-school club places in Stonehaven for men and women with dependent children wishing to work and looking for this type of childcare. If not, then this may be a barrier to opportunities for them.

If one considers the balance of male/female participation in local groups, it is worth noting that nearly half of the current Community Council is female and women can be found engaged and involved in many other town groups. Further research could be undertaken as to whether, for either men or women, there were barriers on the basis of gender, specific to Stonehaven, that inhibit fulfilment, but this is unlikely to be a priority for the town.

Gender - Strategic Conclusion:

- There are no immediate markers suggesting a lack of inclusion on the basis of gender.
- Specific research on the number of available childcare places compared to local demand should be considered.

Ethnic Minorities

The ethnic make up of Aberdeenshire's population of 226,870 in 2001 was:

	%		%
White Scottish	85.6	Other South Asian	<0.1
Other white British	11.9	Chinese	0.1
White Irish	0.4	Caribbean	<0.1
Other white	1.4	African	<0.1
Indian	<0.1	Black Scottish or other black	<0.1
Pakistani	<0.1	Any mixed background	0.2
Bangladeshi	<0.1	Other ethnic group	0.2

The definitions of ethnic group are as used in the census.

Source: Census of Population 2001

It is likely that both numbers and make up of the minority ethnic groups have changed since 2001, especially since eight Eastern European countries joined the European Union. For example, about 2,000 EU nationals are estimated to have migrated to Aberdeenshire between May 2004 and May 2005. They have mainly settled in Fraserburgh and Peterhead. This has significantly altered the ethnic minority population profile of Aberdeenshire.

Aberdeenshire Council's race equality scheme sets out what the council intends to do to fulfil its duty to promote race equality.

There is currently no ethnic minority data specific to Stonehaven.

Ethnic Minorities – Strategic Conclusion

- Stonehaven, like Aberdeenshire, is not very ethnically diverse and being a small town should follow Aberdeenshire's lead on implementing appropriately its race equality scheme.

Sexual Orientation

Aberdeenshire Council does not currently have any reliable data on the sexual orientation of people in Aberdeenshire. Sexual orientation will however be part of the new equality scheme.

Sexual Orientation - Strategic Conclusion:

- In the absence of available data, an engagement programme with those groups in the north east working with Lesbian/Gay/Bi-sexual and Transgender people, such as the Terrence Higgins Trust, should be undertaken to establish appropriate next steps.

Education

The Scottish Government recognises that schools have an important contribution to make in the pursuit of inclusion. As a result, they have developed extensive policies and guidelines to promote greater inclusiveness in education. In turn, Aberdeenshire Council has many policies and guidelines to achieve inclusive education in its schools. The detail of these can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website at: http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/about/departments/er_schools_inclusion.asp. These will be informing the practice of Stonehaven schools with regard to inclusive education.

In Stonehaven, Carronhill School specialises in providing education to children with learning difficulties. It aims to give them the opportunity to develop their full social and academic potential. Carronhill School was recently saved from the threat of closure by an active campaign of parents and supporters who rejected the assertion that mainstream schooling would cater as well for these children.

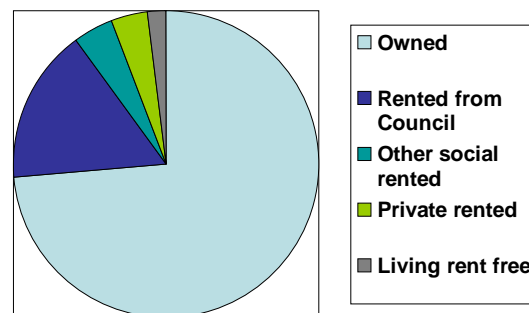
Education –Strategic Conclusion

- Stonehaven, as a small community, is not going to take separate action to review the effectiveness of inclusion in its schools. This is a task for Aberdeenshire Council across its network of schools.
- Carronhill School is strongly supported by those whose children benefit from it and should continue to be safeguarded in the future.

Poverty

In Stonehaven, there are few poverty indicators. In 2005, only 1% of the population was recorded as unemployed. Statistics relating to housing show a very high percentage of privately owned dwellings (74% as compared to 58% in Aberdeen City and 63% for Scotland as a whole) and a comparatively low number of council or social rented housing (20% as compared to 29% in

Tenure of Housing in Stonehaven



Source: SCROL, 2001 Census Population Data

Aberdeen and 28% for Scotland as a whole).

However in Stonehaven, as the town has grown, new neighbourhoods have emerged, some more affluent than others, some better connected to the town than others. Poverty may not be, as a result, the most distinguishing feature of exclusion rather than inclusion.

Poverty - Strategic Conclusion

- Stonehaven is a relatively affluent town although there are neighbourhoods with lower income households. Poverty, however, could be viewed as a relative term and, even if Stonehaven does not present some of the obvious indicators of deprivation, it does not mean that all neighbourhoods feel equally included.
 - Research to investigate the sense of inclusion across different neighbourhoods would be worthwhile. This could include both lower income areas and developments at the periphery of the town.

Healthy Living

According to NHS Health Scotland's 'Community health and well-being profiles', Stonehaven has a relatively healthy population. The data shows that in Stonehaven's two post code areas it ranked as at least 5% better than the Scottish average for over 80% of the 28 indicators measured with no areas of serious under-performance.

Stonehaven has a range of health-related provision available to it at present:

- **Kincardine Community Hospital (KCH)**

This small local hospital offers local care and diagnostic facilities through inpatient and outpatients services with plans for more clinics being available on site

- Arduthie Ward - An acute admissions ward.
- Mearns Ward - A unit caring for frail elderly patients.
- Ardoe Ward - A unit specialising in care of elderly mentally infirm patients, with a small respite facility.
- A range of outpatient clinics – outpatient numbers have been increasing as the number of local clinics has increased
- Base for Out-of-hours GMEDS which means rapid response times within Stonehaven and locality

The provision of local care for patients with dementia or for the very elderly and infirm is important as it enables local friends and relatives to visit with ease which is to the ultimate benefit of the patient and family.

The future of KCH is currently under consideration as the contract between the private health provider Care UK and the NHS is coming to an end.

- **Stonehaven Medical Group (SMG) - General Practice**

Stonehaven is a single zone practice which helps to ensure greater control and co-ordination in the provision of local health care through the SMG and, within the practice, awareness of what is going on.

In addition to general practice, the SMG is the local base for district nurses, health visitors, midwives and community nursing assistants. Stonehaven currently has a good 24 hour nursing service and present supply of doctors is viewed as adequate for *current* needs.

The SMG took part in the Future of Stonehaven Consultation and highlighted a number of issues in relation to health provision in Stonehaven that should be noted here:

- Providing Care in the Community is already difficult to resource and sustain as there are not enough carers. As the population of Stonehaven is set to age, this problem will increase.
- There is a significant problem with a lack of carers and, as a result, long stay elderly care in Stonehaven should be sustained. Currently, Edenholme, one of the providers of care for the elderly in town, is expected to shut with no alternative local provision indicated. This situation needs to be addressed.
- There are quite a lot of special health problems and needs that can be associated with increases in social/affordable housing. The SMG's patient list has increased by 15% over the past 5 years but the corresponding workload has increased by a greater amount because of the greater problems associated with some of the new patients.
- The out-of-hours services – 24 hour nursing and GMEDS – should be maintained locally. If they are not, residents will have to travel to Aberdeen.
- Stonehaven which would have previously been viewed as a suburban/rural practice, is now increasingly similar to an urban one.
- There is little scope for the current medical centre to increase in size and, if the town and other surrounding villages continue to grow, separate practices for Newtonhill or Drumlithie should be considered.
- Sport and leisure facilities need to be adequately maintained and the healthy living agenda needs to be integrated with the strategic thinking on these facilities.

- **Local Support Organisations/Resources**

Stonehaven benefits from the work and presence of several organisations in the town which support residents with particular needs.

- **Pillar Kincardine**

Pillar is a registered charity which offers valuable support to people coping with emotional, social and mental health difficulties. Although Pillar offers a range of activities, it does not have adequate premises to enable it to offer these in one permanent central location in Stonehaven. This lack of a dedicated space can reinforce a mental health patient's sense of a lack of stability and security. The high cost of commercial rentals and the difficulty of achieving the necessary funding rapidly, if premises do become available, are constraints for Pillar.

- **Home-Start Kincardine**

Home-Start provide practical support for families with young children aged between 0 – 5 years. They identified a need, in the Future of Stonehaven Consultation, for there to continue to be adequate play and recreational spaces in the town that have free access. Also, over the long summer holidays many local play groups shut down which can increase isolation for parents.

- **Foyer**

This group provides supported accommodation for young people in the town.

- **Family Resource Centre**

There is a new Family Resource Centre in Stonehaven, provided through the Local Authority's social work department which aims to offer a range of support and services to families.

In addition, Crossroads for Carers and Befriending for Older People are based in Stonehaven and make a significant contribution to those residents who use their services.

- **Local Dental Practices**

There are currently four local dental practices in Stonehaven including the Mackie Academy Dental Clinic. Pressure on the supply of local NHS dental clinics is intense in Stonehaven as it is elsewhere in Grampian.

Joint Health Improvement Plan (JHIP)

NHS Grampian has led the creation of a Joint Health Improvement Plan for Aberdeenshire within its Community Planning Partnership, as required by the Scottish Government.

The seven identified priorities in the JHIP for Aberdeenshire are:

- reducing health inequalities
- improving mental health and wellbeing
- reducing smoking
- reducing substance misuse (especially alcohol)
- reducing the rate of increase of obesity
- improving sexual health
- improving oral health

Resource allocation within the JHIP is based on maximising the health benefits for those most in need as well as delivering adequate services for all residents. Although Stonehaven will benefit from the JHIP, given the relative health of its population, it is not a priority area for targeted extra resources. However, there are local health programmes in Stonehaven in line with the JHIP priorities which include:

- Midwifery work with smoking cessation and pregnancy
- Parenting classes targeted at supporting vulnerable families as well as classes for other families
- Local schools taking steps to be “health promoting schools” by the end of 2007 as required by the Scottish Government. This involves a whole school approach to promoting the physical, social, spiritual, mental and emotional well-being of all pupils and staff.
- Falls Prevention programme for older people

Healthy Living - Strategic Conclusions

- Although not all health treatments can be provided in Stonehaven, it nonetheless has a range of health-related facilities which contribute to Stonehaven’s position as a self-sustaining town. These must be protected and improved for the benefit of the local residents and the surrounding communities that also use these facilities.
- The implications of an ageing population on local health provision needs to be considered and appropriate strategies developed.
 - Care for the elderly in Stonehaven must continue. In particular, unless the resource behind care in the community for the elderly can be substantially increased, it will be necessary at least to maintain the current number of local beds for the elderly.
 - Preparing for an ageing and longer living population, places a need for health and fitness to be improved amongst younger generations so that they present fewer health problems later. There is a lot of work targeted at schools, young parents and families as a result. However, a key group are the *current* 50 – 65 year olds for whom specific classes and programmes need to be developed to improve and maintain their health as they age.
- The implications of further growth on the local medical practice, and in particular growth in social and affordable housing, needs to be considered and resources allocated to the SMG accordingly.
- Out-of-hours services based in Stonehaven are a benefit to the town and local communities. These must be safeguarded.
- Stonehaven benefits from having local organisations based in town that can support some of its more vulnerable residents. Specific issues to be addressed locally are the provision of a dedicated space for the activities undertaken with Pillar clients and not just office space, and the provision of play groups in the town over the summer holiday period.
- The JHIP is a key strategy document which will direct local health improvements in partnership with other agencies. This also includes an emphasis on the health

benefits of increased physical activity and the requirement for local sport, leisure and recreation facilities.

- The JHIP should be considered as part of the context and argument for maintaining and improving these facilities in Stonehaven. In particular, the “health promoting schools” initiative supports the Mackie Academy’s efforts for better sports facilities on their site.

Community Dialogue and Engagement

The Scottish Government has recently laid down National Standards for Community Engagement for public agencies to help improve the experience of all participants involved in community engagement to achieve the highest quality of process and results.

At the heart of community dialogue and engagement is the principle of residents being involved in the decisions that affect them. This happens in Stonehaven in a variety of ways:

- Through public consultations and surveys
- Through the established links and working relationships that exist between key community groups and public agencies
- Through initiatives targeted at specific groups such as youth
- Through community led initiatives and efforts

Public Consultations & Surveys

There have been varied opportunities for the residents of Stonehaven to participate in public consultations which have been undertaken on a wide range of subjects at different times by different stakeholder groups. Much of the consultation was not Stonehaven specific although Stonehaven residents would be affected, in some measure, by all the strategies or proposals under review.

Detailed below are recent public consultations and surveys. These are listed in descending date order.

Consultation in Stonehaven

A New Food Store for Stonehaven

Kensington & Edinburgh Estates, a specialist food and non-food retail developer, held a community consultation in Stonehaven Town Hall in July 2007 on proposals for a new food store on Field 52. Close to 400 residents attended.

Dynamic Drop-in

In May 2007, the Kincardine and Mearns Area Partnership (KMAP) organised a consultation exercise, the Dynamic Drop-in, which took place in Stonehaven Town Hall. Residents from across the Kincardine and Mearns area were invited to attend events throughout the weekend and to give feedback on their particular local communities and to identify their priorities for the future. This event included an opportunity for youth engagement and the provision of Street Football and a Climbing Wall.

Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route

The Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) is a new road being developed to improve travel in and around Aberdeen and the North-east of Scotland. Options for the AWPR were presented to the public in spring 2005 in the form of a series of public exhibitions in communities situated close to the potential routes, including Stonehaven. A further exhibition was held in Stonehaven in January 2007.

Stonehaven Town Hall Feasibility Study

A feasibility study into the potential future uses for the Stonehaven Town Hall was first commissioned by the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership in 1998. The study included public consultation through a public survey, the use of a focus group and consultations with key stakeholders and potential partners. This public consultation did result in a number of considered options being ruled out of the final proposals due to a lack of public support. The final report was published in April 2007.

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/about/feasibilitystudy>.

Future of Stonehaven Consultation 2006

The Stonehaven & District Community Council (S&DCC) decided to consult with the community about resident priorities for the future of the town. Consultation began in late 2005 and continued throughout 2006 and resulted in a report in early 2007. The consultation team met with a wide variety of groups in the town to hear, first hand, residents' views and aspirations. Individual resident participation was also possible through an online survey. The results of the consultation can be viewed on the Community Council website: www.stonehavencommuntycouncil.co.uk .

Imagine Stonehaven

The Aberdeenshire Council project to consider a long-term framework for the town in the light of its potential for long-term growth, entitled 'Imagine Stonehaven', was the subject of consultation in late 2004. Residents were invited to attend a meeting in the Stonehaven Town Hall and, through small working groups, to contribute their ideas and feedback on the draft proposals. The final report, which would include the results of the consultation, has yet to go to the Kincardine & Mearns Area Committee. The draft report can be viewed online at: http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/capacity/SCS_draft.pdf

Scottish Water Proposals for Changes to the Town's Sewerage Treatment Works

A number of public meetings were held in 2004 and 2005 to hear and address resident concerns about proposed changes to the sewerage treatment works in the town culminating in a public inquiry in mid-2005.

Stonehaven Business Association Survey 2003-2005

Under the direction of the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership, of which Stonehaven was until recently a member, Enterprise North East (ENE) worked with the Stonehaven Business Association (SBA) to consult local businesses about their views and priorities so that the SBA would be responsive to and led by those issues as it developed. Over a two year period an officer of ENE met and consulted with businesses within Stonehaven whether or not they were members of the SBA. This targeted support for business and the SBA has strengthened local commerce and is improving services.

Consultation across Aberdeenshire

In addition to the above consultations which were held specifically in Stonehaven and of particular concern to local residents, there are two regular and ongoing survey processes involving Aberdeenshire residents.

Residents Surveys

Aberdeenshire Council has carried out a large scale survey of residents on a two-yearly basis since 2000. The main reason for undertaking the surveys is to identify areas where they need to improve. In the intervening years since 2000, further in-depth research has been conducted into areas of particular interest that have been highlighted in the previous larger surveys.

The 2006 Residents Survey was slightly different to earlier ones in that Aberdeenshire Council were able to produce area specific reports as well as the main overview report. The 2006 Kincardine & Mearns Area report can be viewed online at:

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/consultations/surveys/KincardineandMearns.pdf>

The Citizens' Panel

The Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership ran an initial trial - over an 18 month period - of a Citizens' Panel, with the aim of increasing the effectiveness of their community consultation mechanism. The panel will now continue through to 2009. The most recent survey was sent out to panel members in July 2007.

Citizens' panels are a way for local people to give their opinion on services in their local area and influence decision makers. Approximately 1300 residents of Aberdeenshire have been recruited and have agreed to be consulted regularly on matters of local concern.

Public Consultations on Aberdeenshire-wide issues, plans and strategies have also been undertaken including:

- Gender Equality Scheme
- New Aberdeenshire Structure Plan
- The Regional Transport Strategy
- Aberdeenshire Local Plan
- Aberdeenshire Kerbside Recycling Survey 2006
- Public Attitudes to Waste Reduce & Reuse Practices
- Recycling Survey
- Public Attitudes to Waste: Final Report
- The Aberdeenshire Council Waste Strategy
- The Aberdeenshire Local Housing Strategy 2004 - 2009

Working Together

As already noted, community dialogue and engagement is also occurring through regular working relationships between public agencies and groups in the town. These include:

Stonehaven & District Community Council

The S&DCC represents resident views in a variety of fora but especially to Aberdeenshire Council through meetings and regular contact on a broad spectrum of local community issues. The S&DCC is also increasingly consulted by developers on development proposals and is frequently the community voice in local consultations such as that being led by NHS Grampian on the future of the Kincardine Community Hospital. The S&DCC also represents the local community on the Area Bus Forum and the Kincardine & Mearns Community Safety Group.

Other Community Groups in Stonehaven

Many other groups have working relationships with Aberdeenshire Council, including the newly formed Stonehaven Towns Partnership, the Stonehaven Business Association, Stonehaven...It's Special (the Stonehaven Events and Tourism Groups), the Stonehaven Horizon Project Team and the Stonehaven Recreation Grounds to mention just a few.

Community Development Group (CDG)

Community Development Groups, such as the one in Stonehaven, were established by Aberdeenshire Council as a structure intended to enable communities to decide on their local leisure and learning priorities and specific community projects, consistent with these priorities, that they would wish to support with funding. This can cover a wide range of projects linked to learning, the arts, sport, libraries, culture and youth-initiated projects. Their effectiveness will depend on community awareness of the opportunity to participate in the local CDG and understanding of the group's remit and objectives.

Locally in Stonehaven, the CDG group is still struggling to raise its profile and volunteers involved feel their impact is constrained and limited. Community Development Groups contribute to the Community Learning and Development (CLD) Strategy 2004 - 2007 of Aberdeenshire Council. A recent review of the CLD service across Aberdeenshire underscores issues, problems and variations in the functioning of CDGs across the authority. The findings of this review are documented in an SAC Report which can be viewed online at:

[SAC Report: Community Learning and Development in Aberdeenshire\(pdf 553 kb\)](#)

The principle of engaging residents in the decision-making relating to leisure and learning in their communities is right. However, further work needs to be done to consider how this is best achieved.

Kincardine & Mearns Local Community Planning Group

Community Planning is a statutory process which requires local authorities to lead the community planning process and other key public service agencies to participate in it and together to develop a community plan which will deliver better and more coordinated services. It is recognised that communities have a key role to play in local decision-making through working with the partnership.

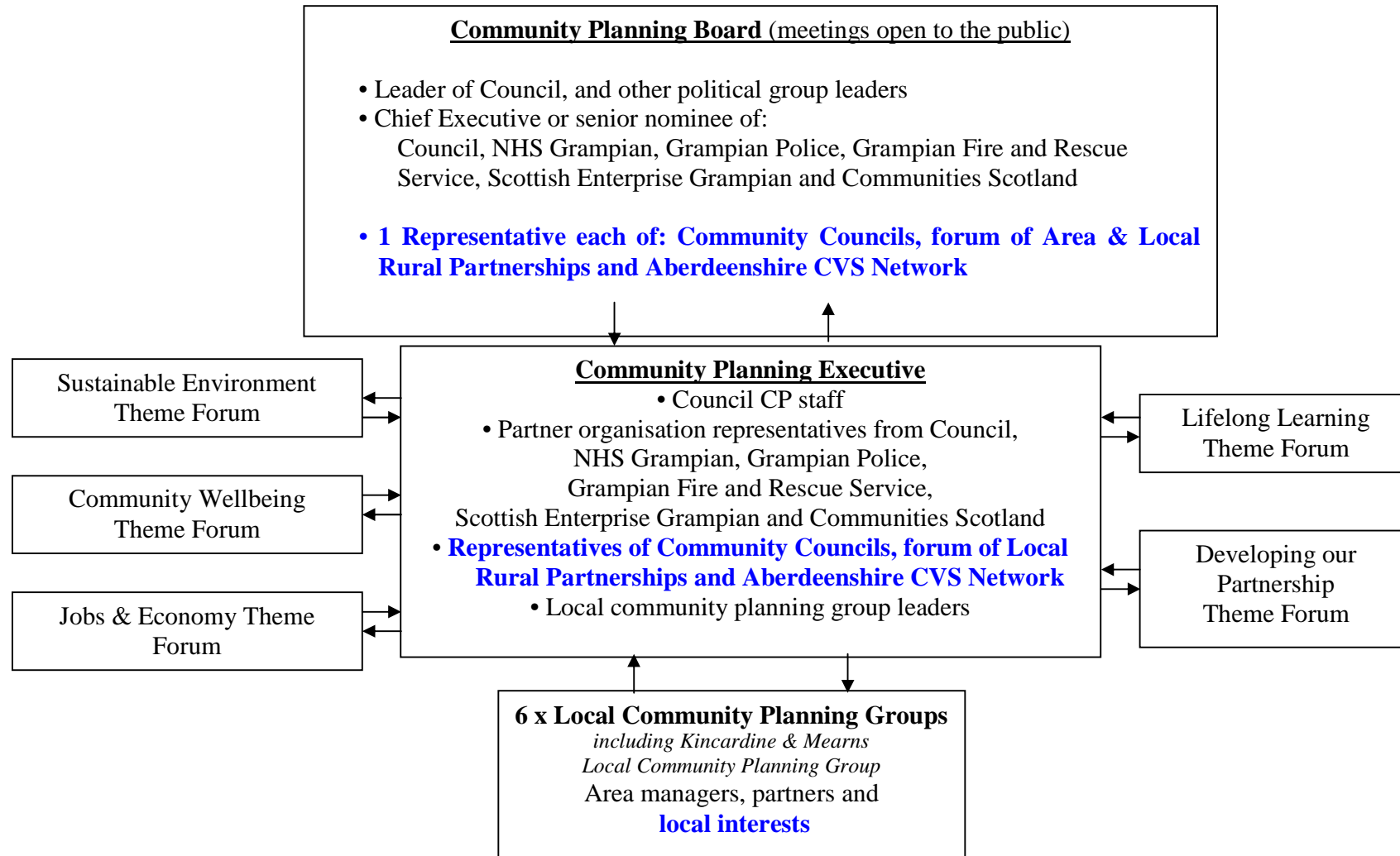
There are six area community planning partnerships within Aberdeenshire Community Planning. The Kincardine & Mearns Local Community Planning Group is the local partnership group for Stonehaven. It has a key role in the community engagement required by the community planning process. This is, in part, supported by the Kincardine & Mearns Area Partnership (KMAP), a voluntary partnership of local groups and organisations, which is also working to support community development and to facilitate community engagement in the community planning process.

Community representation occurs at every level of the community planning process. A representative on behalf of all Community Councils in Aberdeenshire sits on the Community Planning Board, similarly a representative of all Community Councils in Aberdeenshire sits on the Community Planning Executive and local interests are represented on the Local Community Planning Groups.

In other words, there is one representative of all Community Councils in the Kincardine & Mearns area on the Kincardine & Mearns Local Community Planning Group representing thereby residents' interests. The KMAP representative, who also sits on the local group, and the voluntary sector representative will also be contributing a community perspective.

Kincardine & Mearns represents some 12% of Aberdeenshire covering 756 sq km with dramatic coastline to the east, and the foothills of the Grampian mountains to the west. In

The Structure of the Community Planning Partnership



the north, proximity to Aberdeen has encouraged considerable development of population and industry. The southern part contains the rich farm land of the Mearns and a series of attractive former fishing villages. Although within the area there are certain to be issues common to all residents, there will also be many different local priorities.

KMAP has undertaken community engagement, as already noted above, through the Dynamic Drop-in. However, there are no formal channels for Community Council representatives, at any of the levels of the community planning structure, whether local or shire-wide, to gather the views of those they are representing or to feed back information to them. The size and varied aspects of the Kincardine & Mearns area, let alone Aberdeenshire, have been noted and would suggest that a much more robust representative framework is needed. Also, perhaps partly because of the lack of participative depth, there is real confusion about the Community Planning process and how to influence it. This is a significant weakness across the Aberdeenshire community planning system.

Patient/Public Forum

The South Aberdeenshire Local Community Health Partnership has recently set up a Patient/Public Forum for the South Aberdeenshire Area. This is a forum open to anyone who lives, works or has an interest in the area and wishes to be involved and work in partnership with the local NHS.

Targeted Initiatives

Kincardine & Mearns Youth Engagement Project

In April 2007, the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership signed up to a Youth Engagement Strategy. This is a commitment and strategy to ensure the youth voice is heard in decision-making.

As already noted, youth engagement work was undertaken in Stonehaven in May 2007 through KMAP at the Dynamic Drop-in.

In June 2007, Youth Development Workers also met with young people in the new S2 school year (13-14 year olds) across Kincardine & Mearns. In Stonehaven, this was through their Personal and Social Education Classes at Mackie Academy. The consultation aimed to find out what the young people thought of their community and to explore project ideas they might have and their perception of barriers to projects coming to fruition. This was also an opportunity to raise awareness of youth development work. There are plans to speak to this particular group of young people again in a few years time to establish what has been achieved, from their perspective, as a result of this consultation process.

Two other initiatives have been supported as part of the youth engagement project:

- **Street Football**

Street Football was organised every Wednesday in Stonehaven for six weeks over the summer of 2007 as a youth engagement exercise.

- **Stoney Girls Group**

At the end of June 2007, nine members of the Stoney Girls Group, based at the Stonehaven Community Centre, travelled to Amal in Sweden to find out more about youth and leisure in Sweden. A report is currently being finalised of the lessons learned from that visit.

Community Initiatives

Sometimes it is a community group that takes the lead on exploring public views or engaging the public on an issue. As noted above the S&DCC led an extensive consultation exercise in 2005 and 2006. The S&DCC has also consulted on

- The new Waste Management Service – through an online survey during the spring of 2006
- Proposals for a new superstore next to Fetteresso Cemetery – door to door surveying and a short questionnaire with people in the Market Square were used in May 2004

Other groups have also done surveys in the town including:

- The local Conservative Association regarding, in particular, sports facilities in the town
- Residents in Cowie over the issues of the sewerage treatment works at Cowie and the local caravan park
- The Skate Park Committee over the demand for and possible location of a skate park
- The South Aberdeenshire Tenants and Residents Association over community facility provision
- The Stonehaven...It's Special Tourism Group has used marketing consultants to undertake two research studies on Stonehaven tourism. The latest study also included research amongst local accommodation providers and businesses.

Community Dialogue and Engagement - Strategic Conclusions

- Community dialogue and engagement is currently being undertaken by a range of different stakeholders and there is a lengthy list of consultations both within the town and across the shire that Stonehaven residents could have taken part in. However, despite the apparent opportunity, it nonetheless does not necessarily

- follow that the community feels adequately consulted. The actual level of participation is not clear from the list alone nor is the representative quality.
- Further research should be done to establish if residents do feel they are being adequately consulted and to clarify whether it is the same community of interested and engaged residents who are taking part in the various consultations or whether there is a real representative depth to the participation. It should also make clear which, if any, of the community engagement techniques are most effective.
 - If the above research shows that there are specific communities not participating in or being heard through community dialogue and engagement, then different community engagement techniques need to be considered to target these groups.
 - Research into public awareness of the outcomes of community dialogue and engagement is needed to establish if existing feedback mechanisms are adequate as the community needs to see the impact and, therefore, ongoing purpose in its participation.
- The findings from community consultation exercises like the Future of Stonehaven Consultation and the recent Dynamic Drop-in need to be reference documents when considering priorities or resource choices for the town.
 - Community Development Groups offer, in theory, an important avenue for community participation in decision-making about local leisure and learning priorities. In Stonehaven, the local CDG group does not feel effective. This needs to be addressed and group members need to be consulted on achieving a better way forward. However, this dialogue would benefit from including other key community groups in the town such as the Community Council, KMAP and the Stonehaven Town Partnership as all of these collective and representative structures need to work together and not in isolation.
 - At each level of the community planning process in Aberdeenshire - Board, Executive and Local Group - there is only one representative for the shire or area community councils. These representatives have no formal mechanism for establishing the views of their constituent community councils or giving feedback and therefore their effectiveness has to be, at the very least, hampered by this constraint.
 - The Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership needs to look again at the community engagement process at all levels of its structure and to consider other best practice models in Scotland that would ensure not only a better representation of Community Councils, Communities of Interest and therefore all residents across its very wide and diverse area, but also a better understanding of Community Planning itself.
 - When appropriate, a co-ordinated approach to community dialogue and engagement should be developed to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure a targeted and effective use of resources.

Partnership/Local Government

Aberdeenshire Council

Aberdeenshire Council is the Local Authority for Stonehaven. It is divided into six administrative areas with Stonehaven being the largest town within the Kincardine & Mearns Area. The Kincardine & Mearns Area Manager's office is located in Stonehaven as are many other area and wider council services.

Council offices and services in Stonehaven include:

- Adult Literacy
 - The Stonehaven Library
- Building Standards and Building Warrants
- Caravan Sites
 - Queen Elizabeth Park
- Community Education Centre
- Council Tax and Housing Benefit
- Countryside Ranger Service
- Day Centre for Adults with Disabilities
 - Forest View
- Dog Wardens
- Economic Development
 - Area Office
- Education & Recreation
 - Education Office
 - Educational Psychological Services
 - Sports Development Officer
- Environmental Health Office
 - Operational Office
- Finance
 - Head of Finance (Exchequer)
- Halls & Hall Caretakers
 - Stonehaven Town Hall (for bookings)
- Harbour (Part-time)
- Homes for Older People
 - Edenholme
- Housing
 - Depots
 - General Housing Enquiries
- Law & Administration
 - Clerk of the Peace
 - District Court Clerk
 - Licensing Board Clerk

- Leisure Centre & Swimming Pool
- Library
- Planning
 - Environment Planning
 - Development Control & Planning Applications
 - Head of Development Control and Building Standards
- Registrars
- Roads
 - Bridges & Structure
 - Coastal Protection
 - Flood Prevention List of Public Roads/Street Names/Traffic Management/Development Control
- Schools
 - Arduthie Primary School
 - Carronhill School
 - Dunnottar Primary School
 - Mill O'forest Primary School
 - Mackie Academy
- Sheltered Housing
 - Carnegie Court
 - Mcdonald Court
- Social Work
 - Head of Social Work for Children's Services
 - Community Dementia Teams - Kincardine Community Hospital
 - Criminal Justice & Service
 - Dial-a-Trip
 - Invercarron Resource Centre
 - Main office
- Transportation & Infrastructure
 - Landscape Services – area office
 - Road Maintenance – area office
 - Vehicle Maintenance Repair Depot
- Waste Management Transfer Station

This is an extensive list and highlights a significant benefit to Stonehaven residents who can, as a result, usually follow up issues or needs they may have relating to council services *locally*. Also, Aberdeenshire Council is a significant local employer for the town.

However, although Stonehaven residents benefit from many locally performed services, there are a number of issues and concerns that have been raised about local government through the S&DCC Future of Stonehaven Consultation that should be highlighted:

- **Size**

Some participants felt that Aberdeenshire Council was generally too big, even with its six administrative areas. Within such a vast Authority, the varied demand on resources is considerable and Stonehaven, as a relatively affluent town, is perceived to be losing out to other communities on necessary investment to maintain and improve its existing facilities, amenities and services.

Also, albeit the Area Manager is based in Stonehaven, this role requires the Manager to balance the competing needs of the many towns and communities of the Kincardine & Mearns Area. Some participants argued for a local town mayor who could, without the built-in constraint of competing area demands, pursue the interests of the town.

Although not a common perception among newer residents in the town, some longer term residents tend to perceive a shift in key decision-making away from Stonehaven to Inverurie, where many council functions are also performed. This is viewed as being one element in the mix of Stonehaven having lost influence and, therefore, a greater share of resources to the northern parts of the shire.

- **Local Representation**

Stonehaven has four local councillors elected to represent the interests of Stonehaven & Lower Deeside on Aberdeenshire Council. In May 2007, the councillors were elected within multi-member wards for the first time. This has changed the lines of communication for residents with their local councillor as there are now four representatives for a very large ward rather than one point of contact for a small local ward. It is probably too soon to tell whether or not this is a beneficial development for local residents.

- **Developer Contributions**

Developer contributions are a settlement negotiated with prospective developers to address and mitigate the impact of a proposed development on a community. These negotiations are confidential but the eventual outcomes are available to the public. Stonehaven residents have expressed concerns about the transparency of the use of developer contributions raised as a result of recent growth in the town. It is not clear to residents what investment has resulted from developer contributions and whether, therefore, this input is going to address the real priorities of the town itself when it comes to mitigating the impact of growth. This lack of clarity and visible benefit undermines public confidence in these local government procedures as able to safeguard the interests of the town.

In January 2007, Aberdeenshire Council's Scrutiny and Audit Committee reported that local opinion should carry more weight when contributions to communities from developers are decided upon and recommended that supplementary planning guidance be produced on developer contributions.

Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership

There are ten public, community and voluntary sector organisations that provide services to the people of Aberdeenshire that are working together in partnership. Together they are looking to make the area a better place to live through a Community Plan which was finalised in 2006. Current partners are:

- Aberdeenshire Council
- Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Service Network
- Community Councils
- Grampian Fire and Rescue Service
- Grampian Police
- Local Rural Partnerships
- NESTRANS
- NHS Grampian
- Scottish Enterprise Grampian
- The community

Within the six administrative areas of Aberdeenshire, there are *local* Community Planning Groups which are essential to the work and community engagement of the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership. The Kincardine & Mearns Local Community Planning Group covers Stonehaven and its membership includes:

- Grampian Police
- Grampian Fire and Rescue
- NHS Grampian
- Kincardine and Deeside Voice
- Kincardine and Mearns Area Partnership (KMAP)
- Area Manager, Aberdeenshire Council
- Community Learning and Development, Aberdeenshire Council
- Community Planning Officer
- Area Community Councils' Representative

The community voice is represented on this group through the voluntary sector agency that is Kincardine & Deeside Voice, through the Kincardine and Mearns Area Partnership which is a collaboration of local community groups and through the Area Community Councils' representative.

Partnership/Local Government - Strategic Conclusions

- Council services, in particular those that are specific to the Kincardine & Mearns Area, should continue to be based in Stonehaven. As the largest town in the area, it is the natural focal point for these services not just for the town itself but for the broader area as well.

- There are frustrations for some local residents that are linked to the size of Aberdeenshire Council, the pressure on scarce resources within such a large area and the ability to have the town's priorities heard within the process of apportioning those resources. These perceptions may undermine confidence that the existing local government framework can deliver positive results for Stonehaven.
 - Aberdeenshire Council needs to establish if these perceptions are substantiated and, if so, to clarify how they propose to address them or why their priorities direct resources elsewhere. Alternatively, if Stonehaven is not, in fact, being relatively disadvantaged in the distribution of resources then this needs to be clearly communicated to the community.
- Transparency around developer contributions needs to be addressed through the implementation of the proposed Aberdeenshire Council supplementary planning guidance, once finalised.
- Stonehaven residents' views need to be represented effectively within the structures of the Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership if the benefits of the partnership are to be felt locally. Effective community engagement is the key to this process. The strategic conclusions for strong community engagement in the community planning process are noted above in the section Community Dialogue and Engagement.

Long Term Planning

'Imagine Stonehaven' Capacity Study

Aberdeenshire Council has been working on a project titled 'Imagine Stonehaven', which aims to establish a long-term framework for the town, in the light of its potential for long-term growth.

To assess this potential, it took a theoretical increase in the town of 50% - about 2000 extra houses - and explored the implications of such growth. It was not a prediction of fact or timescale; nor was it intended to dictate how to deliver growth as this is the function of the structure and local plans. However, the study was expected to help inform the development of new plans in light of the constraints to growth. The Draft Capacity Study can be viewed online at:

<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/capacity/stonehaven.asp>.

The draft conclusions of this study were presented to the public for consultation in late 2004. The ensuing report, due to be presented to the Kincardine & Mearns Area Committee in ???, was deferred and has not yet been back before the Area Committee for consideration.

The S&DCC Future of Stonehaven Consultation has been concluded since this capacity study was first undertaken. The current draft of the capacity study has conclusions about the priority areas for growth which are different from those prioritised by local residents in that consultation. However, it should be noted that pipeline constraints on development to the west of the town, considered in the Draft Capacity Study, were not necessarily taken into account by residents in the Future of Stonehaven Consultation.

Aberdeenshire Structure Plan

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils are preparing a new Structure Plan for the area.

The Structure Plan will identify the development which is needed in the next 25 years, what form it should take and where it should be focused, with a stress that growth should be managed with as little harm as possible to the wider environment. It will not pinpoint precisely where new development should take place, which is the purpose of the City's and the Shire's separate Local Plans.

The plan, which will cover all of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, excluding the Cairngorms National Park, will aim to ensure the North-East has a large enough population, and sufficient homes and jobs, to sustain the quality of services and facilities which people

expect. It will look at issues like housing, office developments, new shops, transport and the environment.

The public consultation to gather the views of Aberdeenshire residents about the future of their community and environment was undertaken in the spring of 2007. A draft Structure Plan is anticipated by January 2008 following which further consultation will precede the final plan which should be ready by June 2008 for submission to the Scottish Government.

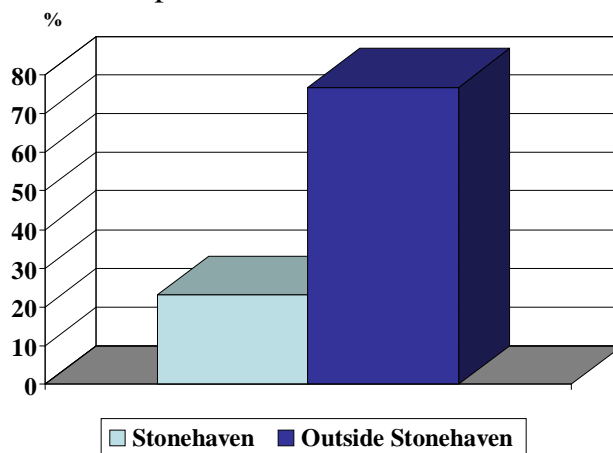
Long Term Planning – Strategic Conclusions

- It is important to ensure that the draft Structure Plan reflects accurately the priorities of the Stonehaven community. The 'Imagine Stonehaven' Draft Capacity Study was expected to inform the Structure Plan.
- The conclusions of the 'Imagine Stonehaven' Draft Capacity Study now need to be revisited in the light of the Future of Stonehaven Consultation Report 2006. Further consultation is needed to ensure that long term planning for the growth of the town recognises the constraints but respects the priorities of Stonehaven residents both in terms of growth location and impact on the character of the town.
- Given the January 2008 timescale for the draft Structure Plan, further community consultation needs to be scheduled with all due speed.

Employment

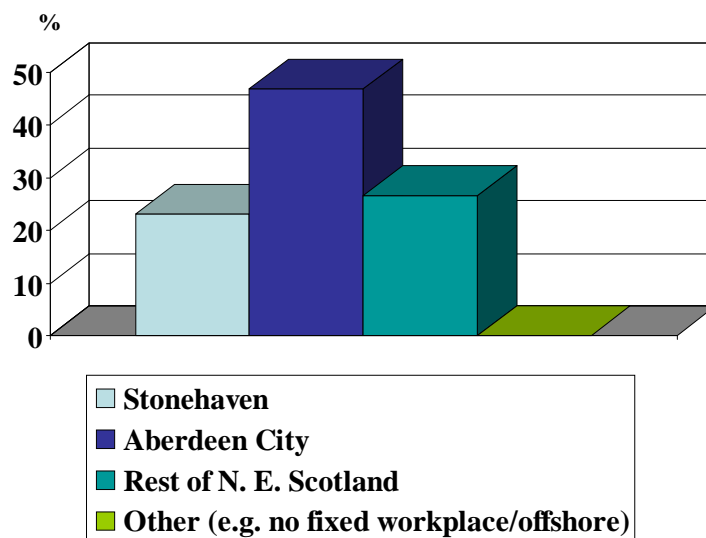
Stonehaven’s economy is closely linked to Aberdeen, with 76% of its residents working outside the town and, of this figure, 50% working in the city. The town economy is therefore influenced by similar factors as the Aberdeen economy and, in particular the oil and gas sector. In 2005, the rate of unemployment was just 1% in Stonehaven.

Workplace of Stonehaven Residents



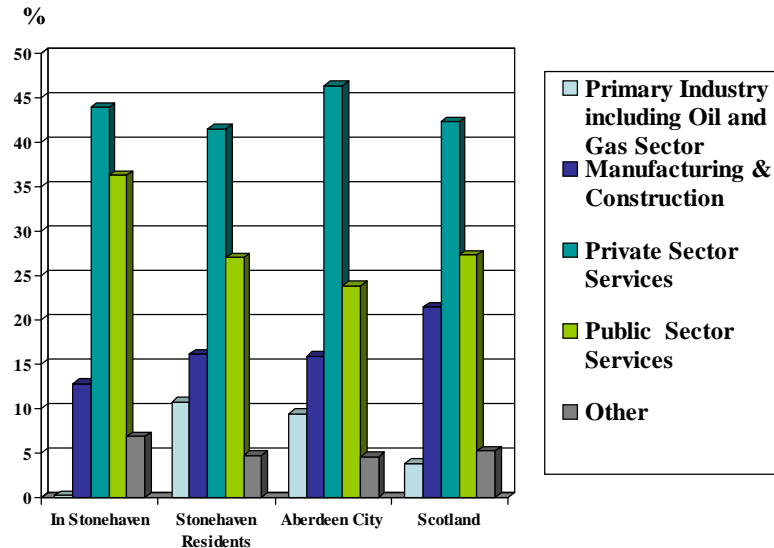
Source: GROS 2004 based on 2001 figures (include all employees and self-employed)

Workplace of Stonehaven Residents - Detail



Source: GROS 2004 based on 2001 figures (include all employees and self-employed)

Employment by Industry



* Stonehaven defined as 2003 CAS Wards Stonehaven Central and Stonehaven South. Source: Annual Business Inquiry 2003, National Statistics (www.statistics.gov.uk) (NOMIS) and SCROL, 2001 Census Employment Data

The main employers in Stonehaven – organisations with more than forty employees – are working in the following activities:

- Plastics Manufacturing
- Shotblasting and Spray Painting
- Supermarket Retailing
- Nursing Home Services
- Health Services
- Local Government Services

The relative importance of the oil and gas sector to Stonehaven residents is apparent in the percentage of residents working in primary industry (90% of which relates to oil and gas production). However, employment in North East Scotland's energy sector peaked in 1991 when the total workforce was estimated to have been 54,000. By 2001, this number had dropped to 41,000. Although the current high oil price is creating buoyant economic conditions for the sector, an ongoing decline in workforce numbers is nonetheless anticipated. Based on 2004 employment forecasts, total employment in North East Scotland's energy industry is forecast to fall to 25,000 in 2021.

Aberdeenshire Council is working closely with Aberdeen City through the Aberdeen City & Shire Economic Forum (ACSEF) to develop an Economic Manifesto which will build a robust and dynamic economy for the future of both areas against this changing energy sector backdrop. Stonehaven's employment fortunes will be largely linked to the success of the strategies for growth and development proposed therein.

However, there are other prospects for employment growth within Stonehaven itself including:

- land zoned in the current Local Plan for industrial development which has yet to be developed
- the ongoing debate about the need for and possible location of a second supermarket in Stonehaven which, if resolved positively, should create additional local employment if competing small retailers are not adversely affected
- the potential for further development of Stonehaven's tourism industry
- additional services associated with possible future growth
- the anticipated ageing of the population could be expected to bring an increase in local support services for this particular demographic

Employment – Strategic Conclusions

- Stonehaven's residents are very dependent on Aberdeen for employment, which in turn is influenced significantly, at present, by the oil and gas sector. Stonehaven should benefit from active support for the Economic Manifesto proposed by ACSEF which aims to ensure the future prosperity of the region including further development of North East tourism.
- Encouraging development of the marketable industrial land in Stonehaven would bring additional employment to the town. Development designs need, however, to be sensitive to the impact on the local environment if they are not to be resisted by local residents seeking to protect the surrounding countryside and landscape from inappropriate development.
- The Future of Stonehaven Consultation indicates that there is a majority of residents in favour of a second supermarket in Stonehaven although some of the preferred locations are very contentious. Supermarket development depends on private developers coming forward with proposals acceptable to both residents and the planning authorities. Although the right location for such development does have to be resolved, employment benefits are one of the reasons for supporting the principle of a second supermarket in the town.

Tourism

A Brief Overview

Stonehaven has many attractive features for tourists. These include:

- The Open Air Art Deco Pool
- Dunnottar Castle
- The Tolbooth Museum
- The harbour
- A dramatic coastal setting and bay walk
- The nearby Highland Boundary Fault – a Site of Special Scientific Interest close to which a fossil of the oldest known air-breathing land animal, a tiny millipede that lived 428 million years ago, was found.
- Accessible coastal, woodland and countryside walks
- A calendar of special events throughout the year and, in particular, the world famous Fireball celebrations on New Year's Eve
- A good range of places to eat and drink

Stonehaven, close to Aberdeen, is also very well located for access to Royal Deeside, other attractions in the Mearns, and Nortrail which provides long distance footpaths and cycle routes.

Stonehaven's tourism season is currently very much focused on the summer with the majority of its special events taking place then and some of its key attractions only open then. As a result, this is the period with the highest volume of visitors.

Stonehaven has a limited range of overnight accommodation available for visitors. This fact, no doubt, affects the customer profile of visitors to the town. Although there is a significant number that stay for a night, a long weekend or even for as long as a week, the majority of visitors come for the day from Aberdeen City or other parts of Scotland.

Stonehaven...It's Special

Tourism in Stonehaven is promoted and supported by the Aberdeen & Grampian Tourist Board of VisitScotland, but also more locally by the efforts of the Stonehaven...It's Special Group (SIS). This group was set up as a result of the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership Strategy for Stonehaven, launched in 1998. It is a voluntary umbrella organisation which brings together various interests and organisations in the town, including the Business Association, The Friends of the Open Air Pool, Aberdeenshire Council, organisers of the town's major events and other tourism interests. It has two groups within it:

- an **Events Co-ordination Group**, which raises funding for and promotes the town's major events and

- a **Tourism Group**, which produces and distributes a promotional leaflet and aims to grow Stonehaven tourism.

Stonehaven...It's Special Tourism Group

The SIS Tourism Group undertook a Tourism Survey in 2005 which gave an insight to the customer profile of visitors to Stonehaven and their experience. The survey report can be viewed online at http://www.sg.webecombiz.co.uk/sis_mr_report05.doc. It was followed in 2006 by a tourism strategy for the town (**need web link to document**) which aims to support national and regional tourism strategies and associated targets for tourism growth.

The strategic priorities of the SIS Tourism Group 2006 Strategy are

- to understand the existing tourism market in Stonehaven and the requirements of existing tourists
- to ensure that visitors have an experience that meets or exceeds their expectations
- to explore and implement ways of extending the season and market
- to encourage structured marketing and the promotion of a consistent image and identity
- to promote greater engagement with the community and visiting tourists

Action plans were developed to support each strategic focus.

A marketing and promotional plan for 2007 – 2010, which builds on the 2006 Tourism Strategy document for the town, was produced in March 2007 for the SIS Tourism Group (**web link to report**) to provide a pro-active, planned, sustainable promotion of the town and the Mearns. It gives a summary of the “Stonehaven product”, including SWOT analysis (a review of the town’s *tourism* Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), and an account of the geographical markets, customer profile, niche markets and market trends and priorities. It identifies a core marketing aim and strategy and specific tactics for delivering these.

- **Marketing Aim:** “to raise the profile of Stonehaven and its hinterland as a fun, good value tourism destination, as a means of increasing volume and value of visits, particularly day visits, the best prospect for sustainable growth.”*
- **Marketing Strategy:** “to target the high priority markets..., using a wide range of tactics, and to address other lower-priority markets by responding to low-cost opportunities and by other low-cost tactics. The over-riding priority is, however, to ensure that market growth remains within sustainable limits, both environmentally and economically.”*

* *Marketing and Promotional Plan for Stonehaven as a Tourism Destination 2007 -2010*

New market research was undertaken between May and July 2007 in order to improve the tourism group's understanding of its local market, the needs of visitors and to determine visitor awareness and views of the main website, marketing material produced and branding used. ([WEBLINK](#))

Promoting Stonehaven as an attractive tourist destination has many tourism specific angles to it. However, there are also a wide range of issues that need to be addressed within the town for the benefit of the tourism industry that are much broader in scope and affect, in fact, all residents. These include:

- litter on our streets and dog dirt
- vandalism
- the town's general appearance and upkeep including its coastal access roads
- the range of shopping
- the range of entertainment and activity options, especially during bad weather
- the availability, cleanliness and opening hours of public toilets

During the Future of Stonehaven Consultation, it was suggested that, "A town that works for its *residents* will attract visitors too".

Tourism – Strategic Conclusions

- Stonehaven tourism benefits from the focussed efforts of the SIS Tourism Group. This group needs to be supported and more local tourism businesses encouraged to get involved.
- The SIS Tourism Group's Tourism Strategy 2006 and Marketing and Promotional Plan 2007 – 2010 are the town's tourism strategy blueprints. These recognise and aim to build on the priority target markets of day and short stay visitors.
 - The limited availability of accommodation in the town is a serious barrier to growth in the number of short stay visitors. It is necessary to consider ways to promote the town to private investment in the area of hotel and Bed & Breakfast accommodation so as to deliver successfully growth in this market segment.
 - The Stonehaven Caravan Park is part of the available mix of accommodation but currently presents serious issues for residents and visitors. This needs to be maintained as a tourist-specific facility and brought up to a suitable and attractive standard.
 - The town's residents need to be made more aware of the tourism aims of the town so that they can understand and play their part in delivering them.
 - The aim of building a *sustainable* local tourism industry needs to be looked at and integrated with other sustainability plans for the town.
- There are issues to be addressed that are not solely of benefit to tourism such as litter management, more entertainment and activity options, a more diverse range of shopping and efforts to create a more attractive town. The groups already

working in the town to address some of these issues should be encouraged, if not doing so already, to build links with the SIS Tourism Group so that the needs of residents and tourists can be addressed together.

Marketing & Promotion

General

The town's official website, offering a wealth of general as well as tourist information about Stonehaven, is **The Stonehaven Guide**. This is a commercial undertaking and includes extensive links to local web pages, offering a very comprehensive overview of the town, its attractions, local business, key groups and the life of the community.

Tourism Promotion

- **Promotional Leaflets**

The SIS Tourism Group developed a promotional leaflet in 2005 and 2006 which marketed the attractions of the town. It was a single leaflet which did not distinguish between the information to attract visitors and the information needed once they arrived. The leaflet was viewed as trying to do too much and, as a result, in 2007 two leaflets were developed instead – one a promotional leaflet aimed at attracting visitors, the other a visitor information leaflet and map. These two leaflets have been the subject of recent market research.

- **The Towns Together Forum**

The Towns Together Forum (TTF) enables businesses in the ten principal towns of Aberdeenshire to work more closely together for mutual benefit. The forum is private sector led, but includes participation from the voluntary sector and functions with the support of the public sector through the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership. The member towns are working together to promote the area to visitors and to encourage local businesses to join their local Traders or Business Associations to create new business connections throughout the area.

As a member of the TTF, the SIS Tourism Group has in recent years attended Visit Scotland exhibitions in Aberdeen and Glasgow to promote the town.

- **Tourist Boards**

Stonehaven tourism is promoted online through the national VisitScotland and the regional Aberdeen and Grampian Tourist Board websites as well as through the inclusion of information about Stonehaven in promotional material they produce.

Stonehaven has a Tourist Information Centre provided by VisitScotland which is open from Easter/April until October and provides marketing and promotional support of Stonehaven and its hinterland through a wide range of available leaflets.

- **SIS Tourism Group Marketing & Promotional Plan 2007 -2010**

The SIS Tourism Group's marketing and promotional plans identify the options and tactics for tourism promotion through PR, the internet, the use of advertising, print and distribution, the travel trade and customer relationship marketing. It identifies product development areas as well as assessing the Stonehaven...It's Special branding.

- **SIS Event Group**

The Events Group is made up of the voluntary organising clubs / groups of the town's community events working together to support each other and jointly market and promote the events. The group currently has its own website: <http://www.stonehavenitsspecial.co.uk/main.html> and through its web pages, each individual event and event website is promoted.

Business and Economic Promotion

- **The Stonehaven Business Association**

Stonehaven has an active Business Association whose work includes promoting local businesses in Stonehaven. To this end a number of initiatives have been introduced in recent years: the monthly Farmers Market, the Continental Market which has come to the town twice now and regular fortnightly car boot sales in the Market Square. These events are popular with local residents and encourage them in to the town centre as well adding to the attractions for visitors to the town.

- **Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Forum (ACSEF)**

In May 2007, ACSEF held an economic summit in which over 100 businesses participated. This resulted in an economic manifesto for the region which clarifies a vision for 2025, the related strategic priorities and the next steps to build on the current buoyant economy and sustain it in the long term. The vision aims to see the region recognised as one of the most successful economies in Europe topping the quality of life league tables, able to retain and attract local talent as well as being a destination of choice for visitors. The manifesto can be viewed online at:

http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/support/ACSEF_Economic_Manifesto_Aug07.pdf

The strategic priorities of the economic manifesto are not in any way Stonehaven specific given its City and shire-wide focus. However, given Stonehaven's dependence on the Aberdeen and north east employment market, efforts to market and promote the region's assets through the manifesto should be expected to deliver employment and tourism benefits for the residents of Stonehaven as well.

Marketing & Promotion – Strategic Conclusions

- The SIS Tourism Group’s marketing and promotional plan is specifically addressing tourism marketing and promotion. One of the issues being addressed within this is the branding of the town as Stonehaven...It’s Special. This is consistently used but not viewed as especially strong. Although this brand may continue, work to improve it will, if so, result.
 - A strong and clear branding for the town will come from the town’s core strengths and features that are then promoted through it but also then have to be protected.
 - Consideration should be given to developing an umbrella brand that is appropriate for tourism but not exclusively so
 - Development decisions for the town must not be at odds with the branding
 - All stakeholders in the town, residents and businesses whether tourism or otherwise, and public sector agencies need to be aware of the agreed branding so that they work together to promote this image consistently

- Stonehaven needs to decide how it will respond to the Economic Manifesto. If the manifesto is successful in growing the regional economy, the town should expect to experience some of the impact of that. It could choose
 - to take a more pro-active approach to promoting local business development and therefore local employment under the manifesto or
 - whilst not specifically promoting business development, it could take an active role in promoting Stonehaven as a good place to live or
 - it could aim for a mix of the two or
 - it could avoid promoting Stonehaven specifically and instead rely on the wider Aberdeenshire initiatives

Depending on the stance adopted, any business or housing development marketing and promotional strategies that may result need to be co-ordinated with the tourism marketing and promotional plan already developed.

Town Centre Management

Town centre management which aims to create a vibrant and attractive town centre is a priority on three particular levels for Stonehaven:

- It will help to strengthen Stonehaven's identity as a self-sustaining town in which people take pride, choose to shop and to spend their time
- It will deliver benefits for the tourism industry and attract more visitors to the town
- It will offer/sustain local employment opportunities

There is currently no one single group with responsibility per se for town centre management in Stonehaven. Aberdeenshire Council, various community planning partners, groups such as the Stonehaven Business Association, the Stonehaven Heritage Society, the Stonehaven...It's Special (SIS) Tourism Group and the Stonehaven Horizon Project Team, amongst others, are all key stakeholders in what happens in the town centre but no one group on its own is identified as having responsibility for "managing" it.

However, working relationships between the key stakeholders have been in place for some time and have been further formalised recently with the formation of a new grouping, the Stonehaven Town Partnership. This group might offer the potential for, if not a town centre *management* structure with the operational overtones that implies, nonetheless a structure through which a more systematic and strategic view of how the town – and not just its centre – should be improved and developed.

The Stonehaven Town Partnership

Stonehaven was until 2006 a participating town in the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership (ATP). The ATP, established in 1998, is a formal partnership between Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Enterprise Grampian and Communities Scotland looking to stimulate sustainable community development in Aberdeenshire's towns. As a result of participation in the ATP, an informal Stonehaven partnership was formed to co-ordinate and to develop a town strategy and action plan. This strategy can be viewed online at http://www.atap.org.uk/stonehaven/exec_summary.htm.

As Stonehaven has now left the ATP, the informal Stonehaven partnership has now constituted itself formally as the Stonehaven Town Partnership and as a company limited by guarantee. The STP is looking to maintain the community engagement and momentum begun under the ATP so that other town development projects are facilitated and encouraged to go forward.

The STP is a voluntary organisation and brings together key stakeholder groups in the town such as:

- Stonehaven & District Community Council
- Stonehaven Business Association
- Stonehaven Horizon Project Team
- SIS Tourism Group & Events Group
- Stonehaven Heritage Society
- Stonehaven Arts & Leisure Trust

with other community groups and Aberdeenshire Council.

Key benefits of the STP are improved channels of communication between the groups with an interest in developments in the town, the opportunity to gather whole town support for proposed initiatives and projects through its membership and, as a result of being a limited company, there will be the possibility of accessing lottery, heritage and other funding sources not open to the Local Authority. The STP will not run projects itself but will support and encourage other groups taking projects forward.

Key Issues for the Town Centre

The following particular issues were raised through the Future of Stonehaven Consultation as priorities to be addressed in the town centre:

- **Stonehaven Town Hall**

A feasibility study has recently been published which assesses options for the future development of the Stonehaven Town Hall. This will, no doubt, inform the thinking of the STP which also has in its sights how best to develop its use. It is a much valued facility that is currently not considered to be achieving its full potential and, located in the heart of the town, proposals for its future will very much affect the town centre.

- **The Market Square**

The Market Square is currently used as a fee-paying car park but cleared when required for special events. The Future of Stonehaven Consultation indicates that many residents would like to see the potential of the Market Square developed in more creative ways. Some of the ideas put forward include a central park, a venue for outdoor eating and a regular market place. However, if the space were to be developed differently, alternative car parking arrangements would have to be found. Visitors to the town currently do not identify a problem with parking and any options considered for the Market Square should aim to ensure this does not change.

- **Retail Diversity**

Residents of all ages consider there to be a lack of retail diversity in Stonehaven and improving the range of shopping in the town is one of the topmost priorities identified in the Future of Stonehaven Consultation. A lack of available commercial property, high business rates and expensive lets are factors that are identified as limiting the growth in local retail.

Also, as many residents work in Aberdeen, there are easy opportunities to shop in the city or outside the town. It is suggested that this leakage might be reduced if there was a second supermarket in the town which would both encourage local residents to shop more within the town and draw shoppers from surrounding communities. However, there are also a significant number of residents who believe a second supermarket would damage the retail centre of Stonehaven, especially if the superstore had permission to sell more than just food and related products but items in direct competition with the town centre as well.

- **Young People Loitering**

At the weekends, in particular, there can be groups of young people hanging around the streets of the town centre. Gathered in numbers, other residents, including other young people, can find these groups intimidating. There are mixed views in the town as to whether providing more facilities and entertainments options for young people will really make a difference. However, nonetheless this ranks as a priority to address. Ideas put forward that might be of particular relevance to the town *centre* are a small local cinema and a youth drop-in centre. Other suggested ideas include ten pin bowling and a climbing wall although the available space for these is unlikely to be found in the town centre.

As already noted in other parts of this report improving entertainment options for young people also has more general benefits for families and visitors to the town.

- **Car Parking & Road Traffic Management**

As noted above, the Market Square, as a location for parking, has both proponents and opponents. There are, however, other issues with car parking especially in the Old Town. Suggestions that the former gas works be explored as a possible parking site for the old town have so far not yielded results. Constraints relating to contamination of the site appear to be a key problem with pursuing this idea.

Road traffic management around the Old Town and the Market Square should be addressed. Ideas to pedestrianise the harbour area should be further explored and plans to facilitate road crossing for pedestrians on the west side of the Market Square should be progressed.

- **Housekeeping & Orderliness**

There are issues of general housekeeping in the town centre that need ongoing attention.

- The maintenance of a clean and tidy town centre. The Adopt-a-Street litter scheme is a voluntary initiative which aims to help address some of the problems associated with litter but it does not cover the town centre. More thought needs to be given to litter management, especially over the summer period when there are more visitors to the town and at weekends.
- Enhancing the town centre through better maintenance of shop frontages, windows and elements of street furniture like railings, benches, lamp posts, and bins depends on the combined efforts of local businesses, the Local Authority and some local residents. The Stonehaven Horizon Project team work hard to enhance the town centre with planters, hanging baskets and window boxes. The STP may be able to support their work by encouraging other stakeholders in the town centre to contribute their part to this effort especially if the common benefits are understood.
- Noise and disorder associated with heavy drinking, particularly at the weekends. These are problems that go far wider than Stonehaven but efforts that can help include the Pub Watch scheme and ensuring take aways shut promptly at 3.30pm so that people who have left the clubs at 3.00pm disperse homewards more rapidly.

Town Centre Management - Strategic Conclusions

- Creating a vibrant and attractive town centre needs to be a cornerstone of our forward thinking in Stonehaven. It is the focal point for developing civic pride and an important contributor to the economic health of the town.
- There is no one group undertaking the management of the town centre although there are many groups with an active interest in the town centre. A single management group with an operational management focus may not be needed. However, there is a need for consensus on the vision for the town centre and agreement on the strategies necessary to achieve it.
- Although the STP is only newly formed, it has the potential, working with Aberdeenshire Council and the local community planning partners, to establish such consensus and to prioritise and lead the strategic input to the improvement and development of the town centre as part of its wider view of the town.
 - Establishing its authority as a group which genuinely represents community priorities will depend on a broad base of participation and efforts to broaden involvement and ensure all key stakeholders in the town are represented should be encouraged and welcomed.

Transportation and Infrastructure

Stonehaven, as a small self-contained town, has key infrastructure elements in place including support for community business and economic development. The Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership strategy highlighted infrastructure improvements and a range of related works have, as a result, taken place in the town over recent years. There are, however, still areas of weakness:

- a lack of services on land zoned for industrial development
- services which are mostly focussed close to the town centre although the town has grown considerably away from the town centre
- the standard of maintenance of local roads and traffic management
- no bus station in the town centre

Industrial Land for Development

In Stonehaven, there are 11.3 hectares of land zoned and with planning permission for industrial development, all of which are classed as marketable, but none are yet serviced. This land is located at East Newtonleys, to the south of the settlement. Delays in developing this land may be linked to relatively high costs associated with infrastructure development for the area.

Retail Services Outside the Town Centre

There has been considerable growth in Stonehaven with new developments to the north west at Slug Road /Redcloak, to the west at Malcolm's Mount, to the South at Braehead and to the north at Glenury. However, with the exception of the Slug Road/Redcloak area, there have not been corresponding developments in local services such as small shops.

Roads

- **Coastal Access Roads to Stonehaven**

The state of the north and south coastal roads into Stonehaven is poor and both the Future of Stonehaven Consultation and the SIS Tourism Group's Marketing and Promotional Plan identify this as an issue that should be addressed. Both roads are affected by subsidence and require major investment with works on the Bervie Braes to the south and Den of Cowie/Den of Logie to the north. If these roads were improved it would considerably improve the first impressions of visitors coming into the town.

- **Road Maintenance**

Better maintenance, in general, of the roads and footpaths in town, although not the foremost priority for local residents, is nonetheless a basic service they look to Aberdeenshire Council to improve.

- **Traffic Management**

Traffic management improvements in the town arise particularly in the context of safe pedestrian road crossing around the Market Square. Proposals for traffic lights at the corner of Evan and Barclay Streets are due to be considered by the Area Committee. The Dynamic Drop-in highlights specific residents concerns regarding traffic management and areas in which traffic calming measures are considered to be required. This community feedback needs to be reviewed and appropriately considered.

Transport Hub

Buses in Stonehaven serve the town as well as offering connections to Aberdeen and other villages and towns in Kincardine and Mearns and Deeside. However, there is no bus station from which to collect bus timetables or at which to make enquiries. Information can be found online but not all local residents have online access.

One solution to be considered would be to locate such services at the Railway Station creating on that site a transport hub. At the end of 2006, Network Rail indicated that additional car parking was to be created at the Stonehaven Railway Station. No visible progress has been made with this but the aim of increasing the Park and Ride capability at the Railway Station is welcome and would sit neatly with a strategy that looked to this site as a transport hub for the town.

Transportation and Infrastructure - Strategic Conclusions

- Stonehaven's infrastructure in the established areas of the town is well developed but needs constant appropriate maintenance. Although the coastal access roads require major investment, for the benefit of local tourism in particular, a commitment to undertake this work should be given, resources earmarked and an achievable timeframe established.
- In the newer developments there are few local services and at the periphery of the town, such as East Newtonleys, where industrial land remains to be developed, further infrastructure development is required. If the town continues to grow, service centres, transportation and other infrastructure need to grow with it.
- Stonehaven is unlikely to get a bus station in the town centre. However, consideration should be given to a transport hub at the railway station where information about rail and bus travel could both be collected. Plans for additional car parking spaces at the Railway Station should be followed up with Network Rail.

Accessibility

Stonehaven is a well connected town with good accessibility. In the Future of Stonehaven Consultation, residents rated very highly the benefit of its transports links considering it the fourth most important strength of the town. Their importance is no doubt directly linked to the high proportion of residents who work and commute out of the town.

Also, given the contained size of Stonehaven, the town is currently viewed by residents as offering good access to its services and facilities on foot and bike as well as by car or bus.

- **Road**

The A90 trunk road connects the town north to Aberdeen and south to Dundee. The A92 national tourist road links it to the coastal towns and villages of the Mearns. The A957 and B979 roads connect the town westwards to the Dee valley. There are further minor roads that connect the town to other neighbouring villages. However, as already noted, the north and south coastal access roads to the town need improving.

The Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and the Stonehaven Fastlink will further improve the connections between Stonehaven, the airport area with its associated industrial activities and the north/west of the shire. The junction to be created by the new road will also create an access to the A90 for south bound traffic off the B979 Netherley Road. This will reduce the traffic which currently travels through the town centre to gain access to the A90 south.

This will be a very important junction for local residents as well as other drivers using it. However, concerns are being expressed within the town about the design of the junction. These need to be heard, adequately answered or else an alternative design put forward. Allowing this junction to become a poor access point for the town must be unacceptable.

- **Rail**

Stonehaven benefits from a local railway station. Although having the rail service is highly valued, local residents are nonetheless critical of its quality and reliability and consider services should be more affordable, more flexible and more frequent especially at peak times.

The town's rail link offers a regular service to Aberdeen from where there are connections with services to the north. Plans to develop Aberdeen Crossrail with more frequent services between Stonehaven, Aberdeen and Inverurie will be beneficial for residents who work and commute to the city or further north.

There are direct rail services to Dundee, Perth, Edinburgh, Glasgow and further south to stations en route to London. However, there are relatively few through-services from Stonehaven to Glasgow.

The Caledonian overnight sleeper stops in Stonehaven en route to and from London Euston.

- **Bus**

Stonehaven does not have a bus station but there are local bus services within the town including a Dial-a-Ride service.

Bus services from the town go north to Portlethen and Aberdeen, south to Montrose and other towns and villages in the Mearns and west to Banchory. There is, however, a lack of bus services in the evenings to surrounding villages. This limits the participation of those residents in these outlying areas, who are dependent on public transport, in evening activities based in Stonehaven.

There are no long distance services that stop in Stonehaven instead residents have to travel first to the bus station in Aberdeen and travel on from there.

Again, although not doubting the basic benefit of the bus services, residents have numerous criticisms of their reliability and quality.

- **Air**

To the north-west of Aberdeen at Dyce, is an international airport serving some 35 destinations as well as a heliport serving the offshore oil and gas industry. It can be reached by car from Stonehaven in less than an hour. Currently, more than 90% of all those travelling to and from the airport do so by car or taxi as the public transport links to the airport, despite a rail station at Dyce, are poor.

- **Sea**

Stonehaven residents can travel by passenger ferry to the Shetland and Orkney Islands from Aberdeen.

- **Cycling**

Stonehaven sits on the North Sea Cycle Route, a 6000 km chain of marked cycle routes around the North Sea connecting Scotland, England, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway.

Stonehaven is also connected to Sustrans and the National Cycle Network which identifies cycle routes on traffic-free paths, quiet lanes and traffic-calmed roads.

In the Future of Stonehaven Consultation residents identify the need for more cycle paths in the town.

- **On Foot**

Stonehaven is on the Aberdeenshire Coastal Path which is part of a scheme to create a series of paths around the North Sea Coast known as the North Sea Trail or Nortrail. Currently the coastal path from Stonehaven only extends south to Dunnottar Castle and north to Garron Point and therefore does not yet enable residents to connect on foot with other coastal towns and villages. However, there are plans to develop the coastal path south from Dunnottar Castle to Fowlsheugh Bird Reserve.

The town has an extensive network of footpaths which enables residents to walk safely within the town. However, given the hills within and around the town, car usage no doubt remains higher than it might otherwise.

The Local Transport Strategy (LTS)

Aberdeenshire Council has responsibility for the local road network, footways and cycle paths within the shire. Its current LTS 2007 – 2010 includes strategies which will help to improve the accessibility of its communities. Strategies of particular relevance to Stonehaven include increasing the opportunities for cycling and walking as well as looking for better integration with public transport options.

Aberdeenshire Council supports socially necessary bus services to help with social inclusion and accessibility. Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) options like the Dial-a-Ride scheme cater for the varying needs of residents, including those with mobility problems, or those who simply do not live close to a regular public transport service. The LTS also looks to increase the range of DRT options.

It is worth noting that the Marketing & Promotional Plan 2007 - 2010 of the SIS Tourism Group also highlights the potential of DRT as a means to enable easier and more affordable access to tourism sites in the hinterland of Stonehaven for visitors without a car.

Private bus companies provide commercial services for more than 80% of bus journeys in Aberdeenshire. As a result, efforts to encourage long distance services to stop in the town or on the A90 at Stonehaven will depend on their co-operation or a perceived commercial benefit.

Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)

Improvements to the trunk road network and the strategic development of the rail network and services are not the responsibility of Aberdeenshire Council but of Transport Scotland. As a result, it is the **Regional Transport Strategy (RTS)** – a blueprint for transport in the region over the next 15 years - which identifies proposals for improvements in these areas. The Final Draft RTS is currently sitting with the Scottish Government for approval. RTS proposals which should further improve accessibility to Stonehaven include:

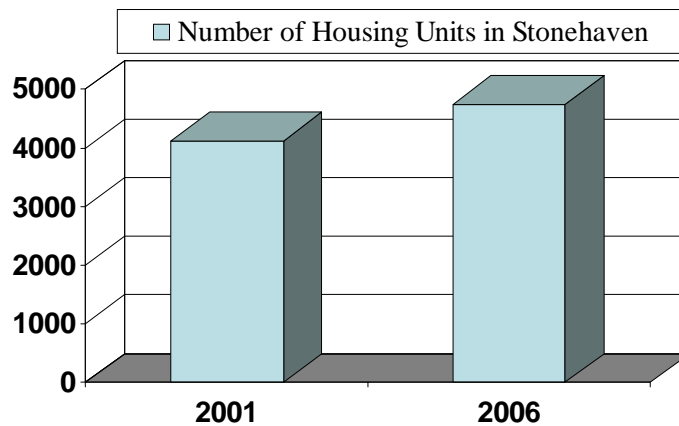
- Proposals to invest in rail links to Edinburgh and Glasgow to reduce journey times and improve quality and reliability
- Proposals to deliver Aberdeen Crossrail with frequent services between Inverurie, Aberdeen and Stonehaven and new stations in Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire
- The AWPR and Stonehaven Fastlink
- Proposals to improve public transport to the airport - including a branded express bus service, and, in the longer term, a rail or guided bus link. It is to be expected, however, that Stonehaven residents would need to connect with such services in Aberdeen.

Accessibility – Strategic Conclusions

- Stonehaven's good transport links are a key benefit to the town and its current size means that accessibility within the town, on foot or by bike, is good as well. The Aberdeenshire LTS and the proposed RTS are the strategic documents which, although not identifying Stonehaven specific strategies, should deliver ongoing improvements to accessibility for the town nonetheless.
- However, the need for high quality, reliable and affordable public transport very much depends on the commercial rail and bus services.

Housing

In 2006, there were approximately 4750 housing units in Stonehaven. This represented an increase of just over 15% since 2001. This development took place in a variety of locations; to the north at Glenury, north-west at Slug Road/Redcloak, west at Malcolm's Mount and south at Braehead. A considerable number of units have also been built on smaller brownfield redevelopment sites within the town itself. These have tended to be flats rather than houses. There is continuing pressure to expand the number of housing units in the town both currently through private developments and over the longer term as part of the necessary future provision of housing in shire.



Source: Aberdeenshire Council Stonehaven Statistics

Current Housing Developments

The Aberdeenshire Local Plan identifies land zoned for housing development in Stonehaven. At present, there is undeveloped land allocated for a further 25 housing units at Braehead and planning permission for 42 units on the former Commodore Site. All other sites zoned for housing within the Local Plan have now been developed and further planned developments should not occur until after 2011.

Nonetheless, planning applications for further infill development opportunities in the town are ongoing. These are not in the Local Plan and, therefore, exceed the requirements for housing growth. The amount of infill has been quite significant in Stonehaven in recent years and has implications not just for *unplanned* increased pressure on local facilities and services but also means this land is no longer available for alternative uses

such as commercial development. This matters when considering the shortage of suitable land in Stonehaven for commercial use.

However, the most significant potential development in housing, also outwith the Local Plan, is occurring on the Ury Estate where planning proposals under consideration are to restore and redevelop Ury House as a Golf Club, Hotel, Office and Conference Facility with enabling development of some 230 houses.

Resident Concerns Over Housing Development

In the Future of Stonehaven Consultation residents identify a number of concerns about recent and future housing development.

- **Unsustainable Development**

Stonehaven residents view the recent growth in the town as not having been supported by the corresponding investment in the services and facilities of the town to meet the needs of the increased population. This is particularly important because of Stonehaven's dependence on Aberdeen as a workplace. If the amenities are not in place in Stonehaven to support the population this reinforces the risk that residents will view the town as a dormitory with serious implications for community spirit in the town and its sense of identity.

Therefore, although residents understand and accept that further growth, in due course, is likely to be inevitable, the view is that the town has to catch up with the impact of recent growth first and thereafter continue to develop only if this can be achieved in an ongoing sustainable way. This needs to be taken into consideration when planning approval is sought for infill sites which are not in the Local Plan and yet cumulatively affect the town.

Insensitive Development

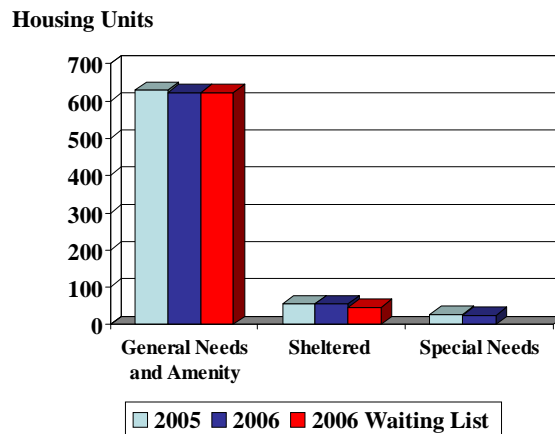
Residents do not wish the town to grow in a way that damages the natural beauty of the landscape. In particular, housing development on the coastal braes that impinges on the views from within or across the town is considered unacceptable. Maintaining these natural assets is part of protecting the core identity of Stonehaven and is consistent with a tourism strategy that seeks to promote the landscapes values.

- **A Lack of Affordable Housing**

Stonehaven is the second most pressured settlement in Aberdeenshire. In 2006 there were 622 affordable rental housing units in the town (Aberdeenshire Council and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) stock) and there were 623 households waiting for one of these units. The turnover in housing that year was just 28. The majority of these applications were for a one bedroom property although many applicants would aspire to a larger property. In addition, with just 55 sheltered housing units in the town in 2006, there was a

waiting list of 46. The availability of affordable rental housing is therefore a major issue in the town.

Stonehaven Aberdeenshire Council/RSL Housing Stock 2006



Source: Stonehaven Housing Strategy

In addition, Stonehaven is one of the least affordable towns in Scotland for first time buyers. Residents consider the lack of affordable housing a significant weakness in the town and one of the priorities to address. In view of the forecast ageing of the population of Stonehaven, encouraging younger residents into the town to help balance the population profile also links to the need for more affordable housing.

- **Development Values**

Some residents highlighted concerns with a seeming lack of control over the quality and design of new housing as well as indicating a desire for new housing that meets high energy efficiency standards. Also mentioned was the high density of housing development with the associated loss of green spaces and implications for the healthy living agenda.

Future Housing Growth

It is generally accepted that Stonehaven will continue to grow in order to meet the changing needs of its population and in order to contribute its share of future shire-wide housing requirements.

The Draft Stonehaven Capacity Study considers the options for this future growth in Stonehaven and uses the assumption that the town will grow by a further 50% or some 2000 houses. However, two issues arise and need to be addressed

- The preferred areas identified for growth within the Draft Study are not consistent with the resident preferences established through the Future of Stonehaven Consultation and, as a result, further consultation should take place to clarify and discuss these options further with residents.
- If future development is to respect the core values of Stonehaven's identity and sense of place and therefore to be aligned also with its tourism strategy, the amount of further growth that can really be achieved without compromising these may be considerably less than the theoretical figure of 50% used as a working assumption in the study.

Also, Stonehaven is projected to have a significantly increased number of older people in future years. Already the Local Housing Strategy identifies a shortfall in housing for the particular needs of older people with a severe shortage of sheltered housing compared to the level of demand, an increasing demand for equipment and adaptations in households and a growing need for housing on one level.

Housing – Strategic Conclusions

- Stonehaven needs to grow. However, not in a way that undermines its future as a sustainable small town with its own identity.
- Current developments have already stretched local facilities. Therefore, any further substantial increase in housing in the town needs to be matched with investment in facilities and services.
- Stonehaven's greatest need is for more affordable housing (both rental and for sale). This will be increasingly important to the town as its population ages, as will the provision of sheltered housing. This is already an identified priority in the current Stonehaven Housing Strategy.
- Further growth in the town needs to take place in areas which do not undermine its essential character, and in particular the coastal landscape that is a key aspect of its attraction as a tourist destination.
- There is a disconnect between current thinking on the location of future development in the Council's Draft Stonehaven Capacity Study and the views of residents. Further consultation is required as this study is moved beyond the draft stage.

Community Facilities

Community facilities for the purpose of this document are being understood as facilities that members of the public can have ready access to, if in some cases for a charge.

The Stonehaven community facilities include:

Education

- Arduthie Primary School
- Dunnottar Primary School
- Mill O'Forest Primary School
- Mackie Academy School
- Carronhill School
- Community Education Centre
- Stonehaven Library

Sport & Leisure

- Stonehaven Leisure Centre
 - 3 Badminton Court Games Hall
 - Swimming Pool
 - 6 person sauna
 - 18 Station Fitness Room
 - General Purpose Room
 - Changing rooms
- Open Air Pool
- Stonehaven Recreation Grounds
 - Indoor and Outdoor Bowling
 - Tennis
 - Putting
- Beach Pavilion
- McRobert Pavilion

Parks & Open Spaces

- Queen Elizabeth Park
- Baird Park
- Mineralwell Park
- School Road Park
- Farrochie Park
- Forest Park
- Little Hampden
- Dunnottar Woods

Halls/Meeting Rooms/Centres

- Stonehaven Town Hall
- Shepherd's Hall
- Invercarron Resource Centre
- Forest View Day Care Centre
- Stonehaven Family Centre

There are other facilities in Stonehaven such as Church Halls, the Scout Hut, and similar buildings owned by local groups that can be hired for use by the public as well as the local golf course.

Findings from the Future of Stonehaven Consultation

Community facilities figured very highly in the Future of Stonehaven Consultation. Their importance to residents reflects the fact that they contribute significantly to the essence of what it means for Stonehaven to be a small self-sustaining town. These facilities also support the wider area of Kincardine and Mearns. If the town is not to be a dormitory for Aberdeen, then the quality of its schools, its sports, leisure and recreational facilities as well as other community resources matter and need to be actively protected and enhanced.

The Future of Stonehaven Consultation highlighted resident views of the weaknesses in current provision and priority issues to address as well as identifying the specific facility needs of certain groups. The consensus amongst residents is that whilst the town has a range of facilities, many of these need improving. The town has grown considerably in recent years and the corresponding investment in the town's sport, leisure and school facilities, in particular, to cope with the extra demand has not been made.

Current Initiatives

Some efforts to improve community facilities in Stonehaven are ongoing, others are being newly initiated. However, all these particular initiatives involve the voluntary effort of the community.

- The Friends of the Open Air Pool have responsibility for the Open Air Pool. Their work in recent years has resulted in considerable improvements to the facility. Current projects include raising the necessary finance to extend the pool boundary to the south and to build within the site a paddling pool to replace the one currently outside its walls.
- Opportunities to improve the provision of sports facilities and social spaces at the Mackie Academy for the benefit of the students and the wider community are being explored. Discussions have already taken place between the school and the local Community Council and separately between the school and the Aberdeenshire Director of Education. The Local Authority does currently have some extra funding to allocate to schools from the Scottish Government whose

- guidance for its use includes the enhancement and upgrading of school sports facilities. The requirement for all schools to be a “health promoting school” also links to the need for better sports provision on the site.
- The Recreation Grounds have been considering how to develop and improve the facilities on their site. The Trustees commissioned a feasibility study to look at the options as part of a whole town view of sports and leisure provision; what is lacking and therefore needed and what exists but must be improved.
 - The local Former Pupils Mackie Academy Rugby Football Club is currently looking at opportunities to improve its facilities.
 - The local group PARCS has worked in recent years to improve the provision of play park facilities in the town. This has resulted in new play equipment at Queen Elizabeth Park. However, PARCS efforts are currently focussed, through its Skate Park Sub-committee, on also providing a skate park at this location. Planning approval for their application has now been approved. Progress of the project will depend on raising the necessary funding.
 - The Dunnottar Woodland Park Association works with the Forestry Commission and Aberdeenshire Council to maintain and enhance Dunnottar Woods.
 - The Stonehaven Town Partnership has identified the Stonehaven Town Hall as a priority project. The facility needs to be considerably improved if it is to deliver its full potential for the town.

Further Potential

The Future of Stonehaven Consultation and the recent Dynamic Drop-in identify other potential improvements in facility provision in the town. Some of these might be achievable through the projects outlined above, certainly the maximum potential of any proposed project should be explored with reference to these documents. However, one particular facility that will need addressing before too long is the Community Education Centre.

The Community Education Centre is a facility no longer truly fit for purpose and options need to be considered for its future use. Options that might include selling this facility for other development and relocating this service to the Mackie Academy using the funds raised from the sale to help finance the development necessary on the school site to make this possible. This could be part of a move to develop the Academy as a Community School.

The Key Issue – Funding

The key difficulty with the projects outlined above, as well as future ones, is sourcing the necessary funding to make them happen. Aberdeenshire Council does not have the available resources to invest in Stonehaven and the town is a low priority for such investment compared to other more deprived or less developed communities.

Developer contributions should be contributing to the budgets available for improvements in facilities and more transparent use of these monies must be established

so that communities can see how they benefit the town. However, although residents are very critical of the level and use of developer contributions, which should help to mitigate the impact of new developments on the town's infrastructures and facilities, these would not, on their own, be an adequate answer.

Additional sources of funding are going to have to be found if existing facilities are going to be significantly improved or new ones provided. This will entail alternative structures of ownership and/or management as local community groups can bid for funds the local authority cannot access. Seeking corporate sponsorship for projects may also have to be considered.

Community groups will, therefore, need to work together or, at least, with awareness of each other's objectives so as not to undermine each other's efforts through multiple bids from the one community to the same funding body. Funding agencies look to communities to develop joined up plans which support and complement each other showing the community is working together for a common goal.

The Stonehaven Town Partnership is an important conduit of communication and mutual support in this context and Aberdeenshire Council must remain a key partner in developments.

Projects already being undertaken are dependent on community groups and this will continue. These bring the benefits of greater community control but the burdens of sustaining over time community involvement. The town's residents will have to be enrolled in the projects being pursued so that the volunteer force that is going to help deliver them is adequately resourced. At the moment, it is a relatively small number of people who are involved across many groups. Participation has to be increased, maintained and constantly renewed.

Finally, however better community facilities are financed, a key outcome must be that they remain affordable for all residents.

Community Facilities – Strategic Conclusions

- Community facilities are a cornerstone in the identity of Stonehaven as a small self-sustaining town. Many of them are also fundamental to helping deliver the healthy living and tourism agendas. Therefore, delivering improved community facilities is a matter of real and genuine priority.
- Residents have identified the need for significant investment in many of the town's community facilities and especially those relating to sports, leisure and schools so that they are fit for the purposes of a greatly increased population.
- Delivering improvements on the scale sought will require greater resources than Aberdeenshire Council is likely to be able to provide and therefore it is through voluntary effort that initiatives are and will be taken forward. Community groups can approach a range of funding agencies the authority cannot. Aberdeenshire Council should work to facilitate and support these efforts.

- Community groups must work together to develop integrated plans for facility development in the town so that their efforts support each other as they approach funding agencies.

Water and Energy Consumption

There is no data available for water and energy consumption that is specific to Stonehaven.

The 2006 Scottish Water figures for average water consumption per capita per day is roughly 146 litres. Given an estimated population in Stonehaven of approximately 11,000 this would be equivalent to 1.6 million litres of water consumed per day.

The total energy consumption figures for Aberdeenshire in 2004 per capita and per annum in kWh was 39,900. If we use these 2004 figures as a guide for the current population of approximately 11,000 this would be equivalent to 438,900 MWh per annum. These figures include vehicle consumption as well as other energies (primarily electricity and gas). *Source: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/statistics/regional/high-level/page36161.html>*

Scottish Government Targets

In addition to its own in-house efforts towards water and energy conservation, the Scottish Government has the target of 40% of Scotland's electricity being generated from renewable sources by 2020 with an interim target of 18% by 2010.

Aberdeenshire Council's Carbon Neutral Pledge

Aberdeenshire Council has set itself a target of being a carbon neutral organisation by 2020 and a carbon neutral region by 2030. In order to achieve this aim, there are a number of strategies being pursued.

- **Energy Conservation**

The Council has already set in place numerous measures to reduce its own energy and water consumption as well as measures to improve over time the energy efficiency of its housing stock.

Its Energy Conservation Unit provides advice on reducing domestic energy consumption and, through its Renewable Energy Development Co-ordinator, advice and information on grants is available to communities and businesses interested in reducing energy consumption and installing renewable energy. Information is also available through the Council website on energy conservation measures.

- **Renewable Energy**

A new pilot project, Renewables Connection, was launched in August 2007. Funded by Aberdeen City Council, Scottish Enterprise, Save Cash and Reduce Fuel (SCARF) and Shell UK Ltd, with support from Aberdeenshire Council and the Aberdeen Renewable Energy Group (AREG), it has been set up to offer impartial advice to

householders, small businesses and public sector organisations on the range of sustainable technologies now available to power homes and other buildings.

- **Grants**

The Council encourages take up of heating and insulation grants available to older people and applicants in all housing tenures in receipt of a qualifying benefit, in particular, to help improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

- **Education**

Schools are being encouraged to work towards increasing pupil participation in taking responsibility for the school environment by participating in the Eco Schools project. Topics covered under the Eco School's Programme include energy and water amongst others. Another school initiative is the Green Butterfly Award, an award scheme which recognises a school's efforts to enhance the natural environment as well as conserve nature's resources.

- **Local Transport Strategy 2007-2010 (LTS)**

The Aberdeenshire Council LTS recognises the fundamental need to develop an integrated and sustainable local transport system in order to reduce harmful carbon emissions and the consumption of non-renewable resources and energy. Achieving this aims depends heavily on improving the delivery of public transport so this can become a genuine option for the travelling public. It also relies on increasing the share of more sustainable travel modes for travel to work, in particular, such as cycling, walking, car-sharing and motorcycling.

Sustainable Stonehaven

Efforts to reduce water consumption and improve energy conservation across Aberdeenshire will have an impact on Stonehaven as a matter of course. The level of impact will depend on whether there are targeted initiatives to raise awareness in the town of how to contribute to a more sustainable future or whether efforts remain at the higher shire-wide level.

However, independently of any Council led projects, a local initiative could have a major impact on a sustainable future for Stonehaven. A new community company has just been set up currently called "Sustainable Stonehaven" with the initial aim of developing renewable energy projects in Stonehaven which could contribute towards local energy needs and possibly deliver income generation if surplus supply can be sold to the national grid. Any income earned could support other environmental or local projects. This project is in its infancy but is ambitious in its scope and potential.

Water and Energy – Strategic Conclusions

- Reducing water and energy consumption is an important national and local government objective. In particular, Aberdeenshire Council's aim to be a carbon neutral area by 2030 will require a significant commitment from residents and businesses as well as the Council itself.
- If Stonehaven is to contribute to achieving this aim, then local targeted efforts to promote energy and water conservation will need to be considered in the town. These should be supported by the local schools so that conservation and responsible consumption is learned from a young age.
- The importance of delivering public transport enhancements such as Crossrail and improved bus services cannot be underestimated if residents are to give up their cars in favour of more sustainable transport options. Improving local cycle lanes and footpaths are also important for travel within the town.
- Sustainable Stonehaven is a local community initiative which will aim to engage the local authority as well as the private sector and local residents. Appropriate support needs to be given to this group as its aims are aligned with Aberdeenshire Council's own support for renewable energy generation.
- Most identifiable efforts to reduce consumption are focussed on energy rather than water. Although this probably reflects an understandable balance of priority and immediate need, water conservation for the domestic and business context needs to be more clearly on the agenda too.

Environment Conservation and Protection

In the interests of clarity, environment conservation and protection will be addressed primarily in the context of Stonehaven's *built* environment, its conservation and protection.

Conservation Areas

Stonehaven's Conservation Area covers the old town and harbour area, most of the town centre and extends up the hill to take in the older dwellings along Kings Road, Arduthie Road, the Slug Road and Bath Street. The attached maps give a detailed view of the designated Conservation Areas. (need Local Plan maps). In 2008, Kirkton of Fetteresso is to be designated a Conservation Area and in 2009 - 2010, Stonehaven's conservation boundaries are due to be reviewed.

Built Heritage

The town has a rich built heritage reflected in the number of listed buildings with Category A, B and C status.

There are five buildings in Stonehaven with Category A listed status, the last two of which are private residences:

- Old Tolbooth,
- St James the Great Episcopal Church
- Fetteresso Parish Church
- Keith Place, Rivendell, Former Textile Yard Including Sea Wall
- Carronbank House

There is also an extensive list of Category B listed buildings and monuments including of note:

- The Harbour
- Sundial outside the Tolbooth
- Mercat Cross
- St Mary's Roman Catholic Church
- Carron Restaurant
- Market Buildings in the Market Square
- Market Square Fountain
- Railway Station
- Open Air Pool

In addition, nearby Dunnottar Castle has both Category A and B listed status buildings on its site and the Stonehaven War Memorial, although not listed, has strong visitor appeal and heritage values.

All of these buildings and monuments together contribute to Stonehaven's sense of place and history. As such they have both an inherent value to residents as part of the heritage and culture of the town and a latent economic value as they contribute to local tourism.

This built heritage is on one level safeguarded through the listed status of the buildings. However, these buildings sit in a wider town context where issues of litter, traffic management and poor building maintenance, listed or otherwise, can undermine the appearance of the whole. Previously, there have been grants available to residents and shop owners for basic maintenance of listed buildings. At present there are no such available funds which means, where there is poor maintenance, the built heritage value is diluted.

The Opportunities

- **Dunnottar Castle**

The castle, as an outstanding ancient monument, is a key visitor attraction. It needs to be adequately maintained and sensitively enhanced. The lack of visitor and car parking facilities need to be addressed in a way that respects the beauty of the coastal landscape and historic context of the castle itself.

- **Old Town**

The Old Town, the harbour, the Mercat Cross and the Tolbooth together contribute some of the core historic value of the town. Parked cars and the narrowing of the High Street as you approach the harbour creates traffic congestion which undermines the built environment in one of the most significant built heritage spots. Ideas to address this have already been suggested and include establishing a car park on the former Gas Works site and pedestrianisation of the harbour area.

- **Town Centre**

The town centre and, in particular, the Market Square, are important to the town, not only for the inherent value of the buildings, but also as the social centre of the town. Along with the harbour area, this is where residents and visitors will tend to gather and have a sense of Stonehaven as its own place with its own identity. Ensuring that the buildings around this area are well maintained will require that the town centre remains an economically active area, with a strong retail base, and ideally added facilities for the town and for tourists.

As already noted, local residents recognise the greater potential of the Market Square and the Town Hall. The latter will be taken forward and addressed through the

Stonehaven Town Partnership, however, work already done through the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership to make more of the Market Square as a civic space has not been developed much beyond the conceptual study stage. Maintaining better the local artefacts, considering a sustainable use for the Market Square Clock Tower and developing further the potential of the Tolbooth Museum are all projects that could help to conserve the built environment and contribute to the town.

The promenade and baywalk are much valued features along the waterfront. The promenade, in particular, would benefit from investment with thought being given to a more attractive sea wall and suitable railings.

- **Ury House**

Ury House is currently a ruin sitting to the west of the A90 trunk road. Development plans are being considered for this site which would restore the house as a Golf Club, Hotel, Office and Conference facility. Restoring Ury House would have the dual benefits of resurrecting a piece of derelict built heritage and providing added facilities for the town. In particular, a venue capable of hosting large scale events is needed and the Golf Course, which is to be designed by Professional Golfer, Jack Nicklaus, should attract more visitors to the town. Major pipelines cross the Ury Estate and these may yet impede the development options before a planning application can come to the Area Committee for consideration.

- **Dunnottar Woods**

In recent years work has been done in Dunnottar Woods to restore the Shell Hoosie, to protect the Ice House and to uncover more of Lady Kennedy's Bath. These unusual features need to continue to be conserved and protected.

Environment Conservation and Protection – Strategic Conclusions

- Stonehaven's built heritage in the old town and town centre, in particular, contributes to the town's sense of history and place. It is a key aspect of the town's identity, and also a strong attraction to tourists and other visitors which contributes to the town's economy.
- Many town centre buildings and monuments have listed status. This, in one sense, protects them but it does not provide the funds that ensures they are then adequately maintained. It is important that a healthy level of economic activity is maintained in the town centre to support these running costs.
- Encouragement should be given to efforts, such as those of the Stonehaven Town Partnership, which seek to enhance the economic use of key buildings, such as the Town Hall, and make them more accessible and attractive to residents and visitors.
- For private dwellings, consideration should perhaps be given to developing again a grant fund to help support better maintenance of listed buildings in the town centre.

Environment Quality

The environment quality of Stonehaven is mostly very good. Air quality across the shire sits within national objectives, land contamination is not a local issue and bathing water standards, which have presented problems in recent years, are now being addressed.

Air Quality

In 2006 an Air Quality Updating and Screening Assessment was undertaken in Aberdeenshire. This assessment concluded that all national air quality objectives for the air pollutants identified in the Air Quality Regulations would be met. As a result, although the Local Authority is required to deliver regular air quality progress reports between reviews and assessments, there are no detailed assessments required on any specific pollutants.

However, as part of the regular monitoring of air quality, nitrogen dioxide is monitored on a monthly basis at different locations around the shire, including three locations in Stonehaven. The local Stonehaven results also form part of a UK National Survey. The latest progress report from 2005,

(http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environmental/air_report_2005.pdf)

shows that in Stonehaven nitrogen dioxide concentrations currently sit comfortably below the annual mean objective and have been mostly in steady decline since the early 1990s. Forward projections to 2010 show that these concentrations will remain well below the annual mean objective.

Major industrial development that could affect air quality is unlikely in Stonehaven given the lack of local industrial land suitable for heavy industry. The Aberdeenshire Local Transport Strategy and the Structure and Local Plans are required to consider the implications of developments on environment quality as a matter of course, and any proposals, in the Structure Plan in particular, relating to transport infrastructure that would cause a breach of National Air Quality Standards are not permitted.

Locally, the impact of the AWPR Stonehaven Fastlink junction on traffic related pollutants should be scrutinised as the junction proposals go out for consultation again in October 2007.

Land

Stonehaven does not present any significant land contamination issues. The suggestion that the former Gas Works in the Old Town could be developed as a car park has caused local questions to be raised relating to possible land contamination on this site. However, until such time as an actual development planning proposal is put forward for consideration, this is not under investigation.

Water

- **Stonehaven Bay**

The waters around Stonehaven have been a matter of concern in recent years. Below is the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency's record of water quality since 1996. It should be noted that Stonehaven coastal waters were formally identified as a bathing water in 1999.

Stonehaven

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Excellent	n/s	Poor	Poor	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Poor	Good

The discharge of sewage effluent into the sea, despite part-time disinfection of the final effluent, would have been the cause of the poor standard recorded in 2005. Improvements to the local public sewerage infrastructure are currently underway and will be completed in 2008.

In 2007, Stonehaven received the Seaside Award for its beach from Keep Scotland Beautiful, which recognises a range of criteria including providing information about the beach, managing litter, access and safety, community involvement and being required to meet the European Standards for bathing quality water. Improving and maintaining the quality of the bathing waters of Stonehaven will be an added attraction for the town and tourism.

- **Rivers Cowie and Carron**

There are also two rivers which flow directly into Stonehaven Bay; the River Cowie to the north of the town and the River Carron to the south. There have been combined sewer overflows from the town area feeding into the lower River Carron and, upstream, agricultural diffuse pollution and septic tank inputs have had some impact on the bacteria levels of the Carron watercourse as well. The River Cowie is less affected by this but also receives surface water drainage from industrial areas of the town. The rivers therefore can also contribute to deterioration in the bathing water standards of Stonehaven Bay.

The sewerage improvement works, currently ongoing, will address the sewer overflow into the Carron River and visits by SEPA to local farms to check and ensure compliance with standards to limit agricultural pollution of the waterways will also be contributing to improved river water quality and therefore bathing water quality in the bay.

Contamination of the rivers is not only about bathing water quality but also affects local riverside wildlife and fishing stocks. In addition to agricultural pollution, housing and industrial developments can also affect their natural habitat.

Other Issues

Other environmental concerns that should be touched upon include inappropriate noise, dust and light pollution as well as odour control.

Proposals for industrial and commercial premises in close enough proximity to residential properties to present these problems would be addressed within the planning application process. Should they arise on current sites, there are complaints procedures that can be followed to see them addressed as required under existing legislation.

Odour is an issue which was of key concern to the residents of Cowie Village in relation to the new sewerage treatment works at Cowie. Assurances have been given by Scottish Water that the odour control measures being put in place should ensure that there is no odour-related nuisance to local residents. The sewerage works are not complete and it is too soon to tell if these assurances are well founded.

Environment Quality – Strategic Conclusions

- Stonehaven benefits from positive environment quality. Maintaining the existing standards or improving them, as currently the case with the waters, should be the objective.
- The AWPR junction proposals need to be scrutinised to ensure that the junction design is the best it can be from an environmental quality viewpoint.
- The odour-control measures at the Cowie sewerage works need to be reviewed once functional to ensure this is delivering the standard promised to local residents.

Natural Heritage

Stonehaven's sense of place is closely linked to its natural setting. The coastline, the braes, the woods, the parks and the rivers which define its local geography are also key to its identity and character as a town. Local residents place a very high value on the natural heritage of the town and it figures highly amongst their priorities of aspects of the town to protect.

Stonehaven sits within the bowl of its hills and safeguarding the views associated with this shape and contour of the town is important. Development must not encroach on the current views from within the town along the waterfront and upwards or from raised positions to the north and south of the town across it.

The natural setting of Stonehaven is not only of significance to residents, it is also part of the town's appeal to visitors. The coastal setting and the harbour are key attractions for visitors to the town. The town's location close to the Highland Boundary Fault and the recent find of a fossil of the oldest air-breathing land animal also provide an opportunity to attract visitors with a specific interest in geology and palaeontology and are features of the town which should be further promoted.

Countryside Access

There are opportunities for the town to make more of the local landscape values by raising awareness amongst residents and visitors of local countryside walks and off-road cycling opportunities. Existing walks and cycle paths need to be linked through clearly marked path and cycle networks to the town centre. This may require further path development work especially to create the necessary safe linkage westwards across the A90. The coastal path south of Dunnottar Castle, as already noted, needs to be progressed and maintenance work on the existing path between the town and Dunnottar castle needs to be undertaken. The work of the Dunnottar Woodland Park Association to enhance and improve access to the woods also increases the recreational benefit of this area.

Nature and Landscape Designations

In addition to Stonehaven's coastline which has SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) status, there are numerous other designations which apply in areas of Stonehaven, these include:

- Areas of Landscape Significance
- Sites of Environmental Sensitive Areas (SESA)
- Sites of Interest to Natural Science (SINS)
- Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)
- River Catchment Area (along the Carron River)
- Tree Preservation Orders (TPO)

Biodiversity

Growing population and spreading development in Stonehaven, as in other parts of Aberdeenshire, place increased pressure on fragile habitats. Areas most affected are the beach, cliffs and waterside woodland. Efforts therefore to protect and enhance Stonehaven's biodiversity are to be welcomed. The Stonehaven Horizon Project won the Green Butterfly Award for its work to enhance the baywalk of the town. This project included extensive planting of indigenous wildflowers with the associated benefit of drawing birds and butterflies to the area.

Natural Heritage – Strategic Conclusions

- The natural heritage of Stonehaven contributes to defining the identity of Stonehaven, creating its sense of place and character.
- The landscape setting must be protected from insensitive development particularly in areas that encroach on the coastal and brae views.
- The town's natural heritage is of significant economic value to the town as it is part of the attraction for visitors to the town. Promoting these values as part of the core identity of the town to visitors should be considered as part of an evaluation of the Stonehaven brand.
- Projects undertaken by local community groups, Aberdeenshire Council, the Forestry Commission and other bodies who work to preserve, enhance and improve access to the countryside should be encouraged and developed for the economic, social and recreational value that they contribute to the town for the benefit of its residents and visitors.