



Community Asset Transfer Request

Tolbooth Building

Old Pier Road

AB39 2JU

By

Stonehaven Tolbooth Association

(SC043279)

16th August 2023



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Introduction

This application relates to a Community Asset Transfer requested by the Stonehaven Tolbooth Association (STA) for the Tolbooth building and its curtilage, hereinafter collectively referred to as 'the Tolbooth building', at Stonehaven harbour. This document provides a brief summary of the structure and history of the Tolbooth building and then proceeds to provide extensive information on the Stonehaven Tolbooth Association which is the Scottish registered charity that runs the Stonehaven Tolbooth Museum situated in the ground floor of the Tolbooth building.

Our expertise and successes are outlined together with the rationale why a CAT is required - fundamentally to secure the long term future of the organisation and the building itself as the current financial arrangements between Aberdeenshire Council and STA are no longer in the best interest of both parties and failure to resolve this issue will lead to the eventual demise of the museum in its current format.

Finally a comprehensive business plan is provided.

Note

This document is an augmented version of the official Aberdeenshire Council Asset Transfer Request Form 2022. The latter has been completed to the basic level of providing signatures etc. whereas this document provides all the necessary detail to support the case of a CAT of the Tolbooth building.

The first two sections have a numbering unique to this document but sections 3 and onward reflect the numbering in the official form.

1. Tolbooth Building

1.1. Description The original 16th century rectangular building was constructed with the long axis being east-west, with a length of 18.9 metres. The construction is of Old Red Sandstone, a locally derived stone that was used in other local buildings of the same period such as Muchalls Castle. A 17th century addition was added at right angles to the original block, leading to a 17th century design as an L-Plan, also in the manner of Muchalls castle. The gables of the original rectangular block are crow-stepped, with a chimney on the west end. An unusual design feature is that access to the first floor is achieved only via a stonework staircase at the west end of the original block. This design may have been derived from a desire to have town government business conducted without having to enter through the prison level (see 1.2). A paved courtyard lies embraced by the two L-Plan projections.

The north block (17th century addition) floor retains original flagstones and cobblestones dating to the original north block. There is also a sizable fire pit (now hidden) along the west wall of the north block wing, although the associated chimney above has been filled, rendering the fireplace unusable. At the ground level a partial stone wall partition separates the two large chambers belonging to the 16th and 17th centuries.

Arrow slits on the south facing 16th century wall are original; however they have been filled in. The height of these slits suggests that the grade level of the building floor has likely been altered. Inspection of the stonework indicates that there was an earlier opening at the centre of the east wall. The upper floor for the present restaurant use has been altered extensively by interior partitions, although the basic window openings are thought to be original.

The eastern boundary is a semi-circular flat-coped, coursed rubble, wall forming an enclosed courtyard at the eastern side of the building. A 2-leaf iron grid-pattern vehicular gate (probably 20th century) is set in the wall.

The building was Grade A listed in August 1972.

1.2. History (ca 1575 – 1963) The Stonehaven Tolbooth is thought to have been founded by George Keith, 5th Earl Marischal (c. 1553–1623), with the original purpose of the rectangular building being as a storehouse. In 1600, an Act of Parliament provided that the building become a tolbooth; text of that act reads: "*The shiref of the shiref-dome of Kincardine in all time cum sall sit and hald their courtis at Stanehyve*". After 1624, the town business functions were conducted on the upper level of the Stonehaven Tolbooth, with the ground floor being used as the prison.

By 1685, there are further accounts of the Tolbooth functioning as the seat of justice for all of Kincardineshire (the former shire of this district that was eventually subsumed into Aberdeenshire). Over the winter of 1748–1749, three Episcopalian clergy were incarcerated for the crime of holding a religious ceremony to more than nine people at the (now ruined) chapel situated on the estate grounds of nearby Muchalls Castle along the ancient Causey Mounth. The Episcopalians were associated with the Jacobite cause and discriminated against by the ruling Hanoverians. The imprisoned clergymen's plight

was memorialised in a well-known painting, illustrating a baptism of an infant through the bars of the prison. Episcopal services were held in the Tolbooth from 1709, when Dunnottar parish church became part of the Church of Scotland, until an Episcopal meeting house was erected in Stonehaven High Street in 1738.

When new county government facilities were built in 1767, the Tolbooth reverted to its use as a storehouse for merchants and fishermen; the upper part became a granary and the ground floor was converted into a coal and lime store. At a later date ship chandlery and fishing equipment were sold within its walls. In November 1944 a British mine drifted into the harbour and exploded against the Old Pier causing considerable damage to the building. This damage was aggravated by a gale in January 1953 which removed most of the remaining roof. Latterly the only occupant was a lobster pot fisherman who mended pots in an area where thick walls gave some protection from the winds.

After the war years Stonehaven Town Council formed a project to renovate housing in the harbour area; the Council carefully preserved the character of the Old Town by using native sandstone for the dwellings so they harmonised with adjacent properties. Having completed this first stage, attention then focused on the Tolbooth which was in a dilapidated state. An Edinburgh architect was commissioned to provide plans for a renovation of the building; the plans were accepted but the project came at a cost of £7000 which was a considerable sum of money. Provost Hugh Ramsay¹ stated that *'he and many other people were anxious to see the Old Tolbooth restored and used as a museum- something which the town does not possess, although there is a wealth of museum suitable material available.'* Provost Ramsay went on to say that *'the first £1000 has been identified but substantial support would have to be received from other sources to secure the remainder. The property was owned by the Town's common good fund and reconstruction could commence without any delay once the financial problem was solved'*. However, there was a lengthy delay and renovations were not officially completed until September 1963 when Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, re-opened the Tolbooth with a tea room and a small museum on the first floor.

1.3 History (1963 – 2011). To begin with the museum only occupied a very small area on the first floor due to the rest of the flooring being dedicated to usage as a tea room. This arrangement continued for the next 12 years. During this period it is believed that profits from the tea area were put into a sinking fund for the benefit of the Tolbooth building. In 1975 there was re-vamp with the museum being moved to the ground floor. The successors of Stonehaven Town Council assumed responsibility for the museum and it operated until 2011. Unfortunately in March 2011 notice of closure was given by Aberdeenshire Council officials and all the artefacts and fittings were removed in the following month as the authority needed to cut £58 million from its budget over the next two years.

¹ Extracts from The Scotsman 15th January 1954

2. Stonehaven Tolbooth Association.

2.1 Early formation. When in 2011 Aberdeenshire Council announced the forthcoming closure of the museum a loose grouping of concerned individuals, supported by Stonehaven and District Community Council and Stonehaven Town Partnership, came together to seek ways in which to re-open the museum. This grouping was initialled called ‘The Tolbooth Group’ and with hard work and dedication managed to re-open the museum on 29th May 2011. By January 2012 it had become apparent that running the museum as a community enterprise was a viable proposition and a more formal organisation was required. In particular the group looked at the new charity format launched in 2011, namely Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). Accordingly an application was submitted to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) and Stonehaven Tolbooth Association was registered as a SCIO on 6th July 2012.

2.2. Purposes. As defined in the original constitution the organisation’s purposes are:

- The advancement of education and the promotion of the culture and heritage of Stonehaven and its surrounding area, through assisting in the preservation and interpretation of the built environment and of historical artefacts associated with the area.
- The operation of a museum/heritage centre in the Tolbooth Building, Old Pier, Stonehaven and/or in any other premises in Stonehaven or its surrounding area.

2.3 Amendment. Following advice from Aberdeenshire Council the text ‘*its surrounding area*’ in the first bullet point was replaced by ‘*the former County of Kincardineshire*’ and a new clause (12.1) was inserted stating ‘*The organization shall not have fewer than 20 members at any time*’. Both amendment and insertion were approved at a SGM on 1st June 2022 and subsequently ratified by OSCR on 13th June 2022.

Numbering now follows as defined in the official Council form.

3. Type of request, payment and conditions

3.1 Ownership

3A Request for ownership

As the Tolbooth Building is part of the Common Good STA propose a price of £1

The offer price will be subject to further discussion with Aberdeenshire Council after validation of this application due to the fact that the Council contend that the building was purchased by the former KDDC in 1989 and therefore it is not part of the Common Good.

However, STA maintain that as far back as the 1930s the Mearns Leader was reporting that the building had been gifted to the Town. In 1954 The Scotsman carried an interview with Provost Hugh Ramsay who is quoted as saying ‘*The property was owned by the Town’s common good fund and reconstruction could commence without any delay once the financial problem was solved*’². It is possible that the Provost was ‘jumping the gun here’ as undoubtedly there had been serious negotiations between the owner and Town Council in advance of the proposed re-construction but evidently nothing had been agreed. However, in 1955 the Eighth Marquis of Lansdowne granted a Deed of Gift of the Tolbooth and its curtilage to the Town Council. For an unknown reason the Disposition was never registered until 13th March 1989 when a new disposition was agreed, and signed, whereby the Tolbooth and its curtilage were gifted to Kincardineshire and Deeside District Council by the Marquis of Lansdowne without any price being paid³. By definition the Tolbooth is Common Good. A copy of the Disposition can be found in the Appendices.

STA would accept a Title condition that if STA ceases to exist at any time, the building will be reconveyed to the Council or another community body.

4. Community Proposal

4.1 Community Proposal

If the CAT request is granted there will be no short or medium term change to be seen by the casual observer. The Tolbooth restaurant would operate as per their newly acquired lease, albeit STA would become their landlord. The museum would continue to exist as at present and continue to offer the local community and visitors the facilities that have been appreciated by the 214,276 individuals who have entered the museum since 2011. Ownership would mean that STA would have a freer rein, within the restraints of a listed building sited in a conservation area, to expand the museum as a community hub. However, the major bonus as far as Aberdeenshire Council is concerned is that STA, as a charitable organisation, would, firstly be able to access funds to undertake the repairs listed in the Squire Associates survey⁴ and secondly assume the annual maintenance costs of the Tolbooth building. It should be pointed out here that STA believe that there has been minimal maintenance carried out on the building for at least the last 20 years. Aberdeenshire Council have undertaken essential

² Extract from The Scotsman 15th January 1954

³ Disposition by Marquis of Lansdowne

⁴ Previously a copy was supplied to Aberdeenshire Council but further copies are available

minor repairs where necessary but previous restaurant tenants may not have carried out their repair and maintenance commitments to the letter of the law. The overall impact is that the Tolbooth building requires a considerable upgrade. The recent building survey identified at least £50K of necessary repairs. Evidently the Council has a fund of approximately £55K ring fenced for repairs at the Tolbooth [REDACTED]. STA would expect this fund to be released after transfer of ownership.

This may be the appropriate place to refer to the Clock Tower in the High Street. The Tower was renovated in April 2015 and STA offered to open and close it to the public as a community gesture with no cost to the Council. Unfortunately some of the equipment failed in November 2019 and it was closed to the public until June 2023 when, after further refreshment, STA again re-opened it to the public. The museum is used as the base for this activity; closure of the museum will entail the Council seeking alternative options for operating the Clock Tower.

4.2 Benefits of proposal

At the time of closure in March 2011 the average annual footfall was 9,000 (Council own figures). The museum was re-opened in May 2011 by a group of local enthusiasts and this group eventually morphed into STA. Prior to the covid-19 pandemic the annual footfall had been increased to 29,000. From the outset STA had wished to drive up the footfall by providing a more ‘entertaining’ museum experience which necessitated completely new, and different, exhibits and child friendly games and quizzes. However, the overriding desire was to turn the museum into a community hub. A hub which the local community, and beyond, would wish to visit. We have examined our records and below are listed groups that have visited us in the last 7 years – many are repeat serial visitors:

Education (Nursery) – Babes in the Wood Stonehaven, Inverurie Nursery

Education (Primary) – Arduthie, Dunnottar, Mill O Forest, Danestone, Durriss, Kaimhill, Auchenblae, Bucksburn (Special Needs), Newtonhill

Education (Secondary) – Mackie Academy, Portlethen Academy, Aberdeen Grammar, St Machar Academy

Education (Higher) – UoA School of Biological Science, UoA Elphinstone Institute, Scottish Geology Trust, Marine Scotland Science,

Youth Organisations – Girl Guides, Cubs, Brownies, Beavers

Area Community Groups – Ladies Probus Club, Portlethen WRI, Lions Club, Ruthieston Church (Monday Circle), Bridge of Don Over 50s, Men’s Shed, SWI, Newton Dee Camphill Community, Alzheimer’s Group, Aberdeen Probus, Stonehaven

Folk Festival, Oil Wives, Banchory St Ternan's Church, Kinneff WI, Bourtie WI, Auchenblae Heritage Group

Out with Area Visitors – Friends of Norwegian Maritime Museum, weekly visits by Globus Tours (approx. 50 Americans/Canadians/Australians each week), Language Travel Tours (annual visit of French & Spanish students), Visit Scotland Information staff (group observing the running of a successful attraction), Cromar Heritage

Outreach – Stonehaven Macular Support group, Arthritis Group, Ladies Probus, Bon Accord Probus, Dementia groups at Invercarron Resource Centre

The list is almost endless. In addition we have hosted:

- 3 paranormal investigations
- 4 weddings
- Children's Burns Night (run by the Fatherland Burns Club)
- Book Launch
- Children Birthday parties
- Film set for forthcoming documentary
- With the demise of the local Tourist Office we have become an informal fount of knowledge for individuals visiting Stonehaven

The impact of covid-19 forced STA to re-think our operations as it became apparent that although there was a number of people seeking entertainment in Stonehaven they were loath to enter buildings. Accordingly STA has utilised an outdoor space (The Outer Courtyard) and although it is not ideal – exposed to any form of inclement weather – a number of events have been held since 2021 to great success. The events included:

- Story Telling for children and Magic Show
- The art of net making
- How to construct a Fire Ball
- The art of Corn Dolly making
- Children's art display and competition
- Live broadcast from Mearns FM
- Demonstration on mackerel smoking
- Demonstrations by the Guild of Weavers and Spinners
- Stonehaven Folk Club
- Stonehaven Choral Society
- Kilwhang Bell Ringers
- Lace making

At a Christmas event STA hosted an afternoon dedicated to raising funds for Pillar Kincardineshire and £197 was donated to Pillar. In addition the Old Pier café supported this initiative by donating its day's takings (£1,300) to the same charity. A great community success.

STA has been actively involved in the production and sales of several booklets of local interest (e.g. Stonehaven Shops, Stonehaven Street Names, Stonehaven Beach Guide), which have had sales numbering in the thousands, many by mail to exiles who still have a keen interest in their home town.

In April 2019 the long established Stonehaven Heritage Society decided to cease operations and all documents, photographs etc. were transferred to STA. At the same time their existing membership was welcomed into STA. STA is currently funding digitalisation of the photographs and these will eventually become part of an ever changing exhibit of former Stonehaven life. There is no doubt that STA has become the custodian of Stonehaven's heritage and is duty bound to preserve and educate for future generations.

“Heritage - be proud of it for you will be its legacy. It's your responsibility to carry on and learn your heritage. Otherwise, it will be lost.” Kailin Gow. 2010.

The strapline for the museum is “... *connecting to your heritage*”

In recognition of the work carried out by STA, in June 2019 the organisation was awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. In October 2019 STA hosted a private visit to the museum by the Duke and Duchess of Rothesay.

This section demonstrates that the museum has moved forward from being a building merely housing some interesting artefacts to one that has become a community hub that is appreciated by all and sundry. There is an invigorating life about the premises and repeat visits are many. However, there is a serious, perhaps fatal, flaw in the current operations. When STA re-started the museum in 2011 it was on the basis of a 3 year rolling access; although this was not 100% satisfactory it was accepted at the time that this was an unknown venture and the Council had to mitigate for a risk of failure. The risk never materialised and the museum has gone from strength to strength.

The following paragraph summarises the crux of the CAT request.

Unfortunately in February 2021 Aberdeenshire Council decided that in future they could only offer a rolling one year licence. This is entirely unsatisfactory as it has removed all security of tenure for STA; we live in dread of receiving a letter from the Council giving 12 months' notice of eviction. We no longer feel that we can make any capital investment in the museum, volunteers question the future and whether they

should expend their energies elsewhere and thirdly the door is firmly closed on external funding. There is a real danger that failure to grant ownership will lead to a loss of volunteer commitment and eventually the slow decline and demise of the museum and consequently the loss of one of the jewels in Stonehaven's crown. Our CAT request is based on the overriding priority of gaining ownership in order to protect the achievements of the last 12 years and that the museum can remain open to visitors and local alike for generations to come. Under the present conditions imposed by the Council this is not possible.

4.3 Restrictions on use of the land

The museum is contained within the confinements of the outer walls of a grade A listed building and we have had to be very careful not to damage the existing interior fabric. To this end we have been successful but due to the amount of relevant artefacts that have been donated space has become a premium. STA considered many options to increase the available space but the grade A listing was always an obstacle. However, in 2015 we employed a firm of architects that specialise in historical buildings and we also entered into discussions with Historic Scotland. The result was the proposal for a large extension on both ground and first floor which encompassed the Inner and Outer Courtyards. Planning permission and listed building consent were obtained in December 2017 and we employed a firm of consultants to seek capital funding. It was at this stage we ran into problems:

- The cost of the extension grew very quickly from a modest £900K to £1.4M and every few months costs seem to go higher
- We didn't own the land or building
- The area has a ranking of 5123 in SIMD (the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation). As the least deprived area in Aberdeenshire has a ranking of 6976 the grading of 5123 means that Stonehaven is regarded by funders as relatively wealthy in financial and cultural terms and is not on their priority list of areas requiring a significant influx of funding. An important point for funders.

At the beginning of 2020 covid-19 arrived; this presented further major logistical and financial problems and we decided that we would allow the planning permission etc. to lapse for the present.



We retain the vision and perhaps sometime in the future this development will come to fruition but we are now looking much longer term. It should be emphasised that the extension has no relevance to the CAT; it is a vision, no more, no less. It is not included in our Business Plan

STA is still interested in maximising the Tolbooth and its curtilage to its maximum potential. During covid we launched many successful outdoor events in the Outer Courtyard; our experience is that the weather can be very changeable and some sort of protection from the wind and rain would be desirable. The Inner Courtyard has been neglected for at least 40 years and is in need of a drastic overhaul. We would like to undertake a significant improvement - perhaps a covered outdoor seating area. None of this is possible without extra funding but it is acknowledged that the Council is 'cash strapped' and unable to provide any funding. As a charity STA is able to seek funding from third parties but neither the latter or STA are prepared to sink money into an asset where the lease is a rolling 12 months.

4.4 Risk Analysis

During the previous 12 years STA has encountered many problems and managed to find satisfactory solutions to all of them. As a consequence nearly all risks have been eliminated or, at the very least, mitigations are in place to combat such risks if they occur. However, there are two medium/long term risks to be considered.

Loss of Income. Currently STA's sources of income are two fold – donations and shop profits. These have proved adequate and the balance of income over expenditure has enabled the organisation to create a healthy bank balance. It is accepted that ownership of the building will be a larger financial burden but the income from the restaurant (see business plan) will significantly increase the income stream. The question asked is '*Can you rely on rent from the restaurant?*'

The restaurant has been operated continuously by at least three different operators over the last 25 years; this demonstrates a strong commercial interest in the establishment. The current tenant acquired the lease at the start of 2023 and his letter of support affirms that he wishes to operate the premises for at least 20 years.⁵ Given his long term ambitions, and that even if the current tenant wished to vacate there would be others interested, the risk, although the impact is high, it is assessed as unlikely and placed in the amber zone.

Lack of volunteers. STA is a charity and has a great reliance on volunteers. For 12 years we have been blessed with an enthusiastic team, numbering around 40, who have always been available to organise, prepare material, greet visitors etc. Many charitable organisations have failed as a consequence of covid-19 but STA has continued to thrive. We have lost a number of our more senior members as, unfortunately, time takes its toll but they have been replaced by younger and equally enthusiastic individuals – at the moment two of our trustees are post grad students. STA is aware of the risk of too greater reliance on senior citizens and has just started a closer cooperation with Mackie Academy whereby senior pupils are encouraged to create artefacts for display in the museum. The hope is that this project will generate an early interest in the museum and lead to young adults joining our organisation. Our risk assessment is that although the likelihood of lack of volunteers is slightly greater than a loss of income the impact is lower but surmountable and this risk is also placed in the amber zone.

		Impact			
		Insignificant	Low	Medium	High
Likelihood	Almost certain				
	Certain				
	Possible		Lack of volunteers		
	Not Likely			Loss of Income	

4.5 Capacity to deliver

The day to day running of STA, and consequently the museum, is undertaken by the 12 Trustees who are elected on a 3 year term at the AGM where proposals for 4 Trustees

⁵ See Letter of Support from Paul Mair

are tabled each year. The Trustees work very closely with each other and apart from the normal appointed Chair, Secretary and Treasurer other Trustees have clearly defined responsibilities. These are:

- Shop
- Curator
- Social Media (Facebook and Instagram)
- Event Organiser
- Web Master
- Collections and Photo Archive Curator
- Editor of *Stanehyve Tolbooth Times*

The current Board encompasses an impressive array of the skills and knowledge necessary to run a successful charity. We include:

- 2 individuals who own successful local businesses
- A chartered accountant
- 3 ex-members of the legal profession
- A Local Government official
- Ret. Board member of Government Agency, ex consultant to the EU and a NGO
- A professional fisherman
- 2 Post grad students

It is difficult not to be impressed with the achievements that have been accomplished by the trustees, supported by the volunteers, over the last 12 years. In May 2011 STA literally did not have a penny in the bank and was presented with a building with blank walls and half a dozen large exhibits which were soon to be removed by Aberdeenshire Council. Twelve years later the museum is bursting at the seams, has a reputation well beyond Stonehaven and a six figure sum of money in the bank.

The years 2020 - 2022 wreaked havoc in the charity sector but STA has continued to thrive albeit that the financial progress has been slower than expected. However, STA has managed to slightly increase its resources during these two years and has been open to the public as often as permitted by the Scottish Government. The above clearly demonstrates that STA is a well-run and innovative charity which is more than capable of taking on board the additional responsibilities of a CAT.

Marketing - pre pandemic

2010 was the last year in which the Tolbooth museum was operated by Aberdeenshire Council and the footfall in that year was 8,717. When the predecessor of STA re-opened the museum in May 2011 there was no money available for any paid marketing and publicity had to be by word of mouth. Even now there is no obvious explanation for the immediate success of the museum but, as can be seen from the table below, the

museum footfall increased by 1,677 (19%) in 2011 (the first year under new ‘ownership’) even though the early summer ‘trade’ was missed. The table also highlights that although the other direct provision museums have maintained a fairly steady plateau of visitor numbers between the years 2011 and 2019 the Tolbooth has increased its footfall by 278%.

2020 was the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic and all Aberdeenshire attractions took a severe hit although the Tolbooth continued to be the most visited.

All Aberdeenshire Direct Provision museums have to record their daily footfall – usually by using a handheld digital counter – and this footfall is one of the key indicators used by the Scottish Government to measure cultural/leisure performance at Council level. It can be seen from the table below that the footfall for the Tolbooth has accelerated since 2011 and for the last nine years the Tolbooth has been the most successful museum as measured by footfall. During each of the ‘covid years’ the Tolbooth had more visitors than all other eight museums combined.

	Arbuthnot	Museum HQ	Farming	Hareshowe	Banchory	Banff	Maud Rail	Sandhaven	Tolbooth
2011	8072	543	18498	5646	3225	1327	355	130	10394
2012	5505	641	18498	6194	3372	671	446	130	15540
2013	9816	704	18995	7344	3598	442	700	53	17063
2014	3459	503	20138	6296	3322	544	633	71	20626
2015	5297	390	21356	6526	3331	579	915	59	22169
2016	4972	388	15074	6183	3022	542	752	46	22574
2017	9863	277	19220	4481	2465	182	476	262	24365
2018	5395	209	18713	4540	2374	118	487	67	23179
2019	5537	177	19141	3779	2159	1015	673	0	28862
2020	579	23	1269	0	343	60	0	0	2542
2021	0	0	2255	0	0	241	108	36	6777
2022	0	0	9706	0	0	543	622	4	13720

* Aberdeenshire Council Museum Service Official Footfall for Direct Provision Museums

2020 - 2022 are the ‘Covid Years’

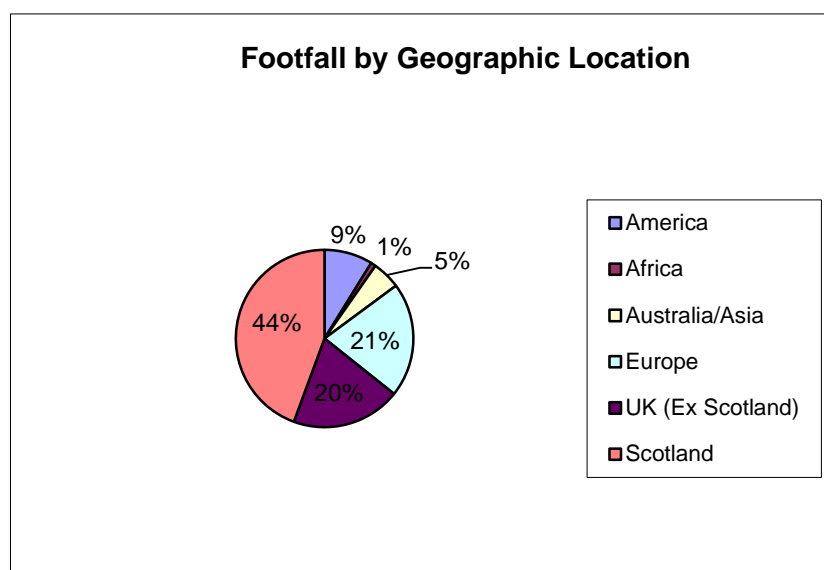
Given that the footfall was increasing year by year the STA committee questioned the wisdom of spending money on publicity and instead decided to continue to rely upon the word of mouth approach (STA is pragmatic and parsimonious). The latter developed its own momentum and soon translated into articles in the print and social media; we also experienced contacts from unexpected quarters. Examples of our ‘fame’ are:

- Articles in KLM in-flight magazine
- Recommended attraction in the 2019 Lonely Planet Guide
- Commended attraction on TripAdvisor (best free attraction in Stonehaven)
- Innumerable print and digital articles on places to visit in Scotland
- Listed on Visit Scotland, Visit Aberdeenshire and Stunning Scotland websites
- Large number of requests to our own website for historical information

- Requests from film companies re work in Stonehaven area
- Invitation to participate in a 2019 symposium run by University of Kocaeli (Turkey) to investigate the feasibility of opening a museum similar to the Tolbooth in the town of Gulnar.
- Three star Scottish Tourist Board award (recently renewed for a further 2 years with glowing references)

However, we have not relied solely on third party publications as we produce a quarterly edition of the *Stanehyve Tolbooth Times*; this magazine has a wide circulation with over 120 copies dispatched every quarter to our members and interested parties which include councillors and Council staff.

The museum has always run a visitors' book in which our guests could record their thoughts on the museum and normally they also left their home address. By examining these addresses STA has been able to ascertain the geographical origin of the visitors and an interesting analysis emerges. Between



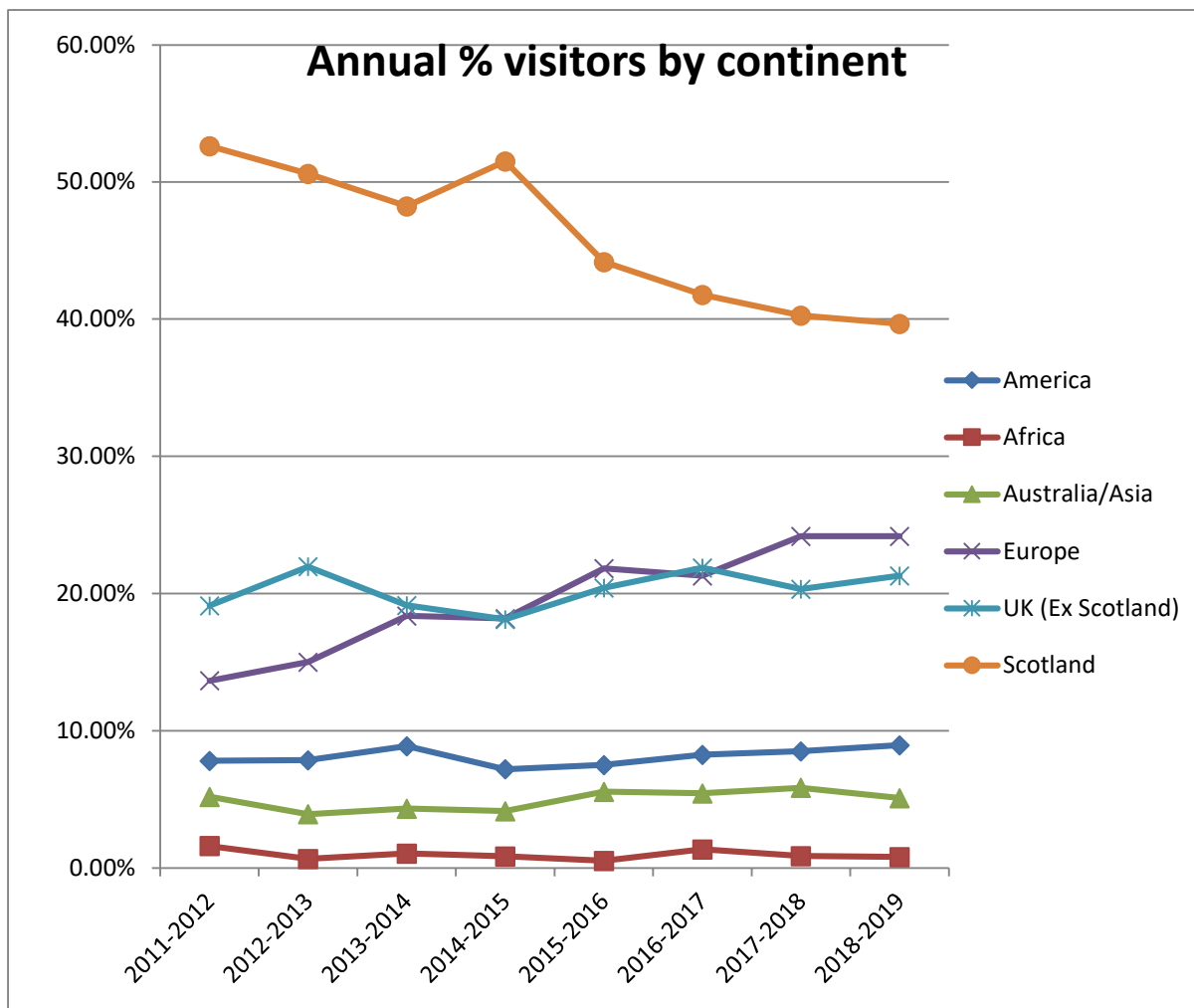
2011 and 2019 (the book was suspended in 2020 to reduce infection from covid-19) the museum has welcomed visitors from 132 different countries and dependencies – 40.1% came from elsewhere in Scotland, followed by 18.5% from England. The top country outside the UK was the USA.

Marketing – pandemic era

Whilst the above is very encouraging and does demonstrate the world wide appeal of the museum a further analysis (see below) revealed an alarming long term decline in Scottish visitors. When Scotland and the UK went into lockdown in early 2020 the door was figuratively shut on the source of the majority of our visitors. STA decided that action was required and we contracted an Aberdeen marketing consultancy to provide the museum with a local marketing plan. As a result of this action volunteers received training in social media, two marketing videos were commissioned and a publicity campaign was launched on the local radio. Our Facebook page has been significantly improved and a new Instagram page created. We have developed links with the RNLi, the Grampian Motor Museum and Peterhead Prison Museum. All this work culminated in a series of events in the Outer Courtyard and by December 2021 we had increased

our annual footfall of 2,526 in 2020 to 5,429. We believe that the majority of these visitors were from Scotland with a significant increase in local participation.

The above clearly demonstrates that STA is a well-run and innovative charity which has the ability to be flexible to changing markets and adapt accordingly. Given the drive and resilience previously displayed STA has no fear of the future and continues to seek ways in which to return the footfall to pre-pandemic levels.



5. Level and nature of support

Considerable effort was made to communicate information relating to the asset transfer application and the group’s plans for the museum to the wider community.

A press release was issued detailing the application process and also explaining the future plans for the museum should the application be successful. The aim being to spread the word widely and allow the opportunity for people to seek more information. This was distributed to local media outlets.

Both the Bellman and the P&J ran the story, giving considerable detail and publicising a drop-in session at the museum where people could come along and find out more and give their views.

The drop-in session was held on a Saturday afternoon in March and over 100 people visited, with 41 people taking the time to fill in a questionnaire asking for their thoughts on the asset transfer and the plans for the museum's future.

The questionnaire asked specifically; *“Are you in favour of the CAT to Stonehaven Tolbooth Association?”* Of the 41 responses 40 were positive and one gave the response “depends”.

Comments were resoundingly positive, comments included;

“The building would be in safe hands”

“Please let this go ahead it would be a disgrace not to.”

“Fantastic asset run by wonderful volunteers.”

“very good for the community”

“good for the local economy”

“would like to see it owned and run by the community.”

“a good future should be given to them to allow access to future funds.”

People were asked specifically *“Have you any concerns about the CAT?”* and there were a small number of comments;

“Will the transfer contract (1) preclude the trustees subsequently selling the building (2) require some minimal number of opening hours (3) if so, how can staffing be assured in the future?”

“fundraising for long term maintenance and protection of this oldest building in the town.”

“keep it free”

Information about the CAT was posted on the Tolbooth Museum Facebook page and the drop-in event publicised.

The press release was also on the museum website for a month and the relevant page viewed 167 times. Only 1 comment was received on the dedicated form:

“As a resident of Stonehaven I write in support of this application for the CAT of the museum. Keeping the building maintained and used is very important but even more so keeping the history alive for our young people, local people and visitors. The work the volunteers do is so important to us all and ensures our heritage is preserved.”

A presentation was given to Stonehaven and District Community Council at their meeting on 11th April 2023. Here is an excerpt from the Community Council minutes (Item 6) where they gave the proposal their unanimous backing:

DL welcomed representatives of Stonehaven Tolbooth Museum, and invited Gordon Ritchie (GR), Chairman, to address the meeting.

GR confirmed that the Museum's Committee has submitted a Community Asset Transfer request to Aberdeenshire Council for the Tolbooth building. The Museum, closed by the Council in 2011, was reopened by volunteers, and received the Queens Award in 2015. In 2019, the Duke and Duchess of Rothesay visited the Museum. The Tolbooth is the oldest building in Stonehaven and is in urgent need of attention and repairs. In 2017, planning permission was granted to develop an extension. The Council does not have a lease agreement in place with the Museum Committee, therefore with no security over the building, it is very difficult to secure any external funding (e.g., Big Lottery Funds) for improvements.

Revenue income will be raised through renting the upper floor as a restaurant, public donations and retail sales. It is hoped to increase the number of visitors to the Museum, these are mainly tourists, however the Museum is also an educational facility. There are 40 volunteers, 12 of whom sit on the Committee.

They are seeking SDCC support for the Community Asset Transfer request, a visitor survey has been supportive.

JS asked about the timescale for the planned building work, also would ownership increase opportunities to secure funding?

GR said the work would take over 5 years, and yes, ownership would provide security and be more attractive to potential funders.

The meeting unanimously supported the proposal.

A copy of the press release and the questionnaire used at the drop-in session are attached as appendices. For brevity we have not included the 41 completed questionnaires but they are available on request. However, we have included letters of support from:

- Babes in the Wood
- Kincardineshire Development Trust
- Stonehaven Town Partnership
- Stonehaven and District Community Council
- Stonehaven Business Association
- Horizon
- Unsolicited support from visitor out with local area
- Paul Mair (Tolbooth restaurant)

6. Funding

In the past STA has proved to be fairly adept at securing third party funding; we have received grants from:

- Co-op Community Fund
- European Maritime & Fisheries Fund
- Kincardineshire & Mearns Area budget
- Architectural Heritage Fund
- Stonehaven Lions
- Museums Galleries Scotland
- Meikle Carewe Wind Farm Community Fund
-

Due to a lack of ownership all the above grants relate to either minor, non-structural improvements or running costs. Once ownership is transferred STA can begin to seek grants for structural improvements and given the expertise obtained in previous funding applications we are confident that we will succeed. In addition, of course, we should have access to the £55K that Aberdeenshire Council has ring fenced for the Tolbooth.

7. Business Plan

16.07.23



STONEHAVEN TOLBOOTH ASSOCIATION CAT APPLICATION FOR TOLBOOTH BUILDING BUSINESS PLAN 2024 - 2026

Visitor Income Information.

The museum operates a policy of **not** charging visitors for admission. Our income is therefore reliant on visitor donations and some sales from the small gift shop situated inside the museum. Shop sales breakeven or make a profit. The main income comes from donations and is therefore very dependent on number of visitors.

Up until 2019 the visitor numbers to the museum had been steadily increasing year upon year and had been further helped when the AWPR opened, and Stonehaven became more accessible to visitors from towns situated to the north and northwest of Aberdeen. Visitor numbers for 2020 and 2021 were however impacted greatly by the government regulated lockdowns.

No figures have been provided for year ended 31st March 2021 as they would not be meaningful. During that year the museum was subject to Scottish Government Covid Guidelines and closed from March 2020 to July 2020. The museum tentatively re-opened in August 2020 but closed again in December 2020 and did not re-open until May 2021.

We are already seeing visitor numbers in 2023 beginning to increase again, although we are not predicting reaching pre-Covid visitor numbers until 2025 or possibly 2026. By not charging for entry to the museum and only asking for a donation, we feel that the public (especially those with young families)

very much appreciate a town attraction that is free and affordable for them at this time of high inflation and high cost of living.

VISITOR NUMBERS - MUSEUM ONLY

	Actual figures					Estimated		
Yr to 31st March	2018	2019	2020	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Number of visitors in the year	24648	23547	27413	6311	14770	20000	25000	30000
Donation – general in boxes	£8092	£8207	£10043	£2071	£5376	£7000	£8750	£10500
Average donation per visitor	£0.33	£0.35	£0.37	£0.33	£0.36	£0.35	£0.35	£0.35

INCOME

In prior years, the museum has had several sources of income. These other sources are likely to continue going forward - such as hiring of the museum for events (*weddings etc.*) - but we felt it was prudent to concentrate on income from our 2 main sources - visitor donations and shop sales.

The museum has also been successful in recent years in receiving grants from various local and national bodies such as Museum Grants Scotland, local windfarm community funds and local businesses such as Co-op. Although we will continue to apply for these grants, we have not included them in our income projections for 2024 to 2026.

Rent receivable - with no information available for the lease between [REDACTED] and Aberdeenshire Council for the upstairs restaurant, we have assumed that the new lease has been negotiated at current market rates and will see the tenant liable for all restaurant utilities/contents insurance/public liability insurance and share of building insurance. We have also assumed that tenant will be liable for all restaurant internal/external repairs and maintenance. Rent has been estimated at £20,000 p.a. The income figures were designed to show that the museum is sustainable going forward with only its core income of visitor donations and shop sales.

EXPENDITURE

The figures for year to 31st March 2018 - 2022 are all actual figures. The figures for the year to 31st March 2021 are excluded however as that year was so disrupted by government lockdowns that the figures were meaningless. All years 2018 - 2022 show a profit except for a small loss of £654 which was incurred in 2022. This loss occurred because the Trustees decided to upgrade the display panels throughout the museum at a cost of £2195 and a grant to cover that expenditure had been received in an earlier year.

The figures for 2024 - 2026 are all estimated and based on the CAT Transfer being completed within the year to 31st March 2024. Assuming the CAT transfer is completed in January 2024, the figures for the year to 31st March 2024 include only a 1/4 cost (or 3 /12) for expenses currently undertaken by the Council (insurance, safety costs etc.) and a full 12 month estimated cost for years 2025 and 2026.

Repairs

The survey undertaken on behalf of the STA in 2021, highlighted various building repairs required in the short to medium term. No extra provision has been made for these repairs as we anticipate receiving the funds set aside by Council for Tolbooth fabric repairs - estimated to be £40,000 to £50,000.

Business rates - because of the Association's charitable status, we will not be liable for business rates in future years.

Utilities – because of recent surges in gas and electric prices, we looked carefully at our provisions for utilities and believe our provision is in line with the limited opening hours of the museum. Even in summer we only open 3 hours per day, 6 days per week.

Water rates - a small provision has been made for water rates, although it is currently unclear if the Association could apply for exemption from this cost.

Other assumptions made include Committee meeting costs being reduced as we are no longer hiring rooms for meetings but using the museum.

ALLOCATION OF SURPLUS INCOME

Any surplus income made from ‘normal’ museum trading will be added to museum reserves. The Trustees propose however that the restaurant rental income received will be used specifically to donate to local deserving charities and to create a ringed fenced maintenance and repair ‘sinking fund’ for the building. This proposal comes with one proviso – as STA has no current knowledge of the restaurant’s lease STA may have to adjust the allocation of the rent in order to compensate for undisclosed Council financial commitments.

- Donations to local charities – 10%
- Ring fenced fund for building repair – 90%

STONEHAVEN TOLBOOTH ASSOCIATION
TREATMENT OF ESTIMATED SURPLUS INCOME
PER BUSINESS PLAN ON PREVIOUS PAGE

Year ended 31 st March	2024	2025	2026
Profit arising from normal museum trading	£4446	£1735	£3105
Rental income from tenancy of restaurant	5000	20000	20000
Total museum surplus income	9446	21735	23105
Proposed allocation of surplus income			
Added to museum reserves	4446	1735	3105
Rental income allocation			
Donated to local charities – 10%	500	2000	2000
Ringfenced for a building ‘sink’ fund – 90%	4500	18000	18000
	9446	21735	23105

