

Draft Press Release

Stonehaven Tolbooth Association

A Community Asset Transfer Application has been made by Stonehaven Tolbooth Association (STA), the local community group who run the Tolbooth Museum at Stonehaven Harbour, to Aberdeenshire Council.

The Tolbooth Museum has been a great success since it was closed by the Council Museums Service in 2011 and reopened by the community group. The Museum is now run by volunteers and free admission given to the public. Over the past 11 years, Visitor numbers have expanded and since 2014, the Tolbooth Museum has been the most visited Museum of all the Museums run by the Council. (In fact ,during the Covid period, our footfall was greater than all the other Council Museums combined.). Visitor numbers in 2019 were 28,862, compared to 8,717 in 2010 when the Council last operated the Museum., and we are now gradually seeing improved numbers as post Covid progresses.

In 2019, the Association received The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest award for voluntary groups, and were visited by The Duke and Duchess of Rothesay, now Our King and Queen Consort.

In 2016, we obtained Planning Permission for a large extension to the Tolbooth building, in order to create a bigger and better Museum, but have not yet proceeded with that. The Tolbooth is owned by the Council, having been gifted to the Town of Stonehaven by the Marquess of Lansdowne in 1934, and forms part of the Stonehaven Common Good. STA have only a 12 month rolling licence to occupy the ground floor of the building, although a Lease would have been preferred. This short term agreement prohibits STA from seeking grants as funders demand either a long term lease or ownership before releasing any funds. In addition, the short term approach of the Council and our failure to be able to start the extension work, demotivates our many volunteers. The first floor of the Tolbooth is leased as a Restaurant by the Council, but if we take over the building, we would continue any Lease.

In order to progress the Museum extension and obtain Lottery funding, we would wish to take over the whole building , and to this end, the CAT application was made to the Council in November 2021. In our discussions with the Council ,we have discovered that the Council have a fund earmarked for the Tolbooth with a balance of £55,000. We had not been told of this previously , and understand it may be the Fund started by Stonehaven Town Council ,before the Tolbooth was restored in 1963 , with rental income since then. This Fund can be used to carry out urgent repairs and maintenance required to the Tolbooth.

As part of the CAT application, STA are embarking on a programme of community engagement in order to inform local residents of their plans for the Museum. To this end , the Museum are hosting a Drop-In Clinic on between and , when volunteers will be available to show folk over the Museum and answer any questions.