



Cultural Tides: North Sea Connections in Aberdeenshire

Aberdeenshire Council's Levelling Up Fund Bid - August 2022

Background

The proposed projects in this bid are a strategic response to local priorities identified by ongoing community and stakeholder engagements over a number of years. Many of these exercises were undertaken by Aberdeenshire Council during the 2015-2020 Regeneration Programme, but standalone community and business-led consultations have also been influential in the development of these projects.

The weight of existing engagement evidence demonstrates an unmet need and aspiration to deliver interventions which celebrate the heritage and townscape of Peterhead; offer meaningful and accessible cultural spaces attractive to a broad range of residents (including residents seldom heard from through public engagement); and deliver economic improvement to a key area of the town where significant challenges barriers to change existed.

The 2015-2020 Regeneration Programme acknowledged and began to address socio-economic challenges with some marked success; however, significant challenges remain: most particularly within the Conservation Area including the historic marketplace of Broad Street linking the harbour and high street. Gap analysis highlights leisure, culture and greenspace are under catered for in the area.

In 2018 a report was commissioned by Aberdeenshire Council to identify opportunities for development of the Macduff Marine Aquarium (see annex 25 Glamis Consultancy Aquarium Feasibility Study). The report found that overall, visitors thought:

- The Aquarium is very highly rated overall
- The staff are excellent
- Access, signage and car parking are generally very good
- Catering is poor – there is no formal catering provision

It is clear from multiple engagements that the current Aquarium is valued and treasured amongst the local community, and this feeling continues to be closely considered during the development of the proposals.

The projects will provide new cultural and recreation opportunities for all people, not just locally but across Aberdeenshire and beyond. The new and improved cultural venues are particularly well situated to provide these opportunities for those communities of place facing complex challenges of multiple deprivation; communities which are evident in these towns.

The Projects

This package of two projects represents a unique transformational investment in the facilities owned and managed by Live Life Aberdeenshire (the culture and leisure arm of Aberdeenshire Council) along the coast of North East Scotland.

The first project in the package, 'Peterhead Cultural Quarter', will involve the development of the historic town centre as a regional destination for culture, re-establishing the former 'market square' as the civic heart of a vibrant and resurgent Peterhead. The focal point will be a prominent and dynamic regional museum which will drive culture-led regeneration and stimulate the town's economic revitalisation.



Arbuthnot House Museum & Library Artist's Impression

The disused B-Listed Arbuthnot House (1805) occupies a prominent position at the base of Broad Street and acts as a visual link between the town and the harbour. In deteriorating condition and on the market for 6 years, much of its original character and features remain but are gradually being eroded.

A thorough but sensitive renovation will restore its unique features and original character, offering a very visible enhancement to the streetscape of Broad Street and lifting the area's somewhat tired appearance. A striking extension will be erected over the footprint of the existing 1960s additions, offering panoramas over the harbour and maximising the site's cultural output, community facilities and income generation.

The former Arbuthnot Museum and Library building – to be renamed the Carnegie Building– will become a live performance venue with dance and music studios. The project will act as a visual vote of confidence in the town centre and as an iconic symbol of Peterhead's future prosperity.



Carnegie Building Venue – Artist's Impression

The second project, at Macduff Marine Aquarium, will offer a demonstrably new experience for visitors to this popular existing attraction. The Aquarium, opened in 1996, is cherished by the local community and provides an important educational role both for local schools and the wider population. Whilst the current offer is well-regarded by visitors, opportunities for growth and development are constrained by the building's limited footprint, and the lack of flexible educational spaces or a hospitality offering are particularly restrictive.



Macduff Aquarium – Artist's Impression

The project will transform the appearance and functionality of the building, with a spectacular two-storey extension taking advantage of dramatic coastal views and offering significant new space for interactive exhibits (such as a lobster hatchery) and educational experiences. A

new café/restaurant and expanded retail offer will further enhance the visitor experience, and external maritime links will be enhanced, connecting with the coastal walking trail and local heritage sites such as Macduff Harbour and unique Tarlair Outdoor Swimming Pool.



Macduff Aquarium Entrance – Artist's Impression

Overall, the package will celebrate our relationships with the sea: industry and culture; pride of place and sense of community; science and natural history. As we look to the future, these two venues will play a key role in our communities meeting the challenges of a rapidly changing world while preserving the legacies of biodiversity, learning, culture and heritage for future generations.

Rationale and Context

Through the (re)development of key town centre assets the visual amenity and quality of the built environment of Peterhead and Macduff will be improved. This in turn will be a driving force for local social benefit, making the area more attractive to commercial interests, and promote the visitor economy and community use.

In Peterhead, Arbuthnot House and the Carnegie Building are both listed structures and Arbuthnot House is in a state of disrepair (designated “at risk”). The costs and risks associated with private development are considered too high and it is therefore necessary for public investment to bring forward development.

Collectively the buildings house public services that are for the wider benefit of the community including Peterhead Library, Arbuthnot Museum, and Macduff Marine Aquarium. These are traditionally commercially unappealing areas for the private sector to operate in, and therefore public sector provision is justified.

Although broader Aberdeenshire has relatively low levels of deprivation, significant areas within Peterhead and Macduff are among the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland. The projects will support employment opportunities across the art and culture sector, visitor economy, and hospitality sector. The developments will serve as anchor institutions for the towns and support pride of place, making Peterhead and Macduff more attractive places to live and do business.

Aberdeenshire Council's aspiration is to celebrate and enhance this region as an attractive place to live and work. The projects will complement other initiatives and developments in the area, attract inward investment and create quality and skilled jobs. They will create and nurture cultural regeneration, provide educational and recreational opportunities and develop the hospitality, tourism and night-time economies. The projects will make the most of our superb coastline; help attract and retain talent; and ensure that Aberdeenshire's coastline thrives as a great place to do business; work; study; live; and raise a family.