



# Aboyne Community Action Plan



Huntly Hotel from the Green.



The Dee at Aboyne.



Aboyne Highland Games.

## **“Making Aboyne an even better place to live and work”**

### **Introduction**

The village of Aboyne has always prided itself on its sense of community, perhaps one of the reasons why more and more people want to come and live here. Locals are friendly, there is a fine community spirit and it is a good environment in which to bring up children. But it is not all about people. The village sits in the heart of Royal Deeside next to the River Dee, surrounded by delightful scenery and is well positioned for access to Upper Deeside and Aberdeen. So why try to improve on this?

The fact is that whether you live in Aboyne, work here or frequently use its facilities, from time to time you will have chatted about what is wrong with the village and what should be done to put things right; but you don't often get the chance to make the changes you think are necessary. That's why your Community Council committed itself to getting your views heard and acted upon by carrying out a survey and then developing a Community Action Plan based wholly on how we all want to see our village developed.

### **What Is A Community Action Plan?**

The purpose of creating a Community Action Plan is to bring together the concerns and aspirations of the community and make people think positively about what should be done to benefit the community; then find ways of doing this. It provides an

opportunity for local people to get involved not only by voicing their opinion but also by coming forward and helping make a difference, whether they do it by themselves or with the support of other agencies.

***The important thing to remember is that it is the community's Plan – it's your Plan, it's what you want that counts.***

### **How Are Your Views Gathered**

As a first step, the Community Council set up a Steering Group comprising Community Council members, residents, and representatives of local organisations to develop and carry through the process. The Steering Group was advised by representatives from the Marr Area Partnership and Aberdeenshire Council Community Learning and Development.

The Group designed a survey form which was distributed among shops, businesses and households in Aboyne, and an online questionnaire. Residents were asked these questions:

What do you like about Aboyne?  
What could be improved?  
What could you do to make these improvements happen?

To ensure that the views of the younger members of the community were also heard, the Steering Group worked with the staff of Aboyne Academy and Aboyne Primary School in designing projects which allowed the pupils to put forward their

own ideas – which they did with great enthusiasm and ingenuity.

Maps of the village were provided for each class in the Primary School and the pupils marked on them what they liked about the village and what they thought should be done to improve it. At the Academy, an Action Aboyne Survey Team was established and a survey of residents and pupils carried out.

The surveys and project work were carried out over a two month period and the exercise culminated in a public drop-in event at the Victory Hall, Aboyne, when residents were given the opportunity to see the main issues and concerns raised by the respondents as well as the work of the pupils. The event also gave residents a chance to add further comments.

The overall outcome was nearly 1000 diverse comments and suggestions. Some of these are listed below but all of them can be accessed by logging on to <http://www.middeesidecc.org/>

### The Past

Aboyne, as we know it, dates from around 1670. Charles Gordon, the first Earl of Aboyne, was granted a Charter to build a Burgh close to his castle. He chose to develop around the existing hamlet of Bonty which had grown up near the ford and ferry crossing of the Dee. With that Charter came the right to hold weekly markets, build a Toll Booth and erect a Market Cross. Neither the Toll Booth nor the Market Cross has survived and only the Market Green remains.

The right to use the Green for recreational purposes was given to the people of Aboyne by the Gordon family.

With the passing years, Charlestown of Aboyne, as it was named, became a sizeable village, a commercial hub and a popular coaching centre, being equidistant between Aberdeen and Braemar on the Deeside Highway. Coaches ran twice daily to the east, with the southern routes being opened with the building of the first bridge in 1828. Tourist prominence came after 1848 when Queen Victoria discovered the area and chose Balmoral as her annual retreat. Victoria and Albert lunched at the Huntly Arms, which was then a first class coaching inn. When the railway was extended to Aboyne in 1859, Victoria used the hotel as an assembly point for the onward journey to Balmoral.

With the advent of the railway and busy station came commercial and tourist prosperity which gave Aboyne a vibrant heart. All roads led to the station, the mart, the hotel, the Green and the many small retail and commercial outlets.

Between 1888 and 1890 Sir William Cunliffe Brooks, a wealthy Manchester banker, bought both Glentanar and Aboyne estates. The buildings and landscape of Glentanar today are almost entirely the result of his vision. On his death in 1900 the estate was bought by George Coats, later to become Lord Glentanar. Between them these men were great benefactors to the village



*Community Action Plan public session.*



*Primary School map display.*



*Aboyne Castle.*



The gazebo at the Huntly.

of Aboyne, commissioning the Victory Hall, the Coo Cathedral (built by Brooks as part of a model farm), St. Thomas's Church, the Fountain and many other beautiful buildings scattered throughout the area. Ean Cecil, son-in-law of Brooks inherited Aboyne Castle policies, and donated the ground for our splendid Golf Course.

During their era Aboyne and Glentanar were vibrant social centres, playing host to royalty, aristocracy, royal mistresses, sportsmen and gamblers. The Gazebo in the Huntly Arms garden is a reminder of those heady days. As late as the 1950's, Fenton Wyness described Aboyne as a progressive commercial and tourist centre with first class shops, hotels and boarding houses.

From 1966 onwards, the railway was lost, the mart closed, the road leading to the centre of the village replaced by a virtual by-pass. Retail business and hotels suffered as development spread away from the hub.

What remains is a beautiful village with enviable assets. A community school which, when it was opened, was upheld as a flagship development at national level, an excellent medical centre and hospital, an outstanding village hall, a unique village green and a variety of retailers and businesses which serve the village well. The valley and river are recognised the world over for their outstanding beauty and sporting access. No longer are our landlords people apart, they are very much part of the business community.



Strachan's shop opening 1926.



Aboyne Station circa 1900.

**The Community Action Plan affords us the chance to play OUR part in the history of Aboyne by using the assets wisely as our legacy to future generations.**

### The Present: What You Like About Aboyne

There was a marked consensus about what was good about living in Aboyne and what residents and school pupils valued most.

Here are some of the comments from:

#### The public survey and online questionnaire

- "Spaciousness"
- "Low crime"
- "A safe environment to bring up children"
- "Excellent health facilities"
- "Beautiful countryside"
- "A wide diversity of wildlife"
- "The Green at the heart of the village"
- "Tranquility"
- "Friendliness and helpfulness of shopkeepers"
- "Good connections to City"

#### The project undertaken by pupils of Aboyne Primary School

- "Play park"
- "Nice places to walk and cycle"
- "Aboyne Loch for fishing and canoeing"
- "Great swimming pool"
- "Nice places to eat in"
- "Good school and playground"
- "All the nature in the forest"
- "Library and theatre"
- "Horse riding nearby"
- "Lots of fruit shops"

### **The Future: What Could Be Improved**

While there was a large measure of agreement on what was good about the village, there were very differing views from residents and school pupils on how things could be improved. Here are just a few from:

#### **The public survey and online questionnaire**

- “Make the place more attractive all year round”
- “Encourage tourists to stop”
- “Central notice board for forthcoming events”
- “Cafe meeting place for the young”
- “Hold a farmers’ market once a month”
- “Provide picnic areas with tables”
- “Toilets required at play park for children”
- “More police presence in the village”
- “Find an area to develop allotments”
- “Fast broadband for businesses”

#### **The project undertaken by pupils of Aboyne Primary School**

- “More sweets and ice cream shops”
- “Wishing well”
- “More things in the play park”
- “Dry ski slope”
- “Canoe club for children on the River Dee”
- “Litter”
- “Art class in the Community Centre”
- “Kite festival”
- “Boxing club for 7 – 14 year olds”
- “Make bike tracks”
- “Toy shop”
- “More litter bins”

### **The Aboyne Academy Action Facebook Page**

- “Astro turf is definitely the best option as it benefits the majority – it works well in Lumphanan”
- “Mountain bike track would be sweet and potentially attract tourists as well”
- “At least invest the money in a non-mainstream sport like mountain biking – there are plenty of football facilities already”
- “A cafe, or something that could provide jobs for young people”
- “The guys have football pitches, rugby pitches and bike jumps, the girls have nothing”

#### **The Issues**

While it was most encouraging to have received almost 1000 comments, it is just not possible to take action on all of them. In deciding what issues should be included we have been guided by three principles:

1. The issue has to be realistic;
2. The outcome has to be achievable; and
3. The outcome should benefit the community at large



*Aboyne Primary School.*



*Station Square.*



*Aboyne Academy.*



Housing Old Mart Road.



Parking in Old Ballater Road.



Fund raising for Christmas lights.

Some of the issues you raised are already being addressed and are not included in the Plan, though progress will continue to be monitored by the Community Council. These are:

### **Signage**

A number of residents called for improved street signage to shops and businesses, especially to those in the Station Square. In fact, Aberdeenshire Council has commenced an audit on existing signage within Aboyne, and Scottish Enterprise has appointed a consultant to work with the Council and the community to develop proposals for signs and also information/interpretation boards.

### **Affordable Housing**

The lack of affordable housing in Aboyne is a concern, especially for those who want to continue living/working in the village. For the past few months, the Community Council has been expressing its disquiet at the situation and has been seeking answers from Aberdeenshire Council and Members of the Scottish Parliament as to why there is a shortage and why those local people who need to be re-housed have no priority over those who live outside the area. Aberdeenshire Council is currently reviewing its Scheme of Allocation and the Community Council is continuing to press for changes which will recognise that local people should be given priority over those living elsewhere.

### **On-Street Parking**

Some residents expressed concern about on-street parking, mainly on Old Ballater Road and Charleston Road where there is often considerable congestion

and also on Station Brae. There are parking restrictions already in place on Station Brae and additional restrictions there have been approved recently by the Marr Area Committee. The Committee had previously approved the introduction of a One Way System on Old Ballater Road and this should improve road safety and minimise congestion.

### **Christmas Lights**

Several people suggested that the Christmas lighting needed to be improved. However, the Community Council had some time ago set up a sub-committee, aptly named, "Switched on Aboyne" to organise the upgrading of the existing infrastructure. With the help of a matching grant from Aberdeenshire Council together with donations from organisations, businesses and the people of Aboyne, new energy efficient replacement lighting was fitted last Christmas and the intention in 2011 and beyond is not only to extend the lighting to even more premises and to trees around the Green but also to replace the existing lights on buildings with these energy efficient alternatives.

### Key Priorities

From the comments and suggestions received, six Key Priorities have been identified:

1. Enhancing the image of the village
2. Developing the Community Centre
3. Reviewing the provisions for vehicle parking
4. Improving facilities for young people
5. Promoting walking and cycling
6. Improving communication within the community

### Enhancing the Image of the Village

#### The Issues

There are several aspects to this. Many of you expressed concern about the village's general appearance. Litter, dog fouling, poor lighting, inadequate signage (particularly to the Station Square shops), vandalism, anti-social behaviour, shrub borders full of weeds and the state of the road, road markings and the turning point in Charleston Road were just some of the issues which you felt impacted negatively on the image of the village.

In addition, some of you drew attention to the need to create a more vibrant village centre, make the village attractive all the year round by providing more tubs of flowers and shrubs, improve the look of the Station Square, create allotments and a community garden, require householders to cut back bushes and tree branches overhanging pavements and improve riverside walks. When you consider all of these issues, what is being called for is a restoration of civic pride in the community.

Several comments were made about the necessity to persuade visitors to stop and spend time in the village and other ideas put forward included augmenting the entrance to the village at the Aberdeen end by creating an art feature and planting trees and shrubs there, setting out picnic areas and providing toilets at the play park, installing interpretation boards to tell the history of Aboyne, creating historic walks through the village, providing more information for visitors, holding farmers markets, arranging activities on the River Dee and making more use of the Green - widely regarded as a real asset to the village – by holding more community events. There were also appeals for attracting more businesses and shops (some Primary School pupils, for instance, understandably wanted a toy shop and a sweet shop), for encouraging residents and visitors to use the shops and for accessing more entertainment.

#### Proposed Action

**ISSUE:** Improving the image of the village

**ACTION:** Community Council to encourage creation of a Village Enhancement Group

**PLANNED OUTCOME:** A more attractive village

### Developing the Community Centre

#### The Issues

The Deeside Community Centre is widely regarded as being of significant benefit to the community on Deeside but there were some comments about the need for improving the lighting, decor, ventilation and facilities such as the coffee bar. There were also calls for extending the hours of opening, reducing the cost of



Strachan's shop 2011.



The Community Centre.



The castle grounds.



Academy playing fields.



The community bus.



Parking outside the Post Office.

hiring rooms, more facilities for young people, providing easier access from outside for the elderly and disabled, making it more welcoming and encouraging more social events especially those which mix the young and not so young.

Making the Community Centre more user-friendly has been under discussion but apart from the introduction of a coffee bar on a trial basis not much has been achieved. There would appear to be a need to establish a forward thinking and active Community Centre User Group to focus on what should be done to make the Centre more vibrant and reflective of what the community wants.

### Proposed Action

**ISSUE:** Make the Community Centre more user-friendly

**ACTION:** Community Council to promote and facilitate meetings of all Community Centre User Groups

### PLANNED OUTCOME:

A Community Centre which reflects the community's needs

## Improving Facilities for Young People

### The Issues

Most of those who responded to the survey carried out by pupils of the Academy said that there wasn't enough for young people to do in the village, and the most common suggestion was the introduction of a youth cafe/meeting place. Interestingly, this was the most popular suggestion from those over 25 years of age. The provision of a cafe was also seen as an opportunity for young people in Aboyne to work there rather than have to rely on limited and expensive transport or on

their parents to get them to and from employment.

The idea of a multi-sport Astro-Turf pitch with floodlighting was widely supported, not just by those who took part in the Academy survey but by members of the general community too. Another suggestion put forward was the creation of mountain bike tracks and jumps in nearby woodlands, again supported by the community at large. Although it is expected that these kinds of facilities would be used mainly by young people, they would need to be available for all sections of the community.

A skate park was considered to be a limited area of interest and a waste of money.

### Proposed Action

**ISSUE:** Improved facilities for young people

**ACTION:** Community Council to encourage the setting-up of a Youth Forum and facilitate its discussions

### PLANNED OUTCOME:

Facilities which meet the aspirations of young people in the village

## Reviewing the Provisions for Vehicle Parking

### The Issues

Parking in the village is an emotive issue. Many of you seem to have difficulty finding a space in the main car parks and others think there isn't a problem. Undoubtedly, over recent years the expansion in housing and car ownership has put pressure on parking whether in car parks or on the streets, and understandably motorists want to park as near as possible to where they are going to shop or do business.

The hoped-for increase in the number of visitors will add to this pressure.

As mentioned earlier in the Plan, Aberdeenshire Council's Marr Area Committee has already responded to concerns about parking along Old Ballater Road by approving a One-Way System and further parking restrictions on Station Brae. These steps will help reduce congestion and improve safety at these locations but they do not address concerns relating to the provision of adequate parking on and off the streets.

As far as car parks are concerned, some of you feel that those who park for long periods such as walkers, shop staff and commuters restrict the number of spaces for those who need to park for only a short time. Commercial vehicles which are left for lengthy periods of time and, in the case of the Station Square car park, the number of disabled spaces were also mentioned as creating difficulty. Further, it was claimed that parking behind the Station Square buildings is restricted by the presence of the bottle bank and other containers.

The main concern about on-street parking relates to Charleston Road outside the shops, restaurant and Post Office. At busy times, parking on both sides of the roadway leads to congestion and, some claimed, puts pedestrians at risk.

Many suggestions were made to tackle the parking problems including discouraging long-stay parking, charging for parking, creating more spaces in the station square, making available separate parking for commercial

vehicles and tourist buses, moving the bottle bank (which would enhance the appearance of the area too), providing for diagonal parking on the edge of the Green in Charleston Road, constructing a pavement at the shops and Post Office and creating a new car park in part of the field next to the Scout Hut (though it should be noted this field is in private ownership).

In the meantime, the Marr Area Committee has asked the Council's Roads to look at possible ways of improving the situation, such as changing the markings/layout in the Station Square and the introduction of time-limited parking outside the Chemist's shop on Old Ballater Road to ensure a turn-over of parking places.

### **Proposed Action**

**ISSUE:** The parking situation  
**ACTION:** Community Council to discuss the issues with the relevant Statutory Authorities and other relevant parties  
**PLANNED OUTCOME:** Better use of existing parking facilities to benefit all users and more parking spaces

### **Promoting Walking and Cycling**

#### **The Issues**

A healthy life style is being promoted throughout Scotland, and walking and cycling certainly contribute to this. Aboyne and the area surrounding is ideal for these pursuits and the development of the Bellwood and the Deeside Way linking, as it will, Aberdeen with Ballater provide an opportunity for walkers and cyclists to enjoy the wonderful countryside. The path presently being constructed between



*The Deeside Way.*



*Community Woodlands.*



*Tarland Aboyne cycle path.*



MDCC Noticeboard.



enjoyAboyne website.



Community Centre forum meeting.

Tarland and Aboyne will also play its part.

Many of you recognised the importance of these activities and there were several suggestions as to how the opportunities might be enhanced by, for instance, improving the surface of the Deeside Way, particularly the sections at west and east ends of the village creating more riverside walks and walks around the perimeter of the village, encouraging residents to walk and cycle to the centre of the village rather than drive (perhaps at the same time helping towards resolving the parking situation),

### Proposed Action

**ISSUE:** Promotion of walking and cycling

**ACTION:** Community Council to encourage common interest groups to work together

### PLANNED OUTCOME:

Enhanced provision for walking and cycling

## Improving Communication Within the Community

### The Issues

There was considerable support for providing the community with more information about current and future events. The community mainly relies on informal notice boards, 'flyers', and the press to find out what is happening in the area. Once there was a free publication called the 'Osprey' which was distributed to householders and businesses but that no longer exists. More recently, the web site [www.enjoyAboyne.com](http://www.enjoyAboyne.com) was set up to be a one stop resource for all residents and tourists who wish to find out more information about the services and activities available in Aboyne.

Web sites have their part to play and, recognising the importance of this medium, the Community Council is developing its own web site to keep residents advised of its work and the issues it deals with. The Community Council is also about to replace its present small notice board on the wall of the Lloyd's/TSB bank building with a much larger one. Minutes of all meetings of the Community Council are available in the Deeside Library, in the Post Office and on Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership web site <http://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk>. In due course, these minutes will also be able to be seen on the Community Council's web site <http://www.middeesidecc.org/>.

Some residents suggested the re-introduction of the 'Osprey' or something similar as a way of keeping residents up-to-date and for a community notice board in the centre of the village. Both these suggestions are worthy as not everyone is able to access information online.

### Proposed Action

**ISSUE:** Community not being kept informed of what is happening in their area

**ACTION:** Community Council to encourage the creation of a Communications Group and facilitate meetings

### PLANNED OUTCOME:

Community much better informed

### Making It Happen

As was mentioned earlier, one of the purposes of a Community Action Plan is to make people think about how they can improve their community and where appropriate take action for themselves. The role of the Community Council is to act as a catalyst and support the efforts of the residents. It is also well placed to involve other bodies and organisations who are in a position, in some cases, to implement change and, in others, to provide help, advice and funding.

The quality and thoughtfulness of the responses from the survey indicate that there is an enthusiasm for the notion of making Aboyne an even better place to work and live. Encouragingly, there were residents who responded very positively to the question “What could you do to make these improvements happen” and their commitment will be very valuable as the process of implementation begins. It is planned to invite them to join one or other of the action groups which are to be formed and it will be critical to ensure that the voices of the young people in the village are heard too. Young people have a real contribution to make and their involvement at every step in the implementation process will add to its credibility and contribute towards its success.

However, all the actions which have been proposed will take time to bear fruit, but there are a number of issues that can be tackled right away by the Community Council. These are:

- Finding a workable solution to littering, particularly on the Green.
- Working with the police to find ways of minimising anti-social behaviour and vandalism as well as enhancing a police presence on the streets
- Identifying those places where branches overhang pavements and, in the first instance, encourage the owners to have them cut back
- Add to the number of flower planters located throughout the village

Nevertheless, while the Community Council can address these issues it is unrealistic to expect them to shoulder also the day-to-day task of taking forward the various actions in the Plan.

***The implementation of the Plan must be community led, and it is therefore critical that local people volunteer and step up to the mark to make it happen. If as many people as possible get involved the better our chances of turning wishes into reality.***

In the survey, someone commented “Aboyne is one of the greatest places on earth to live”.

The challenge now is to make it even better.



Guides planting tubs.



Shelter on the Green.



Welcome to Aboyne.

This booklet is one of a series produced by Local Rural Partnerships together with the community under the banner Making It Real.

The initiative is sponsored by Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership and Shell, and run by Aberdeenshire Community Economic Development Co-ordinators Forum. The aim is to provide community action plans in an attractive, easy to read, professionally printed format.

For most communities, the content of each community

plan is based on the results of Planning for Real® exercises carried out by the communities themselves, together with any other available reports. This process ensures that the plans are truly community-led.

This information can now guide the community and Community Planning Partners in drawing up detailed action plans to implement the top priorities as well as addressing the other issues which have been identified. For each priority or issue this will involve agreeing who should be involved, what resources will be needed and

target dates for completion. It is hoped that this process will be driven by representatives of the community with support – moral, technical and financial – from the relevant partners.

It is important that this booklet is seen by all concerned as an account of the community's views at the time of the latest consultation, and that it will have to be regularly reviewed and updated. As some projects are completed, other issues will arise and take their place in future versions of the community plan.

**Thanks are due to the community of Aboyne for the enthusiasm and commitment that they showed during the development of this plan and to our partners who supported us through the process.**

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