

The Auld Toon News

It's FREE!

Issue 18 - November 2013

The newsletter of the
Old Aberdeen
Community Council
mail@oacc.org.uk



Old Aberdeen Conservation Area

In this issue we take a look at our Conservation Area which is currently under review, along with all the other conservation areas in Aberdeen. The creation of the conservation area possibly saved the Spital and High Street from the same mentality that swept through so many towns in the 1950s and 1960s, clearing ancient properties (and many slums of course) in the name of progress and a fresh start after the war.

Is our conservation area still preserving and protecting our heritage?

The Old Aberdeen Conservation Area was created 45 years ago - what changes are needed to ensure that Old Aberdeen remains an attractive, living community for the next 45 years?

Go to page 3 to read more.....

King's Museum - a new start!

The university's King's Museum opened in the Old Aberdeen Town House at the end of September, displaying the special exhibition 'Nunalleq; the Yupiit and the Arctic World'. Previously located at 17 High Street, the museum's displays now occupy the ground floor of the Town House, with upper floors used by the museum for offices and meetings. This new highly visible venue is an excellent location for our changing displays that draw on the University's extensive and rich collections, particularly since the closure of Marischal Museum.

January will see a successor to Nunalleq, which will display some of our internationally important collections from Fiji. These are currently being studied by two projects, so the exhibition is also an opportunity to display the latest scholarship.

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On pages 4 and 5 we have tried to build up a picture of just how much of the local housing stock may now be under short-term let by looking at the number of HMO licences in the area.

We include an update on Seaton Park on **page 2** and main planning issues on **page 6**.



Finally, we would like to offer a (rather early) wish that all our readers, be you visitor, student or lifetime resident, have a very happy Christmas and New Year.

Do you find this newsletter hard to read? Drop a line to webadmin@oldaberdeen.org.uk for a large print edition.

Don't forget, the latest information can always be found on the web at www.oldaberdeen.org.uk.

Friends of Seaton Park - Update

The Steering Group are trying hard to expand the Friends beyond being expert weeders, mulchers and bulb planters, but have not managed to progress as much as we wished in our aim to start to improve the park, not just maintain it.

We had asked the Council estates department management to advise us of what they saw as their priorities, but as they have not had the time or resources to pull that together, we have decided to select the erection of information boards as our first major project. We would like to see maps of the park at each main entry, plus a few information boards inside the park; perhaps one about the history of Seaton House, another about our little engine (Mr Therm). Other subjects could include descriptions of the wildlife that can be seen in the park and the river and perhaps a guide to some of the trees and plants.

These boards are not cheap. A rough estimate was that each board could cost around £2000, though it might be a bit cheaper than that if we are buying several of the same design, or if we can design the artwork ourselves. The pictures alongside are just examples from various websites, but they give a good idea of what is possible.

Now, we would really like some help to get this moving!

- Firstly, are there any artists out there who could help design boards which are attractive and easy to understand?
- We also need someone to help us fund-raise; to talk to local companies who might be prepared to help, to fill in application forms to send to those organisations who are offering funds for

worthy community improvements and so on. We are not expecting anyone who has done this before, but that would of course be a great bonus! If you feel you could help, do please send us an email at seatonpark@oldaberdeen.org.uk, or talk to any Steering Group member.



By the time you read this, a big bulb planting session will probably already have begun as part of an Aberdeen wide 'Community Bulb Planting' initiative; we have a lot of bulbs on order!

The planting dates are set at:

Bluebell Wood, Saturday, 16th November, from 10 a.m. (meet on path behind St Machar)

Crocus Carpet, Sunday, 24th November, from 10 a.m. (meet by the fountain)

If you have already helped to plant some of them, thank you for your efforts which will be appreciated by everyone. Depending on how long it takes to get this newsletter circulated, there may well still be more to plant so do check our website at: www.seatonpark.oldaberdeen.org.uk, or look up our Facebook page for our remaining planting sessions - more help is always welcome and will be warmly welcomed.

Photo courtesy of The Osprey Company (www.ospreyco.com)

*Steph Kiltie
Chair - FOSP Steering Group*

Old Aberdeen Conservation Area

The Old Aberdeen Conservation Area is the oldest in the city having been created in 1968 - soon after the passing of legislation that first enabled the creation of conservation areas, though too late for many historic buildings within Old Aberdeen and the ancient route north from New Aberdeen which fell to the City Council's desire for shiny new concrete. Other conservation areas followed for other areas of the city.

The Aberdeen Local Development Plan 2012 commits the City Council to having a 'conservation area character appraisal' in place for all the Conservation Areas around the city. The Old Aberdeen Conservation Area Report was published in 1993 and is long out of print, but a version is available on the Council's web site:- click on 'C' at the top of the City Council's web site page, then 'Conservation', then 'Conservation Areas', then 'Old Aberdeen' and you will see the link for the report.

The intention to carry out a detailed review is supported by the Old Aberdeen Community Council as a lot has changed since that Area Report was published. What we have to ensure is that the Conservation Area designation should help to maintain and preserve this historic area for future generations, yet allow the area to move forward with the developments and improvements that a living community needs, provided that the developments are sensitive to the heritage and complement the architecture and purpose of this environment.

The following text is taken from the Council's 'Strategic Overview and Management Plan'; available on their conservation area web pages.:

A conservation area is defined in legislation as "an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance" (Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997). It embraces the quality and interest of an area as a whole, rather than individual buildings within it.

It is not only buildings that are of architectural or historic interest in a conservation area, but also the spaces between them such as the streets, open spaces and the public realm. All of these elements combine to create an area's special character. Planning is therefore directed at maintaining the integrity of an entire area and being mindful of the balance and relationships between the various component parts.

Under current legislation, conservation area designation automatically brings the following works under planning control:

- *Demolition of buildings;*
- *Removal of, or works to, trees;*
- *Development involving small house extensions, roof alterations, stone cleaning or painting of the exterior, provision of hard surfaces and additional control over satellite dishes and*
- *Minor works that are "permitted development" elsewhere such as replacement windows and doors*

Once adopted, the report will be used as a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications and other developments.

Local residents and property owners have a major role to play in protecting and enhancing the character and appearance of a conservation area by ensuring that properties are regularly maintained and original features retained. It is also important that they consider what impact their proposals may have on an area's wider character.

Over the last month, the Old Aberdeen Community Council and the Old Aberdeen Heritage Society have supported the Senior Planning Officer responsible for Conservation in the task of developing a character appraisal for Old Aberdeen, and other organisations, such as the University will have also provided input. The next stage will be the public consultation period where we will all have a chance to comment on the draft Character Appraisal document. Do look out for the consultation period in the new year, and do let the City Council hear your views. If you let the Old Aberdeen Community Council know your thoughts, we may well be able to support your views too. Some issues you might want to comment upon:

- Does the Conservation Area cover the right streets?
- Do you feel that the planning controls for a conservation area are too restrictive - or too soft?
- Do you feel Old Aberdeen is a stronger or weaker community than it was? If so why and what can we learn from this?

Rental accommodation in Old Aberdeen

For many hundreds of years, Old Aberdeen has been host to an ever-changing population of students and post-graduates and this inevitably puts pressure on the resources and longer term residents in and around the area. As the University has become larger, the pressures have inevitably increased and now with some 15,000 students (spread between Old Aberdeen and Foresterhill), there is concern that the pressure on accommodation is having a negative effect on our community.

This is certainly not just about students, more and more young people are finding house purchase impossible due to the ever increasing house prices in Aberdeen and so they also must seek rental accommodation where they can.

The rental market is made up of a wide range of accommodation types. There are purpose-built student accommodation blocks, many owned by the University but with an increasing number now being provided by independent companies specialising in this market. These are of course only available to students. There are very many small flats with one or two bedrooms being rented out throughout the area but of perhaps greater concern are the larger properties with three or four bedrooms being bought by investors for the buy-to-let market, effectively taking good quality affordable family houses out of the housing market. And there is also an increasing number of these larger properties which are being bought then extended, when planning approval is granted, to squeeze in much greater numbers. While this is all done in full compliance with Aberdeen City Council Planning regulations, these conversions can involve major structural modifications and the end result can be the conversion of a building that was once an attractive family home into a rabbit warren of meanly dimensioned rooms. These heavily modified buildings are effectively lost for ever as family homes.

There is no easy way to find out which properties are rental and which properties are privately owned except for one category - those identified as HMO properties.

HMO stands for 'House in Multiple Occupation'. In Scotland an HMO is defined as a property that is shared by 3 or more (adult) tenants who are unrelated. This might be:

- A house split into bedsits
- A house or flatshare where each tenant has their own tenancy agreement
- Students living in shared accommodation.

All HMO properties have to be licensed, primarily to ensure specific important safety features have been installed. So we have means of reviewing how many HMO properties are provided in an area and could, we suggest, provide a marker as to how intense the rental market is in Old Aberdeen.

The map on the right shows all the licensed HMO properties in the area, and also the student accommodation blocks.

In January 2012 new powers were introduced by the Scottish Government to allow HMO licensing authorities to control the distribution of HMOs where it considers that there is overprovision in a locality. Aberdeen Council undertook a consultation earlier this year and the Old Aberdeen Community Council urged the Council to make use of this opportunity to set limits on the numbers of HMO properties within a given area and thus take a small step towards stabilising the mix of accommodation within our community.

The Council Housing and Environment Committee, while acknowledging that there was heavy concentration around the two universities, ultimately recommended to 'continue to monitor policy' and to 'review the position of over-provision ... in 2016' - i.e. - to do nothing. (We have heard rumours of a review in a year's time, but 2016 is what was formally recorded in the meeting).

The Old Aberdeen Community Council is extremely disappointed in this outcome and fears for the long term viability of the area as a family-friendly community.

This map shows the distribution of student accommodation blocks around Old Aberdeen, plus all the HMO licensed properties. Note that we have only shown the HMO properties inside the community council area - there will be many more licensed properties in the adjoining streets.

Many students don't want to be stuck in halls of residence, they want to live in the community. But has Old Aberdeen reached saturation point?

x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x

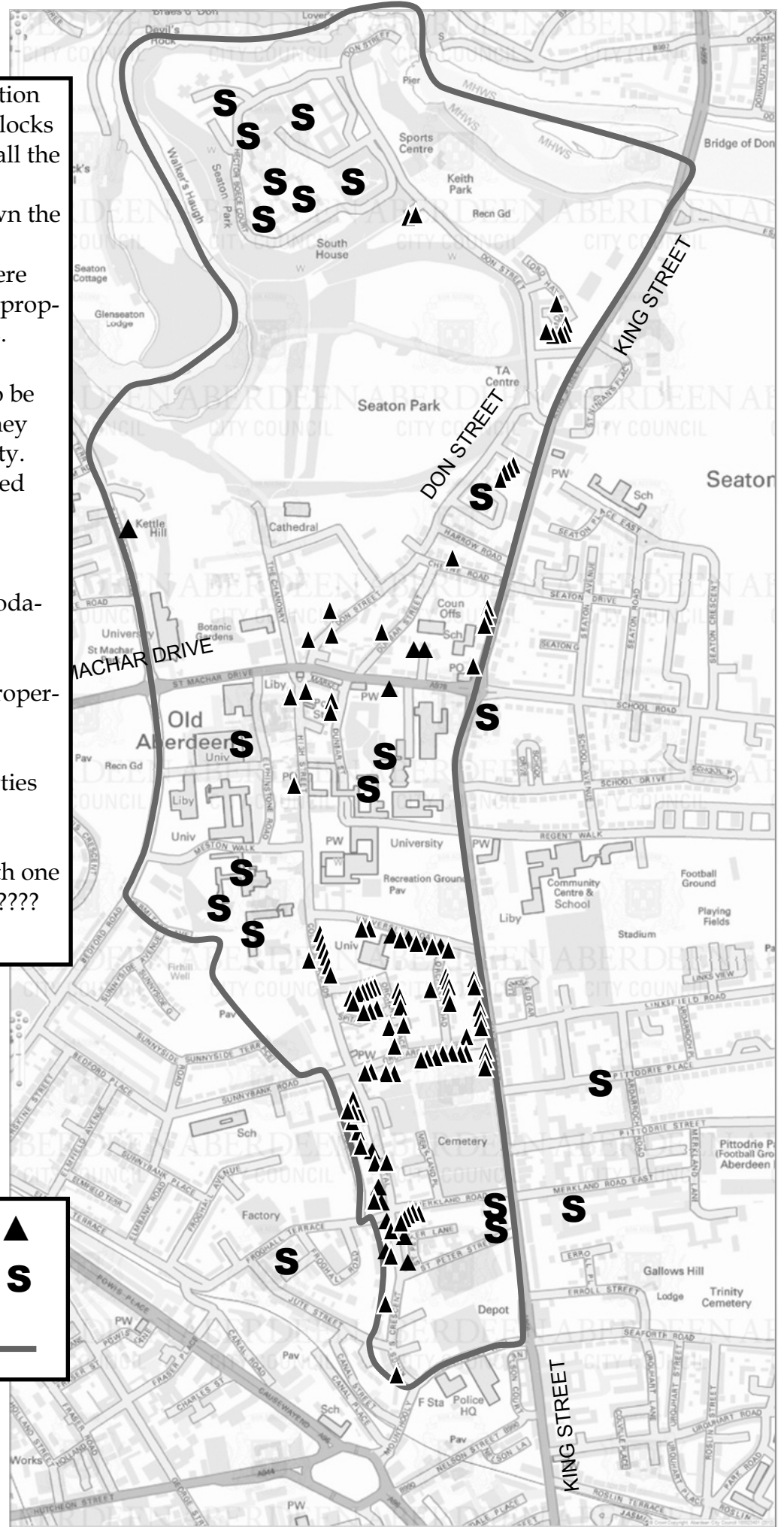
Number of student accommodation blocks.....18

Number of HMO licensed properties110

Number of *unlicensed* properties with 3 or more tenants??

Number of properties let with one or two tenants....who knows????

HMO properties: ▲
Student accommodation: S
Community Council boundary ———



Planning update

One of the important roles of the Community Council is to keep an eye on the planning applications that are submitted in our area. While the OACC has no wish to stifle development, we believe it is important that all developments should be sensitive to the use and style of the immediate surroundings. Proposals for properties within the Old Aberdeen Conservation Area should be sympathetic to that heritage.

During the last six months a number of applications have been considered, but these are the ones which are likely to be of most interest:-

Planning application	OACC position	Council decision
P131227 Change of use of disused public toilet block in Seaton Park into a Council staff Office/Depot	We are pleased to see this corner tidied up and better quality shelter provided for the gardeners	Approved
P131212 39-41 University Road. Application to extend property to rear and underground	Objected. This development, to create a property with some 13 bedrooms for letting is considered to be far beyond what is desirable for a domestic property.	Pending
P131192 The erection of two sculptures (retrospective) - Aberdeen University - near Elphinstone Road	Objected to the powerful lights which have been installed - cause glare for motorists and pedestrians, and general light pollution too. Chose not to formally comment on what many consider to be a rather ugly object.	Pending
P130846 Erection of a 'flagpole' shop sign outside Lidl on Kings St. Present sign is around 3m high, application is for a sign 7m high.	Objected. Existing sign is clearly visible; a 7m high 'flag' would set an unwelcome precedent.	Refused
P130875 On University grounds behind Meston Walk; a children's nursery with associated external play structures, upgrade of existing grassed courtyard and extended boundary fence.	No objection	Pending
P120946 34-36 St Peters St. Proposal to build a five-storey block of student flats. Original application in June 2012 was for 90 flats but this proposal was replaced by a revised layout with 100 flats. Part way through the consultation process, number was increased to 125 flats.	Student accommodation is encouraged in principle, as the only other option available to students is family housing converted to HMO use. However, this application is out of proportion to the area - 4 floors would be more acceptable.	Refused by full council. Applicant has appealed to Scottish Government. Decision by December?
P111465 Proposal to build a 28 apartment development at 22-24 St Peter's Street.	No objections made, though previous community council raised a number of concerns.	Approved

King's Museum - a new start!

Continued from page 1: The Pacific Collections Review is a partnership between the University of Aberdeen Museums, National Museums Scotland, Perth & Kinross Council Museums and Glasgow Museums, supported by the Museums Association and the Esmee Fairbairn Trust. Eve Haddow, the project curator, has started to study our collections – see the blog at <http://pacificcollectionsreview.wordpress.com/>. We are also working with the Fijian Arts project, an Arts & Humanities Research Council project based in the University of Cambridge and the University of East Anglia. Project staff have started to select objects and write texts for the exhibition that will open in the New Year. Subsequent exhibitions will continue our programme of displaying selections from our varied collections and involving academic staff and students in their curation. The exhibition that will open in June 2014 will be curated by students on the new MLitt in Museum Studies, most of whose classes are held in the Town House, who are taught by a combination of museum and academic staff. They have started to think about the exhibition, but we wait to see what they choose to do! All we know is that they have been given the idea of 'Victorian Value' to think about...

As these exhibitions will not tell visitors anything about the history of the Town House, the Burgh or the University, a small exhibit in the stairwell is being prepared to display some items associated with the Burgh, hopefully including the chain of the Provost of Old Aberdeen. The portrait of Provost Irvine that was restored a few years ago continues to hang on the first floor landing of the building he must have known well. We are now thinking about how best to interpret the ground floor cells that intrigue many visitors.

Associated with the development of the Town House to accommodate the museum, the former police station at 90 High Street has been converted to meet the needs of school groups. The museum's service for schools is very popular, with a wide range of topics designed to suit the Curriculum for Excellence, including Ancient Egypt, Vikings, Romans and Victorians. We also have an outreach service that is built around our recreation of a 17th century collector's cabinet. 90 High Street will also be used for adult events, with plans to build on the success of our annual 'Night at the Museum', which attracted about 700 people for an evening in May, to have more events that will involve students and others in the life of the museum. As well as taking part in events and attending the popular evening lecture programme, we are grateful to the many people who volunteer with the museum. With the new location, we are now looking for people who would be willing to welcome visitors to King's Museum. If you are interested, please look at our website for more information.

While we have been busy this summer with the flit to the Town House, work has been continuing with our project to enhance the Zoology Museum. Funded by the Scottish Government's Museum Recognition Capital Fund, this has already seen the museum redecorated, carpeted and computers removed from the bird gallery. Over the coming few weeks we will see some new display cases installed and improvements made to the lighting. Look out for details of the re-opening, scheduled to be during Universities Week in June 2014.

The museum staff look forward to getting know Old Aberdeen residents, and are always keen to discuss the museum, collections and what we do. Our improved website at www.abdn.ac.uk/museums is the best place to look to find out what we are doing, but please feel welcome just to drop in for a chat!

Neil Curtis, , Museum Curator And Tutor, Centre for Lifelong Learning

The driver behind this museum 'flit' was to provide suitable space for the Confucius Institute which has been invited to Old Aberdeen by the University.

Webadmin

Meet the Old Aberdeen Community Council: -

The Community Council can be contacted at: mail@oacc.org.uk, or speak to any of the members:

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Your Aberdeen Councillors

The Councillors for the Tillydrone, Seaton and Old Aberdeen ward and who represent the north end of Old Aberdeen are: -

Councillor Ross Grant

Councillor Ramsay Milne

Councillor Jim Noble

The George Street and Harbour ward serves the Spital end of our area and is represented by:

Councillor Andrew May

Councillor Jean Morrison

Councillor Nathan Morrison

See Aberdeen Council website for contact details: www.aberdeencity.gov.uk, then click on 'Council & Government'

Your MSPs

Aberdeen Central Constituency MSP:

Kevin Stewart

Regional MSPs for NorthEast Scotland:

Richard Baker Alex Johnstone

Lewis Macdonald Jenny Marra

Mark McDonald Alison McInnes

Nanette Milne

See the Scottish Parliament website for contact details:- www.scottish.parliament.uk/msps.

Join your Community Council: -

We are not at full capacity so we would love another two residents to help us better support the community we represent. The method of co-option is simple, but first why not come to a meeting and see what happens?

The Old Aberdeen Community Council

The Community Council meets (usually) on the third Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m., usually in the Old Aberdeen Townhouse but occasionally in Dunbar Street Hall:

Our next meetings: 19th November, December meeting will be on the 10th, then 21st January, 18th February, 18th March, 15th April, 20th May, 17th June 2004.

We will post the details on our web site, but if you are not sure, just drop us a line or talk to one of the OACC members. These are always public meetings and you will be very welcome, whether it is to raise a specific issue, or just to see what is going on.

Don't forget to check out our web-site at www.oldaberdeen.org.uk