

STONEHAVEN OPEN AIR POOL

FRIENDS
OF THE POOL
STONEHAVEN



Recruitment of a New Chair
September 2026

THE FRIENDS OF STONEHAVEN OPEN AIR POOL RECRUITMENT OF A NEW CHAIR

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CHAIR FRIENDS OF SOAP

ROLE AND DESIRABLE REQUIREMENTS

Chair

- As a Trustee, leads the Board, ensures good governance, manages Trustee meetings.
- Is the main legal signatory for grant applications, legal matters and Annual Report and Accounts
- Acts as the main liaison with Aberdeenshire Council.
- Plays an ambassadorial role hosting events, public speaking, media interviews and other such duties as required.
- Would not typically run day-to-day volunteer operations.

Experience / Skills

It would be desirable, but not essential, that a new Chair will have several of the following:

- An interest in swimming or pools
- An understanding of trustee responsibilities and the legal duties of charity trustees
- Experience in the voluntary, community, public or social enterprise sector, or equivalent business experience
- Experience of supporting volunteers
- An ability to help the charity set a clear vision, priorities and achievable plans
- Experience of chairing meetings
- Knowledge of how local authorities work
- Experience of public speaking and media
- Experience of building relationships

A BRIEF HISTORY OF STONEHAVEN OPEN AIR POOL (SOAP)

On the 29th of August 1933. The town clerk, JB Cunningham, decided that the people of Stonehaven would be given the opportunity to vote for the construction of a swimming pool and yachting and paddling pool.

This proposal had been put to the Town Council early in 1933 to consolidate Stonehaven as a prime holiday resort on Scotland's North East coast. Voting was held on the 6th of September 1933 and the proposal was carried by 656 votes to 539.

The new pool was to be 165 feet (50 metres) long and 60 feet (18.2) metres wide and the depth to vary from 2ft 6in (0.7m) to 9ft 6in (2.9m). The original material for construction was to be iron. But this was later changed to concrete.

The cost was the grand total of £9,529 and the project was completed in less than 9 months.

The opening ceremony, carried out by Malcolm Barclay-Harvey MP on June the 2nd 1934, was attended by 2,300 people who after queuing for several hours for admission, witnessed diving, swimming and a mannequin parade, as well as the official speeches.

The superintendent's report at the end of the season indicated the need for various modifications highlighted by customer comments. These alterations were made by the start of the 1935 season and involved a change to modern pool technologies, with water being circulated, filtered and disinfected in a plant room. The biggest difference, however, was a heating system!

As a result, attendances of bathers rocketed to 43,262, with 58,654 spectators attending over the season. A record of 3,000 people attended in one single day. This resulted in facilities being very overstretched, to the point of "people changing in every available outhouse". An extension was built on the gents changing room in time for the 1936 season.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the pool was closed before the end of the 1939 season but it did open in 1940 after considerable debate by the Council.

It was considered that keeping the pool open was good for local morale. Special concessionary rates were introduced for members of the armed forces. At the time, quite a number of British and Polish troops were stationed in the town.

The 1950s were an excellent decade with outstanding attendances. Records were regularly broken and, in 1955, 2,210 people attended the first weekend as the pool celebrated its 21st birthday.

The 60s and 70s saw the need for considerable work to the pool. Which was by then 30 to 40 years old. The old diving boards were partially demolished as safety became an issue. 1975 still proved to be an excellent season with 65,000 people, attending.

By the 1990s the pool was facing closure because of low attendance figures driven by the popularity of low-cost package holidays to the sun and high maintenance costs. In 1995, just 14,000 visitors were recorded. The pool was a huge drain on council resources and also needed considerable work carried out to bring it up to an acceptable standard.

In 1996 closure became a real threat and, in May of that year, a public meeting was held under the chairmanship of the late Alan Bain to start a campaign to save the pool. This led to the formation of the Friends of Stonehaven Open Air swimming pool. The pool was saved and the Friends signed a partnership agreement with the Council

Since that time, the Friends have not only raised funds for improvements, but have also worked tirelessly on the practicalities of making the pool fun colourful, pleasant place to swim, sunbathe and spend a day or two. The Friends, who are all volunteers, work in Partnership with Aberdeenshire Council (Live Life Aberdeenshire) who own and are responsible for the overall structure and day to day management of the pool.

Visitors from near and far seem to appreciate the effort as, post Covid, about 40,000 visits are made each summer. 2022 was a modern day record. 2021 14,000 (Covid restrictions); 2022 41,000; 2023 40,000 (very wet).

In 2018 The friends were awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

Before the 2023 season the local authority invested in the pool to refurbish the tank and secure it's future for the next 10-15 years.

2024 saw the 90th Anniversary of the pool marked by a Royal visit from The Princess Royal, an official opening by Olympian Hannah Miley and the first ever cold water swimming season.

In 2025 the pool hosted the British Ice Swimming Championships (IISA) for the first time and it is expected to host them again in 2028 and every 3 years thereafter.

FRIENDS OF STONEHAVEN OPEN AIR POOL

DRAFT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE (to be agreed at AGM)

The Friends have a classic charity governance model: the Board sets strategy and oversees regulatory and legal compliance while committees handle ongoing operational areas and volunteers deliver the work.

Structure

Chair

- Leads the board, ensures good governance, manages Trustee meetings
- Acts as the main liaison with Aberdeenshire Council
- Plays an ambassadorial role, hosting events, public speaking, media appearances and other such duties as required
- Would not typically run day-to-day volunteer operations

Trustees

- Focus on oversight, risk, safeguarding, finance, compliance with OSCR and other regulatory and legal matters

Sub-Committees (examples)

Operations & Maintenance Committee

- Coordinates volunteer maintenance work, ensures safety procedures. (This does not require to be a committee in the traditional sense of the word. It can be a 'working group')

Finance, Fundraising & Events Committee

- Plans and delivers events, manages volunteer teams.
- Oversees accounts, reporting, policies, risk register

Make Up of Board, Committees, Working Groups

Board: All Trustees including Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, who must be Trustees.

Posts appointed by the Trustees.

Others can attend by invitation.

Committee and Working Group members can be any Friend of the pool. Ideally committees would be chaired by Trustees, but it isn't essential.

Schedule

AGM

December

Board Meetings (In Person)

Last Monday of February, May, August, November

Finance, Fundraising and Events Committee

Last Monday of January, March, April, (May if required), June, July, September, October

Marketing Committee

1st Wednesday of month initially

Operations and Maintenance Working Group

As required

FRIENDS OF STONEHAVEN OPEN AIR POOL

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2025

At our 2024 AGM I reported that, despite it having been our 90th Anniversary, the summer had been a disappointing one but, as we look back on the summer of 2025, I am delighted to say that we saw a return to form.

You will recall that a combination of bad weather, a significant price increase and the abolition of the “low” season led to a drop in numbers from about 39,000 in 2023 to 30,000 in 2024.

Summer 2025 had much better weather; prices were frozen and the “low” season returned. And the swimmers returned too with official numbers being just shy of 37,000. Not the 39,000 of 2023, nor the 41,000 of 2022, but a big improvement. It might be simplistic to say that the 2024 price increases are responsible for the missing 2000 as the all-round economic situation is undoubtedly playing a role as well.

I should probably start with a quick review of the 24/25 cold water season, our first. Cold water swimming was the first “diversification” from our traditional season for a long time and was part of developing ideas on how to get more utility from the pool. It started in November, as reported at the last AGM and continued into 2025, attracting some 695 visitors, with 32% being over 60 years old and a large majority being women. Live Life Aberdeenshire said they would be happy with breaking even on the venture, which it did. The gratitude of those attending was something to behold and made freezing on the door worthwhile. The December water temperatures of 2-5 degrees were to have greater implications for the pool, of which more later in this report.

We have continued to raise funds to make significant improvements or renovations to the pool.

We started off the new season with very smart new front doors, funded by the Friends. They provide a secure entrance with a good fit which should ensure that our historic terrazzo flooring will now be protected from rainwater flooding in.

A new lane rope was provided as the old one had degraded and, most significantly, money was raised from the Scotland – Vattenfall Unlock Our Future Fund to carry out a lagging project that would enable water to be left on during the winter. That project is being completed as we meet. A big thank you to Kay Wood for all her work on that one and to Wendy Rudd and everyone else that has made applications over the year.

Our usual run of fundraising events continued, in the main, as normal, including a successful Bingo evening. A big thanks to Sheila Mclean and the team for their efforts. However, we had to cancel a couple of events. We seem to be having competition from other local events and facing the challenges created by cost of living issues. I wonder whether our audience is aging too. We have talked about doing fewer.

On Saturday 16th August we held a very important event, celebrating 30 years since the formation of the Friends of the Pool. All Friends and past and present workers were invited for an evening swim and barbecue. It was wonderful to see so many familiar faces who have given so much over the years to ensure the continued survival and success of our amazing pool. A fun evening was had by all and was enhanced by

great live music by Jack McPherson. Of course, there can't be a party without a cake and we were delighted that Rosalind was with us to cut it.

Moreen Anderson has done a fantastic job with the accounts and our battles with RBS and she will explain our situation shortly. Donations have been generous. Suffice to say that we are in a very healthy situation and probably a bit risk averse.

The spring and autumn work programmes were carried out in a timely and efficient manner and amounted to some 1,800 hours of voluntary input. I think we regularly underestimate what an extraordinary phenomenon this. When you add all of the other work done by the Friends, which now includes staffing the cold water sessions, for example, some 3-4,000 hours of effort are put into supporting the pool.

A huge vote of thanks to Chris Hall for his organisation of the technical work and all of the volunteers who gave of their time. It's a happy team that produces amazing results. On behalf of Chris, the Committee and myself, I'd like to thank a few individuals for their efforts to support us: Graham Brownie, Bruce Farquhar and Bill Allan for their practical ideas and skills; all Friends for their commitment, hard work, good humour and the occasional tray-bake; Ken Whittaker (Whittaker Engineering) for donating his staff and materials to build and install the sign in Baird Park; Gordon Reid (ISS) for donating his time to test all our Portable Electrical Equipment; Andy Harding, who donated his time to test our Sound System; and, Ivan Groundwater for supplying a forklift.

Amidst all of the extracurricular stuff it is easy to forget that our overarching purpose is to help create an enjoyable summer for thousands and, as I mentioned at the start, it certainly was. Hannah Miley was good enough to kick things off for a second season running and the Friends, through funding and volunteering, continued to enhance people's experiences. The volunteering element of our work continues to expand, and the Moonlight Swims are now pretty much staffed by volunteers. The DJ also continues to be funded by us, which is just one example of the added value that we contribute to the great summer day or night out.

The season ended with another diversification... Doggie Swimming. I won't pretend that it didn't split opinion! However, we are very far from the first Lido to do it (I think I first heard of it from Peterborough Lido three years ago) and there is no way that LLA would allow people to get into water that was unsanitary. In fact, the staff were pretty upset by the implication that they might. I'm not a doggie person and wouldn't go swimming with them myself, I hasten to add, but there have been no problems with water quality since.

Importantly it was a success. It sold out in minutes, took in £3,000 and realised a profit of almost £2,300. And that's a contribution to the pool's bottom line. Next year there will probably be 2 or 3 days of Doggie Swims.

As in previous years, the Friends' volunteers carried out a survey of visitors during the summer season. Again, it showed that the public are very happy with the pool and appreciate its unique art deco appearance. They like that it is a well maintained, clean, safe environment at which to swim and enjoy their day. There were a few areas which were highlighted, some of which we can work on, others that we can't. A big thanks to Helen Rowbotham for co-ordinating the survey and Philip Dean, Mary Gardner, Kay Wood and Gill Walker for the legwork.

All the activities above have continued to raise the profile of the pool both nationally within the swimming community and the media. This led to SOAP being nominated in the Seaside Heritage Network's Bucket and Spade Awards that celebrate the UK's seaside heritage. We came third, which was great. Although the winner was an ice cream in Redcar!

I mentioned earlier our water temperatures in December last year. Well people were watching and the ambition that we had to bring the GB Ice Swimming Championships to Stonehaven was fulfilled rather faster than we anticipated and what a weekend it was. SOAP welcomed around 150 competitors from 15 countries to our beautiful pool. There were visitors from Australia, Canada, Ecuador, Greece and many other European countries. The atmosphere was amazing. Everyone was so friendly and enthusiastic, and they all loved our pool. If there was a downside, it was that the water temperature needed to be below 5 degrees for any records broken to be recognized. Unfortunately, the warm spell during the week before meant that it was just over 6 degrees. However, they will be back in 2028, when we'll just have to hope for a timely cold spell! Many thanks to all who volunteered and came along to spectate, making it a very memorable weekend. There is the possibility that the European Championships will come here too, an altogether bigger event.

Finally, I am now entering my 5th year as Chair and will be standing down at the next AGM in December. I will do everything I can to support this wonderful group this year, but I am 70 next week and not able to give as much time to this as I should, so it will be time for someone else to take over. I hope I will be able to continue supporting the Friends in various ways.

TIMELINE AND PROCESS

If you are interested in being the next Chair of the Friends of Stonehaven Open Air Pool you are requested, in the first instance, to contact Edel Harris, one of the Trustees, to arrange a time for an informal conversation.

Edel is available on edelharris@outlook.com .

Applications should be submitted, to the same email address, by **Friday, October 16th at 17.00.**

Applications should include a CV, or equivalent, and a covering letter explaining why you would want to carry out the role and what you think you might bring to it.

Trustees will shortlist the following week and interviews will be carried out on **w/c 2nd November in Stonehaven.**