

Spurtle



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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

PRAYING FOR AN ANGEL

Contrary to a report in last month's *Herald*, the Mansfield Traquair Centre is not up for sale. Instead, the Mansfield Traquair Trust seeks a long-term leaseholder for when the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations' tenancy ends in June this year.

The A-listed Rowand Anderson-designed former church, built in 1895 and restored/converted in 2002, comprises a 689m² venue/kitchen, and 800m² at mezzanine and ground-floor levels.

The Trust and Friends of the MTC will continue to maintain Phoebe Traquair's murals and hold regular open days. However, until an income stream is provided by some new tenant or tenants, observers will fear for the building's long-term future.



HEARTS RACE ON CROALL PLACE



Image: Courtesy of M. Dickie.

On 14 February, passers-by were intrigued to find an excited crowd of 'well-turned out ladies', mostly of East Asian heritage, gathering close to the Leith Walk Police Box. Our reporter on the ground discovered they had met below Croall PI's digital advertising board to enjoy an appearance by the fictional heartthrob Syllus. This devilishly attractive character – slim, toned, silver-haired, red-eyed and morally ambiguous – features in Chinese computer dating game *Love and Deepspace* [bit.ly/LandDs]. He evokes breathless adoration among fans, and it was one or more of these self-styled 'kittens' who had arranged for his unofficial screen debut in Spurtleshire. The game's website promises players '3D interactions' and the chance to 'Do what your heart desires from various angles', experiences which until now most locals have tended to reserve for community council meetings.

POWDERHALL A MASSIVE MISTAKE

On 6 Feb, Cllr Cameron, Convener of the Housing, Homelessness and Fair Work Cmte answered questions from Cllr Caldwell (Ward 12). In them, she clarified that the decision to withdraw the planning application for affordable and social-rent housing on the former Powderhall Waste Transfer Station site (Issue 347) was taken by the Development and Regeneration team within Sustainable Development (Place).

The move came after the Planning Service advised that the design was likely to be refused on the grounds of unacceptable height and massing. There is as yet no date for submitting a fresh proposal. *Spurtle* finds it hard to understand why Council experts did not have this conversation before submitting the application.

Cllr Cameron continued, 'The Council remains committed to completing and opening the Powderhall Stables Block, starting the construction of the Early Years facility and the wheelchair-accessible affordable housing on the Bowling Green site, and continuing with funding applications and delivery of the wider public realm and junction improvements.'

ACTIVE TRAVELLERS HAIL SWAILS

Work began last month to address long-standing drainage problems in King George V Park.

For decades, the path beside the southern boundary of Scotland Yard (National Cycle Network Route 75) has flooded after even moderate rain. The underground crates installed on this section have not coped.

Now, in a project promoted by the Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust, funded by Sustrans and agreed with the Council, the level of the path has been raised. This has created 'natural swails' in the adjacent ground where water can run off and soak away.

ELGT has been partnering the Council to develop greenspace and play-park improvements in the area, and it was during consultation about this that locals repeated their wish to reduce ponding here. Pedestrians and cyclists we've spoken to have welcomed the development.

In other bog news, the Water of Leith Conservation Trust has secured funds from Paths for All (Scotland's national walking charity) to upgrade the plowtery tunnel under the railway by



Redbraes Weir. WoLCT expects to complete improved drainage, new surfacing and the addition of a handrail by the end of this month.

Susdrain defines swails as 'shallow, broad and vegetated channels designed to store and/or convey runoff and remove pollutants'. They are relatively cheap to install and maintain, but their effect here on adjacent trees remains to be seen.

Briefly



At a time when so many people shout first and think afterwards, it comes as a pleasure to encounter the occasional **still small voice of civility**. We thank reader Sam Murray, who photographed this polite notice on a recent **journey through Leith**.

The British Medical Association's plan to create level access at the front of its Scottish HQ at **14 Queen St** will not go ahead (24/05379/FUL). Officials said the proposed new double door through an extended window bay and a **platform bridge crossing the basement area** would have an unacceptable impact on the character of the A-listed building and on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Police Scotland have released figures for the number of **Drink and Drug Driving offences** across the country between 1 Dec 2024 and 19 Jan 2025. **By Division:** Greater Glasgow (198), Lanarkshire (191), North East (156), Highlands & Islands (145), Ayrshire (131), **Edinburgh City** (101), Lothian & Scottish Borders (83), Tayside (79), Fife (77), Argyll & W Dunbartonshire (65), Forth Valley (55), Dumfries & Galloway (54), Renfrewshire & Inverclyde (32). It is not clear to what extent the figures reflect **population sizes, police resources and number of vehicle users**. However, in most areas, drug-related offences exceeded alcohol-related ones.

Word reaches us that drug dealing on **Bellevue Rd** – a problem before Christmas – plummeted after an individual was issued with an ultimatum by their landlord. Meanwhile, obvious street dealing on foot, by car and electric scooter has been observed on **Heriot Hill Ter, Green St, Melgund Ter., E. Claremont St and Claremont Grove**. The situation is being monitored.

Dunpark (Edinburgh) Ltd, the property agency occupying **1-1a Abercromby PI**, proposes to retain office space here for itself and create **four 1-bdrm and one 2-bdrm flats** (25/00765/LBC). The residential units would suit slim people in tight-fitting clothes with no cat. The outside appearance of the property would not change.

Residents in the 345 flats at **Shrubhill Walk** are obliged to participate in a gas-fired district heating system. They've been alarmed to learn that they have no protection under the **Ofgem price cap** on energy prices, and have found their fuel bills rising alarmingly this autumn and winter. **Some now struggle to pay**. With the support of Leith Central Community Council, their concerns have been shared in a letter to board members of the developer **Places for People**. We detail the full story, along with PfP's response to *Spurtle's* separate lines of enquiry, on our website on 1 Mar.

Room for some improvements, no need for others

The New Town & Broughton Community Council has objected to aspects of a Council proposal to retain pandemic-related Spaces for People measures introduced between Canonmills and Broughton St in 2021.

NTBCC says some of the changes are now unnecessary or unhelpful, while useful others should be retained on a permanent basis instead of under an Experimental Traffic Order.

It criticises Council vagueness about the reasons for measures and the lack of monitoring to gauge their effectiveness. Many of the plans showing existing ETRO arrangements are incomplete.

It says additional community-generated suggestions have been ignored. You can read NTBCC's detailed objections at [bit.ly/41pXl8Q].



Tactile paving – Council feels change would be unhelpful

Transport & Environment Cmte members have considered a report on the 'City Centre West to East Link [CCWEL] and Street Improvements Project and Continuous Footway Monitoring'.

At the behest of Ward 12's Cllr Caldwell, Cllr Dijkstra-Downie asked if – given issues with the placing of tactile markings raised in the report, and at an Edinburgh Access Panel meeting, and at a previous Trams to Newhaven deputation from a Leith Walk resident – the next iteration of Edinburgh's Street Design Guidance would reflect the concerns of blind and partially sighted communities.

An official replied that current ESDG does not recommend tactile paving at the edge of sideroads with continuous footways as it would undermine the message to drivers that they should cede priority to pedestrians (as required by the Highway Code).

Monitoring of such sites had shown 10% of drivers ceding priority before implementation and 60–80% doing so after it. There were therefore no plans to change this aspect of the guidelines. However, at a few very busy locations, use of continuous footways was under review.

In answer to a question from Cllr Booth (Ward 13), the same official said monitoring showed minimal (1%) conflict between pedestrians and cyclists around floating bus stops at the busiest times and locations. Critical findings by Living Streets were based on far more hectic conditions in London.

To our knowledge, blind and partially sighted pedestrians in Leith Walk ward remain sceptical.



Five-storey extension flawed

Leith Central Community Council has made detailed criticisms of plans to add 20 bedrooms to purpose-built student accommodation at 8 Middlefield (24/02439/FUL).

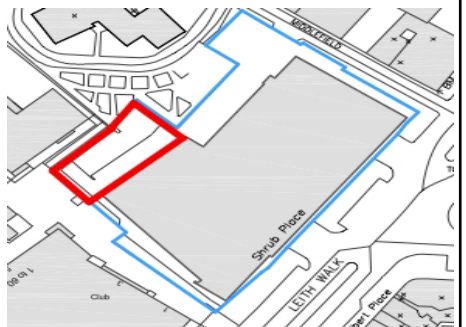
It says the proposed extension is not far enough away (less than 10m) from nearby windows and would have a profoundly negative effect on neighbours' outlook and quality of life.

The increase in a transient population here would harm the Leith Walk community, which already has an excessive concentration of students. The proposal, it says, would reduce the amount of open space for local residents and fail to create or contribute to a sense of place.

In technical terms, the application lacks daylight analysis, is vague about the effect on neighbouring flats and provides insufficient detail about refuse and recycling facilities and sustainable drainage. Site plans and drawings are confusingly rendered, miss important details, and are not always accessible from the Council's Planning Portal.

In general terms, LCCC worries that shifting boundary lines and piecemeal extensions to existing PBSA projects may allow developers to avoid providing the required minimum of 50% residential floor area for sites exceeding 0.25 ha.

At the time of writing, the proposal had received 198 objections and one message of support.



Success for locals who saw red

Councillors on the Development Management Sub-Cmte last month refused planning consent for a proposed red-brick and zinc, 19-unit, flatted development at 21 McDonald Pl (24/03104/FUL). Some 91 locals opposed the plans.

Although the site is suitable for residential development, officials recommended refusal because the design did not provide a minimum of 20% of units with 3 or more bedrooms for larger families.

They said its height, scale and massing (4 storeys) would harm the outlook of neighbouring houses and have an overbearing impact on them.

It would not, they argued, provide a 'robust and comprehensive' landscape setting or a positive effect on biodiversity. There was also an insufficient quantity and mixture of cycle parking spaces.

The rejected scheme, by Staran Architects for MCD Homes Ltd, had already been revised to omit a fifth floor and detached work pods, and to rearrange cycle parking and refuse storage.

Staran's design (for a different client) to build a 4-storey block here was approved in 2016.



Briefly



On 24 Jan, **Storm Éowyn** resulted in the Botanics losing 15 of its trees, including the tallest (a **150-year-old Himalayan cedar**). A further 27 trees were damaged along with 80 percent of the Front Range Glasshouses and research houses. RBGE has **launched an appeal** to help fund repairs here and at its Benmore, Dawyck and Logan sites [bit.ly/StEoAp]. Roof damage was visible across Broughton after the storm, not least at the 51st Division's W Annandale St garage.

Due to resurfacing work on **North Bridge**, there will be no access to it for traffic heading towards Broughton until **early Apr**. Expect snarl-ups and snarling.

New Town & Broughton Community Council has advised Transport & Environment Cmte members not to introduce **temporary cycle routes** on city-centre streets until final decisions are reached about the **George St and New Town revamp**. Changes to Charlotte Sq, Queen, Young, Hill and Thistle Sts would **jeopardise pedestrians' and cyclists' safety**, says NTBCC, and risk wasting money. It says the proposals appear rushed, poorly planned, and in some cases contrary to heritage standards and the travel hierarchy.

Rodney St, Pilrig St, Inverleith Ter, Arboretum Pl and Abercromby Pl are among 76 Edinburgh locations where the Council finds average free-flow traffic speeds **exceed normal tolerance**. Speed-reduction measures will follow as part of the **Road Safety Delivery Programme (2025/26)** and, unless TROs are required, will be put in place next financial year. In *Spurtle's* experience, vocalising support for 20mph speed restrictions exceeds the normal tolerance of most Edinburgh taxi drivers.

Enabling works have now cleared the site behind **36 St Andrew Sq**. If IMPACT Scotland accepts Balfour Beatty's tender, construction of the new 1k-seat **Dunard Centre** concert hall – likened by some to a Tunnock's Tea Cake clenched between buttocks – will begin soon and continue until summer 2028. During the financial year 2023–24, IMPACT (the charity which oversees the DC's **creation, development and running**) raised funds of £30.28m, spent £7.22m (for the most part on capital costs associated with preparation for main construction) and carried forward reserves of £31.91m.

Edinburgh Council is consulting on whether to allow cyclists to ride from east to west along the otherwise one-way **Circus Lane**. This is an entirely theoretical exercise as Instagram tourists filming themselves in identical poses at the same spots of 'Secret Edinburgh' render the carriageway here impassable.

Fuel deliveries linked to Lothian Buses noise

New video footage taken by locals establishes a link between disruptive HGV traffic on E London St and the operations of Lothian Buses.

For the last six years, residents have complained about their sleep being disrupted by out-of-service buses and HGVs using the uneven setted carriageway between the hours of 11.00pm and 7.00am.

But fresh evidence – filmed in January and available here [bit.ly/bdtnkr1] and [bit.ly/bdtnkr2] – for the first time shows that at least some of the disturbing HGV traffic comprises early-morning fuel deliveries to Lothian Buses' Annandale St depot.

The fuel tanker was observed arriving on E London St at around 5.30am, then waiting near the Italian Consulate before entering the depot at 6.00am. It left by the same route just before 7.00am. A similar pattern has been noted on other occasions.

In Issue 347, we reported on an independent acoustic report commissioned by residents into the level of noise experienced along E London St at night. Following additional observations since, that report has been supplemented by consultants Sharps Redmore in terms which establish the probable effect on sleep of nighttime movement by buses and fuel tankers. You can read it in full on our website from 1 Mar.

Scandal-hit Council invites independent scrutiny

Serious allegations last year about the behaviour of then Council Leader Cllr Cammy Day led to a police investigation which is now underway. Councillors last month agreed to commission their own independent review into Council policies and procedures.

The idea is to: check whether Council procedures were followed; identify gaps which could have allowed bad behaviour to occur and may still be present; suggest procedural improvements; consider complaints made against any elected member since 2003; clarify whether any complaints against Cllr Day were made to the 2021 Tanner Inquiry on whistleblowing; investigate possible leaks of Council information to the press. Councillors, officials and the public are eligible to inform the report.

Kevin Dunion, OBE, will lead the review. He is a well-respected and experienced public servant who has worked for the Standards Commission and Scottish Govt concerning ethical standards and propriety of elected members.

Dunion has already started and aims to present findings in May. However, that target date could be extended if necessary.

'Changing Greenland'

A review of Geoffrey Williamson's new book, condensed by AM from the Scotsman, 24 Dec 1953:—Many people must have had their curiosity aroused by the reports of developments in Greenland, and been baffled by the difficulty of finding authentic and up-to-date information about this great Arctic island.

The end of an economy based on the all-providing seal, administrative changes under the Danish Crown, and the startling importance which Greenland has gained both in air strategy and inter-continental travel, have brought it prominently before the newspaper reader in recent years.

It is a remarkable story of early settlement, missionary endeavour, exploration against formidable odds, and, finally, what Mr Williamson calls the 'ultra-rapid transition' from the Stone Age to the age of supersonics'.

The pace of Mr Williamson's narrative almost makes the reader forget that Greenland's 'march of progress' has been in the main haphazard. The war hastened the process, but the searching scrutiny to which every aspect of Danish rule in Greenland had been subjected in the previous decade provides a key to some of the 'hustle' in the present 15 years plan. The dispute with Norway over sovereignty, for example, brought the whole history and economics of the country into the field of controversy, and eventually before The Hague Court itself.

Mr Williamson has produced a book which will enable English-speaking people here—and, it is to be hoped, in America—to follow events in Greenland with sympathy and understanding. *For a modern perspective, see [bit.ly/grnlnfdfr].*



Image: patano, Wikimedia Commons.

Moreover ...





In the first year of **Edinburgh's pavement parking ban**, pavement parking, dropped kerb parking and double-parking offences were reported on 1,372 Edinburgh streets. Of these, **E London St** was the 2nd worst with 184 (PP), 6 (DKP) and 11 (DP); **Annandale St La** was the 10th worst with 103 (PP); **Broughton Rd** was the 38th worst with 1 (PP), 1 (DKP) and 43 (DP). In total, **Greater Spurtleshire** streets accounted for 8 of the worst 100 streets across the capital. However, we believe these figures don't match the reality. On **Elm Row**, for example, pavement parking by commercial and private vehicles is always evident during trading hours, but only 34 instances were recorded. There are **competing theories** about why parking attendants' activity here does not match the scale of the problem, some of which we would be **unwise to publish**. In the ban's first year, 8,394 penalty charge notices were issued. **This raised £325,369.11**, comprising: 5,753 PCNs x £50; 700 x £100; 151 x £150; 425 cancelled/written off; 1,267 not yet paid. Income raised is reserved for helping the Council's **local transport strategy, off-street parking, public transport or road-improvement projects**. For those interested in such things, £325k would be enough to buy you about two-thirds of a **double-decker electric bus** or – as part of a planned programme of repairs – fill **5.7k of Edinburgh's 30.7k potholes**.

Responding to Edinburgh Council's draft document on improving the **'Waverley Valley'**, New Town & Broughton CC says it's hardly a strategy since it lacks any coherent vision beyond **paving stones, benches and new planters**. It doesn't adequately address how to replace Princes St's failing retail with **desirable alternatives**, or how to refurbish the many dilapidated buildings on Edinburgh's 'premier thoroughfare'. Any discussion of **Waverley Station** is irrelevant since Network Rail will do pretty much whatever it pleases. Overall, the CEC draft suggests a lack of imagination and expertise, says NTBCC. It should be **set aside and started again**. Apart from that, it was fine.

Spurtle shares widespread concern at the **deteriorating state** of social-media platform X. We are alarmed by the increasing frequency of **hateful extremism** there, and dismayed by the infrequency of **rational debate**. However, we are reluctant to surrender our quiet acre and will continue to engage sane voices when we encounter them. **Readers are reminded** that *Spurtle* also spreads joy, fairy dust and occasional shafts of improving snarkiness on BlueSky. **Our fragrant abode** there is spurtle.bsky.social.

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I hold monthly Help & Advice Surgeries.

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LEITH CENTRAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL



Will you take a leading role in local democracy?

Are you interested in representing locals' views to City of Edinburgh Council, other public bodies and private agencies in this area?

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