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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

November 2026

No 367

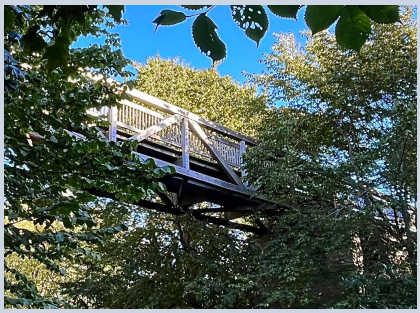
Tel: 07455 770474

spurtle@hotmail.co.uk

LOCALS PAN COUNCIL OVER POWDERHALL FOOTBRIDGE

Edinburgh Council last month issued a Briefing Note on Powderhall Footbridge and the reasons for its closure. We shared and summarised it at length online here [bit.ly/PHBBfNt].

It provided a description of worsening cracks (first observed in 2017) and gave a tentative explanation for their appearance and implications. To provide a new bridge, it estimated the combined cost of demolition, supply, installation and utility diversions and contingency at £2.2m. This could not be achieved before 2028.



While claiming that the Powderhall Footbridge had been designed in accordance with the 'standards and engineering knowledge applicable at the time', the Brief also mentioned 14 similar timber bridges failing across the UK and Ireland since 2020.

At a highly critical meeting on 19 Oct [bit.ly/panCEC], Leith Central and Broughton & New Town Community Councils resolved to make joint representations to officials and an in-person deputation to the Transport & Environment Cmte on 12 Nov.

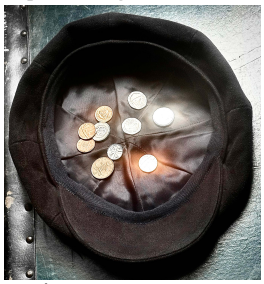
More questions than answers

The following issues are among those variously raised by community councils, residents, the *Spurtle* and readers:

- Are the design and construction of timber bridges more reliable today than in 2009?
- Was Powderhall Footbridge built in accordance with the design? Who checked this? Is today's checking process robust?
- Will a warranty be secured for any new structure here?
- Was the process of engineering inspections here truly in line with standards set out in the *Design Manual for Bridges and Structures*? Were officials suitably qualified?
- Why would the Council absorb costs for Scottish Power and City Fibre?
- How was the £2.2m cost estimate arrived at?
- Why have the value and use of the bridge not been formally assessed?
- Have all options for a temporary repair or replacement been exhausted?

Officials will present a Business Bulletin detailing progress this month. Among elected members, Cllr Caldwell (Ward 11) continues to lead the hunt for solutions.

If you haven't got a penny, a ha'penny will do …



Now in its 32nd year, the *Broughton Spurtle* continues to fund its hyperlocal reporting through advertisements and the generosity of readers. *Spurtle* team members don't get paid – the money we raise goes towards production costs, venue hire (hustings) and occasional modest contributions to local good causes.

Annual subscriptions provide us with financial ballast in choppy waters, help to keep us editorially independent, and maintain our connection to a loyal core of knowledgeable friends on whom we can depend for feedback, ideas and sometimes advice.

We suggest a minimum donation of £16. That gets a paper copy hand-delivered to your door if you want one. For £26, we'll post a copy to the address of your choice. We're grateful to receive greater and smaller sums so long as we cover our costs.

Please send your cheque (made payable to Spurtle) to our postbox on Broughton St (address on back page). Alternatively, for electronic payments, our bank details are unchanged — contact us at spurtle@hotmail.co.uk if required, for a note of them. Thank you!—*Ed.*

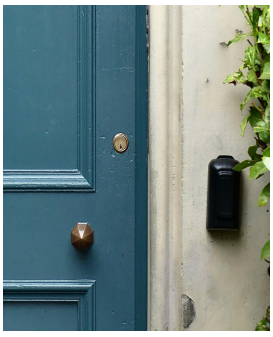
SHAMBOLIC LACK OF DETAIL

Figures seen by Leith Central Community Council suggest nearly 70% (4,408) of Edinburgh's 6,307 Airbnb hosts do not display a Council registration number online.

The figures come from a reputable analysis platform, Inside Airbnb, which scrapes data from the STL giant's official website and shares it. Edinburgh-specific details appear at [bit.ly/stlEFRPB].

Missing registration numbers could be due to oversights or because hosts are operating without a licence. Either way, potential customers cannot tell from the listings whether the properties are properly licensed and safety-compliant.

Unregistered operators don't pay for a licence or contribute to the Visitor Levy. They can undercut legitimate operators, and some reinvest profits to grow their businesses. Inside Airbnb says 54.1% of Edinburgh hosts have multiple listings.



Shocking

One Leith Central member described the situation as 'an absolute shocking shambles', and the community council is writing to officials demanding improved enforcement and continued lobbying of the Scottish Govt for meaningful reform, including more stringent penalties.

At present there is conflicting feedback from officials about evidence levels required for prosecutions to go ahead. Can informants request anonymity? Are witness statements from guests needed or will digital evidence suffice? No one seems sure.

In the meantime, an easy first step would be for Airbnb to take down online listings which don't display a valid registration number. Legitimate operators, customers, Council and residents would all benefit.

TIME TO PLUG PLANNING GAP?

One of the difficulties individuals and organisations have in resisting the spread of apart-hotels lies in the way they are defined. In Planning terms, they are neither Class 7 Hotels nor Class 9 Residential. Furthermore, where 5 or more serviced apartments are clustered, there is no requirement for them to be licensed as short-term lets.

Under provisions of the National Planning Framework 4, local authorities do not have legal authority to ban any particular kind of development. However, in drafting its City Plan 2040 (Issue 365), Edinburgh Council could in theory set such high standards for their construction that they become financially unattractive to developers. Similar rules could be formulated for purpose-built student accommodation. See [bit.ly/SpSTLwot].

Briefly



Unsightly green safety netting on the **Papermill Wynd chimney** was removed last month. A local rumour suggests it is being replaced by invisible red netting. If that is indeed the case, we have yet to see any evidence of it. *Spurtle* has approached Northern Steeplejacks for comment. The **B-listed stack** (comprising a square base, polygonal stalk and ribbed angles with 3 varying stages of decorative blind arcading towards the top) originally served the 19th-century **Bowershall Mills**.

STOP PRESS:—Officials closed the Kinauld Tan Works Footbridge across the Water of Leith (connecting Currie and Balerno) on 22 Oct. Given also the recent closure of Powderhall Footbridge, Edinburgh Greens Transport spokesperson **Cllr Booth** (Ward 13) says the situation 'raises serious questions about whether this council administration is doing enough to ensure our vital network of pedestrian and cycle bridges is being given the maintenance and inspection it deserves'.

The Edinburgh Bike Coop on **Rodney St** closed last month after the company went into administration. 'Heartbroken' managing director **Alan Nestor** blamed 'rising costs, a challenging economy and a very difficult market'. Outlets in **Bruntsfield** and Newcastle, and Giant stores at **Hamilton Pl** and **Stirling** continue to trade. Signs in the windows of the empty Rodney St shop point those seeking bike sales or repairs to the nearby but unrelated Substance Cycles at **6A Montagu Ter.**

Partial road closures occurred in mid-Oct during routine maintenance of the Waste Water Pumping Station poower cable between **Bellevue Rd** and **McDonald Pl.**

Dundee-based Kerrs Hart Street Ltd has applied to change the use of **17B Hart St** from private sauna to 3-bdrm short-term let. The applicant says this new venture would not increase the number of visitor comings and goings associated with the basement property's **established commercial use**. Potentially, thus ends a Hart St association dating back to at least the 1920s, when flats here operated in discreet business relationships with the Kosmo Club on **Swinton Row** (Issue 223).

Sòlas Restaurant & Bistro is opening at **52 Rodney St**, promising a new space 'where great food, warm moments and good company come together'. Its **BYOB policy** will bring solace to many.

Merkur Slots has applied to open a 24-hr adult gaming centre in the former betting shop at **21–22 Crighton Pl.** In its Health Impact Assessment, Merkur concedes that the premises 'may be near or in an area of relative deprivation' but asserts that 'Staff are aware of the importance of social responsibility and are trained to advise customers on gambling responsibly and the identification of potential gambling harm.' **Leith Central Community Council** says the business would detract from residential amenity in the conservation area and not support **National Planning Framework** aspirations for lifelong wellbeing, active lifestyles or social inclusion.

Forth Street apart-hotel gets green light

Councillors on the Development Management Subcmte voted unanimously in Sept to consent Limetree's plans for a change of use from offices at 16–26 Forth St and redevelopment as apart-hotel accommodation (26/00661/LBC).

Representatives of the Proprietors Assoc for 16 Union St, Picardy Residents Assoc, New Town & Broughton Community Council and Cllrs MacFarlane and Mowat (Ward 11) made presentations.

PA16 feared increased vehicle movements in the narrow rear lane on which their main entrance is situated and to which they have right of access. Limetree denied any such increase would occur, a position which a Transport official supported.

Picardy Residents Assoc said 74 locals had objected, in particular to an overlarge and incongruous new extension at the back and servicing arrangements. The development would further unbalance visitor/resident numbers, to the detriment of community and housing availability. PA also highlighted Historic Environment Scotland and Edinburgh World Heritage reservations.

Hierarchy and hand-wringing

NTBCC complimented locals' well-argued objections, which officials had discounted without sufficient explanation. It said the extension was a heritage loss to the area and repeated EWH's objections to loss of trees and hierarchical building patterns. Loss of residential character was a major issue. The developer had not fully explained non-viability of alternative uses. NTBCC had doubts about future-proofing and adaptability.

Subcmte members seemed most concerned by issues of pedestrian safety along the lane and did not address PA, NTBCC, EWH or HES points beyond a little soggy handwringing over hard choices for a successful tourist economy. Theirs was an underpowered discussion and disappointing decision.

Opportunities and challenges for Princes St Gardens

The Friends of Princes St Gdns, formed in Aug, was officially launched at City Chambers on 20 Oct.



In summary, its aims here are to:

- champion conservation, preservation, protection and improvement
- encourage a responsible attitude towards amenity and attractions
- promote and encourage enjoyment by a wide range of people and organisations, including locals.

With Council officers preparing proposals for Princes St and the Waverley Valley (for consultation next year), observers detect both opportunities and potential dangers for the area. It's right that organised public input should form part of the discussion. We wish the new group well.

Future challenges for the FPSG may include:

- proving itself to be representative of people beyond the familiar social, professional, racial and age demographics common in Edinburgh 'heritage' circles
- exerting effective influence on Council departments with their own 'competing' agendas for Planning process and Events monetisation at a time of cost inflation and stalled or diminishing local-government budgets
- overcoming bureaucracies' typical resistance to outside interference
- engaging the best philanthropic instincts of local businesses without in return sacrificing the Gardens' greenery, tranquillity and rights of public access.

More details at [bit.ly/FPSG].

Pilrig Park – a great place to hang out

Two red-light districts and one completely dark one have been established in Pilrig Park, allowing local bats to go about their business undisturbed.

Traditional street lamps dazzle and confuse urban bats, whose vision is attuned to the shorter wavelengths they produce. However, whilst people can navigate by red light, bats don't notice it at all.

Another advantage is that red light does not attract and concentrate insects in the same way as white light. Insect numbers are therefore more balanced across local ecosystems, and bats themselves are less likely to fall prey to cats, owls and other raptors.

Perhaps now we should also ban the playing in public parks of K-Pop, whose climactic high notes are thought by some to interfere with bats' echolocation systems and are known by others to affect the sanity of humans.

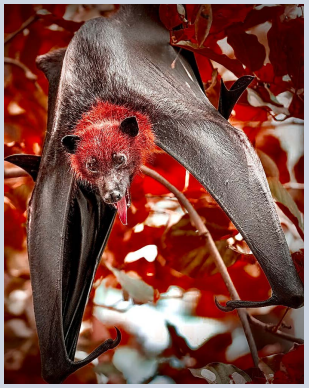


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No new homes planned

A Glasgow-based developer seeks planning consent for 28 serviced apartments at 11 Gayfield Sq, vacant since demolition of galleries and garages here in 2018 (26/03863/FUL).



Many features appeared in an earlier application for 11 residential flats (17/03392/FUL), approved despite objections from the Gayfield Assoc and locals (Issue 275). The architects now claim to have improved the main entrance, detailing, biodiversity and rain capture using one less storey and a smaller footprint.

Whilst some may acknowledge the design's respectful scale, 'dignified and well proportioned' form and durable materials in keeping with the area, others see only an incongruous modern cuboid.

Spurtle welcomes the site being brought back into use but is underwhelmed by the design. We mostly regret yet another spurned opportunity to provide for permanent residents in the city centre. The irony of the developer's name – MacTaggart & Mickel *Homes* – is not lost on us.

Street art stretches a point

Since its arrival in Sept, new exterior decoration along one side of The Street at 2b Picardy Pl has been turning some folk's heads and others' stomachs.

Comprising a repeated Damask motif, stencilled in vivid green alongside mischievous child iconoclasts, it is the latest appearance of the 'Rude Kids' series by artist The Dotmaster (aka Lynton Allan). Similar variations occur around the world [bit.ly/dot2dots].



Spurtle has tested local opinion over recent weeks. Some welcome this 'playful subversion', saying it's 'just a bit of fun' and 'adds to the gaiety of nations, or at least the gayness of The Street'.

Others say it would be fine if it weren't 'defacing' Robert Burn's B-listed building of 1807 and 'compromising' the Edinburgh World Heritage Site and New Town Conservation Area.

Two days after the work was completed, one purveyor of sunbeams told us, 'It's not particularly skilled. It says nothing specific about here. It's crass crap.' They had already reported it to the Planning Enforcement team.

Glittering prizes, gift horses

In this year's 9th annual SME Scottish Enterprise Awards, *Spurtle* won in the 'Best Independent Local News Publication' and 'Civic Impact' categories. As with our 2023 accolade as SME's 'Best Community Publication' (Issue 334), it is unclear why we were nominated or with how many other organisations we were in competition.

Again similar to our experience 3 years ago, on this occasion *Spurtle* accepted a free 'SEO optimised listing' in an online 'Hall of Fame' plus access to SME's official press release. However, we declined the offer of attending a glittering award ceremony or spending up to £6,220 on a range of promotional extras.

Never afraid to look a gift horse in the mouth, *Spurtle* notes that these commercially motivated awards are not admired by all.

Firework Control Zone safety

From the Scots Magazine *on 5 May 1749 in anticipation of an organised display:*—This is to give notice, That the Sieur *Rocquet*, *surgeon,* is lately arrived from *Paris*, and hath brought over with him *fifty assistant surgeons,* who will attend at the ensuing *Royal fireworks,* where they will be ready to assist all persons of quality and distinction.

For carrying off and bleeding a dead corpse, (he reserving the corpse for anatomical lectures), 5 *s*.—For ditto, returning the corpse to the relations, 2 *s*. 6 d.—Cutting off a thigh, (leg included), 1 *l*. I *s*.—Ditto leg below the knee, 10 *s*. 6 *d*.—An arm close to the shoulder, (wrist, hand, fingers and thumb included), 1 *l*. 1 *s*.—Hand, foot, thumb, toe, or finger, each, 5 *s*.—For clearing out a bruised eye, and replacing a right *Paris* brilliant black, blue or squinting one, in the socket; *N. B.* to be put in red hot without loss of time, or blood.



He hath also brought over with him, a quantity of *Kevenhuller* cotton for the ears, which will entirely prevent any ill consequences which may otherwise arise from the noise of the cannon; absolutely necessary for Ladies, Gentlemen, and officers of the fleet and army, not used to sudden and frightful explosions. And he will extract grains of gunpowder out of Ladies faces, necks, arms, or other parts of the body, at the most reasonable rates. *[For more, see (bit.ly/5NovOuch).]*

Briefly



The owner of A-listed **38 Queen St** aims to convert part of the sub-basement into a 2-bdrm flat. His application [bit.ly/lowmaze] includes interesting plans of the property's **labyrinthine interior**, occupied for over a century by pawnbrokers.

Within hours of *Spurtle* reporting on the **unsafe zig-zag walkway** down Broughton St (Issue 366), developers cut windows into the road-side partition to improve visibility. This was clearly a **triumph for hyperlocal journalism**, although the prompt intervention of Cllr Mowat (Ward 11) 2 weeks earlier may also have had an effect. Despite the improvement, the temporary path is **still too narrow** for pedestrians to comfortably pass an oncoming mugger in a pram.

The Luxury Lighting Boutique has moved from Stockbridge to **1 Rodney St**, former premises of Keith Gunn Electrical Solutions. For their 5 tips which 'instantly elevate any space' without taking rabbit hutches into the lifts at **John Lewis**, visit [bit.ly/bunup].

Green councillors **Jule Bandel** (Ward 5), **Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill MSP** (Ward 13), **Claire Miller** (Ward 11) and **Susan Rae** (Ward 12) will not stand in next May's Council elections.

No laughing matter. Salt 'n' Sauce's bid to turn staff accommodation at **4 York Pl** (opposite the Stand Comedy Club) into an STL has been refused. Officers said **loss of residential property** had not been justified.

Cllr McFarlane (Ward 11) has welcomed official indications that resurfacing of **E London St** will take place next year, probably after Aug. Sceptics wonder: **What kind of resurfacing?** Complete re-setting (c. £1.2m)? Partial replacement tarmac (c. £700k)? Tarmac overlay (c. £300k)?

This autumn, **Leith community police officers** have been visiting local primary schools at home time. **Victoria PS, Broughton PS and Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce** are among those where officers have patrolled, 'engaging with parents, pupils, teachers and road users to support safe travel'.

Mandale Homes has applied to build one 2-bdrm and ten 3-bdrm homes at the end of **Heriothill Ter**. We summarised the plans (significantly better than previous ones withdrawn in June) here [bit.ly/Spherter].

Grisly goings-on in **Queen St Gardens East**, where locals seek Council consent to 'remove hanging limb'.

Cycling Scotland has highlighted an error in our reporting last month (Issue 366) of statistics relating to bike usage on **Leith Walk**. We posted a correction on our website here [bit.ly/ourbad].

The Parents & Friends Cmte at **St Mary's RC Primary School** is working to raise £500 for an outdoor table-tennis table. It's part of ongoing efforts to turn the tarmac playground into a **'more fun, active and engaging space for children'**. Contact: admin@st-marysrc-pri.edin.sch.uk.

Moreover ...



The Broughton History Society meets next in **McDonald Rd Library** on 2 Nov at 6.00pm. Barclay Price will talk about the History of the Café Royal. Bring your own lobster.

Councillors approved proposals to erect a 143-bdrm Dakota hotel with ground-floor bar and restaurant at **108–114 and 116 Dundas St** (26/01504/FUL). The building could be adapted for **future residential use** if market conditions change. See [bit.ly/DougC47].

Since this summer, **Deaf Action** has been running a café on the first floor of its centre at **49 Albany St**. Serving freshly made hot rolls, sandwiches, pastries, cakes and barista coffee to eat in or take away, the social enterprise **supports members of the local deaf community**. It is normally wheelchair-accessible (although check if external lift repairs have been finished) and open **Tues–Sat, 7.30am–2.30pm**.

Urban Pulse MCMD has submitted a Proposal of Application Notice for demolition of office buildings and major redevelopment of the site at **101 and 107 McDonald Rd** (26/03947/PAN). It envisages residential uses and affordable housing plus potential ancillary commercial/community uses. Two public events are scheduled: one at **Broughton St Mary's Parish Church** (3–7pm, 26 Nov), one at **Out of the Blue Drill Hall, Dalmeny St** (3–7pm, 7 Jan 2027).

A tree report prepared for **Essential Edinburgh** in Aug has shown that a stage, bar and associated infrastructure, erected at short notice in **St Andrew Sq Gdn** during the Fringe (Issue 365), were 'partially encroaching root protection areas on site'. Protection measures (e.g. raised platforms) meant 'significant detrimental impact' was unlikely. Once again, however, *Spurtle* says: **This is not good enough.** Not even raised temporary structures should be sited anywhere near root systems in this sensitive location. Worryingly, the report also noted 11 trees here with **exposed roots and mower damage.**

An application to create a 15-person HMO at **9 Pilrig St** has been withdrawn. Objectors argued the change would run counter to Council policy and was unnecessary given that a new facility for 230 homeless people would open soon in **Halmyre St.** In any case, they said, it should have 24-hr management and be subject to the same security/health and safety measures as the new alternative.

We enjoyed a recent contribution to the Development Management Subcmte from **Cllr Booth** (Ward 13). Notwithstanding one particular application's **01010** reference number, Booth said elected members did not face **a binary decision.** Edinburgh councillors do not do tumbleweed. There was, rather, **an exhalation of breath**, a sigh like the seeping of gas in a boneyard.

Spurtle Team: E. Brown, P. Cockburn, E. Dickie, C. Ellis, J. Hart, M. Hart, D. Hill, V. Kirby, A. McIntosh, S. Michael, H. Muir, M. Orr, W. Quinn, C. Roussot, E. Roussot, T. Smith, D. Sterratt, E. Taylor-Smith, D. Young.
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Ben Macpherson MSP
Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh North Eastern and Leith Constituency
The Scottish Parliament Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



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Please get in touch if there's anything you'd like assistance with or to discuss – issues, concerns, ideas and feedback. My team and I are here to help all – no matter who you vote for in elections.
Please see below for details of my monthly 'help and advice surgeries'. These are times when anyone in our area can come and speak with me.
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HELP AND ADVICE SURGERIES
(no appointment is necessary, please just turn up)

FIRST Friday of the month:
2:00pm
Craigentinny Community Centre
9 Loaning Road, EH7 6JE
3:30pm
Piershill Library
30 Piersfield Terrace, EH8 7BQ

– AND –

LAST Friday of the month:
11:00am
Out of the Blue Drill Hall
36 Dalmeny Street, EH6 8RG
3:30pm
Leith Library
28-30 Ferry Road, EH6 4AE

I serve and represent
Leith, Western Harbour, Pilrig, Bellevue, Hillside, Easter Road, Abbeyhill, Meadowbank, Restalrig, Lochend, Loganlea, Marionville, Willowbrae, Abercorn, Northfield, Piershill, Seafield, Craigentinny, Mountcastle, Duddingston, Holyrood Park

ben.macpherson.msp@parliament.scot
www.benmacpherson.scot
0131 348 5767
24 Constitution Street, Leith, EH6 6RS
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