

# Spurtle



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**September  
2016**

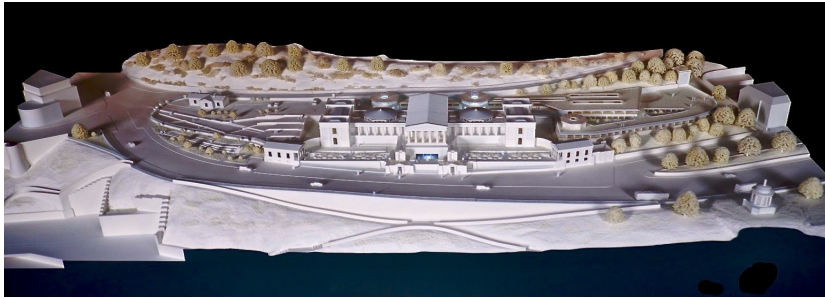
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**BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free**

## COUNCIL APPROVES MUSIC SCHOOL'S PLANS



Councillors last month unanimously granted planning permission for proposals to adapt and develop the former Royal High School (see our website 17.8.16).

There were conditions requiring changes to parts of the plan, but overall the decision endorsed a sensitive re-imagining of the site and structure as a new home for St Mary's Music School. The Royal High School Preservation Trust now has seven years in which to start work on the site.

The news was greeted with widespread pleasure among those who contacted *Spurtle*, but also some caution.

City of Edinburgh's preferred partner Duddingston House Properties is appealing to the Scottish Government against earlier rejection of its hotel scheme. If this route fails, DHP still has until 2022 to bring forward an acceptable alternative, perhaps learning from those consented elements of the music-school plans which maximised space and minimised impact. If any DHP proposal were to receive planning permission, CEC would be legally obliged to take that scheme forward.

For those opposed to a hotel on the site, perhaps delay is their best hope. Overseas backers may look elsewhere for a timely return on their money. On the other hand, the current state of the pound makes investing in British projects comparatively good value.

Meanwhile, some architectural-heritage Jeremiahs are worried by the music-school success. @EdinburghSSC tweeted: 'Could prove Pyrrhic victory. Precedent now set to demolish A-listed outbuildings, significant interventions to RHS + new build'.

## COMMUNITY COUNCIL ELECTION COUNTDOWN

The election process for community councils (CCs) across Edinburgh begins this month. In Spurtleshire, these will be for the Leith Central, New Town & Broughton, and Stockbridge & Inverleith CCs.

CCs are legally constituted voluntary bodies which represent the views of their communities to the local authority and public bodies. They have a statutory right to be consulted on planning and licensing issues. Some people describe them as the first step on the democratic ladder.

Nomination forms for candidates will be available from 5 September, and must be returned by 26 September. If polling is required (more candidates than places), it will take place on 27 October. Details are available on the community councils' websites, and from our website (*Extras*, 1.9.16). The Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council (ELREC) wants to see more people from black and minority ethnic groups become involved in CCs. A workshop offering information and support to potential BME candidates will take place at 14 Forth Street on 7 September at 6pm. To book a place, visit [<https://goo.gl/XHH8w3>].

## BOTTOM'S UP



Detail from 'Thou art translated'.

One of Spurtleshire's cultural high points last month was *A Knavish Lad*, Joanna Robson's delightful retelling of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in images. Her detailed and amusing observations are achieved through panoramic intaglio etchings and laser-cuts, colourfully combined in concertina book form. See our online review (19.8.16). The exhibition of her work continues at McNaughtan's Bookshop & Gallery on Haddington Place until the end of September.

## BAFFLING BONNINGTON BLAZE



Flames gutted the former Bonnington Bridge Bar on 15 August. Five fire engines attended. The property at 74–76 Newhaven Road had been partially renovated, but that process stalled 2–3 years ago. When we spoke to Police Scotland on 18 August, the cause of the fire had not been established, and enquiries were 'ongoing'. Previous (unrelated) events here have involved the discovery of a cannabis farm in the cellar (2009), building waste burned in the garden or dumped in the Water of Leith (2010–11), and alleged breaches of planning consent (2011). Let's hope the owner was insured.



# Briefly



We've been saying for years that this is the **wrong spot for a cash-and-carry**, and now it seems someone has listened. *Spurtle* has learned that **Batleys sold their property** at 30 McDonald Place on 28 June for £1,831,081. At this stage, we don't know who bought it, **how they intend to use it**, or which neighbourhood Batleys will favour next with their community charm offensives.

**Calton Rd** has reopened following completion of **wall repairs** at its Leith St end.

Welcome Söderberg, the newly opened **Swedish bakery** at 45 Broughton St, Mon-Sun, 8am-6pm. The **Riparian Rooms'** reappearance on E. London St in August was a temporary pop-up featuring burgers.

**Drummond CHS** pupils returned to school on time and as normal on 17 Aug. **Remedial works** to the school gym were carried out during the summer holidays, and the facility will be back in use from Day 1.



Trenchant local Twitter satirist @ **NewTownFlaneur** posted this image online last month. Appearing to show a **much loved shrunken hyena**, it was captioned simply 'Stockbridge'. Such things would never happen in Broughton.

Nearly half Edinburgh's **community police officers** are being redeployed in Sept to improve response rates. **Expect fewer plods on the pavements**. However, those CEC-funded officers who remain – three per area, plus a Licensing officer for the city centre – will be able to concentrate, **uninterrupted**, on local issues. Meanwhile, more officers are being trained to use **handheld speed guns** to enforce 20mph zones where problems arise.

A 56-year-old man fell 40ft into gardens behind Fettes Row on 9 Aug. **He later died of his injuries**. He is understood to have been working on the property at the time of the incident.

## Where the buffalo roam

Oh, for the endless skies and broad rolling prairies of Leith. A paradise for those seeking deer, antelope, wide horizons and freedom from controlled parking restrictions. But not, perhaps, for much longer.

There are moves afoot to bring Leith into line with regulated areas to the south, and they stem in part from those who live on the boundary between the two in Pilrig.

Here, shoppers, commuters and summer visitors take advantage of free parking, dump their vehicles and head for the city centre. Pilrig Street is often nose-to-tail parking as a result, with roads visually congested and hard to cross safely, junctions difficult to negotiate, and the acrid tang of pollution in the air.

If the authorities were to control parking along Pilrig Street, those same drivers would simply move a little further north, and so on and so on. The only solution, it seems, is to control parking across the whole of Wards 12 and 13 simultaneously, pushing car-users into the Forth or onto public transport.

CEC need to see a 'sustained and significant level of interest from residents' before even considering the change. So Leith Central Community Council is looking into the question to see if any local consensus exists on the subject.

Will car users in one part of Leith sacrifice personal convenience for householders in another? Based on our experience of drivers more than our understanding of Leithers, we suspect not. By 21 August, opposing online petitions promoted by a Leith-based Facebook page had attracted seven signatures in favour of controlled parking and 376 discouraging words against.



## Swings and roundabouts over King George V Park

At the time of writing, there was still no sign of Royal Bank of Scotland's planning application for their Dundas Street/Eyre Place/Fettes Row site (Issue 253). We expect it imminently, but in the meantime, an intriguing rumour which originates within the Council has reached us.

CEC's Parks Department is reviewing its Open Space Strategy, and – since King George V Park is marginally below the desirable 2ha threshold for such an amenity – the story goes that it may seek to extend it using half of RBS's car park from Dundonald Street eastwards.

The pay-off would supposedly be CEC consent for 6 tall blocks in a less extensive development (6 storeys at street level, 8 storeys from the park); as opposed to 8 lower blocks across the entire site (4 storeys at street level, 6 storeys from the park).

Sceptics say this is a false choice between equally undesirable outcomes. Both options, they argue, constitute overdevelopment and would result in overshadowing. Faced with a firing squad, the colour of the blindfold is immaterial.

## Local children living in poverty

Councillor Marion Donaldson (Ward 12) last month drew LCCC's attention to the 26% of children in her Leith Walk ward who grow up in poverty, and the 21% similarly affected across Edinburgh as a whole. An additional 30% experience transient or recurrent poverty, and the figures are expected to rise by 2020.

The shocking statistics come from a recent Council report '1 in 5: Raising Awareness of Child Poverty in Edinburgh' (see our website, *Extras* 1.9.16). It defines poverty as a household earning under 60% of median household income (a lone parent with 2 children living on under £326 per week or a couple with 2 children on under £416 per week, all before housing costs are deducted).

'There are lots of myths around poverty (work-shy, drug addiction) but the statistics do not back this up', says Donaldson. With two-thirds of children in poverty having at least one parent in work, 'all the evidence points to structural problems to do with low pay, zero-hour contracts, unemployment and the punitive benefits system'. High housing and childcare costs make things worse.

The report concludes with practical suggestions for how schools can help with clothing, food, equipment and the cost of school trips.





## Blue plaque for grande dame

The life of Dame Sarah Elizabeth Siddons Mair (1846–1941), a campaigner for women's suffrage and higher education, is to be commemorated with a blue plaque outside her former home at 29 Abercromby Place (today's Royal Scots Club).

The Edinburgh City of Literature Trust proposed Mair for the honour to Historic Environment Scotland, which announced the decision on 2 August. No date for the unveiling has yet been set.

Edinburgh-born Mair founded the Ladies' Edinburgh Debating Society here in her teens. It discussed social issues, developed public-speaking skills and published its own magazine *The Attempt* until 1876 when it became the *Ladies' Edinburgh Magazine*. The group often discussed women's suffrage, of which it was increasingly in favour from 1884 onwards. Mair served as president of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage and of the Scottish Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies, favouring constitutional reform over militant action. After partial concession of female emancipation in 1918 (for women aged 30), she led the Society for Equal Citizenship.

She belonged to the Edinburgh Ladies' Education Association from its foundation in 1867 and went on to campaign for women's inclusion in mainstream higher education (rather than in some parallel system). She was active in practical steps to improve women's school education and established St George's Training School for female educators (1886), and in 1888 St George's High School for Girls, the first Scottish day school teaching up to university entrance level.

She received an honorary doctorate from Edinburgh University in 1920 and a DBE in 1931. 'My life has been a long and very happy one,' she wrote in 1936. 'I have watched and to a small extent shared in the Awakening of Women.' For more on Mair and her contemporaries, see Edinburgh Museums' excellent pack: [<http://goo.gl/8Zcdg4>].



Photo courtesy of St George's School, Edinburgh

## Look out for: Jays

Crows, like gulls, have a bad reputation. They're great parents, clever, omnivorous, sociable, noisy, abundant and at times aggressive – much like humans, really. However, it's the Jay – one of the rarest and shyest cousins of the common or Carrion Crow – that has moved tentatively into Edinburgh over the last decade and has now started appearing in St Mark's Park.

The Jay boasts a beautiful range of feathers, which were ideal components of fishing flies in the past. This, combined then with picky eating habits, has made them a rarity in Scotland.

*How to see them:* With their salmon-pink bodies, black and white flashes, spotted head crests and electric-blue wing flashes, you'd think Jays would be easy to spot. But these birds are shy and elusive, and most views seem to be of a generally black and white bird with a distinct white rump disappearing noisily into the thickest trees around. Harsh scolding calls are the biggest giveaway to their presence.

Whether Jays are finding enough acorns and other food around Broughton to become permanent residents here remains to be seen, but their arrival is an interesting development in the ever changing bird populations of the city. — Miles Forde



Photo: Henrique Oliveira, Flickr

## Has Edinburgh reached saturation point?

For as long as we can remember, those Edinburgh residents who haven't let their flats and fled to France have muttered about the number and behaviour of visitors during the Festival. It's a kind of native permuriosness that allows us to disguise the fact we're having fun.

But last month, there were times – really quite a lot of times – when central Edinburgh from Picardy Place to Newington, from Holyrood to Morrison Street, seemed to have reached, if not surpassed, its saturation point.

Despite the city's best efforts, bins were repeatedly filled to overflowing, pavements and pedestrian crossings in the Old Town were impassable, air quality on the High Street was intolerable, and even the hinterland on either side of Leith Walk was allegedly filled with the cars of tourists over-summering in 'student accommodation'.

And still the city permits more hotels to spring up in the centre. Soon we will have a new Marriott in Baxter's Place, Henderson Real Estate have just revised plans for James Craig Walk to include hotel rooms instead of boutique retail spaces.

With City of Edinburgh Council now embracing a year-round festival culture, it's not unreasonable to ask our leaders when or even if they'll ever say enough's enough. For unless we draw a line, the authentic, working Edinburgh that tourists come to see will have been hollowed out, asphyxiated, displaced. This year, that tipping point felt closer than ever. AM

## Briefly

You can barely hear yourself think at present in the debate about music audible outside Edinburgh pubs and clubs in which it's being played (Issue 252). NTBCC's **misgivings** about the system were reinforced last month when they learned that despite members of the advisory Licensing Forum **voting against** a change in the rules, they were **reported as being in favour** to the Licensing Board. NTBCC's position on the subject, in summary and in full, can be found at [[www.ntbcc.org.uk](http://www.ntbcc.org.uk)].

Locals welcomed a reversal of recent trends last month when the 4-storey **Capital Residence Hotel** on Pilrig St successfully sought planning permission to convert into a **5-bedroom townhouse** with separate **2-bedroom flat** in the basement.

**Leith Central Community Council** will meet next in McDonald Rd Library at 7pm on 19 Sept. In that order.

Artisan Group's outline proposals for **180–220 residential units (4–6 storeys)** on the Warriston Rd B&Q site were displayed at the end of July (see our website 29.7.16). **Over 90 locals attended**. Some Powderhall neighbours fear loss of views and light, but most others find the **baby-parrot plans** – green, fluffy, making roughly the right noises – too vague to comment upon in depth just now.

**Councillor Lesley Hinds** (Ward 5) has announced that she will not stand for re-election next year. After **33 years' service**, she told the *Evening News* (22.8.16), 'I feel it is time for the younger generation to come forward'.

The Scottish Government Reporter met locals during a site-visit to the '**Sandy Hill**' **backland** behind Broughton Rd on 19 Aug. A decision on the appeal against CEC's **refusal of planning permission** here (our website 10.2.16; 17.5.16) is expected by 29 Sept.



NTBCC will discuss the RBS plan for Dundas St/Fettes Row/Eyre Place on 12 Sept (see p.4). **Also at that meeting:** J.C. Decaux will present proposals for digital **billboards/bus stops** on George St (our website 22.7.16); and **Cllr Lesley Hinds** will take questions on parking changes in the City Centre and New Town.

Police investigated **6 racially aggravated hate crimes** in Leith between Apr and Jul, Police told LCCC last month. Five have been solved. The number of such known crimes is **down on last year**, but most are never reported in the first place.



## Moreover ...



Since it was **D-locked to railings** in Mansfield Place 2 months ago (itself a bad idea since they are easily broken), this mountain bike has lost its seat, its pedals and its front wheel. The rear one has been **buckled beyond repair**. A GT Aggressor, it may once have been the '**ultimate beast on the trails**', but sadly has proved unable to stand up for itself on the mean streets of Broughton.

If you're concerned about **cyclist and pedestrian safety** between McDonald St and Broughton Rd, you have **until 4 Sept** to respond to a Council consultation. CEC's proposing an **improved crossing and extended cycle lanes**, but not all *Spartle* readers think the plans are ambitious (or safe) enough. See our website (9.8.16).

Finally, we have a date for **Lidl's arrival in Logie Green Rd**: October 2016. This is the cut-price supermarket chain's 96th shop in Scotland, and the outlet will create 15 new jobs (our website 12.8.16). The news was **greeted enthusiastically** by three kinds of people: (1) **strapped-for-cash locals** anticipating more 'economy brands' than currently on offer over the road; (2) **not strapped-for-cash locals** nevertheless keen to acquire more hock for their buck; (3) **thrifty Fifers** thrilled at another free car park close to the city centre.

Phase 4 of the **Leith Walk improvements** between Pilrig Street and McDonald Road should be complete by summer next year. As we understand it, works here to replace old metal pipes with new plastic ones began in August, and are **scheduled to last three months**. Once they're finished, the scheme to upgrade road surfaces, pavements and new cycle routes will begin. They're designed to be '**tram-proof**' in the event of pigs flying and everything coming up roses. A Traffic Regulation Order enabling Phase 5 (McDonald Road to Annandale Street) will be issued soon.

Tim Smith reports that **Tesco on Broughton Rd** is considering new signs to warn drivers turning in **down the ramp** about drivers exiting up it (and vice versa).

**Spartle Team:** E. Dickie, J. Dickie, M. Forde, R. Fullerton, J. Hart, M. Hart, D. Hill, D. Young, A. McIntosh, J. R. Maclean, M. Orr, L. Rogers, C. Roussot, T. Smith, D. Sterratt, E. Taylor-Smith.

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3.30-4.30pm, McDonald Rd Library  
**Stockbridge: 3rd Friday of the month**  
1-2pm Stockbridge Library  
**Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre:** Last Friday, 4-5pm  
**dbrockmp.scot**  
Tel: 0131-555 7009  
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New Town and Broughton Community Council

**New Town & Broughton  
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You're welcome to attend  
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