

Spurtle



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Tel: 07455 770474

spurtle@hotmail.co.uk

BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER

Free

PEOPLE SUGGEST SPACES FOR PEOPLE

Edinburgh Council last month invited suggestions from the public for temporary travel measures to be funded by the Scottish Government. This is a distinct and separately funded programme to the one reported last month in Issue 296.

The aim is to prevent a second Covid-19 outbreak by assisting social distancing. To relieve pressure on public transport, ways have been sought to cut down on unnecessary car journeys by making streets safer for walking, cycling, and other forms of 'wheeling'.

Priority will be given to interventions (for up to 18 months) that will have the greatest benefit to public health and can be delivered quickly. Proponents of the scheme say initiatives still take too long to set up. Critics say they're being rushed through with insufficient forethought, consultation, or democratic scrutiny.

Suggestions for Broughton and surrounds which caught *Spurtle's* eye on the Spaces for People website [bit.ly/2XZs6zt] included:

- speed bumps on straight roads such as London Rd and Queen St;
- converting the Mansfield Pl roundabout into a traffic-light-controlled junction, and widening nearby pavements for outdoor bar/café use;
- uphill lanes for cyclists and pedestrians on the carriageway in Broughton St;
- removal of parking on north side of Albany St, Abercromby Pl, and Heriot Row and replacing it with a 2-way segregated cycleway;
- closing the Montgomery St rat-run at its Leith Walk end;
- insertion of a traffic island at the west end of Great King St.



PER MARE PER TERRAM



Until recently, the best known mermaids in Edinburgh were those Rubensesque *mademoiselles-poissons* on the Ross Fountain in West Princes Street Gardens. Now, though, a coyly charming newcomer has appeared at the water's edge in Newhaven. She wears a facemask and nothing else. Why she arrived and when she'll go remain to be seen. For an interesting take on small papers making too much of nothings, see *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (Vol. 13) from 1842: [bit.ly/2YqyykD].

CALLS TO HUMBLE HIGH-AND-MIGHTY DUNDAS

Following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests worldwide, attention has refocused on Henry Dundas (1742–1811).

Aside from delaying the abolition of slavery by over a decade, Dundas (Lord Melville) is also recorded to have been a corrupt and repressive bully, a domestic abuser, and an authoritarian enemy of democracy. Nevertheless, he has towered over St Andrew Square since 1821.

There are now calls from people like Martyn McLaughlin in the *Scotsman*, to remove this 'celebration' of wickedness. Others have covered its plinth and that



of his son's statue in Melville Street with spray-paint graffiti: 'SON OF SLAVER + COLONIALIST PROFITEER!' Unfortunately, persons unknown also daubed the Dundas Street shopfront of a family who have no responsibility for Britain's former policies on slavery and colonialism.

The Cockburn Association takes a different view [bit.ly/2AGuUdl], preferring reinterpretation to removal. It supports Professor Geoff Palmer's call for an explanatory plaque at the foot of the Melville Monument, something Council Cllr Adam McVey has now belatedly pushed to expedite after a two-year delay over wording.

Yet another view is that removing ugly embarrassments from our street names and civic/national monuments is a distraction. More worthwhile would be pressing governments to curb today's slave-labour mining of minerals for our mobile phones, and the sweated-labour production of cheap garments for the developed world.

Spurtle coverage of the dislikeable 'Henry IX' and Broughton's grubby secret has appeared in 2013 [bit.ly/30Won8N], 2014 [bit.ly/2Cg1g1e], 2016 [bit.ly/371fDo6], and 2018 [bit.ly/2YO5Bhj].

DO E-CONSULTATIONS DILUTE PLANNING DEMOCRACY?

Drum (Stead's Place) Ltd and CAMVO 123 LTD are preparing a Proposal of Application Notice to demolish industrial units and develop 'residential led uses' at 106–62 Leith Walk (20/01447/PAN). They aim to retain the existing 2-storey sandstone building for a range of office, catering, and leisure uses.

Discussing the case at last month's virtual Development Management Subcmte [bit.ly/2U7JzV1], Cllrs Booth and Munn called for Drum to hold an online consultation event. Given the company's previous controversial application [bit.ly/30b0DO4], they said Save Leith Walk and Our Leith Walk campaigners should be closely involved. Convener Neil Gardiner aspired to an exemplary process that would show planning democracy could succeed under current Lockdown arrangements.

Under emergency coronavirus legislation operating since April, the requirement for public events as part of pre-application consultations has been suspended in favour of alternative online engagement [bit.ly/2XA4N02]. Leith Central Community Council has grave doubts about democratic access to, and effective communication via, video or telephone-conferencing technology.

Large-scale planning developments, LCCC believes, are too important to consider by depending on hard-to-operate and unreliable virtual exhibitions and online conferencing platforms. It will therefore participate *only if* such arrangements form part of a broader conventional process involving public exhibitions and properly constituted meetings when it is eventually safe to do so. It would be unreasonable, says LCCC, for Drum not to wait until this is possible.

We await developments with interest. (For more on potential development on Leith Walk, see Briefly, p. 3.)

Briefly



A much-delayed report on plans by Duddingston House Properties and Urbanist Hotels to convert and extend the **old Royal High School** as a luxury hotel was submitted to **Scottish Ministers** on 2 June. Ministers' decision will be based on the merits of the case, but politics will also play a part, not least in terms of the timing of the decision in relation to the May 2021 **Holyrood election**. It would be interesting to know to what extent the **impact on tourism** of Covid-19 has informed the report (if at all), and how much it will inform it from now on.

Statistics released by the **National Records of Scotland** last month contained figures for the number of **Covid-related deaths** in each Zone during March, April, and May. There were clear disparities, with Leith (Albert St) and Bonnington emerging as local hotspots; and Liberton West & Braid Hills, and Craiglockhart as the worst affected across Edinburgh. The **location of care homes** may have had some part to play, but *Spurtle* remains cautious about interpreting the results. See [hbit.ly/317x7Jx].

J. Bentley Estates Limited seeks permission to redevelop, refurbish, and upgrade the top 4 storeys of **23–25 Greenside Pl** as 31 serviced apartments (20/02211/FUL). The Category B-listed **Greenside House** most recently operated as 8 open-plan office suites. Some critics, *Spurtle* included, **oppose the plans** [bit.ly/2NeziTr]. We think there are more than enough short-term holiday lets in Edinburgh already. What we need is more long-term and affordable **accommodation for locals**. The deadline for comments is 3 July.

Scotland could reopen for tourism on 15 July. Campaigners **Place Edinburgh** have written pointedly to Tourism Secretary Fergus Ewing requesting guidance on how to cope safely with visitors in **unlawful short-term lets on common stairs** during the coronavirus crisis [bit.ly/3eqPFs5].

Planning permission in principle has been granted for the demolition of Smithie's at **49–51 Eyre Pl** (19/05565/PPP). Some former regulars are already voicing a wish that certain of the bar's fittings – **particularly its mirrors** – be retained locally.

Whale bones of indeterminate date, **clay pipes** and a **cannon ball** were among items unearthed around **Constitution St** earlier this year during preparatory excavations for the tram line. Further research is needed, but they may evidence the area's **rich history** of some residents not using bins properly.

Lothian Buses ends East London Street rat-run

Responding to complaints from locals, Lothian Buses has agreed to reduce the number of its vehicles using East London Street.

As reported earlier this year (Issues 292 and 293), drivers have made the diversion to avoid hold-ups caused by traffic-light phasing at the Broughton Street/York Place and Annandale Street/Leith Walk junctions.

Drivers have now been given alternative off-service routes (7pm–9am). These will be monitored to avoid simply moving the problem elsewhere.

LB says those buses heading to and from Canonmills and Stockbridge will continue using East London Street. It is sceptical about allegations of excessive speed but will run ad hoc checks.

LB says troublesome noise and vibration would be reduced by tarmacking the centre of the road (as on London Street), something which divided opinion at March's New Town & Broughton Community Council meeting [bit.ly/2UZrclK]. Some locals reply that driving much more slowly would be a cheap and effective alternative.

LB notes that further local disruption may result from tramworks, particularly when McDonald Road and Annandale Street close simultaneously for 6 weeks. Locals say tram contractors have already agreed the need to avoid diversions causing more air pollution outside St Mary's Primary School.

Various observers question the advisability of so many (particularly diesel-bus) routes crossing the city, and whether a large central depot best facilitates them.

In the short term, LB invites further public feedback following its service increase on 21 June; and Cllr Mowat (Ward 11) has asked CEC officers to assess the Broughton St/York Place light phasing and report back.



Image: Wikipedia [bit.ly/3fO9IRq]

Broughton–Newhaven tram project restarts

Preparation of the tramway construction site between Broughton and the sea restarted on 1 June. Phase 2 work started in earnest on 15 June.

To begin with, infection control stations, and extra water and toilet facilities were set up. 'Protective infill' put in place when the shutdown began in late March was removed.

Socially distanced work with optional personal protective equipment recommenced on existing sites a fortnight later, followed by traffic-management measures and Lothian Bus diversions on 20 June.

On 22 June, construction work started on the section from Elm Row to Crown Place. Also on that day, local businesses' logistics hubs for despatches and deliveries reopened at Mitchell Street, Foot of the Walk, Dalmeny Street, Albert Street, and Montgomery Street.

The project is still on track to operate within its £207.3M budget, a loan which will be paid back out of future tram revenues over 30 years.

Green hope for old greens

Tucked away in the secret heart of Broughton, Tramways Bowling Club is an asset few people have heard of.

All club activities have ceased, but the land and building/clubhouse remain potentially valuable community assets. Local residents have therefore taken an active interest, voluntarily undertaking some basic tidying and cleaning-up of the site. They are also investigating potential sources of funding, and are at the earliest stages of talking to Lothian Buses and the Council about future possibilities here.

Lothian Buses cautiously informed *Spurtle* last month, 'We welcome communication from all interested parties regarding this piece of land, but speculation about future usage of the site would be premature at this stage.'

Cllr Susan Rae (Ward 12) told us: 'The residents have shown real commitment and imagination in their efforts to turn a neglected space into a flourishing community garden that can be enjoyed and loved by all.'

'The current crisis has highlighted how precious green space is – how beneficial it is to the well-being and health of our residents. It's a joy to be able to support such a positive project.'



Edinburgh on high: Chemical fixture

How often does one pass under this splendid Broughton Street sign without registering its existence?

Ancient in origin, the mortar and pestle share the company of Asclepius (the Greek God of Medicine) and his serpent rod, and the unicorn in advertising the work of the pharmacist. In Britain, these symbols were supplanted by the green cross in 1984.

In pharmaceutical terms, mortars and pestles are still used for crushing medicinal ingredients. The words derive from the Latin *mortarium* = mortar and *pistillum* = pounder.

As for Asclepius, who became a universal medical symbol from the 5th century BCE, there are many representations in Edinburgh. Perhaps the most impressive (or daunting) are the fearsome gilded serpents guarding the former Royal Infirmary entrance on Lauriston Place. Situated until 1997 at the threshold of the old Dental Hospital on Chambers Street, they suggested to this sufferer 'Abandon all hope, ye who enter herein.'

More pleasing is the unicorn, which the ancient Greeks revered as a symbol of purity and grace. They believed its whorled horn had healing powers, especially, like the serpent's serum, as an antidote to poison. It is represented in the coat of arms of the Society of Apothecaries, and was the trademark of the Wellcome Foundation from 1908–95.

Would that a fine fugitive unicorn could be ensconced one day in Broughton Street to afford us additional reassurance of healthy and happy times ahead!—JRM



Image: DM.

Ambridge on Forth – a reality?

What makes a village-in-the-city? Edinburgh blogger Mark McKergow pondered this question here [bit.ly/318T0Z1] last month.

His draft list of prerequisites includes: a name; everyone present being a member; accessible meeting places within walking distance; good communication within the 'village'; hosts fostering connectivity (e.g. pubs, churches); inclusive gatherings; an identity. He says a village-in-the-city is definitely *not*: a formal administrative unit, somewhere with a leader or governance or enforcement powers; a place where activities depend entirely upon grants or funding.

McKergow says consciously building on the 'micro-local' will be important in the post pandemic world as a way of building community, connection, good mental health, well-being, and resilience in big cities just as much as in rural settlements.

What do readers think? Do Broughton, Stockbridge, and Pilrig count?

Overcrowding a tramcar

From the Edinburgh Evening News (7 June 1898), a timely report concerning problems in controlling the number of passengers on public transport.—AM

Before Bailie Robertson in the Edinburgh Burgh Court to-day, William Drever, a car conductor, residing in Pitt Street, Edinburgh, pleaded guilty to having allowed his car to become overcrowded in the South Bridge on 19th May.

The evidence for the prosecution showed that the attention of two constables was called to the crowded condition of the car by two gentlemen. The constables found the car overcrowded to the extent of 18 persons—six too many being inside and 12 in excess outside.

For the defence, evidence was led showing that the accused had done all in his power to keep the people off the car. He was up on the top collecting tickets at the time of the rush. He did not, however, call for the assistance of the police.

Addressing the accused, the magistrate said that there was no doubt that he was to blame for the number in the car. He thought he should have seized the opportunity of reducing the number when the police were at hand. Otherwise he seemed to have done his best, and taking that into consideration, he would admonish him.



Popular elder attacked in Warriston

Unauthorised lopping of a tree on Council land outraged neighbours last month.

The elder, in Warriston Playing Fields, was popular with locals, particularly Eildon Street children who enjoyed playing in its branches and beneath its shade.

For unknown reasons, a person or persons unknown took umbrage and effectively pollarded the tree with a handsaw during the night of 10/11 June. Residents reported the incident to police. Children later vented their upset in posters attached to the railings [bit.ly/2YgoV83].

The event – not the first of its kind in the area – has left neighbours feeling resentful and suspicious. Fortunately, the tree should recover.



Briefly

New Town & Broughton Community Council's **June Zoom meeting** was virtually attended by c.45 members, political representatives, and local residents – not all of them actually in the **New Town or Broughton, or Edinburgh, or Scotland, or even the UK**. This is substantially more than usually attend normal meetings in non-pandemic times. There is no substitute for **real body language, facial expressions and early-evening personal odours**, but those 'present' seemed not to mind. Harder to judge are the effects of abbreviated agendas, remote chairing, and unequal access to software and technology.

At the meeting above, Edinburgh World Heritage's head of external relations **Nicholas Hotham** commented that EWH strongly favours building a **greener, fairer, and less cluttered city** post-pandemic. He said the volume of traffic allowed in the **fragile city centre** was 'unusual' for a world heritage site, and the Old Town must not be allowed to deteriorate into a **North–South through-route**. On a more positive note, Covid-19 could prove the mother of invention when it comes to **creatively experimenting** with traffic management.

Charges for **on-street pay and display parking spaces**, suspended in Mar for reasons which **made no sense to the Spurtle** – but apparently protected workers and the public from the risk of coronavirus, and helped key workers make essential journeys – resumed on 22 June, for reasons which **make no sense to the Spurtle**. Reintroduction will supposedly 'encourage turnover of visitors to shops and business, and create a safer, more welcoming environment for pedestrians, cyclists, and other wheelers'.

Leith Central Community Council is determined to consider the future of **Stead's Place** (see p. 1) in the context of potential development over the road around **Halmyre St** [bit.ly/3h5WTUub]. Combined, the two sites could provide up to 1k residential units, which would require an **integrated expansion** of other facilities, perhaps including a purpose-built health centre behind historic shopfronts on the south side of **Leith Walk**.

If you've enjoyed the **North Edinburgh Cycle Network** lately, try Andy Arthur's fly-through video detailing the Caledonian railway lines and industries of old from **Princes St to Leith and Granton**: [bit.ly/3fMY896].

At the time of writing, nobody knew for sure, but some think **Ediston and Orion Capital Managers** may bring forward a full planning application for the former RBS site on and behind **Dundas St** soon. Local reservations remain: too dense development; too few car parking spaces; loss of trees on Dundas St to extend **new building's footprint**; and a sense among some at the corner of Eyre Pl of **being overwhelmed**.

Moreover ...



The Botanics reopened to the public on 1 July. On-line prebooked slots are **de rigueur**. Dress code: **informal**.

Permission has been granted for a new mews house on a site currently used as a carpark at 17m west of 11 **Cumberland St NW Lane** (19/04576/FUL).

A TCO to lop a 'large presumed magnolia tree' **somewhere in Greenside** has been withdrawn (20/01865/TCO). Neighbours say: the address given was unclear; the tree was a sycamore; the application was to accommodate **potential** purchase and residential development and did not form an integral part of a development application itself (as required). Locals are now drafting a **Tree Preservation Order** for the leafy inconvenience.

An application made on 9 June to change the use of a former police box on **Heriot Row** for use as a coffee and food sale point [20/02262/FUL] had attracted 32 objections by 23 June, possibly from neighbours who don't like truncheon meat. Some 27 parties expressed support. The deadline for comments is 10 July.

Recycling centres at **Seafield, Wester Hailes, and Craigmillar** reopened on 1 June. Members of the public, in cars only, should make an appointment in advance to drop off objects they can't safely ignore at home or dump outside a neighbour's house.

After many **false dawns and misleading evenings**, *Spurtle's* online archive of back issues, dating back to Feb 1994, is now complete here [bit.ly/37GbZva]. Following a **2-month coronavirus-related hiatus**, a limited number of monthly Spurtles are now available again in print at: Bellevue Express (**Bellevue Rd**); Canonmills Newsagents, (**Howard St**); Claremont Food & Wine (**E Claremont St**); London St Grocery; Real Foods (**Broughton St**); Scotland St community library; Vino Wines (**Broughton St**); and noticeboards the length and breadth of the local far and wide.

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

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Next meeting: to be confirmed. For local information, visit the website at

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Next meeting: to be confirmed.

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Ben Macpherson MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Northern and Leith Constituency



0131 600 0134

www.benmacpherson.scot

ben.macpherson.msp@parliament.scot

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak my office is currently closed until further notice.

My team and I continue to assist constituents, are available to help as best we can, and can be contacted by phone or email.



The costs of this publication have been met out of parliamentary resources. The SPCB is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.

CORONAVIRUS CORNER

- For definitive NHS guidance on dealing with Coronavirus, visit [bit.ly/2J2dkRh].
- For accurate information on how the Council is responding to the pandemic, visit [bit.ly/398sYFq].
- Factual up-to-date coverage from the Scottish Government is available at [bit.ly/3aa8j5h].
- For useful news on volunteering to help in Edinburgh, visit: [bit.ly/2UBBg3E] and [bit.ly/3dmmQwE].
- And finally, if any reader finds themselves vulnerable or struggling, contact us at the number or email address on Page 1, top-right. We'll seek reliable advice and solutions on your behalf.