

Spurtle



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No 315

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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER

Free

St MARK'S PARK ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Last summer we wondered why, over the past 15 years of Keep Britain Tidy's annual scheme, St Mark's Park had not won a Green Flag award. Now we know ... locals aren't stuck in enough.



In Feb, a Council official told us: 'St Mark's Park hasn't been put forward for a Green Flag Award. There is not the same level of community support/involvement as other parks and there is no associated community or friends group. Our experience shows that having a Friends Group greatly enhances the prospect of a park achieving Green Flag status.'

'As a result we have not developed a management plan for the site but of course continue to assess the park on an annual basis, through our Park Quality Assessment (PQA) programme and tackle any issues identified as and when resources allow.'

'We're currently looking at bulb planting and the reinstatement of the wild flower meadows. There will also be more trees planted as part of the million trees project, and the Active Travel Team has continued to look at ways of improving cyclist/pedestrian safety throughout.'

'We continue to liaise with Craigroyston Football Club to ensure ways of improving their continued safe use of the pitch and changing facilities.'

Thoughts, please. Can we do better?

ONWARD AND UPWARD



Drummond CHS aims to improve access for all pupils to the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. This month, shoppers can boost the school's fund for this by using the blue checkout tokens available at participating branches of Tesco.

NEW PLANS TOO BIG FOR BROUGHTON ST LANE?



More details have emerged about the new 55-unit aparthotel proposed for Forth St and Broughton St Lane (Issue 314). You can view the full application at [bit.ly/3HVVCQJ].

Supercity Aparthotels proposes reconfiguring and refurbishing Forth House, from which most period detail was gutted in 1970. But for Playfair House it favours a new 'façade envelope' and building forward to the edge of the lane.

SA says the increase is necessary to provide 'a floorplate of sufficient area to support the commercial viability of the project.' Some sceptics respond that if you try squeezing a hippopotamus into a hamster cage, of course you'll need a bigger cage. A better solution might be to find a lake somewhere else.

Others we spoke to laughed at claims in the Design Statement about subtly referencing Georgian architecture. The Cockburn Association says a mews-scale residential development would better suit the narrow lane.

More welcoming voices say almost anything would be better than the current 'non-heritage-sensitive' Playfair House, which is the acme of unloveliness. Top-floor glazing would at least reduce the new structure's visual impact, and reusing the original superstructure is a sustainable approach.

Neighbours who contacted the *Spurtle* express concern at the arrival of an extra hotel in an area which already has 4 within 100m and awaits another in Picardy Pl. They don't want: noisy extra football late at night and service vans during the day; more people locally who have no commitment to the area; possible stag and hen nights. As we went to press, the proposal had attracted 20 objections.

AND ... BREATHE

Councillors voted in favour of a city-centre Low Emission Zone in late Jan [bit.ly/34VwpTy], just too late for us to report it in Issue 314.

Scottish Environmental Protection Agency experts had recently advised officials that neither expanding the boundary nor changing the grace period would be justifiable in terms of carbon impact. This prompted Greens to withdraw their objections, albeit with continued reservations.

Critics of the scheme say consultation was poor, and insufficient attention has been given to how to enforce the project or prevent the most polluting vehicles being driven round the perimeter.

In other news, Inverleith Row was until recently one of 5 Air Quality Management Areas across Edinburgh designated in response to breaches of national NO₂ objectives.

Now though, that dubious distinction is to be revoked after 3 consecutive years' compliance and modelling of future improvements [bit.ly/358DKza].

Pollutants in the Central AQMA (which includes the First New Town, Leith St-Shrub Pl, London Rd, and Easter Rd) remain troubling.

PROACTIVE APPROACH TO PICARDY PLACE

An online meeting last month, run by the Better Broughton residents group, discussed the future design of Picardy Pl's central reservation. *Spurtle*'s detailed report of who said what appears here [bit.ly/3GNTt3K].

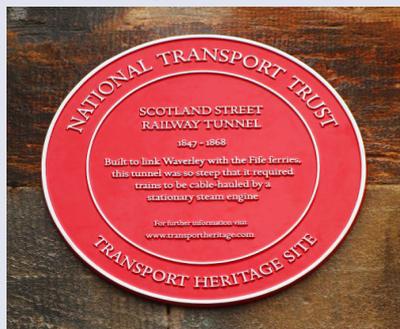
Councillors Doran, Miller, and Mowat echoed locals' calls for transparent process and timelines in future consultation/'engagement' by officials. There was agreement that locals want proactive input, not just a chance to rubber-stamp or stamp feet about completed designs.

There was consensus on the need to screen polluting traffic from pedestrians by effective and attractive planting. Improved crossing points prioritising walkers also attracted support.

Aspirations were expressed for public toilets, public art, and pedestrianising the western arm of the gyratory should CEC's target 30% reduction in traffic ever be achieved [bit.ly/3JyYbV3].



Briefly



The **National Railway Trust** has attached this commemorative plaque to the northern end of the **Scotland St Tunnel**. ‘Red wheels’ mark transport heritage sites significant for: importance in the **development of engineering and transport**; rarity of features; ‘hidden gem’ status; being worth a visit. The Scotland St RW is the **145th to be installed** across the UK since the scheme began in 2009. For more see [bit.ly/3g3JPPQ].

Two men, aged 26 and 28, have been **arrested and charged** in connection with the abduction in January of a man on **Spey St** and subsequent robbery at the Scotmid on **Leven St** (Issue 314). Police thanked the public for their help following an **appeal for information**.

You read it here first – the **Aussie Rules Euro Cup** will be hosted in Edinburgh on Sat 18 June. Nine-a-side **men’s and women’s national teams** will face off in group-stages before progressing to a knockout competition to decide the winners. **Spartle** understands **Inverleith Park** and **Edinburgh Academicals** rugby ground are likely venues.

Temporary loos in the **Botanic Gardens** have been given the go-ahead (Issue 313). Officials were not persuaded by 10 objections, including concerns about size and **possible noise impacts**. The structure will stand for 8 years during construction of the **BIOMES project**.

The new occupant of the **Toll House at Canonmills** will be the third Dine Edinburgh restaurant. The other two multi-award winners are at **Cambridge Street** and **Murrayfield**. Michelin Scottish chef Stuart Muir, and Paul Brennan, have their hands on the saucepans. The opening is **scheduled for this spring** and will create 28 local jobs.

Work began last month on the ‘safe and direct’ **City Centre West to East Link** for walkers and cyclists between **Roseburn** and **Leith Walk** via **Haymarket, the West End, and George St**. The project properly kicked off in 2020 with completion of a short section between **Elder St** and **Picardy Pl**, where cyclists and pedestrians may one day confidently collide at the crossing outside the **Conan Doyle**. Construction is expected to take until Aug 2023 and cost £19.4M. For **full details** see [bit.ly/3Bel3pN].

‘Carbon negative sustainable drainage units’ are being installed below **Inverleith Park** (at a cost of £145k) to address the longstanding problem of temporary summer lagoons [bit.ly/3I8uoSH].

High hopes for Jenners Building

An application submitted to the Council in Feb details plans to restore the former Jenners Building on Princes, North St David and Rose Streets (bit.ly/3LlkeGA). They are the work of David Chipperfield Architects, 3DReid, and Loader Monteith for Danish clothing retailer, Highland landowner, and conservationist Anders Holch Povlsen.

This preservation and refurbishment of historic features and fabric is one component of a wider scheme proposing shop, bar/café/restaurant and hotel uses within the Category A-listed structure.

If approved, some 10,000m² of the total 17,500m² would comprise a top-end 100-bedroom hotel on the upper floors. It is interesting to note that those seeking to develop the old Royal High School back in 2015–20 argued that their own upmarket offer could not be financially viable with fewer than 127–47 bedrooms.

Other significant elements include: hospitality in and around the central atrium’s 3-storey ‘grand saloon’; reopening of a double-height atrium at the Princes St entrance and a major exterior makeover for the 1966 extension; a ‘modern yet sympathetic interpretation’ of original unrealised plans for a turret overlooking St Andrew Sq; and sensitive upgrading of the building to improve sustainability.

It all sounds splendid; a potentially enlightened and imaginative boost for Princes St’s East End. So long as you can afford luxury, don’t mind yet another city-centre hotel, and do trust billionaire developers bearing gifts.



Eyre Place ruminations and manoeuvres

As reported in Issue 314, CASL Eyre Place (Edinburgh) Property Owner Ltd is at the early stages of proposing student housing for 72–4 Eyre Pl.

In a report to the Development Management Subcmte on 9 Feb, officials provided a (useful but not necessarily exhaustive) list of key conditions which the final plan must satisfy (bit.ly/3ux5h7Z).

Councillors Osler, Mitchell and Mowat raised their own preliminary concerns about such a constrained site, with potential problems around: access, current and future amenity of neighbours, future amenity of residents, mixed uses on a narrow lane, and pressure on King George V Park. Convener Cllr Neil Gardiner said use classes for the development would need careful consideration.

On 14 Feb, New Town & Broughton Community Council discussed some of the issues, noting that the area was designated for residential (not student housing) use in the draft City 2030 plan (Issue 313); and in fact measures 0.27 ha not 2.7 ha as stated by the developer.

Meanwhile, c.45 locals following the proposals have set up a dedicated website at [bit.ly/3rLP5xW]. Among other things, it contains useful and updated information on the timing of various stages within the consultation process. The deadline for responses to CASL’s ‘virtual feedback event’ last month is 16 March.

Meanwhile, small comfort over the road

A different developer, Eyre Place Properties, has applied to replace the former Smithies bar with a 3 storey (+ basement) block of 6 compact one-bedroom flats and a two-bedroom maisonette (22/00533/FUL).

The proposal is one floor less than that granted planning permission in principle in May 2020. It would have a ‘traditional appearance’, with window proportions and sizes matching nearby tenements’, and using ashlar sandstone at the front and a pitched slate roof.

No parking is proposed, but there would be 10 cycle spaces. There is very little room for outdoor amenity, with architects McLaren Murdoch & Hamilton pointing to the boundless empty acres of the Botanics, Water of Leith Walkway, and King George V Park nearby.



Forward to the past and back again

Some pre-pandemic normality returned to Spurtleshire last month as Leith Central Community Council held its first in-person meeting since Feb 2020.

The bracingly well-ventilated event took place in Hillside Bowling Club on Brunton Pl. Attendees soon remembered the joys of old-fashioned eye contact, invisible cues, silent curtailments, raised eyebrows, unmutable interruptions, and human faces free from de-flawing skin filters. Hurray for humanity!

Challenging times for Church of Scotland

The Church of Scotland is considering merger of three central Edinburgh congregations: Broughton St Mary's, St Andrew's and St George's, and Greenside.

The *Edinburgh Presbytery Plan Consultation Document 2022–2025* is a citywide response to a dwindling number of men and women entering the ministry, with many of them being older or approaching retirement, and a need for financial responsibility in challenging times.

'We are therefore required to make a significant cut in the number of ministries posts we are permitted to have, and this will be shocking to many in the Presbytery,' the document states.

As part of a wider programme of increased cooperation and shared resources, the three merged parishes would have 2 full-time ministers between them, with a half-ministry post to theatres.

The document suggests discussions about the future of the St Mary's building should begin 'as a matter of urgency' given fabric costs.

St Mary's Kirk Session supports the proposals but asserts in Feb's edition of the *Broughton Beacon* that its building is 'an essential mission resource for the Church of Scotland and has written to the Presbytery explaining why'.



Image: Ros Davis.

Shaken and stirred

Drummond Civic Association's committee responded with alarm last month to traffic being diverted via London St, the north side of Drummond Pl, and Great King St.

In a strongly worded email to Lothian Buses, the Council, and elected members, it observed that rather than one bus service using these cobbled residential streets, there were now nine, resulting in an estimated 600 double-decker bus journeys there per day.

Hence, DCA's concerns about: road safety; damage from vibrations to historic buildings, cellars, and road surfaces; air pollution; and effects of noise and disruption on residents' health and amenity.

DCA deplored the lack of prior consultation with itself, asked what risk assessments had been conducted first and what compensation/repair provision would be available after. It demanded the immediate use of more suitable streets.

Not all locals shared DCA's approach. *Spurtle* has seen related correspondence arguing that such temporary changes are an unavoidable and temporary consequence of tramworks, and that no obvious alternatives exist.

One observer noted that the diverted bus services (7,8,10,11,14,16,22) were essential for other communities which were already badly disrupted.

Lothian Buses has now re-routed most services, with only the 8 continuing to rattle Drummond Pl teacups.



Short-term let news

The retrospective application by Aberdeen-based Callidus Services Ltd to convert a residential dwelling into a short-term let at 24 Annandale St Lane has been refused (21/06142/FUL).

Officials said it would have 'a materially detrimental effect on the living conditions of nearby residents' and potentially cause disturbance in an otherwise quiet area.

In a clumsily phrased explanation, an official stated, 'Police incident call logs provided demonstrates that transient visitors using this size of property have had less regards for neighbours' amenity compared to long standing residents.'

An objector to the application cited multiple problems since Aug 2018 caused by inconsiderate partygoers here, and the inadequacy of Police responses to noise complaints. In 2021, evening calls on 101 were not answered for over an hour.

As we went to press, councillors were about to vote on whether to ask the Scottish Govt for new powers to designate Edinburgh as a short-term let control area. This would oblige residential property owners wholly letting a property here which is not their principal home as an STL to apply for change-of-use permission.

In other news, the *Evening News* (15.2.22) revealed that 15 registered 'super-landlords', owning c.5.3k Edinburgh properties, account for about 9 per cent of the capital's private rented sector.

Briefly

C*LD
TOWN
BEER

Plans by **Cold Town Brewery** for an extension to accommodate a new warehouse and visitor centre/shop at **8 Dunedin St** have been approved. A basic programme of 'archaeological historic building survey' will record the current late 19th and mid 20th-century structures before development starts.

In Issue 314 we speculated about whether **flood prevention doors** would soon become commonplace in **New Town basement dwellings**. We now note the arrival of floodgate frames outside **Napier Bathrooms in Canonmills**. Rainfall amelioration (temporarily storing it and or slowing down run-off) is critical for parts of the city **built on a slope**, and will be a major challenge for years to come.

Donations towards the cost of refurbishment and tower repairs at **Broughton St Mary's** have now reached £48k. Finances have also been eased by the Kirk Session's sale of a garage on **Inverleith Ter Lane**.

Welcome to **Bowzos** in the former basement premises of Casa Angelina at **42 London St**. Expect: handmade canine collars, leads, coats, **bandanas, bow ties, treats**, waistcoats, and dug-foost expungement requisites. More at [bit.ly/3gIyULs].

There has always been a small proportion of dog owners who **fail to pick up** after their pooches. And with the increase in dog ownership during the pandemic, so too has increased the number of troublesome non-baggers. One **Dundas St** pedestrian has now grown so tired of the resultant '**coprological hopscotch**' required walking to work that they've set up an **Instagram account** dedicated to the problem. Visit @ **unescoworldheritageshite**.

Revised plans to demolish a garage at **17 Spey St Lane** (20/04132/FUL) were consented last month. The height had been reduced; use of metal cladding had been changed to stone; window design had been altered; and cycle storage had been added. As first reported in Oct 2020, a **spirited local campaign** had earlier resulted in 1,054 public objections (bit.ly/3KCDIW5).

Nuveen Real Estate proposes new public sculpture for the **St James Quarter**. David Harber Ltd's *On the Shoulders of Giants* is designed to inspire young people and stop them clambering up the ribbon round the **Golden Turd hotel**. On mounting the steps in St James Sq, two head profiles would appear of a **younger man and woman** looking optimistically upwards 'to a bright future'. Descending the steps, outlines of two old artists: suggesting **past achievements** few if any youths have heard of or care about, and the inevitable human descent towards **lost looks, infirmity, and death**. See [bit.ly/3JxNxl].

Moreover ...

At the next meetings of the **Broughton History Society**, Una Race will talk about *The History of the Dog Trust* (7 March) and John Ennis about *The Linen Trade in Scotland* (4 April). For **Zoom**, email [spurves004@btinternet.com].

Despite widespread criticism, plans for the redesign of **Elm Row** will go ahead unchanged (Issue 313). Officials may revisit the conflicts of **cycles, pedestrians, and floating bus stops** later, but not until the tram project is finished and the danger of penalty charges for late design changes has passed. For latest news on Leith Walk traffic management, visit [bit.ly/3p1380P].

From 9 Feb until Apr, trams from **Edinburgh Airport** will terminate at **Shandwick PI** during demolition of the temporary **York PI** stop and building of a cross-over link to the new section of line. Pedestrians can cross at **Elder St**. From Apr, trams will resume but only as far **St Andrew Sq**, meaning tram travellers from Edinburgh and the rest of the world will continue to be cut off. Construction of the permanent **Picardy PI** stop is scheduled to start in May. Engineers expect the new route connecting **Newhaven and Leith** to Broughton will begin operating in 2023.

In further signs of commercial churn, Greggs bakery at **27 Broughton St** and Ladbrokes betting shop at **No. 29** have closed. Estate agent Culverwell says the latter's rateable value is £16.1k, with annual rental over £22.5k. The barony has **many positive qualities**, but being chic ain't cheap. *Spurtle* is aware of 11 businesses closing on or adjacent to Broughton St since March 2020.

A Council-sponsored **Business Overview** for Jan–Jun 2021 finds that more businesses across the UK are closing than new ones opening, with retail **harder hit than services** and shopping centres suffering the most. **Leith's vacancy rate** (13.6%) is as usual higher than Edinburgh's (8.7%), but has now plateaued whilst closures rise elsewhere.

If you've had trouble getting from one side of **Leith Walk** to the other recently, a useful map of where the crossings are is available here: [bit.ly/3h8pdWR].

Police are continuing to conduct road checks along **Pilrig St** and **Bonnington Rd** to improve local safety and detect road traffic offences. Slow down. Put away your mobile.

Spurtle is preparing an April hustings for the 5 May Local Govt Election in Edinburgh's **City Centre** ward. Unable to attend? Email your question to [spurtle@hotmail.co.uk].

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LEITH CENTRAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

A forum for local people who want to engage with and work for their local community.



Participate in local democracy.

Make representations to City of Edinburgh Council, other public bodies and private agencies on everything that matters locally.

Next meeting: 7pm on Mon. 21 March.
See website below for confirmed venue.

<https://leithcentralcc.co.uk>

Deidre Brock MP Edinburgh North & Leith



Regular constituency surgeries are now resuming by appointment only.

Full details can be found on my website dbrockmp.scot or contact my office by email or phone for more information about surgery dates and locations.

Stay safe, Deidre.

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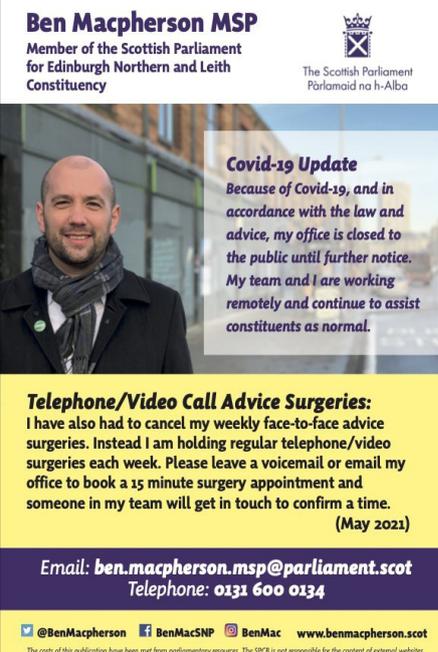
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Covid-19 Update
Because of Covid-19, and in accordance with the law and advice, my office is closed to the public until further notice. My team and I are working remotely and continue to assist constituents as normal.

Telephone/Video Call Advice Surgeries:
I have also had to cancel my weekly face-to-face advice surgeries. Instead I am holding regular telephone/video surgeries each week. Please leave a voicemail or email my office to book a 15 minute surgery appointment and someone in my team will get in touch to confirm a time. (May 2021)

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NEW TOWN & BROUGHTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Representing locals' views to City of Edinburgh Council.

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Venue to be confirmed.

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