

# Spurtle



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**BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER**

**Free**

## EDITORIAL

Four stories in this month's issue highlight public disillusion with how some Council officials and elected representatives seek and respond to public opinion. The level of such resentment in Edinburgh across a wide range of issues – including the design of cyclepaths and footways along the new tram route, commercialisation of public space, and 'out-of-control' festivalisation of the city economy – is unprecedented in *Spurtle's* experience. It should give candidates of all parties in next month's Local Govt elections serious pause for thought.

## BIN-HUB ALTERNATIVES – 6-MONTH REVIEW

At Jan's Transport & Environment Cmte meeting, deputations from Edinburgh World Heritage, the Cockburn Association, and Stockbridge/Inverleith and New Town/Broughton Community Councils opposed bin-hubs in the Edinburgh World Heritage Site.

Some said the roll-out lacked justification and was unpopular in the New Town. There were calls for improved communication and consultation, and for consideration of successful alternatives to bin-hubs which have been applied elsewhere at home and abroad (Grassmarket, Venice, Cordoba).

Following a second meeting, Environment Convener Cllr Lesley Macinnes told *Spurtle*, 'We're now arranging for an independent third party to undertake a feasibility study to investigate their proposals including underground solutions, waste rooms and other alternative ways of waste collections.

'And when we've appointed a third party, we'll share our scope for the work with the community council and any other interested bodies to make sure they're fully informed. We've paused our Temporary Traffic Regulation Order for around 6 months to allow the feasibility study to be carried out.'

Optimists see this as a welcome shift, a Council agenbite of inwit after its charm campaign by steamroller fell flat. Sceptics say it's a pragmatic delaying tactic at a time when bin-hub roll-outs in other parts of Edinburgh face bureaucratic backlogs. Cynics think the delay is for appearances only, and that in the final reckoning officials have always and will always reject alternative arrangements on grounds of cost. We watch with foreboding.

## ANGER AT POTENTIAL LOSS OF BINGO HALL

All Leith-based community councils have objected to a Planning Cmte decision to exclude the Bingo Hall on Manderston St from an extended Leith Conservation Area.

The PC decision goes against the community councils' joint support for including the landmark structure. They are angry at what they see as officials' misleading advice to the Committee.

They point out that the Leith Walk/Halmyre St Place Brief for development of this neighbourhood has 2 options, one retaining the Bingo Hall and one replacing it with vehicular access. But officials' report to the PC mentioned only the latter and used this to justify excluding the building.

A joint letter has now been sent to the PC Convener, Nick Gardiner. It concludes: 'In order to prevent the erosion of public trust in the Planning process, we Leith Community Councils ask the Council to void the approval of the extension of the Leith Conservation Area and, without further delays, to reinstate the Bingo Hall in the proposed Leith Conservation Area.'

The building opened in 1929 and ran as the 2,300-seat Capitol Picture House until 1961, when its use changed. It is not a listed building, and although the main entrance under the arch has some charm, the rear is beyond doubt an ugly great lump. However, the whole is culturally, socially, and historical embedded in its Leith community, and once again that's what locals resent being undervalued [[bit.ly/3JtMYVZ](http://bit.ly/3JtMYVZ)].



## CITY CENTRE HUSTINGS – CONTACT US FIRST!



PROCESSION TO THE HUSTINGS AFTER A SUCCESSFUL CANVASS.

*Spurtle* will host a Local Govt Election hustings from 7.15–9.00pm on Wed 20 April in Broughton St Mary's Parish Church, Bellevue Cres. The event will focus on the Edinburgh City Centre ward. To attend – online or in person – register at Eventbrite here [[bit.ly/hustings22](http://bit.ly/hustings22)]. This meeting will be socially distanced, and any hot air from candidates will be counteracted by ample ventilation. Please dress warmly.

Questions will be clustered in themes. Some will come from the floor, others from those sent by 15 Apr to [spurtle@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:spurtle@hotmail.co.uk). Please get in touch early.

## PICARDY PLACE ISLAND – CONSULTATION NO CLOSER

In Issue 315 we reported Better Broughton's virtual public meeting to discuss the future design of the central island in Picardy Pl. New Town & Broughton Community Council has also been considering its options.

NTBCC's Environment Cmte is vexed by the lack of public consultation since the Council's Transport & Environment Convener promised such engagement in Jan 2018. They are now perplexed by the Council's determination to develop what it calls 'an outline scope' based on the 'consultations and feedback' which haven't happened.

NTBCC favours greenery and public art on the island rather than commercial activity. It wants any design to include consideration of Picardy Place's side areas, and how cyclists and pedestrians will traverse the area.

However, there remains a concern within NTBCC and further afield that the Council intends to present a complete design of its own which locals could then perhaps adjust not shape.

Hence, NTBCC's Environment Cmte concludes, '[It] is not sensible to devote any further time to considering possible design options until the position of the Council is clearly and formally stated. In particular, if a design is being produced by the Council prior to any engagement of local people and organisations – contrary to commitments made over recent years – such efforts would probably not be worthwhile.'

This is a rational response by NTBCC, and a depressing reflection of what faith locals now place in aspects of local-authority practice.

## Briefly



On the morning of 9 March, locals were alarmed to hear of a traffic incident in **Bellevue**. A mid-road lamppost of previous good character failed to avoid an approaching motorcar, damaging both. **Police attended at the scene**. Photo: @DeaconThurston.

**Broughton Primary School** pupils (and their siblings) are encouraged to raise money for the school through a sponsored run of 1–5 km. It's all part of the **Edinburgh Marathon Festival**, in which 100+ pupils participated last time in 2019. The event will take place at **Holyrood Pk** on 28 May, with Sunday training sessions in **Pilrig Pk** from 13 March. More details here [bit.ly/3LXGyjH] If joining-fees are a problem, **help is available** from the Parent Council.

'Greenside', the former Blenheim House on **Blenheim Pl**, is up for sale. Built in 1989, the interior has been gutted to create 'unique office space' which 'celebrates the raw building fabric'; i.e. exposed interior surfaces and unapologetic ducting. It has all the charm of a Swiss proctology clinic [bit.ly/3t9Xyvl].

**Leith Central Community Council** objects to a new application to convert the bowling clubhouse/green at **54 Rosslyn Cres** into a private home/garden (22/00745/FUL). It says the plans are contrary to the **National Planning Policy** and **Edinburgh Local Development Plan** which aim to encourage developments creating stronger communities and safeguarding vulnerable places. A change of use like this should be a last resort, but **Pilrig locals** and a community group have expressed formal interest in renewing public life at the site.

Boda Bars have been refused permission to create a decked, winter seating area outside **Joseph Pearce's** at **23 Elm Row**. (21/05858/FUL). Councillors said the proposal would spoil the listed building's **special character** and would not preserve or enhance the New Town Conservation Area's **special character/appearance**. They said neighbours' amenity and road safety would be compromised. Some **69 public comments** were submitted, 48 in favour of the plan and 20 objecting.

**Friends of Inverleith Pk** are raising money towards new play equipment, with a target of £300k. To donate £5, text **PLAYPARK** to 70450 (texts cost £5 + one standard network rate message). Or **donate online** at [bit.ly/newplaypark]. To become a sponsor or **volunteer fundraiser**, email [newplaypark@hotmail.com]. For a short questionnaire on **current park usage** and users' hopes for the future, visit [bit.ly/InverleithPark].

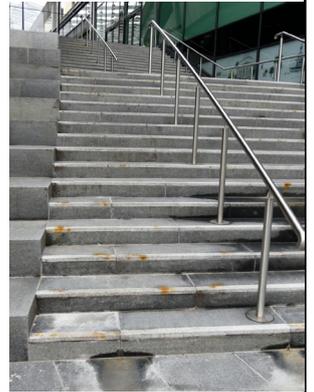
## Rust assured – no problem

Last month online we reported the appearance of red/brown patches on the Grand Stair from St James Sq into the new St James Qtr (bit.ly/3w1kpeN).

Had the application of salt here in cold and then wet weather caused rust below? Was the St James Qtr about to fall apart? Management and PR people at Nuveen Real Estate declined to answer our questions, but did respond to the local resident who first alerted us.

Iron brackets used under the stair had corroded, they told him, and would have to be cut out and replaced. But these defective components had not been used anywhere else in the development.

In mid-Mar, the rust stains were power-hosed away, and horizontal holes 50–60 mm deep were drilled between the horizontal veneers and the risers. We await further remedial steps with interest.



## Transport officials hunkered in the bunker?

NTBCC has submitted a Participation Request to the Council using the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 [bit.ly/3CEIfhH]. It wants to be at the heart of decision-making about pedestrian and cyclist safety in this area. However, it understands the Council intends to refuse the request.

NTBCC's transport convener Mike Birch writes, 'This is a surprising position for the Council to take when there is a clear expectation in the legislation that such requests should be refused only where there are clear reasons for dismissing them. We will continue our dialogue with the Council on this issue and seek support from our local councillors'.

To some observers, this is evidence of a deepening bunker mentality among under-resourced officials overwhelmed by their workloads and the expectations of a restive population dissatisfied at how decisions in Edinburgh are made.

## New twist on Dundas St

A Scottish Govt reporter considering the appeal of MMMARS Dundas St against refusal of planning permission for their proposed new building at 108–14 Dundas St has visited the area.

'When undertaking his site inspection, the reporter noted that demolition works/redevelopment appears to have commenced at the large building opposite the appeal site on the junction of Dundas Street and Fettes Row.'

Perhaps it was the clouds of dust, the grinding machinery, or the missing walls that gave it away.

He has now written to the Council asking for further details on New Town North's future relation to adjacent footways, and how its design, materials, scale, massing, form and position will affect the local Conservation Area.

The implicit question seems to be: Would the new proposal for 108–14 be any more impactful? The worry for some is whether Council consent for one controversial development in the Conservation Area makes it logical to green light others.



## Who should decide on public art?

In Issue 314, *Spurtle* expressed doubt about the quality of a sculpture proposed for Little King St. In Issue 315 we interpreted another, this one proposed for St James Sq. Local resident Antony C.O. Jack has related and wider concerns.

Among these, Jack suggests, first, that the proposed *On the Shoulders of Giants* could present health-and-safety dangers given the likelihood of young people clambering all over it half-drunk and falling off.

Second, he wonders why the chosen profiles of older people – to whose efforts and success young people are supposed to aspire – are based on those of artists Bernat Klein and Cecile Walton. The application says they were picked to express 'how social and creative change and development over the last century has [sic], and is [sic] helping to shape the future', but doesn't explain how. Exactly what is being endorsed here?

Given the controversy which now attends public sculptures of real people, whatever these embodied meanings are should be clear both in the application and the work itself.

Third, asks Jack, is it right that the cultural context of a prominent piece of public art is wrapped within a planning application where such aesthetic and philosophical considerations are immaterial? Wouldn't it be better if such decisions also involved, say, the City Arts Centre and/or the advisory panel administering Edinburgh's Jean F. Watson Bequest?

## George Street regeneration edges forward

Since we last reported on the final Concept Design in Mar 2021 [bit.ly/3KLhUkR], work on the regeneration of George St has continued behind the scenes.

A fresh round of public engagement took place last month, with feedback and further discussion scheduled for May. At one event *Spurtle* attended, members of the public called for close attention to: taxi access for disabled users; bus stops on Hanover St; provision of toilets accessible to older and disabled people; safety by design for women at night; segregated pedestrian and cycle areas; modelling of traffic displacement; and the need to employ consultants with local knowledge of Edinburgh – its character, quirks, and climate.

An Operational Plan should be ready by this summer, with proposals ready for consideration by the Transport & Environment Cmte in the autumn. Traffic Regulation Orders will be published at around the same time. Detailed technical designs and pricing should be established by autumn 2023, with work in phases beginning in 2024. Construction is estimated to take 2–3 years.



## Briefly



Congratulations to **Napier Bathrooms** in Canonmills, which won the award for **UK Bathroom Showroom of the Year 2022** in Mar. Flushed with success, Napier's **Johnny Bacigalupo** later recalled 'bursting with pride' at the awards ceremony, hosted by **TV presenter Vernon Kay** and attended by hundreds of kitchen and bathroom industry **leaders and influencers**. Napier, set up in 2004, has also hit the heights as **Community Champion of the Year in the Retail & Design Awards 2020**.

**Sic transit Veneziana.** Something new and perhaps better will emerge at **1 Deanhaugh St**. On Twitter, @kathy\_odonnell posted this **bitter-sweet elegy**: 'Farewell then, Pizza Express. / Your meals were reliably below average. / Even for a Pizza Express. / But I like to think that together we saved Venice / ... if not Stockbridge.' In Oct 2019, celebrated local gourmet @IrvineWelsh was less **sfumato**: [bit.ly/3vj6DE3].

Celebrated local coffee aficionado @IrvineWelsh was not backward in coming forward to endorse the new coffee kiosk at the west end of Heriot Row [bit.ly/35WTPsC]. He likes its 'old school technology' and '**arresting brew**'. *Spurtle* sees no evidence to suggest that the enterprise has led to the end of civilisation in **Wester New Town**, as some foretold this time last year [bit.ly/3u2UroK]. There again, despite repeated visits, we have found no evidence of it **being open**. Can any reader supply details of the venture's trading hours?

**Toolstation Ltd** has experienced considerable growth during the coronavirus pandemic, and now plans to open an outlet at **169B Bonnington Rd** (on the corner with Pilrig St). It would serve as a collection point for pre-ordered and prepaid items useful to the building trade and **private DIY enthusiasts** (e.g. power-tools, hand-tools, screws, fixes, decorating materials, heating and electrical supplies, clothing, swearboxes, sticking plasters). This outlet would employ **5–8 FTE staff**. The Council's City Plan 2030 earmarks the **Bonnington Trading Estate** here for future redevelopment as housing, but so far it continues to be popular with businesses.

Permission is sought to convert the staff room of an office at **15 Queen St** into a lower-ground-floor coffee shop with seating for **33 people**.

A refurbished and more various Crombie's opened on 24 March as **Broughton Market**.

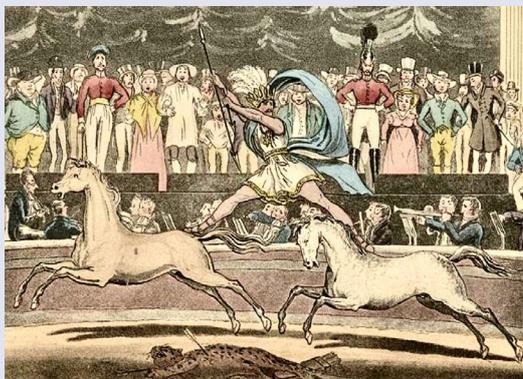
## Numerous claps on opening night

In January 1790 a new venue opened in King Street (now the site of St Mary's Catholic Cathedral), and the *Scots Magazine* reviewed its premiere:

*The Edinburgh Equestrian Circus opened on Monday with a variety of entertainments. The company who attended the Circus were no less brilliant than numerous. Mr Parker's great abilities in the Equestrian Exercises were fully displayed on the occasion and most deservedly applauded. Messrs Sutton, King, and Ricketts, in their various and repeated exertions to please, did not lose their share of merit, and received the gratification of the audience in numerous claps; as did Mr Jenkinson, whose abilities as the clown in the horsemanship excited the laughter of every one present. The Ground and Lofty Tumbling, if not superior, was at least equal, to any performance of the kind ever exhibited.*

Also included in the opening evening were rope dancing and a ballet, *The Caledonian Shepherds*. Despite its glittering opening, the Edinburgh Equestrian Circus closed after just three years. One of its principal equestrian performers, John Bill Ricketts, left for America. He set up his own circus in Philadelphia and is credited as the founder of American circus.

In 1817 the venue was taken over by Mr Corri and horses were back on the stage for the opening show, *The Grand Equestrian Burletta Spectacle of Timour, Khan of the Tartars!*— [Taken from Barclay Price's new book, *Beastly Edinburgh*, Amberley Publishing, ISBN 9781398107304.]



## New Town tractors – Where are they?

Gas-guzzling sports utility vehicles in the Grange were targeted by green activists last month. A loose alliance of eco-warriors deflated tyres in affluent areas across Britain to highlight these vehicles' harmful effects on the environment and pedestrians unlucky enough to meet them in motion.

Intrigued at this alleged correlation of affluence, geography and SUVs, we conducted an unscientific survey of 44 varied streets in Spurtleshire. The results relate to three successive weekdays between 2.00pm and 3.30pm. By dividing the parking meterage of the street by the number of SUVs (excluding e-vehicles and hybrids) on each we were able to derive comparative concentrations.

Great King St topped the list with 37 SUVs squeezed into its 282 m of end-on parking (1 every 15 m). Abercromby Pl came second with 16 (1 every 16.5m), London St came third with 11 SUVs (1 every 11m). A few SUVs were found on Bellevue Gdns, Rd and St. Only 2 streets contained none: Dryden Gait and Eyre Ter.

Interesting to us was the fact that SUVs are scattered across nearly all local streets, regardless of whether they're parked outside palace fronts, typical tenements, or unexceptional semis. Urban motorists' infatuation with height and power is not exclusively the preserve of the high and mighty. Our full, flawed findings will appear on the *Spurtle* website soon.



# Moreover ...



After discussion with residents, the route from **Gayfield Sq** to **E London St** was again closed to through traffic on 10 Mar. Not everyone is pleased, and the effect on **congestion elsewhere** is being monitored.

Some **200 local residents** were contacted by agents for CA Ventures in a pre-application consultation about plans for 200+ bed student housing at **72–74 Eyre Pl** (21/06729/PAN). Over 237 have now replied, mostly through the **Eyre Pl Lane Owners Association** which represents residents in Eyre Pl, Rodney St, Rodney Pl, Logan St, and Canonmills. In EPLO's **survey of residents' opinions**, 81% strongly opposed and 15.3% opposed the proposal. Those who supported it (3.7%) did so with conditions, such as the development not being too large. We detailed EPLO's objections to the plans in **Issue 314**. What is remarkable about the body's latest response is its clear identification of what it would like instead. A **breakdown of locals' preferences** shows preferences for: family homes (38.5%), park/green space (33%), community centre (15%), medical centre (9%), student housing (1.5%). Had the developer or its representative met the community earlier, says EPLO, they would have understood the **overwhelming negative reaction**. Alas, developers of student housing rarely solicit or listen to negative feedback earlier than necessary.

In Nov last year (Issue 312) we reported Council plans to spend **£2.2M on 66 electric-vehicle charging points** across Edinburgh by the end of this month. The 4 intended for **India St** have been dropped following objections by locals and problems with the **power supply**.

Figures obtained by **Leith Central Community Council** break down reports of dumping/flytipping by ward in 2019–21. Grand totals: **Leith Walk**, 2,671; **City Centre**, 1,884; **Inverleith**, 1,263. **Sighthill/Gorgie** recorded the most: 4,230. **Corstorphine/Murrayfield** recorded the fewest: 526.

Plans to change the use of Unit 2, **25 Beaverhall Rd** (21/06312/FUL) from a workshop/showroom to a Class 11 **axe-throwing entertainment venue** have been consented. To safeguard the amenity of neighbouring residents and other occupiers, dangerous uses – such as **cinema, concert hall, casino, dance hall or discotheque** – will not be permitted.

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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. 18 April.**  
**See website below for confirmed venue.**

<https://leithcentralcc.co.uk>

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**Ben Macpherson MSP**  
 Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Northern and Leith Constituency

**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.**

**You're very welcome to attend.**  
 Come along and make a difference. Next meeting:  
**Mon. 11 Apr at 7.00pm.**  
**Venue to be confirmed.**

[www.ntbcc.org.uk](http://www.ntbcc.org.uk)