

Spurtle



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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

NEW TOWN QUARTER APPEAL

Developer Izar V Lux S.A.R.L. and Fusion (managers of purpose-built student accommodation) have appealed to the Scottish Govt against Edinburgh Council's refusal of planning consent for elements of their 'New Town Quarter' proposals [bit.ly/NTQb2db].

Their reasons (PPA-230-2755) include assertions that:

- There is no requirement to provide a minimum housing capacity for the site.
- The proposed development is of high quality, with 88% of PBSA rooms meeting design-guidance targets, and with excellent internal and external amenity.
- The Development Management Subcmte misread Local Development Plan stipulations about student density.
- The percentage of mainstream housing exceeds the level necessary to 'dilute' the proposed concentration of students.
- There are no LDP policies requiring assessment of student density within the wider population.

Supporting information is provided in 327 documents which you can enjoy at your leisure here [bit.ly/OMG327].



DEAD AND GONE AND BACK AGAIN



Image: Courtesy of Lyon & Turnbull.

No, not something found bobbing about in the Water of Leith (see p.2) but a hooded dodo, illustrated and described in John Latham's *A General Synopsis of Birds*, (1781–87). Latham described it as 'an uncouth being' and cited Sir Thomas Herbert (*Some Yeares Travels*) who said that her 'pace is slow, and the body round and fat; by some eaten as meat, but is more pleasurable to look than feed upon; and her stomach so fiery that it can easily digest stones'. The work – auctioned by Lyon & Turnbull on 25 Feb – was estimated to fetch £1.5k–£2k. See also [bit.ly/Dadodo].

WHO'S AT THE HELM ON ELM ROW?

Readers will recall that although the Council rerouted the cycle path behind the southbound Elm Row bus stop in Oct 2025, it did not repave the former path, remove old lane markings or introduce new explanatory signage (Issue 356).

Because the resulting confusion is dangerous for both cyclists and pedestrians, Leith Central Community Council has kept calling for remedial action ever since. It has sent messages direct to officers and via Ward 12 councillors.

LCCC says communication from officials has been polite but infrequent and short on detail. And despite written assurances, nothing has been done. Not even LCCC's ideas for easily achieved temporary fixes – such as physical barriers across the former lane – have been taken up.

LCCC will now 'escalate' its concerns with the help of elected members.



INS AND OUTS OF CAB COMPLAINTS

According to Council licensing figures, Edinburgh had 1,078 taxis and 3,069 private-hire cars on 1 Dec 2025. Not including London, only Glasgow (4,683) and Birmingham (5,998) had larger combined fleets.

Statistics also show the number of complaints (in 17 categories) and how many of them were upheld (in italics below). For taxis, the top 6 were: vehicle not of required standard (106, 84); aggressive behaviour (65, *10*); inappropriate parking (34, 22); driving manner (29, 7); poor customer service (24, 3); overcharging (21, 7). Across all 394 complaints, 122 (31%) were upheld.

For private-hire cars (not including 'miscellaneous' complaints) top gripes were: Greenway (126, 72); pick up/drop off from taxi rank (116, 32); pick up/drop off in vicinity of taxi rank (113, 19); vehicle not of required standard (113, 19); aggressive behaviour (84, 8); smoking (84, 5). Across all 1,091 complaints, 253 (23.2%) were upheld.

Two points spring to mind. (1) Compared to other cities, the size of Edinburgh's combined fleet is surprising given the depth and extent of its public transport. (2) Given the size of the combined fleet and the huge number of journeys made each year, the number of complaints is low. For background, see the reports pack at [bit.ly/EdRegs126].



VOTERS v FLOATERS

Save Our Shore Leith and the River Almond Action Group have joined the Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland to fight excreta in our H₂O. Last year, 30 billion litres of raw sewage were discharged into Scottish waters.

Campaigners want Scotland's political parties to: demand monitoring of all sewer outflows; stop routine pollution; hold polluters to account; and set targets for investment in blue-green spillage-resistant infrastructure.

They urge the public to sign their petition, lobby MSPs and send postcards to the Scottish Parliament detailing personal experiences of keech in the wrong places. Everybody loves getting postcards. Find out more at [bit.ly/ERCScampaigns].

The Scottish Wildlife Trust profiled SOSLeith at [bit.ly/SWTsos]. ERCS's purpose is explained at [bit.ly/ERCSwhy] and the key policies it wants Scottish political parties to include in their manifestos for this year's Holyrood elections are at [bit.ly/H0526]. For related *Spurtle* poos in the news, see Issue 336 and [bit.ly/SpWoL].

Briefly



Image: Caroline Roussot.

An electric vehicle caught fire in **Great King St** on 1 Feb, ruining itself and damaging another car parked adjacent. Assault of sorts and battery.

Leith Central Community Council met a Trams to Newhaven representative last month to discuss the new Iona St civic square opposite **Pilrig St Paul's**. Eight items of redundant or poorly sited street clutter which **did not feature** in original designs were identified for action.

Scotsman Group (unconnected to the newspaper) seeks to make internal changes and convert B-listed **13C Dundas St** from serviced apartments to a 4-suite and 1-bdrm hotel (25/06415/FUL).

This year's LeithChooses participatory budget process selected **10 worthy community projects** from Wards 12 and 13 for funding. Of 30 applications, only 1 was Spurtleshire-specific (**Broughton Primary School planters**). It was unsuccessful. It seems LeithChooses mostly attracts Leith causes and Leith choosers, and Leith choosers mostly choose Leith causes. This imbalance could be addressed by a **more inclusive rebrand** (e.g. YouChoose) and much improved marketing/publicity in areas of Ward 12 south of **Pilrig and Iona Sts**, and in **Broughton, Hillside, Canonmills** and the **Beaverlands**.

Cllr Caldwell (Ward 12) last month established that the potential **Powderhall–Meadowbank** active-travel route has not yet secured Scottish Govt funding. However, in 2025/26 the Council will spend about £10k on continued **land negotiations**, designs and scheduling. Leith Central CC is pressing for accelerated effort to realise this 'green corridor'.

Out of the Blue has entered a rent-free period of testing 'infrastructure, systems and processes' in the newly refurbished Powderhall Stables on **Broughton Rd**. The sea-trial could last 3–6 months unless problems are found. Once snags are resolved, a **75-year lease** will be signed with the Council, and creatives will occupy the **12 studios, 2 co-working spaces, meeting room and 2 function areas**. For more detail, see [\[bit.ly/OOTBpdh\]](https://bit.ly/OOTBpdh).

New Town & Broughton CC last month made 6 safety-conscious applications to the Council's **Local Travel Improvement Programme**. (1) Remove parking bays at the **Carlton Brae/Ter** junction to improve sightlines. (2) Remove parking bays currently blocking N and S entrances to **Gayfield Sq Gdn**. Improve one-way-traffic signage. (3) Widen and declutter busy footway between taxi rank outside Balmoral Hotel and Waverley Station bus stop on (S side of) **Princes St**. (4) Patch **Bellevue Cres** potholes. (5) Patch potholes at junctions of **Abercromby Pl/Dundas St** and **Heriot Row/Howe St**. (6) Create yellow box on **Annandale St/E London St** roundabout to improve access for **Huntingdon Pl**.

Powderhall problems rumble on

Locals are comparing the Considerate Constructors Scheme (CCS) 'Code of Considerate Practice' adopted by Powderhall developer CCG to what is actually happening on the ground.

Part of the scheme undertakes to respect the neighbouring community (including businesses) by:

- ensuring courteous and respectful language and appropriate behaviour
- providing a safer environment, preventing unnecessary disturbance and reducing nuisance
- actively maintaining effective engagement with the community to deliver 'meaningful positive impacts'.

According to the CCS website [bit.ly/mapCCS], CCG began work here on 10 Nov 2025 but only registered with the CCS on 16 Jan 2026. The same source states that CCG's site contact had not completed any CCS eLearning modules by 22 Feb.

CCG did not proactively engage with the community before closing **St Mark's Path** (Issues 357–58). It did not warn the **DelishYoss** coffee kiosk before piling began 10m away – this despite repeated assurances that it would do so. Noise and vibration forced the business to close for 2 days in Feb, and the owner must now seek financial compensation at Edinburgh Sheriff Court. CCG has been approached for comment.

Meanwhile, Leith Central CC wants the Council to answer 3 questions about **St Mark's Path** (Issue 358). (1) How long will the current 'rail-crossing'-style arrangement remain? (2) What operating protocol applies for this temporary crossing? (3) When will diversion-path details (route, surface, gradient, lighting) be shared?



Council struggles with rat romance

Over the last 5–10 years, warmer winters, loss of wild habitat, denser human occupation and easy access to dumped fast food have caused an increase in rat and mouse populations across UK cities. Greater Spurtleshire is no exception, with **Gayfield** and **Abbeyhill** among areas known to have had recent problems (Issue 312).

The Council has statutory duties to tackle the problem in its social housing, schools and offices but the Pest Control Service (PCS) struggles to meet this promptly because it must supplement an inadequate budget (£141k in 2025/26) by taking on extra jobs in the private sector.

Officers are therefore urging elected members to double the PCS budget from 2026/27 onwards and allot a further £350k for additional Environmental Health, Cleansing and Ground Maintenance resources. Corporate Director of Place **Gareth Barwell** concedes that better, coordinated, routine estate management is also needed.

A healthy pair of gantlin rats tail-toddlin under the floorboards can reproduce every 2 months, potentially resulting in up to 1k multi-generational descendants per year.



St James Square access

After litigious resistance by **St James Qtr** and **W Hotel** owners, Transport & Environment Cmte members last month voted to change tactics in defence of **St James Sq** as a pedestrian-friendly space (Issues 343, 354).

Officers' report to the TEC [bit.ly/TEC126] contains a tangle of legal arguments and counter positions, the upshot of which was the Council's retreat in Oct 2024 from seeking to limit vehicular access as the Roads Authority using a Traffic Regulation Order.

Its new position emphasises conditions imposed under the original planning consent. Acting as landlord, the Council will have 'oversight' of vehicle access and place responsibility for safety on the leaseholder.



Access to **St James Sq** will be limited to taxis, private hires and executive coaches serving the hotel with no more than 2 vehicles (or 1 coach) at a time. The Council will monitor the area using CCTV and, if the square is misused or overused, may withdraw access entirely.

The officers' recommendations were informed by a report from engineering consultancy **Jacobs**. This found that between Sept 2024 and Aug 2025 there were 27 near misses involving vehicles and 5 involving bikes in **St James Sq/Elder St**.

On average, there were more than 2 vehicles in **St James Sq** on 4 occasions each day, contrary to a proposed Standard Operating Procedure drawn up by the Council and stakeholders. The SOP also has provisions for a controlled barrier, banksperson, and segregated area for pedestrians and cycles.

Jacobs concluded that blocking all access to the square would displace traffic and increase risks for pedestrians on nearby streets.

Call to calm East Claremont Street

Local resident Matthew McClure is campaigning to test traffic-calming measures in E Claremont St. He proposes using an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order to trial a mid-point modal filter (MF) near W Annandale St.

McClure wants to stop rat-running, reduce noise and vibration along the setts, help reduce expensive repairs to the road surface and protect New Town Conservation Area buildings (Issue 354).

MFs are barriers (such as planters or bollards) restricting access but allowing permeability. They are psychological as much as physical blocks.

McClure says an MF here would neither prevent residential access and parking nor hinder emergency responses or waste collection. If successful, the monitored experiment could be made permanent later. He calls on locals to press councillors for the change.

His idea drew mixed responses from those *Spurtle* consulted. Some welcome potential reductions in noise and vehicle speed. Some support less through traffic, especially around Broughton Primary School.

Critics say the through-route is necessary to avoid congestion and idling vehicles elsewhere. Some argue that an MF would displace traffic onto other local streets, most of which are just as residential as E Claremont St and much narrower.

Council funding of up to £50k for such projects is available under the Local Traffic Improvement Programme. Community and ward councillors can propose them, with the plans being scored based on 'community impact' and safety data.

Curbing rogue landlords

In recent deputations to the Full Council and Regulatory Cmte, Living Rent staff criticised rogue landlords and questioned the Council's record on enforcement.

Some 22% of Edinburgh residents rent 66.5k private homes from 44.7k landlords. Based on latest national averages, LR estimates 16k such lets are below tolerable standards. Meanwhile, rents have increased by 104% since 2010.

LR notes that in 2025, only 3 landlords were struck off or meaningfully sanctioned for unlawful practices. This, they say, in no way matches the known extent of non-compliant behaviour. It asks if this is due to insufficient Council resources or staff practices. It calls for honesty about where the problems lie.

LR criticises officials' binary approach (do nothing or ban bad landlords), instead favouring improvement plans with clear deadlines and consequences for inaction. It says changes should be made to simplify and improve the system for tenants and calls on officers to exceed minimum requirements and monitor and enforce outstanding Tribunal decisions better.

In separate reports, officials say they already apply best practice (e.g. working to guide landlords), are bound by law to a 'binary' response and are at full stretch despite having appointed temporary additional staff in advance of an organisational review later this year. As part of that review, there are proposals to increase the number of landlord registration checks and provide additional support and mediation for tenants. Doing so would require significant extra funding.

Officials and LR agreed that they were happy to work constructively together. (See also Issue 356.)



Charge of the bike brigade in battle with balaclavas

Plain-clothed officers on Leith Walk recently apprehended the balaclava-wearing rider of an unregistered Sur-Ron e-motorbike. The 15-year old was charged with 6 offences, and the bike (bought for £2.5k) was seized.

A later police statement stated: 'We know there is significant concern in local communities about unregistered motorbikes on public roads and their use in criminality.'

To be legal, vehicles of this kind must have lights, indicators, speedometer, horn, mirrors, registration/number plate, and a top on-road speed of 28 mph. Strictly speaking, they are mopeds. Riders must be at least 16 years old and wear a helmet. They require a full licence or compulsory basic training and 3rd-party insurance.

A History of Dundas Street by Barclay Price

This is the 9th of Barclay Price's tightly focused companions to neighbourhood places and personalities. Generously illustrated and approachably written, it tells the stories of a street which, despite existing since 1802, has until now attracted comparatively little attention.

Price's approach is anecdotal not academic, but he usefully summarises the Second New Town's development, unpicking the early conversion of domestic spaces to commercial premises. His chapter on 'Lodgings' is unusual and insightful, and the 'Twenty Decades, Twenty Lives' section is an entertaining Cook's Tour of local worthies. The index is organised conventionally and, usefully, by today's property numbers.

I enjoyed glimpses into lost premises and enterprises. Who knew, for example, that Britain's largest swimming pool (100ft x 30ft) once stood close to the Fettes Row junction, where in 1866 a 'scientific' exhibition involved performers eating, drinking and smoking underwater?

More could have been said about the former New Town Paperback: its back room (admission on request) stacked with damp-smelling publications beloved by senior lawyers and other votaries of unusual discipline.

Price's self-published work has flaws. The dense typeface and narrow lineage will deter some. There are far too many typos. There are too few citations to sources. Despite such shortcomings, it will be deservedly popular with local readers.—AM [Available from Golden Hare Books, £18.]

A history of
Dundas Street
Edinburgh



Barclay Price

Briefly



Image: Richard Hamer, ia

For many years, poor temporary signage has alerted drivers to the lamppost they're about to hit in the middle of **Bellevue PI** [bit.ly/BivPI]. A Council road safety officer is now discussing with **Drummond CHS** whether an extended footway would improve safety for pedestrians crossing the road here. Some locals want the lamppost moved.

Broughton History Society meets next at 6.30pm on 2 March in **McDonald Rd Library**. John Yellowlees will talk on *The History of the Red Transport Wheel Plaques*. See also [bit.ly/NTTEH7].

The **Edinburgh World Heritage Steering Group** (EWH, Historic Environment Scotland and the Council) 'finalised' a new 10-year **Management Plan** in Nov 2024. It still hasn't been published. Planning Convener **Cllr Griffiths** tells us: 'Governance of the World Heritage Site is due to be discussed at the next steering group meeting for the partnership in Mar. When this is agreed, the Management Plan will be finalised and published.' Until then, the unfinalised finalised version is available at [bit.ly/WHAP2435]. *Spurtle* has repeatedly approached the Council for explanations. No joy yet.

Wheel of Fate has rolled into **24 Haddington PI**. It promises **local folk art** for sale and a workshop for **witch crafts** such as book binding, broom making, straw work and spinning. The **spacious new premises** are apparently perfect for 'hen/stag dos, birthday parties and visiting covens'.

Uneven paving slabs near the eastbound bus stop on **Hamilton PI** are an accident waiting to happen. When local **Shane Carter** last reported the issue, some tarmac was hastily patched in. But the problem remains. He is now asking for **permanent repairs**.

After months of enabling work, construction began last month on transforming the old **Royal High School** on **Regent Rd** into Scotland's **National Music Centre**. This £47m phase of the project will take 2 years. See [www.rhspt.org].

Officials insist all remaining 'critical' snags along the **Trams to Newhaven** extension (71 at the last count, Issue 358) will be fixed by the end of this month. We salute their optimism.

The **Edinburgh Library of Things** is a new, environmentally friendly initiative whereby **household items** are borrowed rather than bought new and forgotten in cupboards. Read **Balfour St** blogger **Tracy Griffen's** report at [bit.ly/eh-fit-things].

Tee Hodges, founder of **Typewronger Books** on **Haddington PI**, worked a 14-hr shift from 9pm–11am on 21/22 Feb. The business's 34-hr continuous operation over 2 days probably set a record for Edinburgh bookshops. The point wasn't simply to enjoy the **company of owls**: Hodges' tax bill is keeping him awake at night.

Moreover ...



We regret that the noble old bay tree in Drummond Lawn Tennis Club, beside **E Scotland St Lane**, will be expunged. It was boon companion to the late **Ross Maclean** (1942–2021), who cooked with its leaves and rested from toil beneath its shade. The reason for removal is the 'inevitable damage' it would eventually cause to a nearby garage (26/0055/TCO).

The **Collective Gallery** and **Café Calton** want advertising banners for 7 lampposts leading to the top of **Calton Hill**, and 2 hanging adverts at the gates of the **City Observatory enclosure** (26/00217/ADV). They say wayfinding signage is 'business critical', despite the area already **heaving with folk**. Calton Hill Conservation Trust suggests rewording the signs but is generally supportive. Others find the **commercialisation and visual cluttering** of public green space objectionable.

Congratulations to fellow hyperlocal **C&B News**, which last month celebrated its 50th year of uninterrupted news, views and features. Run mostly by **volunteers**, the free magazine champions communities in Currie, Balerno, Juniper Green, Baberton Mains and Colinton.

At the 4th time of asking, the **British Medical Assoc** gained consent in Jan for a wheelchair stairlift and reconfigured steps and landing at its A-listed Scottish HQ on **Queen St** (25/06439/LBC).

Councillors last month agreed on how to spend a crock of gold beneath the Tourism rainbow. Greater Spurtleshire recipients of **Visitor Levy** funds will sooner or later include: extra **city-centre policing** (£1m pa); **Inverleith Park** (£4m); **Calton Hill** (£1.5m); **Water of Leith Conservation Trust** (£0.5m pa); **National Centre for Music** (£3m); **settled streets renewal** (£3.8m). Councillors voted to defer using VL funds to revamp **George St**. Plans for this will first be reviewed alongside proposals to smarten up and repair **Princes St**.

Local campaigner Neil Gilmour notes that 1 of 3 benches removed from **Gayfield Sq** for refurbishment 5+ years ago was at last returned on 14 Feb: **grubby, unvarnished, tethered** to the railings and surrounded by plastic fencing so **no one could sit on it**. A triumph of glacially slow, tone-deaf and ineffective bureaucracy.

A date for your diary. **Spurtle** will host an **Edinburgh North Eastern & Leith hustings** for the Holyrood Elections on the evening of **16 Apr** in **Broughton St Mary's Parish Church**. Details to follow. If you'd like to help shape the event, email us your **questions in advance** with Hustings Question in the subject line.

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