

Spurtle



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2026**

No 360

Tel: 07455 770474

spurtle@hotmail.co.uk

BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

NEIGHBOURS RALLY AGAINST FORTH STREET APART-HOTEL



Locals last month coordinated objections to proposals to redevelop 16–26 Forth St as an apart-hotel (26/00661/LBC). A determination is expected by 22 Apr.

As first reported in Feb (Issue 358), Limetree Developments wants to change the use of the B-listed buildings from office space, creating 90 bdrms for around 180 guests.

Residents say they oppose the plans because:

- Disruptive access for guests would be at the front, with disruptive access for services via Union St and the narrow lane at the back.
- Several protected trees would be lost, and there is potential for 'loitering guests' to cause disturbance in landscaped spaces to the rear, particularly at night.
- The contemporary extension would congest this already densely developed area, causing loss of amenity.
- So many transient visitors would further erode the community.
- While no existing homes would be lost by the proposal, none would be added to a city suffering a self-declared 'Housing Emergency'.
- The neighbourhood is already saturated with visitor uses.
- Apart-hotels are 'in effect, short-term-lets by stealth'.

With support from the New Town & Broughton Community Council, Picardy residents' aim has been to generate enough comments (20+) for the application to be considered by councillors on the Development Management Sub-Cmte instead of by a single delegated official. Whether they succeeded in this was not clear by the time we went to press.

GREEN LIGHT FOR CONTROVERSIAL PLANS

The Development Management Sub-Cmte has approved plans to change the use of 7 Baxter's Pl from social club to 6 serviced apartments for 18 people (25/05562/FUL-STL).

Some neighbours objected to potential negative impact on their amenity, but officials said the building (pictured below) had long sat in an active and noisy area.

Although the former Edinburgh Football Club had been adapted as private homes in 2016, these had not been used as such (Enforcement history showed they had been unauthorised short-term lets), so no loss of housing would occur. Whilst 24-hr on-site management was promised by the developer, this could not be a Planning requirement.

Despite reservations and regrets, notably those of Cllrs McNeese-Mechan (Ward 12) and Pogson, consent was granted.

No change for a change

Some similar issues were later addressed in considering an application to turn the 50-bdrm hotel at 14–15 Claremont Cres into 7 serviced apartments for 28 people (25/05228/FULSTL).

Cllr McNweese-Mechan said the proposal, with no staff oversight, would jeopardise locals' amenity. Cllr Parker stressed possible threats to women's safety at the nearby Edinburgh Rape Crisis Centre.

Cllrs Mowat (Ward 11) and Osler (Ward 5) said fewer guests (and removal of the function room) might improve neighbours' amenity. Similar changes of use elsewhere in the city had not brought a surge in complaints.

Because an earlier consented proposal to turn the hotel into housing had not been completed, there were no relevant Planning reasons to refuse the latest application.

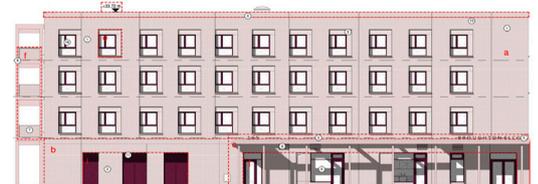


IF I SHOULD BECOME A STRANGER



Spurtle was not inundated by entries for our People and Places puzzle, which ran from Jan–Mar. For every 1 reader who thought it 'fiendishly intriguing', another 10 found it 'off-putting', 'impossible' or 'just flaming annoying'. We thank all who offered instructive comments. Among those who took up the challenge, Sam Murray did best with a score of 19 out of a possible 24. She can now retire to the South of France with her £20 prize. Anyone still seeking a clue or complete solutions should start at [\[bit.ly/Sppzpl\]](http://bit.ly/Sppzpl).

COST-CUTTING FOR POWDERHALL



Council Planners have approved 'non-material variations' to the consented plan for development of older persons' housing and a nursery on the former Powderhall Bowling Green site on Broughton Rd (21/00381/VARY).

Collective Architecture says the design changes are necessary to bring the proposals 'in line with City of Edinburgh Council funding levels and the requirements of the Roads Dept'. It says the 'amendments' to materials and landscaping will 'retain the quality and robustness, as well as preserving the original aesthetic of the proposals'.

The changes include replacement of: clay brick by concrete brick; concrete cladding by concrete facing brick; concrete window surrounds by rendered EWI; wire mesh balustrades by perforated steel sheets and brick; precast concrete canopy by steel entrance colonnade; permeable finish for footpath, hardstanding and St Mark's Path by impermeable surface. The 3-storey element will be reduced in height by 460mm.

The variations were sought in July 2025, then approved and made available in Nov 2025. Following standard practice, they were then posted online with so little fanfare that only *Spurtle* noticed.

Briefly



All 3 benches are back beside **Gayfield Sq Gdn**. Locals welcome their return but want bins alongside so **elegant sitters** don't leave inelegant rubbish left, right and centre.

We hear of **road safety concerns** about: (1) too many speeding vehicles on **McDonald Rd** not stopping for pedestrians at the zebra crossing outside the Co-op; (2) too many cyclists ignoring No Entry signs and travelling NE along **Hopetoun Cres** into oncoming traffic.

Real-estate investor Melford Capital is negotiating purchase of **Waverley Gate** for an estimated £85m. The A-listed, 8-storey office block on **Waterloo PI** (built in 1861 for the General Post Office) was last refurbished in 2005. Current tenants include Amazon, H&M, Microsoft, the National Health Service and the Scottish Govt.

At the next **Broughton History Society** gathering, Patricia Brown will talk about 'Between the Old and New Towns. The Development of the Mound, Princes Street and its Gardens'. The meeting is on 13 Apr at 6.00pm in **McDonald Rd Library**.

A report to the **Finances & Resources Cmte** last month listed debts the Council wrote off in 2024/25. Among these, the volume of **Parking and Traffic enforcement** write-offs stayed the same as in 2023/24, but their monetary value (**over £1.1m**) rose due to increased charges. **Low Emission Zone penalty** write-offs totalled over £205k. Both categories are partially explained by the DVLA's difficulty tracing vehicle owners. Automated number plate recognition technology can **recognise unlicensed vehicles**, but, without sufficient police and local-authority resources to act on the spot, they are useless. Also problematic are the estimated 1 in 15 UK cars with unreadable 'stealth plates'.

New Town & Broughton Community Council has opened an **Instagram account** with the aim of reaching a wider and younger community. If you are a wider younger person, **stop aura-farming on TikTok** and tap in instead to the latest drip skibidi local planning, transport, licensing, cultural and environmental moods at [bit.ly/InstNTBCC].

A local resident's campaign has resulted in new double-yellow lines at the east end of **Eyre PI**. Until their arrival, obstructive parking here caused vehicles to swerve into the contraflow cycleway on the other side of the street.

Spring sprung for Edinburgh World Heritage?

Terry Levinthal began as Director of Edinburgh World Heritage in Sept 2025. Last month, he spoke publicly to the New Town & Broughton Community Council.

His was a wide-ranging and unsparing assessment of EWH's record over the last 10 years (Issue 353). Levinthal addressed ineffective leadership, patchy management and risk-averse arrogance. He said its problems were in part the result of 'complex' governance arrangements (involving Edinburgh Council, Historic Environment Scotland and UNESCO): 'We are not always our own masters.'

He asserted EWH's 'significant impact' through hundreds of successful programmes and insisted that, behind the scenes, it had exerted 'considerable pressure at considerable cost', not least about bin-hubs. It would not shy away from difficult issues in future. In a sign of progress, EWH has at last published



its overdue Management and Two-Year Action Plans.

Levinthal sees the organisation as entering a reset phase of repair and improvement. Targets include:

- **Advocacy, engagement, connection:** Explaining EWH's importance to those who benefit from it.
- **Liveability:** Reaffirming that the Old and New Towns are for their 30,000 residents, not just for visitors.
- **Context:** Reviewing the role and process of EWH's Oversight Group to make it more useful.
- **Conservation:** For example, securing and spending £10.5m from HES over the next 5 years for practical projects in closes, graveyards and buildings.

Levinthal's defence of EWH, his honest acknowledgement of shortcomings, his sense of purpose and direction were well received on the night. He is an outspoken leader with a gift for mending fences.

How brown was my valley



An Aug 2025 report on ground conditions and necessary remediation measures at the Powderhall Bowling Green development site has appeared on the Council planning portal [bit.ly/Pwdrprt].

The historical waste-tip here has left potential risks for human health from elevated concentrations of copper, nickel, zinc, benzo(a)pyrene and dibenzo(a, h) anthracene. There are also elevated concentrations of carbon dioxide and methane.

Without mitigation, metals and half-burnt organic matter could reach future site users through direct contact, ingestion, inhalation, or via vegetation and new water pipes. Ground gas could reach them through migration and accumulation in confined spaces.

The report says all these risks can be reduced to an acceptable level using: resistant barrier membrane; a new 600–900 mm layer of clean topsoil/subsoil; gas-resistant membrane; suspended floor slabs with minimum penetrations; passive sub-floor venting; barriers around new pipes; decommissioning of any preexisting boreholes.

This updated report was produced by G3 Engineering for the construction contractor CCG. It adds to and should be read in conjunction with an earlier report by the Mason Evans Partnership in 2022 which we have not seen.

Challenges such as these are not uncommon when redeveloping brownfield sites. However, meeting them is of particular importance here given the vulnerable older persons and nursery schoolchildren coming to this part of the Powderhall site.

In related news, a CCG representative has answered questions raised in Issue 359 ('Powderhall problems rumble on'). Human error caused the firm's late registration as a Considerate Constructor, and the Site Manager has now completed 2 eLearning modules 'Introduction-to-CCS' and 'Community'.

Incomings, outgoings and the great outdoors

The Council administers various public assets for the common good. A report last autumn to the Finance & Resources Cmte [bit.ly/CGFLSD] showed their revenue (roman), expenditure (italics) and how the money was spent in 2024–25. We focus on Greater Spurtleshire.

- Caltion Hill: £0, *£49.17k* (park staff, maintenance).
- City Observatory: *£73.35k* (Collective Gallery, Creative Scotland), *£118.78k* (premises, construction, gallery).
- Inverleith Pk: *£15.75k* (programmes, events), *£327.99k* (maintenance, premises, toilets, tennis courts).
- King George V Pk: *£0*, *£11.30k* (maintenance).
- Nelson Monument: *£116.47k* (admissions), *-£8.62k* (repairs, maintenance, premises, electricity reimbursement).
- Pilrig Pk: *£0*, *£130k* (maintenance, Matta tiles, bark pits).
- St Mark's Pk: *£150* (programmes), *£12.43k* (maintenance, resurfacing).



Council saves significant cypress

Edinburgh Council has confirmed its decision to issue a tree preservation order for the mature Lawson cypress in a communal garden off Albany St Lane.



Since July 2025, 1 of 15 owners has made 3 applications to remove the 18m-high tree on the grounds that it is too close to a garden wall and steps, has not got long to live and makes only a 'modest' contribution to the local landscape.

Officials disagree. They found the tree in good condition, not damaging or likely to damage built structures and several decades away from dying. It is not, they said, dangerous and can be managed by pruning.

The cypress, they concluded, has high amenity value. It is a 'significant feature' in the landscape and will become more so as nearby ash trees succumb to dieback disease. We applaud officers' expert, clear and consistent responses.

Incidence of incidents – meaning and coincidence

Once a month, the Leith Community Policing Team shares figures with Leith Central Community Council listing reported incidents in 10 categories: public nuisance; neighbour dispute; theft; housebreaking; drugs; disturbance; robbery; road traffic / collisions / offences / vehicle crime; noise; concern for missing person(s).

Leith Central CC has begun mapping these trends, and the result may surprise those who think everything everywhere is always going to the dogs. Since 15 Oct 2025, there have been marked declines in all categories except concern for missing persons.

Such trends may reveal more over time, but for now they are hard to interpret. For example, are people behaving better or are they unable to misbehave here if they're banged up in Saughton? Or are incidents going undetected or unreported? Or being plotted hereabouts and perpetrated outwith E Division's area of operation? Is it all just random?

The figures make for interesting but inconclusive reading, although a recent focus on tackling retail crime has been successful. One offender arrested in Feb was wanted on 17 warrants and was charged with a further 30 offences. Another was arrested and charged with 17 retail-crime-related offences, and 5 more people with shoplifting and threatening shop workers.



Local spots street-cleansing flaw

Local activist Shane Carter submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Council in Jan and now has a reply.

He asked if the Council had records of which streets were 'spot checked' by managers and supervisors to achieve benchmark standards of street cleansing in the New Town & Broughton Community Council area (1 June–31 Dec 2025). If they did, he asked for dates and findings.

An official replied that no such records are kept but 'Street cleansing is a statutory duty under the Code of Practice (COPLAR) and cleansing frequencies are designed to meet those standards, in line with how the streets are Zoned under COPLAR.'

Carter is not impressed: 'Supervisors and managers carry out a visual inspection of some streets, the day before, in order to plan the next day's work.'

'This visual inspection is clearly random as the Council is unable to say which streets it spot checks and on what days. No wonder street cleaning is so haphazard and the streets are so dirty.'

New pass speeds border crossings

From the Morning Advertiser (28 Mar 1914):—In case any of my readers might be contemplating touring on the Continent during the Easter holidays or later, they will be interested to hear that the Royal Automobile Club reports that the new International Customs pass is now available for touring in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Roumania, Spain, and Switzerland.

This pass is very handy, as one can obtain it at a few hours' notice in this country, and once it is affixed to the car one can cross freely any frontier in any of the countries just mentioned. This does away with the delays and formalities that have hitherto been enforced at these points.

The only countries for which the International Customs pass cannot be used at present are Germany, Russia, and Sweden, but these exceptions are not likely to be very important.



Image: www.perchance.org

Briefly



Cheer up! The 2026 Christian Aid book sale at the New Town Church on **George St** takes place next month (10–16 May). Donations of scores, CDs, records, stamps, jigsaws, toys, games, postcards and ... books are invited. **Drop-off times include:** 28 Apr–2 May (9am–8pm) and 5–7 May (9am–8pm). Details: bit.ly/4bkAu3z.

Edinburgh Council is moving to extend its lease on **Royal Ter Gdns** from the Governors of George Heriot's Trust. The additional **25-year period** will last until 2051, with the Council paying GHT 25% of any commercial rent gained from subletting the **Gardener's Cottage**. This will bring a yearly income of £30k for the Parks Account. **See Issue 354.**

Since new regulations were introduced in 2022, some property owners who were refused planning consent for short-term lets have **continued to operate** during lengthy appeals or repeat processing of tweaked reapplications. Overstretched Planning officials are now battling them off with '**Decline to determine**' responses which save time and administrative effort. Informed observers note an increasing number of **STL applications being withdrawn**. 'I think this whole process is reaching the end game,' one told the *Spurtle*.

A report by **The Workers' Collective** for the Scottish Occupational Road Safety Alliance argues gig workers (e.g. cycle couriers) are a new category of **vulnerable road user**: 'highly exposed, underprotected, and poorly represented in official data'. It **calls on policymakers** to 'explicitly integrate platform-mediated work into regulatory and safety strategies' [bit.ly/TWCrep]. **See Issue 353.**

Studio Bla will open soon at **157 Broughton Rd**. The business specialises in 'innovative interior design products' and, like neighbour Doggie Style's exterior design trims, aims to blend 'aesthetics with functionality'.

Change Mental Health, the charity behind **Hopetown Coffee**, attributes the closure of its not-for-profit café at **27 Broughton St** to a sharp increase in operating costs.

Planning consent has been granted for a plaque commemorating Frederick Douglass at **29A Waterloo PI** [bit.ly/FD29WP]. The application attracted ringing endorsements from the Cockburn Assoc and the '**bonnie, brave and beneficent**' American Women's Club of Central Scotland.

Moreover ...



NIBs updates since Issue 359. (1) Council officials have at long last positioned a temporary barrier across the discontinued **Elm Row cycle path**. Parts of the accompanying signage are meaningless or misleading: 'EXTENSION PLANNED FOR CONSTRUCTION' and 'CYCLISTS REJOIN CARRIAGEWAY'. **Leith Central CC** is disappointed by delays and an 'unacceptable level of service'. (2) The **LeithChooses** steering group is looking for ways to improve engagement in areas south of Pilgrimage St.

Splendid Hotels Ltd proposes building a 2nd-floor, 8-bdrm 'extrusion' behind the Indigo Hotel at A-listed **51-9 York PI** (26/00554/FUL). Bring your own toothpaste.

Work has started to transform the **old Royal High School** into a new National Centre for Music. Repair, preservation, removal and reuse of roof elements are underway under cover, alongside **masonry work** and replacement of lead and rainwater goods. Meanwhile, builders are excavating through soil and bedrock to a **depth of 6m** to create new foundations and a lower ground floor. Between now and early May, they will connect an **upgraded power supply** from the Abbey Mount substation via the Regent Rd entrance. Robertson's are in charge of the project and, as **Considerate Constructors**, invite feedback from impacted locals [bit.ly/CCSRHS].

The **Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals** appealed for information last month about a dead dog found in **St Mark's Pk**. The black and white, miniature bull terrier was discovered on 23 Feb, half-buried under a blue fleece blanket. Its body was emaciated and had other signs of neglect. If you can help, **contact the SSPCA Helpline** on 03000 999 999.

Spurtle's Holyrood hustings for the **Edinburgh North Eastern & Leith** constituency will take place in St Mary's Parish Church (Bellevue Cres) on 16 Apr from 7.15-9.30pm. **Entry free. Exit by voluntary cash donation.** Questions on the night or by email in advance to spurtle@hotmail.co.uk

Work on tramline snags **between Broughton and Newhaven** last month aimed to fix collapsed utility chambers and damaged track bed, check earlier repair quality, finalise **Ocean Terminal** landscaping and install bollards on **Elm Row**. After discussion with officials, community councils and Cllr Caldwell (Ward 12), officers are expected to respond this month with options on better delivery/loading bays for **Leith Walk**. Wearing Corporation rose-tinted spectacles, the Council's Roads Team expects to mend all remaining minor issues by the end of June.

Spurtle Team: E. Brown, P. Cockburn, E. Dickie, C. Ellis, J. Hart, M. Hart, D. Hill, V. Kirby, A. McIntosh, S. Michael, M. Orr, W. Quinn, C. Roussot, E. Roussot, T. Smith, D. Sterratt, E. Taylor-Smith, D. Young.

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Next meeting:
Mon. 13 April at 7.00pm.

See website for agenda.

www.ntbcc.org.uk

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Tracy Gilbert MP

Member of Parliament for
Edinburgh North and Leith

✉ tracy.gilbert.mp@parliament.uk

f Tracy Gilbert

X [tracygilbert72](https://twitter.com/tracygilbert72)

📷 [tracygilbertmp](https://www.instagram.com/tracygilbertmp)

 **Tracy Gilbert**

Member of Parliament for
Edinburgh North and Leith



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