

Spurtle



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No 251

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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

EDINBURGH SCHOOLS CHECKED OVER BUILDING SAFETY FEARS

Seventeen state schools across Edinburgh closed for safety-checks on 11 April.

All had been rebuilt or refurbished, in part or in whole, under the first round of the Public-Private Partnership (PPP1) initiated by Edinburgh Council from the late 1990s onwards. Construction flaws first surfaced at Oxbgangs Primary School, and other PPP1s were shut as a precaution.



Drummond Community High School is relatively unaffected so far. S4-S6 pupils missed only two days, and the rest followed soon after (see our website 9.4.16; 11-12.4.16). The gym, canteen and nursery were closed off, but the rest is now open again.

The full extent of problems across Edinburgh remains unclear. Key is how external walls were inadequately or not at all secured. The Edinburgh School Partnership, not the Council, will meet repair costs. Compensation looks unlikely, but CEC can withhold £1.5 million monthly payments to ESP.

Some observers say this is purely a matter of poor workmanship. Others claim that the issue began in PPP1 arrangements, where self-policing private enterprise's urge to maximise profit outgunned the public sector's cautious urge for best value. Yet others argue that, whatever CEC's contractual obligations, its technical team should have made more effort to check work was up to standard.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme (12.4.16), Malcolm Fraser, former deputy chair of Architecture & Design Scotland, repeated his long-standing criticisms of PPP1 schools. Bankers and lawyers had benefited from fantastically complicated financial instruments, he said, but architects' expertise and vision had been marginalised. Building and learning environments were the poorer for it, and now children's safety also appeared to have been put at risk.

TOO TALL, TOO DENSE, TOO UNAFFORDABLE

Local residents have enlisted the help of councillors, professional planners and the New Town & Broughton Community Council to help resist proposals for a 5-storey, 14-unit apartment block on McDonald Place (Ref. 16/01329/FUL; our website 21.3.16).

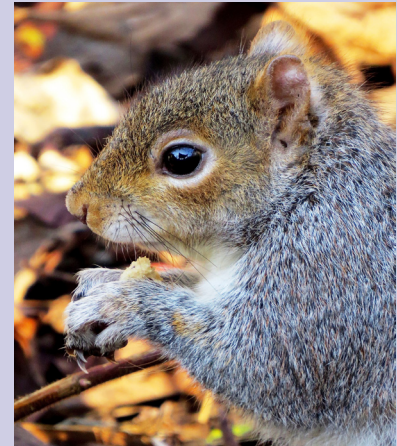
Whilst not against new housing in principle here, they claim that this particular plan is flawed because it:

- constitutes overdevelopment
- lacks any element of affordable housing
- is too high, blocks views, and will invade neighbours' privacy
- does not have enough car parking or cycle storage
- has too little communal open space
- makes no contribution towards improving the local public realm.

They're also raising doubts about land ownership, plans missing from the submission, and 'misleading' animated visualisations. Apart from that, it's fine.

Local resident Robin Lippett regards this as the thin end of the wedge. He's keen to oppose any precedent for what he sees as 'poorly designed, high-density and excessively tall new-builds' in an area which may well be redeveloped if Batleys cash-and-carry relocate.

Brrrrr ...



As *Spurtle* went to press, a few sunny spring days in late April had been replaced by the promise of Arctic air, wintry showers and high winds. We recommend you follow this local's advice: 'Cast not a clot till May is oot, and always carry a nut'.

154 McDONALD ROAD – SOLD FOR A SONG?

Readers will remember the saga surrounding 154 McDonald Road, the red sandstone building next to Broughton Primary School, for which planning permission for redevelopment was controversially granted on appeal two years ago (Ref. 13/02458/FUL; our website 25.3.14).



It now appears to us that when City of Edinburgh Council's sale of the property went through, it realised a mere £361k. This figure is tucked away in Appendix 4 of CEC's 27 August 2015 Report on 'Capital Monitoring 2014/15 – Outturn and Receipts' to the Resources & Finance Committee.

To our untutored (but popping) eye, it appears CEC disposed of a public asset at a bargain-basement price. (St Stephen's Church went on the market for offers over £500k back in 2013, and even the piddling former Canonmills WC is now expected by experts to fetch up to £200k.) We unsuccessfully approached CEC for a timely confirmation, and so have now submitted a Freedom of Information request to find out more.

Developer Kingsford Estates Ltd is creating 75 apartments here in a fully managed complex including roof terrace, gym, concierge service, private dining room, private car pool and club room. According to contractors Redpath Construction Ltd, the £4.7 million development is scheduled for completion by the end of 2016.

Briefly

In case you'd forgotten, the **Scottish Parliamentary Election** takes place on Thurs 5 May (see our website 14.4.16, 23.4.16). After which, we can all settle down to enjoy the **EU Referendum** on Thurs 23 Jun.

Margiotta's on Dundas St has received planning consent for a **small bakery area** and two associated flues at the rear of the building. **Five objections** were dismissed concerning: takeaway hot food, noise and smells, fire risk, unsightliness, and impact on **'stunning views of the town'**.

Broughton History Society meets on 9 May at 7pm in **Drummond Community High School**. Tony Lewis will talk on **'James Craig and the New Town'**. Bring your own draughty parallelogram.

Planning consent has been granted to change the use of **16 Pilrig St** from a domestic dwelling to a Class 7 **guest house** (Ref. 15/05310/FUL). Officials and **Development Management Subcommittee** members were unpersuaded by objections from **Leith Central Community Council, Cllrs Donaldson and Gardner** and seven others to overprovision, lack of parking, road safety/pollution, and further reduction of **too few family homes** in the area.

Broughton St Mary's parish now has a population of **around 12,000**. Presbytery has therefore agreed that an **additional worker** should be appointed in the form of an **ordained local minister**.

Posh estate agency **Retties** have been told they don't need planning permission to **lower the tone on Heriot Row**. They will now paint their **former police box** dark green and add 6 company logos. Front and back of the static structure will be adorned with the assertion **'Moving with the times'**. Some neighbours are **turning purple** at the intrusion of such 'crass commercialism'.

Last month we reported the E London **St Riparian Rooms** 'rebranding'. This month we report that its lease is up for sale. **Sad and surprised** to see it go.

Cycling campaign group **Spokes** wants to reinstate a bridge over **Waverley Station** and use it as a cycleway connecting the **Old Town to Calton Road/Leith Walk**. The route would avoid congested, polluted and downright dangerous **Waterloo Pl**. CEC considered including the idea in their March response to **Network Rail's consultation** on future Scottish rail development. But they **decided against** so doing as the study was about railway service and capacity rather than **stations and infrastructure**.

For reasons which are not entirely apparent, **Lidl still hasn't opened** on Logie Green Rd despite a projected date for the grand unveiling last Dec, then late Feb. A spokesman tells us **there have been issues with developer Jones LaSalle** concerning access. These are now being resolved and work should be complete **'soon' or in June**. In any event, the **breeze blocks in windows** will remain, hidden behind lovely vinyls.

Debate hots up on future of RBS site

Last month's New Town & Broughton Community Council meeting got testy during discussion of Royal Bank of Scotland proposals for land between Dundas Street and King George V Park (Issues 249-50).

Around 10 locals fumed at NTBCC's 'broad agreement' with some earlier elements of the plan. Not realising NTBCC's position had since hardened against, they objected doggedly as councillors struggled to be understood. A brief calm finally settled.

Harder to resolve was these locals' conviction that NTBCC must actively support their view – shared, they said, by 170+ signatories to a petition – that no building should take place on the RBS car park. Councillors agreed they had a duty to acknowledge and report that position and depth of feeling, but felt obliged also to express other gradations of local opinion.

Based on experience of the planning system, NTBCC's planning convener Richard Price argued for achieving the best possible development here with reduced massing and fewer residential units. Campaigning for non-development was, he said, 'unrealistic'.

Compromises followed. NTBCC stuck to its guns but co-opted one of the malcontents. Both sides belatedly agreed on the importance of harmonious cooperation. Chair Ian Mowat suggested the central heating had been turned up too high.

Meanwhile, RBS's outline planning application in principle is now expected to be submitted in late June.



Council's bright ideas to save money

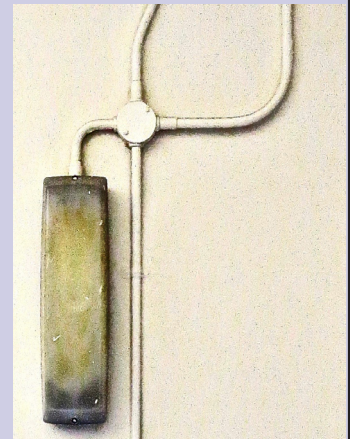
From 1 July, the Council will stop maintaining stairlights for free in tenements where all flats are privately owned.

CEC will continue to pay the electricity bills for what are effectively street lights, but householders will be legally obliged to ensure 'common stair lighting is in working order and does not present a health and safety hazard'.

Spurtle isn't thrilled at the prospect, which offers benighted neighbours ample opportunity for being awkward, disorganised, falling out and falling over. Lists of soon-to-be-wealthy Council-approved factors and trusted traders can be found here: [<https://goo.gl/1x3A1b>].

CEC currently looks after the lights in 70,000 properties built before 1980. The change, which brings Edinburgh into line with local-authority practice elsewhere in Scotland, is estimated to save £1 million per year.

In a related development, CEC expects to spend nearly £9 million over four years on parts and labour as it replaces 90,000 tenement bulbs with LED equivalents. In so doing it aims to cut energy costs by 50 per cent.



Crime in the Claremonts

A woman who momentarily put down two bags on E. Claremont St last month was almost immediately robbed by an opportunistic thief. The incident happened at around 10pm on 29 Mar.

Territorials leaving Hepburn House after training heard the woman's cries and gave chase along Claremont Grove and Bank. They retrieved the bags and pulled off the thief's jacket containing ID before he escaped. Police later arrested and charged a 29-year-old man. He appeared before Edinburgh Sheriff's Court on 30 Mar and was remanded in custody.

In other news, local anecdotal evidence in mid-April suggested that as many as 10 break-ins or attempted break-ins had occurred in the Claremonts over the previous 5 weeks.

We checked with Police Scotland, who told us three house-breakings had been reported in the area over this period: two on Claremont Grove and one on Claremont Drive. However, these are 'unaudited statistics'. Do you know better? For advice on securing your home, visit: [<http://goo.gl/gD8e7K>].



Jaundiced of Claremont's hustings report

[More factual coverage appears on our website, 15.4.16 and 21.4.16.]

Jack Caldwell (*Indep.*): Fresh, articulate, thoughtful responses from



no-party debutant. Used humour to make virtue of youth; candid commitment to counterweigh lack of track record. Miserabilist cynics wanted to throttle.

Lee Chalmers (*WEP*): Didn't shy away from elephant in room standing on her foot: WEP's admirable but limited number of policies. Came across as principled, pragmatic, potentially effective deal-maker.

Lesley Hinds (*Lab.*): Hugely experienced political bruiser. Impressive, but offered few surprises. Serial offender on exceeding 90-second answers. Conveyed most passion, more often, than others on disadvantaged.

Iain McGill (*Con.*): Now has squatter's rights at these hustings. No doubting his concern for rough sleepers. Refreshingly blunt on tax rises: 'No, nae, never!' Will locals finally feel differently about voting for him?

Ben Macpherson (*SNP*): Calm. Nicely dressed. Fluent. Did not put foot wrong. Exciting as Redybrek. If heather had been set alight, he seemed most likely person to extinguish it. Looked like technocrat minister in making.

Calum Martin (*RISE*): Only candidate to tidy up chairs afterwards. Repeated message on tax: rich must pay their fair share. Too affable for much fiery left-wing bombast, but would benefit from displaying more sparks.

Alan Melville (*UKIP*): Disconcertingly fails to match audience expectations. No frothy mouth. Softly spoken libertarian, uncomfortable with collar buttons, peculiarly erudite. Only one to quote *Magna Carta* from memory.

Martin Veart (*Lib-Dem*): Pleasant and straight-talking. Sounds well on education, local tax reform, devolving power, housing. But 'evidence-based' party policy on benefits of fracking went down like cup of cold sick.

Andy Wightman (*Green*): Growly, strong-minded, pan-European perspective, funny on manifesto joys. For top Scottish expert on land reform, bore unsettling resemblance to Badger in *Wind of the Willows*.

Audience (*Mixed Bag*): Over 110 (in number). Keen. Mostly residents + few party faithful clapping like mums at talent show. No heckling. Didn't trouble Hinds or Macpherson on personal and/or party records in power.

Look out for: Pigeons

Feral Pigeons used to be one of our commonest city birds (hardy hybrids of the cliff-dwelling Rock Dove), thriving among buildings. Times have changed, and the Feral Pigeon is now rarer, replaced by larger and slightly pompous-looking Woodpigeons (see pic.). Woodpigeons are voracious eaters of crops, and are considered an edible pest in the countryside. They're now one of our commonest local species, making use of cities' relative safety, increased tree cover, and bird-feeders.

How to see them: Woodpigeons are hard to miss but bear close scrutiny. They're generally a smooth, blue-grey, but iridescent red and green suffuses their necks and chests. Mature adults have sharply defined white flashes on their necks and wings. They produce a soft but strong five-note cooing throughout summer.

Also look out for: Collared Doves also used to be common in cities but are now quite rare – perhaps due to competition with Woodpigeons or some change in how we now manage urban spaces. Often sociable, with a distinct muted cry, they are a delicate, warm grey and have distinct, black collars. — *Miles Forde*



Photo: Jerzystrzelecki, Wikimedia Commons

At home with Richard Murphy

Many readers will remember the painstaking evolution of the Richard Murphy building and its controversial placement in a former garden space opposite the 'Huguenot Monastery' on Hart Street. (Issue 165).

Now it features in the RSA's annual exhibition on the Mound (16 April–25 May), looking at work by current Scottish and international architects around the theme of 'Home'. It forms part of the Scottish Government's Year of Innovation, Architecture and Design.

In photographs and a most engaging video, Murphy gives the viewer a virtual tour of his complex and beguiling building.

Equally remarkable, but as remote from Murphy's conception as the far side of the Moon, is 'ANCHORHOLD' (by Sutherland Hussy Harris), a pine multiple/construction which originally stood in the middle of a frozen Finnish lake and sheltered fishermen above their borehole in the ice.

At first glance, this home seems impenetrable, until one chances upon a low entrance leading to seating at the core of this pine igloo. Heaven for hermits ... Highly recommended. — *JRM*

Briefly

The **City Centre Neighbourhood Partnership's** next public meeting will be in the Central Library (George IV Bridge) on 26 May from 6.30pm–8.00pm. All welcome.

Neighbours were alarmed last month when **common ground** at the end of the service lane north of **E. Claremont Street** was cleared of trees, scrub, vodka bottles and old rubble **without prior notification**. *Spurtle* identified the instigator as a local resident who had grown sick of **odd goings-on in the shrubbery**. He has now grown sick of **cars and vans** parking on the newly accessible space.

Planning permission has been granted to change the north and east façades of the 'monastery' building at **2 Hart Street Lane** (Ref. 15/05345/FUL). The scheme includes re-creating original **18th-century features**, if not always in their original positions, and adding a new timber balcony, 'tying it back to the larger residential community and reducing what might be regarded as **rather nefarious or malodorous activities** that are known to occur in neglected and dilapidated back streets and lanes'. For more on malodorous activities, see Issue 250.

Broughton St's **Escargot Bleu** comes 'Highly Recommended' in the 2016 edition of **Scotland the Best**. We hear **Bonsai** will soon transform into another Rollo restaurant/wine bar.

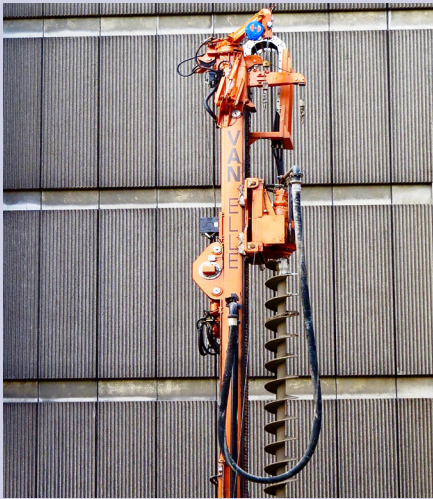
Scottish ministers have called in the appeal against CEC's decision not to grant **listed building consent** for Duddingston House Property and Urbanist Hotels' proposal at the **old Royal High School**. The Minister for Planning will make the final decision rather than a civil-service Reporter. How this may affect the outcome is a **moot point**. We examined the entrails on our website (29.3.16).

Albany St-based **The Rock Trust** seeks locals with a spare room who can offer **warmth and safety** on a short-term basis to young people in crisis. **It's a big ask, clearly**, but it's a big problem. Everyone's vetted, expenses are paid and there's 24-hour support on hand. See our website (18.4.16).

13C Dundas St is to be converted from a long, narrow antiques shop into a long, narrow, open-plan, one-bedroom flat (Ref. 16/01661/FUL). Plans for the 74.69m² property include **'manoeuvring space[s]'** in front of the kitchen, wash-hand basin and sanitary units, and **'activity space[s]'** in front of the loo, wash-hand basin and shower. Will probably suit a **long, thin person** with no desire to swing cats.

Walid Salhab's latest **time-lapse, stop-motion-photography film** captures astonishingly beautiful **rain storms** over Edinburgh. Many of the views were filmed from or around **Calton Hill**. You can watch it free at [https://vimeo.com/161181429].

Moreover ...



Brace yourselves. The pace is picking up on preparations for the St James Quarter. From now until June, new John Lewis fire-escape stairs will go up on Leith St and Little King St. A **new entrance** for the store and temporary road crossing will go in almost opposite Greenside Row. A new **infill building** should be ready by January 2017. The customer collection point and layby are now complete nearby. Gas mains will be upgraded on Leith St and Calton Rd down **as far as the bridge**. 'Minor gas/BT/drainage works will take place from Elder St to East Register St. **Substation and cabling work** will continue on Cathedral Lane and the lower end of Leith St. A hoarding will go up around the entire site this month. **Scaffolding and propping** for demolition will go up first along Elder St. Enabling works for piling will continue until June along **James Craig Walk**.

Residents near Batleys report a dramatic improvement in HGV drivers' behaviour on **McDonald Place and Street** (see Issue 250). Progress has followed a combined total of 65 visits by Council officers since **Cllr Gardner** reported problem parking here in mid-March. Four vehicles were logged as illegally parked, **three skedaddled** before action could be taken, one ticket was issued. Word has clearly got round. Missing 'permit holder only' signs are to be restored soon. The **increased frequency** of such spot-checks will continue in future. The situation isn't yet perfect, particularly **first thing in the morning**, but locals are delighted.

On 25 April, new turf in **St Andrew Square Garden** was dying just 4 days after being laid. **Essential Edinburgh** won't listen to residents but really should **listen to the grass!**

Sputtle Team: E. Dickie, J. Dickie, M. Forde, R. Fullerton, J. Hart, M. Hart, D. Hill, D. Jackson Young, A. McIntosh, J. R. Maclean, M. Orr, L. Rogers, C. Roussot, L. Rynne, T. Smith, D. Sterratt, E. Taylor-Smith.
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 Tel: 07906 481 511 Email: grmassage@hotmail.co.uk Glenogle Road, EH3 5JB

Deidre Brock MP
 Edinburgh North and Leith



Regular Surgeries
Leith: 6 May
 1-2pm, 166 Great Junction Street
Leith Walk: 13 May
 3.30-4.30pm, McDonald Rd Library
Stockbridge: 20 May
 1-2pm Stockbridge Library
Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre: 27 May, 4-5pm
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Broughton St Mary's Parish Church has a modern suite of rooms with disabled toilets and baby changing facilities.

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Contact: Lindsey Rowlands
 Tel. 556 4252
 admin@bstmchurch.org.uk

The Church of Scotland is fully committed to working with people of all faiths and no faith.
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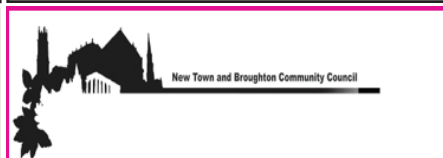


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New Town & Broughton Community Council represents the views of local residents to City of Edinburgh Council.

You're welcome to attend our AGM and next meeting on **9 May at 7.15pm**
 Broughton St Mary's Parish Church, Bellevue Crescent

www.ntbcc.org.uk