

# Spurtle



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Tel: 07455 770474

[spurtle@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:spurtle@hotmail.co.uk)

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## NEW-LOOK POLITICS FOR CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

Under the Council's interim political management arrangements dealing with Covid-19, urgent Council decisions are being taken by the Chief Executive (see 'Briefly'), and important but less urgent ones by the Leadership Advisory Panel comprising Group leaders (chaired by the Council Leader Adam

McVey). You can find the agendas for their meetings here [[bit.ly/2RYpgZk](http://bit.ly/2RYpgZk)] and follow their deliberations on webcasts here [[bit.ly/2XVLMG7](http://bit.ly/2XVLMG7)].

The Governance, Risk and Best Value Cmte is scrutinising Covid-19-related changes, with conveners and vice conveners from other (temporarily suspended) committees able to play a role and offer expertise. Critics say this smacks of marking their own homework.

The full council has been replaced by the 17-person Policy & Sustainability Cmte, meeting every 2 weeks until it is technically possible to virtually reconvene the former in truncated form. Not all the other 45 councillors are entirely pleased about this, particularly those independents frozen out. Supporters of the scheme say the P&S broadly reflects parties' respective weights, and has a majority of Opposition members (9:8). Its role will be reviewed in September at the latest.

Meanwhile, the quasi-judicial Development Management Subcmte and Licensing Cmte will resume on 1 May.

## BY-ELECTIONS ON TEMPORARY HOLD

In the event of a ward councillor resigning or dying during the current lockdown, there will not immediately be an election.

Chris Highcock, Depute Returning Officer for City of Edinburgh Council, clarified the situation in response to a *Spurtle* enquiry last month.

Normally, under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, a vacancy is filled within 3 months of it arising.

But under Section 70 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, filling the vacancy can be postponed in order to protect public health in compliance with national guidance [[bit.ly/3amsX1m](http://bit.ly/3amsX1m)]. Such a decision would be made following consultation with Scottish Ministers and the convener of the Electoral Management Board for Scotland, and further postponement could be arranged if deemed necessary.

Such a solution has already been adopted following the resignation of Cllr Ian Campbell (SNP, Ward 14) in February. Another six by-elections have been postponed elsewhere in Scotland.

## GOOD INTENTIONS BUT CONCERNS REMAIN

The New Town & Broughton Community Council followed Leith Central's lead last month and held its first virtual meeting, with 16 members and one journalist participating.

Despite closed access and a reduced agenda, it was an informative and useful event run in orderly fashion. NTBCC now intends to open up future Zoom meetings to members of the public.

However, nobody we've spoken to is 100 per cent clear if online meetings like this are strictly legal. Some observers (including community-council members themselves) worry that sections of the community without access to digital conferencing (or public computers in libraries) will be effectively excluded. How can a formally constituted body like a community council then claim to speak for them? Obviously, it isn't an ideal solution. In the short term, we may simply have to accept that such arrangements are a pragmatic and imperfect compromise. If and when 'normality' returns, it may be necessary to revisit decisions made during this period and mull over their legitimacy. For now, though, citizens' well-intentioned activism would seem more valuable than strict governance compliance.

## TWO-FACED, FINGER, AND FLOWER



We are pleased to feature another enigmatic intervention from the Mystery Mosaicist. This time their work adds a flower or speech bubble to the ambivalent Janus by Mozg. Both appear at the foot of Canon Lane.

## QUESTIONS CONTINUE



Most of the Council's public consultations have been suspended while staff concentrate on front-line services. Exceptions include those on the Phase 1 development of a nursery school and housing at Powderhall, and a Place Brief for Halmyre Street.

Also still underway is discussion about Winter Festivals in 2022. Officials are liaising with the Edinburgh Tourism Action Group [[bit.ly/3arGg0l](http://bit.ly/3arGg0l)] to frame a public consultation. Their aim is to fairly gather, collate, and interpret public opinion so that procurement of any contractor(s) can start at the end of this year. These plans are, of course, subject to pandemic-related problems.

Meanwhile, all events in publicly owned green spaces have been cancelled for May and June 2020. Events after that date remain in doubt, including the August Summer Sessions in West Princes Street Gardens, for which tickets are still on sale (Issue 294).

With potential audiences of 6k each, common sense suggests they will be cancelled to prevent the spread of coronavirus. After all, as one New Town & Broughton Community Council member thoughtfully noted, Tom Jones – who will turn 80 in June – is himself a vulnerable citizen.

On the other hand, as one *Spurtle* reader recently remarked to us, 'Virus-related common sense, like PPE, is not always in plentiful supply.'

# Briefly

**Question:** What, do Braemar, Boudicca, Black Watch, and Balmoral have in common? Answer on page 4.

Helpful numbers in troubled times: **Age UK** – 0800 169 6565; **Childline** – 0800 1111; **Domestic Violence Hotline** – 0808 2000 247; **Mind** – 0300 123 3393; **Samaritans** – 116 123.

Police Scotland have told **Edinburgh allotment owners** that they are free to work on their plots so long as they observe **appropriate social distancing** and are careful about what they touch and how they clean hands afterwards.. However, police also told **Inverleith** allotment owners last month that they should limit their time in the allotments to half an hour. **Cllr Hal Osler** (Ward 5) seeks clarification.

**Citizen Network** – the campaign group first reported in Issue 284 – seeks **written contributions** from the public (max 800 words) on how they want a post-coronavirus capital to change. See [bit.ly/3byR7qD].

Series 2 of BBC Scotland's **Debate Night** seeks 'virtual audience' members at home to question public figures and politicians on 17 Jun. They should **represent themselves** (not a company or organisation) and be prepared to **Zoom** on a mobile or laptop computer. If interested, contact: [bbc.co.uk/debatenight]. Stephen Jardine awaits.

Officials estimate Covid-19 will cost the Council an additional £50M+ in 2021. **Payment sources** include reserves, savings, delays to projects, and an anticipated £12M from **Westminster via Holyrood**. All Scottish local authorities are assessing expenses consistently, using a COSLA template.

*Spurtle* online transferred to a **new website** last month, designed for us by bright and effective students from **Edinburgh Napier University**. A couple of minor gremlins remain to be gralloched, but **readers' reactions** have so far been very positive. See [bit.ly/3eLmgJC].

One positive side-effect of current problems has been a blossoming of **new and established, more or less formal, local organisations** offering advice and practical help to neighbours, particularly those neighbours struggling to manage while self-isolating. *Spurtle's* list of those we believe trustworthy appears here [bit.ly/2ydmVOy]. We naturally **urge caution**, and **counsel against** sharing bank details or computer passwords with strangers.

CEC's Chief Executive has used emergency powers in response to the **Covid-19 emergency**. These are listed in reports to the Leaders Advisory Panel, and last month included: extension of **Death registrations** to 7 days a week; 3-month reservation of 44 hotel rooms for **temporary housing**; closure of South Side gardens due to **non-compliance** with social distancing and Police having to attend. See [bit.ly/3bGrZ1a].

## Mixed up, muddled up, shook up Edinburgh

On 15 April, Edinburgh's Lord Provost Frank Ross used a press release to highlight a silver lining to the Covid-19 crisis.

Major change in the city usually comes about incrementally. But the pandemic has 'blown apart' the status quo, providing a 'unique opportunity' to implement some mid to long-term goals today.

'Businesses will be considering if working from home is the new normal with the potential to dramatically reduce commuting; tourism will not automatically rebound with the resulting reduced demand for short term lets; retail will need to reinvent itself; and our Festivals may need to reshape how they deliver their programmes.'

Ross sounded simultaneously thoughtful, pragmatic, and forward looking.

Then, in another Council press release on 18 April, Council Leader Adam McVey announced he was chairing a series of meetings 'with key sectors' to kickstart recovery of the city's visitor economy, including business tourism.

Invited to these meetings were the Edinburgh Tourism Advisory Group, Edinburgh Airport, Festivals Edinburgh, Visit Scotland, Essential Edinburgh, and the Chamber of Commerce. Not invited were residents groups, community councils or heritage watchdogs such as the Cockburn Association. McVey spoke of a commitment to sustainable and responsible tourism, but to outsiders it sounded a lot like restoring the status quo ante as soon as possible.

On 22 April, McVey welcomed the first meeting of the Edinburgh Climate Commission, a body which ambitiously seeks to end the capital's contribution to climate change by 2030. Mass tourism by air is a major contributor to that problem.

Edinburgh's successful future will require joined-up thinking. As the Climate Commission's Chair Dr Sam Gardiner bluntly puts it, 'Back to normal will not be good enough.'



## New thoughts on post-coronavirus Scotland

Cliff Hague, Chair of the Cockburn Association, used an article in the *Scotsman* last month (bit.ly/2KpAEZX) to suggest aspects of the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework and Edinburgh Council's City Plan 2030 which may be seriously unsettled by the pandemic's effects. These included:

- The impact on commercial property, higher education, and transport of new home-working practices.
- Effects on retail development of a blighted economy and reluctance to mingle in public.
- How to fill city-centre properties vacated by commercial bankruptcies.
- International aversion to mass tourism by aeroplane.
- Increased demand for self-contained accommodation away from city centres with land on which to grow food.
- Increased attractiveness of parks and green spaces in urban environments.



## New thoughts on post-coronavirus world economy

Some 170 Dutch academics have assembled a 5-point manifesto based on 'de-growth' principles they would like to see implemented after the current crisis passes.

Below, we repeat Jason Hickel's summary of them on Twitter last month (@jason). We found the points interesting, but include them without further comment.

1) Shift from an economy focused on aggregate gross-domestic-product growth to differentiate between sectors that can grow and need investment (critical public sectors, clean energy, education, health) and sectors that need to radically de-grow (oil, gas, mining, advertising, etc.).

2) Build an economic framework focused on redistribution, which establishes: a universal basic income, a universal social-policy system; strong progressive taxation of income, profits, and wealth; reduced working hours; job sharing; and recognition of care work.

3) Transform farming towards regenerative agriculture based on biodiversity conservation, sustainable and mostly local and vegetarian food production, as well as fair agricultural employment conditions and wages.

4) Reduce consumption and travel, with a drastic shift from luxury and wasteful consumption and travel to basic, necessary, sustainable and satisfying consumption and travel.

5) Debt cancellation, especially for workers and small-business owners and for countries in the global South (both from richer countries and international financial institutions).

## Good Plod not God

Community police officers are generally favoured by the public, as they combine familiar faces with detailed local knowledge.

However, budget cuts mean Edinburgh Council no longer funds these specialists, and even before the coronavirus crisis hit it was unclear precisely what alternative arrangements would apply citywide in future.

Meanwhile, at a national level, senior human-rights lawyer John Scott QC will chair a 6-person group reporting directly to the Scottish Police Authority (SPA), providing independent scrutiny of how officers and staff apply new emergency legislation [in full [bit.ly/3eqbwQM](http://bit.ly/3eqbwQM) and in summary, [bit.ly/3aa4axl](http://bit.ly/3aa4axl)].

Chief Constable Ian Livingstone QPM says Police Scotland will still operate on the basis of public consent and cooperation. 'We will continue to focus on explaining the legal instructions, encouraging compliance, and using enforcement only where necessary.'

SPA Vice Chair David Crichton supports these principles, and the role of John Scott and others in maintaining them at a time when Police Scotland's 'unprecedented powers [...] and the judgements they make [...] come under growing pressure as the period of restriction continues'.



## Social distancing – a first stab at some dos and don'ts

With new strictures on social distancing have come new niceties concerning etiquette in public spaces. Below, we offer a provisional *Spurtle* guide to social-distancing dos and don'ts. Your additions and refinements would be welcome.

1. Social distancing applies to joggers and cyclists as well as walkers. Joggers and cyclists on shared paths should adjust their speed, wheezing, coughing, and spitting to avoid others. Cyclists may push but should not ride on pavements where a road is available.

2. When approaching someone on a pavement, it's easier if everyone always passes on the left, preferably not consulting a mobile phone in the process.

3. Where a pavement is too narrow for pedestrians to pass at the required 6ft 6ins distance (e.g. on a metric pavement), the person(s) facing oncoming traffic should step carefully into the road if/when it is safe to do so. The person facing them may slow or even stop completely to facilitate this manoeuvre.

4. Couples do not have a God-given right to hold hands in the middle of a pavement, forcing others to skirt round them. It is perfectly possible for the loved-up or clingy to temporarily disengage and walk one behind the other for a few seconds.

5. In confined outdoor spaces, dogs, children, and extroverts who think Covid-19 is a lot of fuss about nothing should be kept under close control.

6. Do not walk too closely behind another person. Doing so not only exposes you to a potential microbial soup-vortex, but – just as it did in the days before the pandemic – gives the person in front of you the creeps.

7. In supermarket aisles with marked exclusion zones on the floor to separate customers from each other, supermarket staff should follow the same rules.

8. In the same supermarket aisles, it is not acceptable to cause traffic jams by spending 15 minutes deciding which jar of marmalade to add to the essential 3 bottles of wine, 3 bottles of beer, and 3 bottles of spirits, you really came in for.

9. If you're wearing a facemask and someone you know isn't, don't smirk. They can still tell what you're thinking by the shape of your eyebrows.

10. Never try to eat pot-noodles in public while wearing a hazmat suit. — AM



Image: Wikipedia, creative commons [bit.ly/3568rRf]

## Deaths from influenza and pneumonia

The following questionable advert appeared in the Scotsman on 12 December 1919.

Over 140 deaths a day from Influenza in Scotland alone! That was the official record for one month during the epidemic of 1918–1919 while the number of fatalities during the year averaged fifty a day.

A common cold, once it gets a grip on the system, can most easily turn to Influenza, but a common cold can most easily be cured. Bitrate of Tar contains all the essential ingredients for the quick relief of Influenza as well as Coughs, Colds, Bronchitis, &c. It is perfectly harmless and pleasant to take—it heals the inflamed membrane, soothes the lungs and overcomes the cause of the trouble.

Keep a bottle of Bitrate of Tar (Concentrated) in the house and use it at the first symptom of Influenza and other Bronchial and pulmonary trouble. It costs but 3/-, and a Guarantee is enclosed with each package to the effect that if you are not perfectly satisfied your money will be returned. A few timely doses of Bitrate of Tar may ward off serious illness, preventing much suffering and avoiding heavy expense. Get a bottle to-day.

Elsewhere, the manufacturers recommended adding 2oz of Bitrate of Tar to a plain syrup made by dissolving half a pound of sugar in half a pint of hot water. 'Mix thoroughly and take one or two tablespoonsful every hour until the trouble disappears.' We're not sure what Bitrate of Tar was, but it is no longer available on the market.

## Briefly

The former premises of P&W Plumbing at 38 E Claremont St have been frozen in mid-refurb since the dawn of the **Great Lockdown**. However, after hob-nobbing with **those in the know**, we now have a clearer idea of what will eventually fill them: an **upmarket kitchen-design studio**.

Collection of **blue-bin glass recycling** resumed on 28 April at usual times. Flexible staff practices, availability of vehicles, and number of **residents affected** influenced the move, not the fact that the Council gets paid for delivery. Work is underway to restore **brown-bin garden-waste** collections as soon as possible. Options for recompensing subscribers are being considered.

There is contradictory advice available on **domestic bonfires**. Both the BBC and STV reported a Council 'ban' on bonfires over the Easter weekend. But closer reading reveals a more **advisory reality**, intended to promote fresh air for those with coronavirus and other bronchial problems, and to prevent avoidable call-outs for stretched emergency services. During the temporary absence of **brown-bin garden-waste collections**, composting is preferable to fire, particularly in enclosed tenement back greens. Those enduring **persistent problem bonfires** may report them to CEC's Environmental Health Dept on Tel. 0131 608 1100.

Following ravages by the Christmas Market, steep south-facing banks in **E Princes St Gardens** are scheduled to be returfed in the next 2–3 weeks. A Council spokesperson tells us contractors are also undertaking substantial '**drainage improvement works**' on the lower lawn which should allow it to recover more quickly after heavy rainfall. Reinstatement works are expected to be **completed in May**, with public access restored 'to sections of the gardens as soon as it is safe to do so'.

A range of reactions greeted news that **Claremont Cres** residents had trimmed the overgrown hedge growing through the railings between their shared garden and **E Claremont St**. Some observers on social media welcomed the public-spirited pruning, which has freed up some **466ft<sup>2</sup>** of pavement which neighbours on foot can now use to avoid each other. Others said it had always been the owners' responsibility, and they **should have gone radge** with the clippers ages ago. Others still were amazed to find this wasn't – as they had previously assumed – a Council responsibility, and that therefore they had been **grumbling into their brose** for years about entirely the wrong people.

NTBCC's **annual general meeting** had been scheduled for May 2020, but will probably now be postponed until Sept. The *Spurtle's* AGM took place virtually in April, but **independently audited accounts** will not be formally approved until it is safe to do so at a later date. Suffice to say, our financial position is stable – thanks in large part to the generosity of subscribers.

# Moreover ...

*Spurtle* understands Little Sisters of the Poor on **Hopetoun Cres** are now providing meals for c.90 people each day, a substantial increase on previous need.

The online formats of so many **business and civic meetings** these days offer fascinating glimpses of participants' bookshelves, store cupboards, domestic furnishings, and nostrils which have **never before** been available in such detail. Careful attention to these details will surely become an **important element of social discourse**, with backgrounds prepared as carefully in future as faces used to be in the past.

**Scottish Government Reporters** were expected (again) to deliver their recommendations on the future of the **old Royal High School** to Ministers last month.

A regularly updated list of **food /drink shops and essential services** in Spurtleshire (Pilrig St to Howe St, Queen St to Canonmills) is available here [bit.ly/3bdKnhP].

Dash – an urban fox who is expecting cubs – has been visiting Luke Cotton in his **Broughton Rd** back green this spring. She is the 4th generation of a single family to have lived in the area of Sandy Hill for the last decade. Cotton is clear that the creature is a **wild animal not a pet**, but says the vixen has grown up around humans and is confident about accepting food from them. Cotton takes the opportunity to introduce **herbal medicine** into her diet to treat mange. Edinburgh Live carried the news here: [bit.ly/2W23pBm].

**Keep-out notices** around the former Craigroyston FC pitch in St Mark's Park **will probably be removed**, a Council spokesperson told us last month. Access is meant to be restricted only during matches. In an unrelated development, the **burned-out car** nearby has been removed.

Edinburgh's satirical misery guts is finding much to enjoy about lockdown in the capital, not least the unusual resurgence of Nature.



**The 4 Bs:** They are all Fred Olsen cruise liners currently on lockdown at anchor off Edinburgh.

**Spurtle Team:** E. Dickie, J. Dickie, M. Forde, J. Hart, M. Hart, D. Hill, A. McIntosh, J. R. Maclean, S. Michael, M. Orr, L. Rogers, C. Roussot, T. Smith, D. Sterratt, E. Taylor-Smith, D. Young.

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## LEITH CENTRAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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### Ben Macpherson MSP

Member of the Scottish  
Parliament for  
Edinburgh Northern and  
Leith Constituency



0131 600 0134



[www.benmacpherson.scot](http://www.benmacpherson.scot)



[ben.macpherson.msp@parliament.scot](mailto:ben.macpherson.msp@parliament.scot)

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak my office is currently closed until further notice.

My team and I continue to assist constituents, are available to help as best we can, and can be contacted by phone or email.



The costs of this publication have been met out of parliamentary resources. The SPCB is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.

## CORONAVIRUS CORNER

- For definitive NHS guidance on dealing with Coronavirus, visit [bit.ly/2J2dkRh].
- For accurate information on how the Council is responding to the pandemic, visit [bit.ly/398sYFq].
- Factual up-to-date coverage from the Scottish Government is available at [bit.ly/3aa8j5h].
- For useful news on volunteering to help in Edinburgh, visit: [bit.ly/2UBBg3E] and [bit.ly/3dmmQwE].
- And finally, if any reader finds themselves vulnerable or struggling, contact us at the number or email address on Page 1, top-right. We'll seek reliable advice and solutions on your behalf.