

Spurtle



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**August
2020**

No 298

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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER

Free

NEW TOWN NORTH – PLANNING APPLICATION SOON

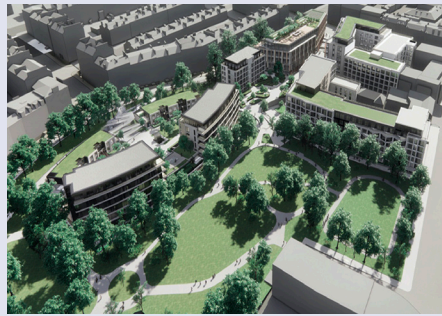
Interactive online consultation about the proposals for the New Town North development generated almost 2k hits and 87 completed questionnaires from Scotland and abroad.

Developers Ediston and Orion Capital Managers say concerns about the height and density of development on the 5.9-acre site (between Dundas Street and King George V Park) have been addressed.

Additional green space and soft landscaping will increase that in the park by 25%, they claim, with old trees being maintained long term and new ones planted.

Overshadowing, they say, will not be an issue, and spaces for 164 cars (not 20 as rumoured) and 700 bikes have been stipulated by the Council. Walking through the site will be prioritised over cycling. The Eyre Place courtyard will be 50% bigger than before, with some 'inevitable' overlooking no worse than before and in some cases reduced.

As we went to press, a full planning application was expected to be submitted by the end of July.



PLENTY MORE ROOM NO MORE



Tourists may be trickling back into Edinburgh for what remains of the summer, but life cannot return quite to normal. A reduced 2020–21 Hogmanay programme will be discussed by the Policy & Sustainability Committee later this month, reflecting changed post-viral public-health priorities. Expect more small events spread across the city ... and the usual Underbelly spin. Not all but many residents would welcome the end of gaudy tat and ever-increasing visitor numbers, and a return to locally focused activities.

ROUNDAABOUT PROPOSAL PUTS COUNCIL IN A SPIN

Some 70 people objected to a proposal last month by Community Partners Ltd to erect four advertising panels on the Mansfield Place roundabout (20/02480/ADV).

An artist's impression submitted as part of the application appeared to show Edinburgh University as the scheme's 'sponsor', but the University soon denied any knowledge of the plan and the mock-up was removed from the Council planning portal without acknowledgement of the fact. *Spurtle* has a separate issue about the ethics of that (see 'To tweak or not to tweak', p. 2).



CP Ltd is associated with CP Media Limited, the Council's Halifax-based partners in a project to sponsor roundabouts across the city. The total worth of these deals is estimated by the Council at up to £380k; and some elements of it may have merit in the local authority's desperate struggle to find money for maintenance costs.

However, specific objections to adverts at this particular location included: loss of amenity; dangerous distraction of road users; loss of views; and detrimental impact on the character/setting of the Conservation Area and World Heritage site.

For chapter and verse, see [bit.ly/2DGMM90]. In the meantime, observers anticipate the spectacle of two separate parts of the Council contesting in public the merits/demerits of a scheme voters don't want.

Spurtle poked for being too woke

Spurtle's coverage in Issue 297 of controversy surrounding the Dundas statue irritated at least one reader. They described it as 'for the WOKE folk to devour'. *Spurtle* had tried to report all available opinions. If we had encountered anyone expressing affection or admiration for Dundas, we would have reported that, too.

Our disgruntled reader will not enjoy the new plaque coming to the Melville Monument in St Andrew Square. The agreed wording for it refers to Dundas' instrumental role in deferring the slave trade's abolition, his curbing of democratic dissent in Scotland, his imposition of colonial rule on indigenous peoples, and his impeachment for misappropriation of public money.

It concludes: 'In 2020 this plaque was dedicated to the memory of the more than half-a-million Africans whose enslavement was a consequence of Henry Dundas's actions.'

HUGE SCALE OF SHORT-TERM-LET ABUSE

A tiny fraction of commercial short-term lets have planning permission and the vast majority are not paying non-domestic rates, according to a report last month by Charlotte Maddix and Andy Wightman MSP for the Scottish Greens [bit.ly/2ZZw7pM].

CEC guidelines say change of use from residential to STL use may require permission, depending on location, size, activity, and services provided. Of 147 applications for planning permission since 1997, a mere 33 have been refused.

Between January and June 2020, tenement residents using homesfirst.scot reported 477 dwellings used as commercial STLs. City Centre and Leith Walk Wards accounted for 52% of these, with planning permission for just one found in Council records.

Between 17% and 25% of the 477 addresses are liable for non-domestic rates, with the remainder liable for Council Tax. Flat numbering ambiguities meant 8% could not be classified.

Non-domestic rates are several times higher than Council Tax: £4.9k versus £1.13k in one example. But landlords can save even more using the Small Business Bonus Scheme, which can give a 100% discount on non-domestic rates, accounting for an estimated £5M in Edinburgh.

Although Covid curbed STLs, 10% were reported as used during lockdown, with only 2.5% being offered as long-term lets.

This report is no surprise, but just how infrequently the planning system has been able to respond is shocking.—David Sterratt

Briefly



Edinburgh citizens have been emerging from Lockdown to find that not all their fellow citizens have been public-spirited and indoors over recent months. Large swathes of Broughton and the city centre are now covered in graffiti, much of it comprising dull and inartistic tags. Vandalism is also apparent, with many of the Just Eat bikes (like those pictured at the Broughton Rd Tesco) wrenched from their stands and abandoned at random elsewhere. Hopefully, the return of 'natural surveillance' will curtail such inconsiderate idiocies. [Photo: Peter Clarke.]

Laura Mulholland (née Johnson) died suddenly at home on 24 Mar. The Procurator Fiscal has now determined her cause of death, aged 42, as 'unascertained'. A sports enthusiast, Laura grew up in Bellevue and attended Broughton PS and Drummond CHS. She is survived by parents Janice and Selwyn, sister Wendy, and son Aidan.

B&M Joiners & Building Services are celebrating 50 years in business this year with a new website and advertising campaign on Sky TV. They're still based at 13-15 Rodney St, but now undertake jobs across Scotland. Typical work includes: windows, kitchens, bathrooms, home improvements, heritage and conservation, extensions, insurance projects, commercial work and maintenance.

Sad news about Henderson's, since 1962 the iconic vegetarian and vegan shop / restaurant / café on Hanover St plus later Thistle St and Holyrood Rd. It has gone into voluntary liquidation after financial damage caused by the Covid lockdown. Some 40 staff will lose their jobs.

And it doesn't stop there. After 20+ years in business and 13 on Broughton St, Concrete Wardrobe will not reopen once lockdown restrictions end. The team there have no regrets. 'We may be down, but we are by no means out ... we will take time to take stock, reflect and respond. We will resurface and, as always, say onwards and upwards.'

And on it goes ... The White Witch's spell on Broughton St has come to an end, with the lease for sale. Its joyful hostess's great Italian coffees and home baking will be missed but always fondly remembered.

To tweak or not to tweak? That should not even be a question.

The inadequacy of Council consultations was apparent again last month. In a stop-gap measure to get around Covid-related delays, CEC cobbled together a questionnaire with Edinburgh University students on Edinburgh's 'Thriving Green Spaces'.

The online exercise was short on detail and technically glitchy, and poorly framed questions provoked criticism. To make matters worse, the authors then substantively changed that framing after the launch without telling anyone.

In Spurtle's opinion, that breached important points of trust and academic principle, so we criticised it. The Council, however, responded breezily as if nothing untoward had occurred and all would come right in the end. We are not impressed. See [bit.ly/30E686f bit.ly/32Hsc2z and bit.ly/3eLieQc].



Tempesta in una tazza di caffè

As briefly reported in Issue 297, the application to convert the former police box on Heriot Row into a 'coffee and food sale point' has caused a considerable stir (20/02262/FUL). When the window for comments closed on 10 July, 74 people had written in to object and an astonishing 90 to support the plan.

In Spurtle's experience, this is an unprecedented number of people favouring such a small projected enterprise. We're at a loss to explain it. Some locals, however, smell a rat.

The applicant says she intends to provide 'a coffee outlet to serve the local community', but local community sceptics say they have their own well-appointed kitchens, chairs, and cafetières for just this sort of thing ... in comfort and out of the rain. They suspect a more likely market will emerge from marauding tour buses, and envisage disruption from litter, idling engines, caffeine-infused gawpers, piped music, and the creeping commercialisation of a hitherto residential area.

The New Town & Broughton Community Council notes that the police box is a listed structure, but as yet no listed building consent has been sought. It also seeks more clarity on what class usage is being sought, as some class usages can be converted to others without additional planning permission.

To some outside observers, all this rather resembles an Ealing comedy with added red corduroys. To insiders, though, it's not nearly so funny. A determination is expected by 7 August.

No wee problem in Auld Leakie

It is a perfect storm, and some Pilgrim inhabitants have found themselves awash with the results.

With bars in Scotland allowed to sell drinks for consumption off the premises, but not allowed to open their (often cramped) toilets owing to Covid restrictions, the inevitable overflow has impacted local residents close to clusters of Leith Walk establishments.

Anyone caught urinating in public in Scotland can face a £50 fine on the spot. But that does not deter the full of bladder and empty of common courtesy. They think nothing of using locals' gardens, bushes, odd corners, communal bins, and parking spaces, and of abusing anyone who remonstrates at such behaviour. Bar owners and police seem indifferent to the problem or slow to react.

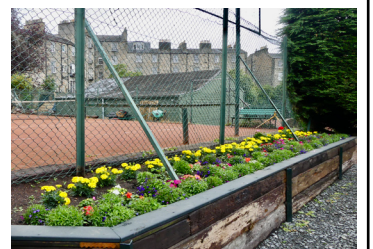
The Council can afford to maintain seven public conveniences to the standard necessary in a pandemic, none of them in Spurtleshire. Many non-pint-guzzling citizens who for other reasons need a loo quickly or often are thus unable to travel far or long from home comforts.

To many, this is not just about the stringencies of the Covid response. There have been far too few public loos here for too long. Edinburgh falls below an acceptable standard of 21st-century civilisation.



Out-of-court improvements

Over recent months, the grounds of Drummond Tennis Club on E. Scotland St Lane have been transformed by long-term member and general groundsman John Foxwell. Weeds have been cleared, new beds and lawn set out; decking, hanging baskets and seating introduced. It's a major achievement already, with further improvements still to come. See [bit.ly/39phW0r] on 1 August.—JRM

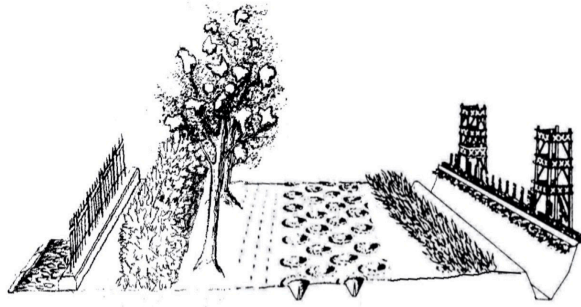


Back to the future at Drummondum

Speculation is rife in the New Town following last month's work on the perimeter of Drummond Place Garden, and the chance discovery in neighbouring Scotland Street of a diagram showing Roman-era defences.

In years to come, perhaps marauding Caledonii may expect to encounter (from left to right): *picula* (railings); *sepes ligustrum ovaliflorum* (privet hedge); *lilia* (pit traps with spikes); *cippi* (thorn bush pits); *fossa* (ditch); and an *agger* (embankment).

Of course, the new spikes may simply restore the listed cast-iron railings to their former glory. But don't say you weren't warned: Rule 5 of the Garden regulations specifically points out that 'The railings must not be climbed' [bit.ly/2W11Euw].— *E. Roussot*



Carrots and sticks for short-term lets

Councillors want Edinburgh's short-term-let sector to make a long-term contribution to easing homelessness in the capital.

The Scottish Government's current lockdown rules [bit.ly/30azd9b] mean holiday lets with shared facilities (such as communal entrances, stairs and landings) should not operate. All properties operating as STLs without change-of-use consent will be pursued by Council Enforcement even after lockdown rules change. Bringing these properties back into genuine residential use is an opportunity for all sides.

Council Leader Adam McVey says, 'I want to see us work with, rather than against, landlords to make the rental market fairer on everybody who lives here. As we recover from this pandemic, we have a real opportunity to work together. We can jointly support our City's most vulnerable residents and return properties to their rightful purpose as homes.'

Landlords can either manage their properties themselves, or sign up for the Council's private sector leasing scheme under which rents are guaranteed for five years [bit.ly/392FBne]. The Council is also aiming to build an additional 10k affordable homes by 2022.

It is heartening to hear that the poorly managed and unregulated STLs face carrot-and-stick encouragement to cease. However, given the number, cynicism, and tenacity of many STL landlords, doubts persist about the Council's capacity to enforce change. (See 'Huge scale', p. 1.)

Fond hopes for a summer drift



Photo: Alexey Sokolov
1971 [tiny.cc/v2ksz]

Reports on the swifts' ecstatic presence in the sky above Broughton and its environs are mixed, but numbers seem to be less than in previous years.

This may be due, as long-term *Spurtle* correspondent Peter Verity writes, to a violent storm over Greece in early April which killed many migrating birds, and decimated their insect food source. But other factors may also apply, such as lack of traditional nesting sites.

It is still a great joy to observe those that are present, wheeling and swooping above our rooftops. And happily, one is nesting, as before, in Mrs Gaby Holden's eaves in Scotland Street. Moreover, Mr Verity informs us of the following remarkable occurrence ...

'Two weeks ago, we wondered why the big ginger cat was taking an interest in the corner between cabinets in our kitchen in the top-floor flat overlooking Broughton St Mary's. I removed the cat, fished inside the open-back cabinet, and removed a swift by wrapping it gently in a duster. We released it onto a window-sill, and it flew shakily away after a couple of seconds.' An expanded version of Mr Verity's fascinating letter appears here [bit.ly/39j3PcY].

The *Spurtle* would welcome other readers' reports of sightings, which will be conveyed to the British Trust for Ornithology.—*JRM*

Swifts

A party of latecomer swifts, shrill mud-brown screamers, patrols the evening sky.

The Greeks called them apus, footless, believing they could neither perch nor stand,

just as folk used to say the geese that fly here from Greenland had hatched out of barnacles.

Seen head-on, they are torpedoes, bullets, small bombs engineered to skim rooftops.

Sweeping clouds of gnats into their wide gapes, scything the air on stiff crescent wings,

every year they come squealing later, and fewer. We have been warned they may leave us,

are glad when we first hear their screechy exchanges, envoys from the ancients.

Imogen Forster

Briefly

Not so much regret, we wager, will follow the closure of William Hill at the corner of **Rodney St** and **Eyre Pl**. 'Pride. Passion. Belief' were not always in evidence here [tiny.cc/n9yjsz]. Although the company's revenue has **crashed thanks to Covid**, this doesn't explain these developments. The bookmaker had already announced the **closure of 700 branches** (and loss of 4,500 jobs) nationwide last year as a result of lower **maximum stakes** being set for fixed-odds betting terminals.

A 22-year-old man has been **arrested and charged** in connection with the alleged robbery and attempted robbery of convenience stores in **Bonnington and McDonald Rds** in July.

A woman was robbed but unharmed in the **Dryden Gait** area on 3 July between 10pm and 11.40pm [bit.ly/2CWKodX]. The 6' 2" suspect was aged about 30 and wore a **bright-orange bike helmet**.

To help Edinburgh pedestrians through the pandemic, many 'Green Man' crossings are now **temporarily working automatically**, without needing pushed. **Local examples are:** Broughton Rd/Logie Grn Rd, Canonmills/Brandon Ter, Dundas St/Heriot Row, Howe St/Heriot Row, Leith St/Calton Rd, Leith St at John Lewis, Leith St/Greenside Row, Leith Walk at Playhouse, Queen St/Dublin St, Rodney St/Broughton Rd, York Pl/Broughton St, York Pl/Elder St.

The Edinburgh & Lothians Regional Equality Council, based in **Forth St**, is calling for greater efforts to tackle racism in schools **among staff and teachers**. It recommends: policymakers, teachers, and families combine to **tackle discrimination** at school and at home; creation, funding, and enforcement of **anti-racism** policies; training of teachers to work with kids from **all backgrounds**, with parents involved in framing school initiatives.

As reported in Issue 296, work re-started on **McDonald Rd Fire Station** in May. Further steel structural framing systems are expected to be installed soon, followed by closure of the 'building envelope' and, we assume, licking of an enormous stamp. **Windows and internal fitting** will start in Oct. Meanwhile, Robertson Construction have joined locals in watering **drouthy young trees** in the neighbourhood, to the satisfaction of many.

New Town & Broughton Community Council has new ideas about how to improve **Broughton St** for cyclists and pedestrians. See: [bit.ly/30F5o13].

Pandemic-related administrative problems mean the **Census** scheduled for March 2021 will now be conducted in **March 2022**.

An application to extend the driveway and improve access behind **30 London St** has attracted 38 objections. Many opposed increased commercial use of the quiet **E. Scotland St Ln** [bit.ly/3jAhyB1].

Moreover ...

Work on **E Claremont St's** footways, drainage and lighting between **W Annandale St** and **Broughton Rd** began on 13 July and should last till about 24 Aug.

Faulty points in Issue 297 directed readers **off the fragrant mainline** and into a siding full of dog poo and stinging nettles. Sorry about that. For **Andy Arthur's** fascinating flyby tours of the capital's railway past, alight now at: [tiny.cc/7qbgysz].

Cllr Lewis Ritchie (Ward 12) is facing further questions about his conduct. On 17 June a **Police Scotland** spokesperson said, 'A 36-year-old man has been arrested and charged in connection with **sexual offences and indecent communications** between April 2016 and October 2019 in the Leith area of Edinburgh, and October 2017 in the Kelvinbridge area of Glasgow. He was released on an undertaking to appear at Edinburgh Sheriff Court at a later date.' Cllr Ritchie **denies the charges** against him but is unable to comment further at this point. *Spurtle* first reported alleged problems surrounding his conduct in Mar 2018<[bit.ly/3eYE0QK].

A new '**Walk, Talk, Make Sculpture Trail**' has launched in the grounds of the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art [bit.ly/3jHhooL] on **Belford Rd**. The free online guide is suitable for all ages during opening hours from **9.45am-5.30pm daily**. Visitors can also avail themselves of a pop-up café, changing place, and loo (takeaway only).

After around 8 years of closures, work is due to start soon on restoring and reopening the Water of Leith Path west of **Dean Village**. The 26-week project will include: clearance of debris and vegetation, **soil nailing and piling**, reinstatement of concrete foundations, repair of the footpath, **remedial landscaping**, and new drains. There has been **protracted negotiation** about the extent of necessary repairs, and how costs should be shared between the Council and neighbouring owners.

Earlier this summer, much speculation followed *Spurtle's* highlighting of localised spikes in **Covid-related deaths** across Edinburgh [bit.ly/30GtV5I]. New and not yet peer-reviewed research into care homes across the **Lothian Health Board** up to mid-June now concludes: 'The large impact on excess deaths appears to be primarily a direct effect of COVID-19, with cases and deaths concentrated in a minority of care homes.' **Government action** to ensure such vulnerable residents are **effectively shielded** looks, to the layperson, like an obvious and cost-effective way to minimise any **Wave 2 of the virus** in future. See [bit.ly/3f15y7O].

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Printed by Minuteman Press, 63 Elm Row.



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Leith Central Community Council



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Edinburgh North & Leith

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Surgeries

Every first Friday 1-2pm Constituency office 166 Great Junction St	Every third Friday 1-2pm Stockbridge Library
Every second Friday 3.30-4.30pm McDonald Road Library	Every last Friday 4-5pm Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre

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Ben Macpherson MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Northern and Leith Constituency



Constituency Surgeries

(no appointment necessary)

Every Monday: 5-6pm at Leith Library 28-30 Ferry Road Edinburgh EH6 4AE	Every Friday: 4-5pm at Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre Pilton Drive North Edinburgh EH5 1NF
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