

Spurtle



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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

COUNCIL RESPONSE FALLS SHORT

Anguished yodels greeted removal of the lang chute in King George V Park before Christmas. Young people, parents, carers and other adults who have enjoyed active childhoods and bear the scars to prove it criticised what they saw as an over-cautious Council terrified of Life's inevitable and character-building crash-landings.

In response to *Spurtle's* subsequent Freedom of Information request, officials produced CEC's twice-yearly inspection reports of equipment here between Dec 2016 and Mar 2023. In each one, the condition of the embankment slide was rated 'OK'.

However, in parallel, Operational Inspection Reports were lodged by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents from 2004. In Dec 2019, RoSPA first noted that the paved slope beside the slide had a 'free height of fall of 600mm or has forced movement without the impact area being fully covered with suitable impact attenuating surface'. It raised similar concerns in 2021 and 2022, saying a protective surface was required. But it could not identify 'a reasonably practicable solution' to this medium-risk score of 12. This seems to have prompted removal of the slide.

To *Spurtle's* certain knowledge, no-one in human history has identified a reasonably practicable solution to childhood and gravity. We also note that, by the time the average infant learns to walk (between 8 and 18 months), they already exceed 660mm. Such dizzying fall distances are normal.

In another part of the FOI request, *Spurtle* asked how many injuries on or adjacent to the slide had occurred since its installation in 1989. The Council holds relevant statistics for 1996 onwards. In those 24 years covered, there have been no reports of injuries here.

Spurtle has contacted Friends of King George V and Scotland Yard Park for comment.



STEP CHANGE BRINGS STEEP SURPRISES



On 18 Jan, this 7.5T truck became the third vehicle in recent weeks to find itself wedged at the top of Greenside Lane. New steps were built here to prevent motorists crossing the tramline, but some have blithely followed unupdated directions on Google and Apple Maps, traversed 3 kerbs, 1 cycle lane, 1 footway, crossed fingers and got stuck. Ward 11's Cllr McFarlane has repeatedly called for the installation of bollards. When *Spurtle* passed shortly after the incident occurred, the shocked Professional Linen Services driver had turned as white as a sheet.

BAN TO CREATE 'MORE EQUAL CITY'



Writing last month on X, Transport & Environment Convener Scott Arthur noted that enforcement of the ban on pavement parking, which began on 29 Jan, is supported by all 5 of the capital's political parties.

'I know that the ban will mean that things will have to change in many streets in Edinburgh, but it is important to note that the process of parking on the footpath was already illegal. The same is true of parking in such a way that the road is blocked to other vehicles. (Check what the Highway Code has to say about both points.)

'It is also important to note that the parking ban is being introduced to create a more equal city. Vehicles parking on footpaths represent a significant barrier to people with disabilities, and that's why the ban has the support of campaigning charities like Guide Dogs Scotland.'

Spurtle welcomes the development: commercial parkers should comply with rules and/or adapt practices to find legal alternatives. But we misdoubt sufficient resources exist for timely and widespread enforcement.

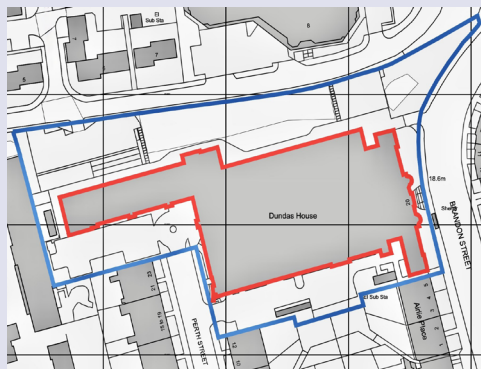
CREAG DHUBH ON THE MOVE

Investment-management giant Black Rock has submitted additional plans for its transfer to the former Standard Life building at 20 Brandon St (23/07209/LBC) [bit.ly/No334p2].

Exterior features include an extensive 3m 'Victorian-style' anti-climb fence. Neighbouring Perth St residents may be reminded of HM Prison Shotts, but with reference to the Glenogle Rd side BR claims the addition would create 'undeniably more prominence' for the property while providing not only a 'more engaging elevation' but 'an improved sense of place and identity'. CCTV cameras will add to the charm.

Interiors are to be refurbished throughout, with a new or upgraded reception area, 'community' atrium, staff restaurant, café, office floor plates and amenity spaces. Improved high-performance and sustainable mechanical/electrical infrastructure promise reduced energy use and emissions.

In economic terms, says BR, the plan would: safeguard 800 operational jobs and create 500 new ones, with a gross value-added effect of £77m. It would provide an annual GVA effect of £100m (an extra £39m at city-region level); and result in supply-chain benefits and construction jobs.



Briefly



Readers Sam Murray and Richard Patterson were the most successful solvers of *Spurtle's* online puzzle in Dec. They identified all 25 cryptically referenced places around central Edinburgh, and for the last 5 days also supplied the **number of steps at each**. They are pictured above at the final location, **Greenside Lane**, with prizes: limited-edition No. 8 buses commissioned from Corgi by **Model Motoring** of Broughton St in 1986. Congratulations to all who took part. Answers here [bit.ly/BSpzzl].

Friends of Calton Hill have published a list of preferred native trees which, if introduced so as not to obstruct views, could enhance the place's beauty and improve wildlife habitats. The 8 **hardy 'pioneer' species** are: crab apple, elder, goat willow, hawthorn, holly, rowan, silver birch and wild cherry. Alder, pedunculate oak and wych elm would flourish in specific locations. Some locals call for **less mowing** so that harebells can once again thrive. Not all visitors to the hill admire recent Council planting of conifers, or the public's additions of fireworks, vapes, beer bottles, carry-out boxes and latex exotica.

Ward 12's **Cllr Jack Caldwell** has been asking for months why tactile paving has been installed at peculiar angles on continuous-footway junctions along **Leith Walk**. He has still not received an adequate answer. According to **Edinburgh Street Design Guidance**, tactiles should be aligned both parallel to and perpendicular to the carriageway. They alert blind people and those with visual impairments to the **possible presence of vehicles**. Some continuous footways still don't have any tactiles at all. These are just a few of the **pavement problems** alongside the tramway extension. As long ago as Dec 2022, **National Federation for the Blind's chair Sandy Taylor** told the Local Democracy Reporting Service, 'Cyclists should not be sharing space with pedestrians. It is too dangerous for blind and visually impaired people to use this space.' He called for a **complete redesign** to make Leith Walk safer and more accessible.

Low Tide BJJ seeks to expand from its current ground-floor yoga and Brazilian jiu jitsu studio at **25 Rodney Street** onto the first floor. The current premises accommodate 25 people, but an additional 40+ could use the 216m² space upstairs. The club has **around 200 members** (many of them locals) but hopes to double this in 2024 if the Council agrees a change of use for the first floor from **office to leisure**. Elsewhere, Murray Developments propose a parting of the ways by subdividing **8-10 Tanfield** (currently occupied by A & A Studios) into 2 separate business units. Finally, the owner of a 2-bedroom basement and sub-basement flat at **40 London St** (below the former sauna) seeks permission to convert it into a short-term let.

Spurtle turns 30

The *Broughton Spurtle* turns 30 this month. We are thus exactly the same age as pop sensation Harry Styles. Coincidentally, our first issue featured calls for E Claremont St and McDonald Pl traffic to travel in one direction.

A desire to reset the balance between motor vehicles and pedestrians was the principal finding to emerge from *Spurtle's* inaugural survey of attitudes to life in the area. Reducing and calming traffic, particularly in residential areas, remain familiar aspirations today, not least on E London St. One local even called (forlornly) for pedestrianisation of congested Broughton St (see Miguel Vivanco's visualisation below).

Spurtle's newsgathering area has expanded west to Howe St over the years, but we remain true to the prospectus laid out by founding editor John Dickie. We aim to: provide a contact point for local people who want to get together and change things; help local action groups publicise their work; make connections between 'the news' and people's own lives in Broughton; and 'generally stir things up a bit'.

Perhaps the greatest change has been the ability of the printed *Spurtle* to refer readers to relevant coverage and background information online. Just copy the links between square brackets (not the brackets themselves) and wait for a new planet to swim into your ken. For example [bit.ly/No1p2].



Snap! Yet more student housing

On 15 Jan, Longstone (2) Ltd outlined to Leith Central Community Council its plans for the former Manderston St bingo hall. It held a public consultation 2 days later.

Longstone says Council planning constraints around matters such as dual aspect housing and minimum open space mean the structure cannot be converted to mainstream housing. Its favoured alternative is 200-bedrm purpose-built student accommodation comprising 24 flats and 10 studios.

Many members of the public hold that developers are influenced less by regulatory limits than by the desire to maximise profits. To such seasoned cynics, Longstone's scheme comes as no surprise: see a crocodile, expect teeth. Detailed plans will be submitted in Feb. For background see [bit.ly/MSt].



More to do on river poo

Campaigners at Save Our Shore Leith are calling on elected representatives to push for more action on sewage pollution in the Water of Leith, particularly around The Shore [bit.ly/no2poo].

They point to revolting contamination (probably due to frequent discharges from combined sewer outflows upstream) and want the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and Environment Standards Scotland to undertake bacterial testing.

So far, SEPA and ESS have not leapt into motion because of a technicality: they say this sewage constitutes silt not solids and is therefore legally exempt. SOSLeith wants more robust proof of this through regular monitoring.

Meanwhile, Edinburgh Council claims that, since the Leith basins are not used for bathing, recreation or drinking water, there is no danger to health and no relevant bacterial standard to measure against. CEC appears oblivious to canoeists, anglers and other forms of wildlife on the river.

SOSLeith says this isn't good enough. Rigorous testing and enforcement are needed to ensure Scottish Water complies with the terms of its Controlled Activities Regulation licence. 'The people of Leith deserve to have their health and environment protected.'

Sewage spills also affect people in Broughton. See our report in May 2023 [bit.ly/WoLpol].



Tram-related risk for cyclists

Legal firm Cycle Law Scotland claimed in its blog last month that nearly 700 Edinburgh cyclists have been injured here since 2009 [bit.ly/CLSTrms]. In Sept 2022, it reports, figures showed that the Council had paid out £1.2m+ in relation to tram-related incidents, and the rate of their occurrence since remains constant.

CLS calls for road-safety and infrastructural improvements based on successful European practice, and for an ongoing campaign to raise public awareness. It also deplors the Council's refusal to settle claims before going to court.

Elsewhere, edi.bike notes that Leith Walk cycle paths are still not officially open, a lamppost obstructs the route through Picardy Pl's Fantasy Island, an old 'No Entry' sign misleads on the downhill section from the OMNi centre, and several utility/manhole covers have collapsed along the route to Newhaven. 'One has to wonder why CEC doesn't seem to have any real mechanisms for quality assurance around "Getting Things Done™".'

Sound of the Hound

Meet John Duncan, owner of Broughton's newest restaurant – Howlin' Hound. It opened just before Christmas, followed in Jan by the basement Don Gatto's Speakeasy. Access to and from the latter (Thurs–Sat) is something of a mystery ... ask staff for hints.

Duncan's backstory is in Law, international Hospitality consultancy, nightclub management and film production. On E London St he promises 'wee nibbles' from around the world, Scottish tapas, cocktails and a cool (not too loud) playlist of 1950s–80s tunes. Small well-behaved dogs are welcome.

For reservations, menus and more see [bit.ly/HHDG].



Briefly



Widespread discontent about the design quality of Edinburgh's public realm coalesced around the **Picardy PI** Fantasy Island before Christmas. *Spurtle's* observation that seated users must face out towards traffic rather than in towards (yet to flourish) foliage was seen by **over 52k people** on X, with more commenting than we could cover at [bit.ly/MToP]. A timeline showing how we arrived at the current dreary desolation appears at [bit.ly/PPLFIT]. It provides an object lesson on **how to consult about pre-established decisions without listening**.

Edinburgh Street Food's proposal to reposition its illuminated exterior signage away from tactile paving has been accepted for a 5-year period (23/06731/ADV). It seems officials no longer believe the garish letters' **'design, colour and lighting'** create 'visual clutter, to the detriment of amenity in the New Town World Heritage site and conservation area' (23/0608/ADV). Perhaps because their consent to an even larger and more garish advertisement attached to the **OMNi** means there is no local amenity left to spoil.

Warriston Allotments were rated 'outstanding' in Keep Scotland Beautiful's 2023 Beautiful Scotland and It's Your Neighbourhood annual seminar and celebration event on 5 Dec. The designation recognises **'the passion, commitment, and positive action** taken by 208 groups from 27 local-authority areas across Scotland to improve their communities for people, climate and nature'.

CA Eyre Place (Edinburgh) Property Owner Ltd has appealed to the Scottish Govt against the Development Management Sub-Cmte's unanimous refusal of planning permission for student accommodation and townhouses at **72–74 Eyre PI** [bit.ly/7274EP]. The developer says it has addressed the Reporter's reasons for dismissing earlier appeals [bit.ly/SHPEyPI]. It concludes that the latest iteration accords with the **Edinburgh Local Development Plan** and other material considerations, ensures acceptable daylight, sunlight and privacy for neighbours, creates a distinctive place and provides high-quality accommodation. Many locals beg to differ.

We hear a local returning home along **London St** after Hogmanay reacted with alarm then irritation to a keyless **AirBnB visitor** ascending the outside wall of a neighbouring property. 'Nice ... you come to Edinburgh, accept our hospitality and then climb all over our listed buildings!' The **unapologetic first-foot** eventually entered by an upstairs window.

A Wex Photo Video branch is to open at **39 Haddington PI**. It replaces Costa Coffee, which created quite a stir when it closed without warning at the end of Apr 2023. M&S Food is leasing the 500m² former Scotmid premises at **36–38 Raeburn PI** for a new outlet. Profits in this edible wing of the company rose 10% from 2022 to 2023.

Slow progress on bus disruption

At last month's Transport & Environment Cmte, elected members bypassed officials' advice to take no further action on East London St.

Officers' latest traffic-count and speed monitoring in Nov 2023 compared figures to 2019 and included results for public service vehicles (buses) and HGVs [bit.ly/ELSTE]. These showed speed levels were mostly within the 20mph limit. But traffic volumes had fallen a lot, particularly for westbound vehicles. This, officials attributed to Leith Walk reopening after completion of the tramworks. Bus use accounted for 2.21% (627) of all vehicles (28.3k) passing between 17 and 23 Nov, HGVs for 0.09% (25).

Sett reconstruction in line with Council policy on built heritage would cost 1.5m–£1.8m, take 52 weeks and not greatly reduce tyre noise. Asphalt reconstruction would cost £0.75m–£1m, take 16 weeks and, although reducing tyre noise, likely increase traffic speeds unless calming measures were included. Asphalt overlay would cost £0.3m–£0.5m, take 4 weeks and soon fall apart. Spot repairs to damaged setts were not considered.

Three options were assessed to improve the Green St/Annandale St junction so that buses could use it as an alternative route to and from the depot.

Councillors approved SNP and Green amendments whose provisions included: engagement with residents, heritage bodies and others to consider 'blacktopping' the middle of the street; further exploring a traffic-calmed Green St as an alternative route for buses. Ward 5's Cllr Bandel requested and was promised specific figures from Lothian Buses about financial and operational effects of routing buses away from E London St. We do not expect anything to change soon.

East Branch Library and Nelson Hall

From the Edinburgh Evening News, 19 Jan 1904.

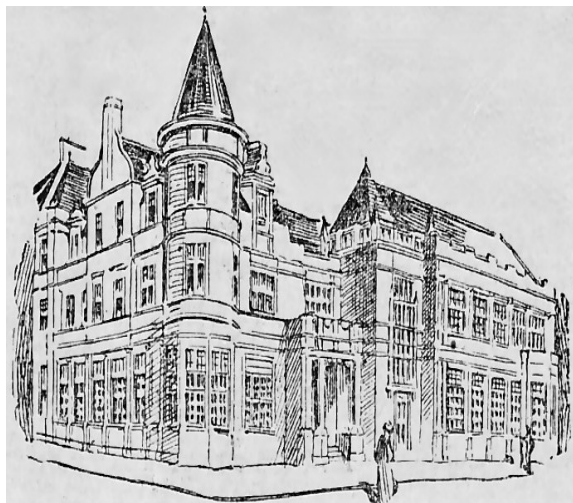
The new buildings of the East Branch Library and Nelson Hall occupy a splendid site at the corner of M'Donald Road and Leith Walk, and in the style of architecture adopted the most has been made of it. There are three storeys towards Leith Walk and two in M'Donald Road.

The accommodation and equipment of the buildings are superior to those of any of the other branch libraries in the city. In the lending library there is space for 20,000 volumes, all within easy reach of the hand. The library has an open timbered roof, and is very well lighted in every part from the roof. The reading room, which gives sitting accommodation for 75 persons at tables, is separated from the library by four arches fitted with leaded glass.

The Nelson Hall forms the recreation hall and news room, a large handsome apartment, with seating for 218 persons at the reading tables and the tables for such games as draughts and dominoes. On the floor above a large room is to be fitted as a gymnasium, and the upper flats also contain houses for the librarian and the hall-keeper.

The whole building has been made as bright, comfortable, and attractive as possible. The architect is Harry Ramsay Taylor, of Messrs Lessels & Taylor, Young Street.

A longer article in the same issue summarised the funding and financial context of McDonald Rd, Fountainbridge and Stockbridge Libraries, featured a defence of fiction and lauded the efficacy of books, games and exercise in keeping people out of public houses. You can read it here [bit.ly/SpBrkNws].



Moreover ...



Plans are afoot to convert the hotel at **14-15 Claremont Cres** into seven 2-bdrm flats with two new 3-bdrm mews buildings at the back [bit.ly/CCflats]. A Council determination was expected around 27 Jan.

Leith Central Community Council has objected to licence applications for a street-trading café on **Elm Row** (loss of space for relaxation and play) and a tattoo parlour on **London Rd** (overprovision).

McDonald Rd Library first opened on 19 Jan 1904. A programme of events to celebrate the **120th anniversary** was held last month, including local history, storytelling, dance and music from Scotland and around the world. In a sign of **changed times**, not a single *shush* was heard. See also p. 3 and [bit.ly/McRdLib].

We hear building costs for the 1k-seat **IMPACT** concert hall on **St Andrew Sq** have nearly doubled to £100m since planning consent was granted in 2019. **Additional applications** are being made to potential funders. The effects of **galloping construction inflation** are felt across Edinburgh. No in-progress project mentioned in recent issues is safe from financial collapse.

HUB Residential Ltd's application to develop 73-bedroom purpose-built student accommodation at **26 Dunedin St** was refused in Dec [bit.ly/NotoHUB]. Among other criticisms, officials found the proposal's **size, footprint and relationship to site boundaries** would constitute overdevelopment detrimental to the area's character and amenity. The **Cockburn Association** says the Beaverlands risk being transformed through ad-hoc market-driven development. It favours a **community-led Local Place Plan** establishing residents' aspirations and priorities.

The perimeter of Italy House (the new consulate on **E London St**) will soon be graced by 2m high galvanised steel railings rather than the 2.4m high 'open mesh steel high security system with mesh infill' originally proposed. As one local sceptic put it, 'So much for Italian style!'

The *Scottish Beacon's* **Rhiannon J. Davies** won the prestigious Georgina Henry prize at the *Press Gazette British Journalism Awards* in Dec. *Spurtle* is one of SB's 21 founding members, covering community news between Shetland in the north and Dumfries and Galloway in the south. See [bit.ly/PrGxScBc].

The next meeting of the **Broughton History Society** will be at 6.30pm on 5 Feb in **McDonald Rd Library**. Ian Milne will talk about 'Animals and Plants in Historic Tapestries'. Expect more woof than warp.

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

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<https://leithcentralcc.co.uk>

Foyso! Choudhury MSP

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Ben Macpherson MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Northern and Leith Constituency



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Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre, 11 Pillon Drive North, EH5 1NF

11:00 to 12:00
West Pillon Neighbourhood Centre, 19 West Pillon Grove, EH4 4BY

15:30 to 16:30
Leith Community Centre, 12A Newkirkgate, EH6 6AD

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