

Spurtle



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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER

Free

LOCAL EFFECTS OF WIDER PROBLEMS

The Leith Community Policing Team says drug dealing and anti-social behaviour on Melgund Ter has now stopped after a coordinated multi-agency campaign. Banning orders were issued to those responsible.

As reported in Issue 348, this has been one of several Broughton locations experiencing such issues. Broken glass and used needles left overnight by adults (not of school age) were even found within Drummond Community High School's playground, leading to the gates there being locked when Amey staff finish at 10pm, Mon-Fri (term time) and 5pm, Sats and holidays. Public access has been prohibited there outwith those times since the autumn.



We now hear that school staff, Amey representatives and others are reassessing the situation. We hope the New Town & Broughton Community Council and other local stakeholders will also get to help decide what happens next.

The playground here has been an important sporting and social hub for young people since at least the Second World War. Its informality, centrality, good lighting and (until recently) comparative safety have made it a really useful resource.

Extending access

In *Spurtle's* view, improved monitoring, policing and safe cleaning of the site are preferable to reduced access. In any case, reduced access is a limited option given the ease with which iron railings can be bent or removed.

At last month's Full Council, Ward 12's Cllr Caldwell asked how Edinburgh's draft strategy of extending access to school sports pitches could be made to work where school estates are managed by private partners.

In a written answer, the Culture & Communities Convener said, 'Operating hours for PPP schools are clearly defined in the contract between the Council and PPP partners and cannot be changed without agreement between both partners.' Caldwell now seeks clarification on what practical steps can be taken to maximise both access and safety. See our website on 21 March.

ACCESS TO CALTON HILL

After a 2-month closure, gated vehicle access to Calton Hill was restored on 27 Feb during daylight hours (9.30am-6.00pm) Unauthorised vehicles are still banned but, without enforcement, anyone can drive up.

The gate will close at 7.00pm from 24 Mar, at 8.00pm from 21 Apr, and at 10.00pm from 26 May. A coded lock allows entry for authorised users. 'Less able and blue badge access' will continue to be facilitated, with contact numbers displayed at the entrance.

Council Parks & Greenspaces says, 'These are short term measures whilst we work through the requirements and processes to be able to procure and install a robust automated vehicular access system that meets the needs of all users.'

The Calton Hill Conservation Trust understands that officials are considering new retractable bollards here, spaced in compliance with hostile vehicle mitigation requirements. It says software options should be determined at the same time as hardware ones. 'Moreover it's vital that the future entry system is sustainable and convenient for users, including disabled people. In our view that means it should be automatic and not monitored in real time.'

CHCT says the hill is 'cleaner, quieter and safer for all when general motorised traffic - with no particular reason to be on the hill - is excluded'. For this reason, it regrets the effective daylight reopening to all and sundry.

Others resent any limits at all to motorised access, and some suggest real or potential restrictions contributed to closure of the Lookout and Gardener's Cottage restaurants in Jan.



Image: Simon Holledge.

BIG CHARACTER AND A BANJO



Image: Courtesy of Lyon & Turnbull.

This monumental work (182cm x 152cm) by artist and writer John Byrne was auctioned at Lyon & Turnbull in Broughton PI on 2 Apr. Prior to the sale, it was estimated to fetch between £20,000 and £30,000. Byrne (1940-2023) was a familiar face around the barony in his later years, and while this portrait may remind some readers of the Silly Wizard musicians who dwelt uncomfortably at 69 Broughton St in the early 1970s [bit.ly/wizard1978], it was more likely inspired by the US folk musician David Crosby or some other character encountered in Hollywood dive bars around that time. Most understand the various floating organs as a reference to contemporary slaughter in Vietnam and nothing to do with Crombie's.

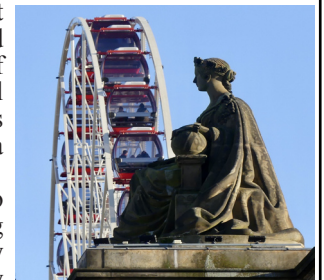
FAIR GROUNDS FOR DISAPPROVAL

Edinburgh World Heritage has joined the Cockburn Assoc in publicly opposing Unique Assembly's plans to erect the Big Wheel in Princes St Gardens for 6 months of the year, starting in June. EWH says such use would disrupt the balance between 'commercialising this space and maintaining its traditional use as public gardens'.

This unusually forthright statement has pleased critics who accuse EWH of too often resisting Council and commercial pressures with all the backbone of a panna cotta.

It does little, however, to appease those - including ward councillors - who say the organisation, currently short of top leadership, lacks clear governance and effective oversight. The recent departures of 3 senior staff members, they say, suggest turmoil behind the scenes.

Community councillors and residents-association reps are irritated by EWH's failure to engage them, as it claimed it intended to do in Sept 2024. Some describe EWH's inability or unwillingness even to answer emails as 'rude and unprofessional'. They say the organisation is dysfunctional and requires root-and-branch review.



Briefly



The Leith Walk Police Box on **Croall PI** is celebrating its 10th year as a treasured **pop-up venue** for local businesses, services and entertainments. Owner **Monty Roy** attributes its survival through tramworks, the Covid lockdown and economic hardships to 'our fantastic, supportive local community'.

On 14 Mar, **Dylan Curran** (25) was convicted of murdering Peter Mullen (30) at the junction of **Leith St and Greenside Row** on 2 June 2024. He was also convicted of the attempted murder of a 43-year-old man during the same incident. He will be sentenced at a later date.

Edinburgh Trams will pay for increased operational costs by upping ticket prices from 6 Apr. **Adult single fares** rise from £2 to £2.20; **adult returns** from £3.80 to £4.20; **day tickets** from £5 to £5.50.

After complaints from pong-plagued upstairs neighbours at **8 Picardy PI**, Taco Bell has agreed to trade no later than midnight for the next year. Talks between those who create the smells and those who endure them continue. Next door, the Tesco Express on **Picardy PI** has begun closing earlier at 11pm after anti-social behaviour from late-night customers. Cash-till staff there now operate from behind protective screens like bank tellers in an old episode of **The Sweeney**.

Plans are afoot to change one office at **15 Northumberland St NE Lane** into a yoga/Pilates studio, and another at **30 Annandale St Lane** into a 2-bdrm dwelling.

The controversial application to build additional student housing as a 5-storey extension at **8 Middlefield** (behind Shrub Place, see Issue 348, p.2) was refused. Officials said the proposal would have an **unacceptable impact** on the outlook and daylighting of neighbours' property and contain more than the permitted 10% of studio flats. There were 195 objections.

Some **14 mature trees in Drummond CHS** playground have been marked with an ominous orange spot. Drastic felling has featured here before, mostly due to **Dutch Elm Disease**. Three specimens were taken down in 2008, 1 in 2010, 3 in 2012, 6 in 2013. Fast-growing **silver birches** replaced some of them.

As part of its plans to create a National Centre for Music on **Regent Rd**, the Royal High School Preservation Trust has submitted plans for internal and external changes to the A-listed **Lodge House** there (25/01128/LBC). To the untrained ear, the detailed designs by conservation architects **Simpson & Brown** are a symphony of cills and soffits, brass bullnose threshold plates, burnt sand mastic, **demountable baton rod stops**, escutcheons, fixing lugs, insect mesh and intumescent backing, ironmongery, **louvered transom panels**, masonry jambs, penny gaps, strike plates, weather bars and **rotten sarking boards**.

Delivering climate-ready Edinburgh

The Policy & Sustainability Cmte has identified which parts of Edinburgh Council's Climate Ready Implementation Plan it will prioritise in the next 2 years [bit.ly/dntdspr].

The plan comprises 66 actions, 47 of which do not require funding or are already funded, 12 of which are partially funded, and 7 of which are unfunded or need resourcing. 'This includes infrastructure delivery projects which are complex and costly and will take many years to deliver.'

Aspects of particular interest to readers in Spurtleshire include:

- ensuring adaptation of the Old and New Towns of the World Heritage Site preserves their historic character and Outstanding Universal Value (completion of 4 retrofit pilot projects by 2026)
- establishing ways to adapt the city's housing stock, social rented accommodation, school estate
- supporting owners of basement properties to reduce their flood risk, improving flood resilience and placemaking
- identifying risks and impacts of climate change on transport providers' services and infrastructure.



Purposeful paper packs a punch

After months of preparation, Leith Central Community Council has finalised its position paper on purpose-built student accommodation.

It argues such developments diminish local and citywide housing availability, disregard community needs and conflict with local development goals.

It finds that, despite not being a university area, Leith has about 6,332 PBSA beds out of Edinburgh's total of 9,873, and 31 PBSA buildings out of 46 across the capital.

Such disproportionate numbers and their unbalancing effects on neighbourhoods are sensed or dreaded in adjacent areas of Broughton and the New Town as well. We suspect locals there will welcome LCCC's proposal to collaborate with other community councils, housing providers and advocacy groups to provide a coordinated response, focusing on affordable, family-oriented and mixed-use housing for long-term residents.

For a 7-page document, the paper packs a powerful punch. It's hard to know what is more astonishing: that unpaid volunteers have produced something so well-researched and persuasive; or that Edinburgh's paid officials and elected members, despite widespread public alarm over recent years, did not. Read it at [bit.ly/enuffzenuff].

The Council's consultation on draft planning guidelines for PBSA remains open until 23 May at [bit.ly/OMGPBSA].



Communal bin review in a mess

Phase 6 of the Council's Communal Bin Review (CBR), which looks at waste and recycling arrangements for 152 streets in those parts of the New Town, Stockbridge and West End within the World Heritage Site, will close on 4 Apr.

Critics say Council communication of its proposals has been confusingly expressed and often lacks detail (particularly about gull-proof sacks for those who haven't used them before). See [bit.ly/binbetter].

New Town & Broughton Community Council is frustrated that the fine-tuned experience gained during two years of trials appears to have been arbitrarily trashed. Members say there is no clarity about the choices now on offer (e.g. frequency of collections) or the decision-making process.

NTBCC points to some gull-proof sacks being foisted on small properties where they would be inappropriate and says communal bin hubs for Broughton St would have to be positioned on neighbouring streets whose residents wouldn't be supposed to use them. Gull-proof sacks could also appear on railing-free Barony St – where locals might struggle on tenement stairs with weighted bags. In some areas, people would have to carry their rubbish as far as 120m from home.

NTBCC Chair Peter Williamson calls for a 'rational discussion not polarised debate' and hopes to restart cooperative re-engagement with Council officers once the CBR has ended.

Bin windy

Edinburgh Council's Head of Environmental Services has responded to questions from Leith Central Community Council in the aftermath of Storm Eowyn.

The official says there are currently 7,446 fill-sensors operating in bins across the city. In-cab devices for crew to report damaged bins will be installed soon.

He agrees that fragile bin locks are 'problematic' and are frequently broken by people disposing of items too large to fit through the slot. Crews do not routinely report faulty locks.

He had no answer to the observation that bin brakes are hard to access and often ineffective. However, he *did* note that during the recent red-warning storm, 3 bins on Princes St were blown away despite being bolted to the ground.

Cross-party cooperation on a bumpy ride

Despite the woeful condition of E London St's setts, it is only fourth on the Council's list of surfaces to fix. Officials insist no work will take place here until funding becomes available.

City-centre ward councillors say the disruptive effect of buses and other traffic traversing this lunar landscape does not enter into official Council thinking.

They discussed the problem with officers on 10 Mar and will continue to exert pressure with a united front behind the scenes. They hope to influence the city's street-surface priorities, which will be laid out in a report to Apr's Transport & Environment Cmte. If push comes to shove, they may reluctantly use the 'blunt instrument' of tabling an amendment.

If and when funding for E London St is secured, discussion will follow with locals about whether to restore complete setting or perhaps macadamise the centre of the carriageway.



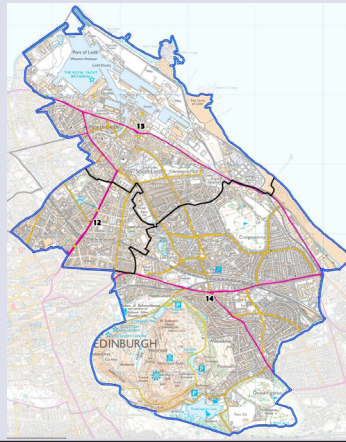
Pushing the boundaries in Spurtleshire

Boundary changes to balance electorate numbers will result in new Scottish Parliament constituencies for parts of Spurtleshire in 2026.

Edinburgh Northern & Leith will be renamed Edinburgh North Eastern & Leith. The new constituency comprises Council wards 12, 13 and 14, and includes Craightinny, Northfield, Willowbrae, Duddingston and Arthur's Seat. Ben Macpherson, MSP, last month signalled his intention to stand again here.

Stockbridge and Inverleith will form part of another new constituency, Edinburgh Northern, which stretches west as far as Silverknowes and includes parts of Council wards 1, 4, 5 and 12.

Most Spurtleshire residents in Edinburgh Central will not be affected. Most boundary changes here affect areas to the west, with the new constituency now including parts of Council wards 7, 9, 10, 11 and 15.



Advice to fighting schoolboys

From the Edinburgh Evening News, 13 Apr 1920:—'If you must fight, go down to Inverleith Park or some quiet place, so that you won't disturb anyone,' said Bailie Wallace in the Edinburgh Police Court today to two boys who pleaded guilty to committing a breach of the peace in West Register Street on 2d April. The boys had gathered with a big crowd, presumably by some arrangement, to indulge in a fight. On the inquiring who was the winner of the battle, the bigger boy said he thought his small opponent won. They were admonished after friendly advice from the Bench.

Convenient companion

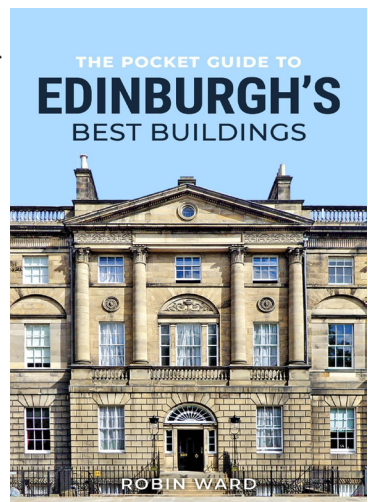
A handy new companion to the capital's architecture was published in Mar. In *The Pocket Guide to Edinburgh's Best Buildings*, Robin Ward provides very short descriptive histories of 300 'fascinating' structures and sites (9 of them in central Spurtleshire), helpfully grouped as 6 self-guided tours with maps and photographs.

Ward is knowledgeable, accurate, concise and sometimes opinionated. It's an entertaining combination. But at no point does he explain his evaluation of 'best'.

He particularly admires Calton Hill, the Mansfield Traquair Centre, the Scottish National Portrait Gallery and the Scottish Parliament, for example. But, confusingly, he also includes and damns the St James Qtr (it is at best better than what it replaced), dismissing the Golden Turd as 'a pretentious intrusion on the historic skyline'.

So, yes, all interesting choices ... but arrived at how? What criteria? Which 'architectural qualities'? Why do we hear about *Wojtek the Soldier Bear* but not about the Waverley Exchange or Broughton St Mary's or Claremont Court? By what measures of 'fascination' are we to understand Ward's routes? Perhaps subsequent volumes, in the same style and format, could be thematically tighter.

Despite that cavil, I enjoyed the book. It's useful, legible, attractively designed and well-written, and the right size and weight to carry about. It's ideal for curious tourists and generalist locals seeking information in brief. It will also please those frustrated by intermittent phone signals, haptic wry-handedness and unreliable online 'facts'.—AM
Birlinn Books, £9.99 pbk, ISBN 9781780279237.



Briefly



Image: Courtesy of Lyon & Turnbull.

After 18 years and 203 monthly issues, **Maria Hart** is stepping down from her role as *Spurtle's* in-print designer. **Much midnight oil** has been burned in that time, many teeth have been ground, but Maria has never missed a deadline. We are **profoundly grateful** for her expertise, patience (also that of husband Jonathan), dedication and good humour. We are still astonished by the appearance in **Issue 246 (p.1)** of her historic doppelganger.

Work to resolve flooding issues and improve climate resilience in **King George V Park** was finished in early Mar. Upgrades along **200m of path** included new swails and the planting of trees (Issue 348). The path forms part of the 96-mile **National Cycle Network Route 75** connecting Gourrock and Glasgow to Broughton.

Members of the **Finance & Resources Cmte** last month agreed to renew the Council's lease on **Edinburgh Bus Station** for another 15 years, starting in 2027, at a rent of **£350k per year**. Alternative locations and new construction would be too expensive and would not meet the **needs of users and operators**. The Council has also appraised the circumstances under which it would make a **compulsory purchase** of the Bus Station from Coal Pension Properties Ltd.

The Council's Planning Dept has belatedly shared details of its refusal to allow demolition of **11 Marshall's Ct** and erection of a 12-bdrm aparthotel in its place (24/02959/FULS). Officers said the proposal provided **no justification** to support the demolition of the existing property. Use of the new building for short-stay lets would have a **materially detrimental effect** on nearby residents' living conditions and amenity. The development would have an **unacceptable potential impact** on protected trees. There were 14 objections by locals and no messages of support. See [bit.ly/4iEqEu5].

Three flats in the modern extension of the **Canon Mill** overlooking Canon St can now be seen in person and on the **Murray & Currie** website. They range in size from 1 to 3 bdms and from **£340k to £775k**, depending on how much you value a small, top-floor, outdoor terrace view of nothing in particular.

Among more or less (mostly less) interesting **archaeological artefacts** unearthed during work on the second stage of the Royal Botanic Garden's **Biomes project** was a 19th-century iridescent-blue bottle [bit.ly/blupoo]. It is of the kind once used to contain a tonic for **combating constipation**. The find adds weight to our own observation that while some **Inverleith residents** may be stuck-up it is rarely for want of trying.

Moreover ...



At some point between 10 and 11 Mar, the bus shelter at the foot of **Broughton St** (southbound) was damaged by a party or parties unknown. We have heard no reports of injuries to prangers or prangees.

The Council's **unified snagging list**, covering the Broughton–Newhaven tram extension (Issue 347), has so far identified over **750 defects**, a far larger number than previously disclosed. Community councils are expected to add as many as 200 more. Leith Central CC wants **priority funding** to fix the problems by the end of 2025.

In the recent community-council elections, sufficient candidates were elected for the **New Town & Broughton, Leith Central, and Stockbridge & Inverleith CCs**. Elsewhere in the city, 8 community councils (including the Old Town CC) received **insufficient nominations**. A second period for volunteers there to come forward will run from 31 Mar until 21 Apr.



Draft management rules for **public parks, beaches and green space** include restrictions on dogs, fireworks, buskers and barbecues. **Are they welcome? Are they enforceable?** Have your say by 11 Apr [bit.ly/CECprkman].

Officials propose 'bespoke' designs for **bin hubs** to soften their visual impact on the World Heritage Site. For mixed recycling, this would involve **British Racing Green** lids (not dull old mid-green lids as now); glass recycling bins would be **black all over but with purple flaps**; and the finish of metal retaining bars at each end of a hub would be **black not chrome**. We are reminded of ribbons on rhinoceroses.

Ziydin Properties Ltd wants to change the use of **7–8 Baxter's PI** to three 3-bdrm and three 1-bdrm serviced apartments (25/00469/FULSTL). The property would be **staffed around the clock** (but without sleeping, kitchen or toilet facilities). The applicant refers to the building's **previous lawful use** as a social club, thereby overlooking: (1) a string of **disruptive and unlawful STL** occupants (under different ownership of the property) in the intervening years; and (2) residential use of a caretaker's flat here. Locals say servicing such apartments would add to **congestion in the narrow Greenside streets**. New Town & Broughton CC supports those neighbours objecting to the proposal.

At the start of this month, *Spurtle* reported online a proposal to reintroduce goats to **Arthur's Seat** and **Calton Hill**. We doubt officials will get to chew it over.

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I hold monthly Help & Advice Surgeries.

Get in touch for more details or if I can help.

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LEITH CENTRAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL



Will you take a leading role in local democracy?

Are you interested in representing locals' views to City of Edinburgh Council, other public bodies and private agencies in this area?

Next meeting at 7pm on 21 April in McDonald Road Library.

<https://leithcentralcc.co.uk>

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