

# Spurtle



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**BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER** Free

**December  
2017**

**No 269**

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## PICARDY PLACE – CITY STILL IN A SPIN

City of Edinburgh Council's belated Picardy Place consultation coughed and spluttered into action in November with three events: one for invited 'stakeholders' and two for other members of the public. We estimate that around 400 people attended the two open sessions.

Changes compared to the earlier design included more pedestrian space and a segregated two-way cycle lane in front of the cathedral. The width of the traffic lanes adjacent has been reduced.

The pavement has been widened around the Conan Doyle bar, and at the corner with Union Place, and at the north-east end of the Omni Centre. Hereabouts, the road width has been reduced, and traffic lanes narrowed.

The Sherlock Holmes statue appears at the north-east end of the central 'development island'. The Paolozzi pieces appear in the same order as before but closer together, near to John Lewis, and with the hand now stranded alone on the south side of Little King Street.

Further refinements may follow, including a 'replacement' pedestrian crossing somewhere along Union Place. A Y-junction, roughly like that in the *Sustrans* and *Zone/Spurtle* plans would, the traffic modellers say, cause widespread and unacceptable congestion elsewhere, including on nearby residential streets.

### Reactions

Officials and designers have worked hard to respond to earlier criticisms, and continue to assert that this is the best practical compromise between competing needs of pedestrians, cyclists, drivers and public transport. Critics say it remains predicated on a tramstop, bus interchange, and facilitating motor traffic volumes based on current levels plus additional vehicles accessing the St James Quarter.

Promoters of the plan say that they aspire towards a continuous promontory of the kind posited by *Zone/Spurtle* on our website on 25 October. They say their proposed arrangement would allow for gradual reduction

and removal altogether of roadway in front of the cathedral as city traffic volumes decrease. However, danger, as we see it, is that facilitating motor traffic flow in the short term will encourage more people to drive here not fewer.

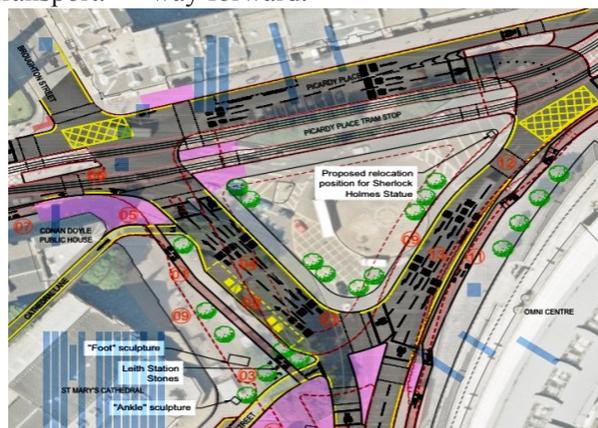
In any case, how is such a reduction in an expanding Edinburgh to be achieved and according to what timetable? Such a plan could, in theory, form part of the capital's Transformation project starting in 2018, but there is nothing tangible here to cling on to at this stage.

### Creative inertia

It seems prudent to *Spurtle* not to proceed with any plan for Picardy Place until that Transformation programme is nailed down. In the meantime, we would also urge locals to demand cast-iron guarantees that the 'island' is not modified in any way that precludes linking it to the public realm outside the cathedral at a later date.

The public has until 15 December to examine and comment on the proposals. The easiest place to do both is online at: [[goo.gl/qSbcNF](http://goo.gl/qSbcNF)].

Meanwhile, investigative journalism at *The Ferret* [[goo.gl/tTDQKv](http://goo.gl/tTDQKv)] has shone some light on to the obscure inner workings of the GAM deal between CEC, St James Quarter developers THREE, and the Scottish Government. It claims THREE have repeatedly sought to minimise spending on public-realm improvements, and repeats local misgivings about who really controls the project. STOP PRESS: The anti-gyrary Picardy Place Coalition Campaign held its first meeting on 29 Nov. to discuss priorities and the best way forward.



## All that glisters



Meet 'Puff', the latest addition to the always fascinating Martinez Antiques Christmas display. The gilt wooden sculpture copies authentic Chinese designs, but is only around 30 years old. However, that hasn't stopped it attracting many admirers on Brandon Terrace.

## PARKING DEBATE LOOMS

Leith Central Community Council (LCCC) is to organise a petition calling for City of Edinburgh Council action on parking in the area.

The aim is to extend parking controls from Pilrig Street northwards. They're fed up with local streets being clogged with cars, despite Leith having the lowest rate of car ownership in the city. Many vehicles belong to commuters. However, other locals value their free parking, and will resist losing it.

The idea for a petition is modelled on a similar recent campaign in Shandon, where 300 signatures obliged CEC to organise its own survey of local opinion.

Our sense is that feelings on both sides of this issue run high, and that it may well feature prominently in 2018. On a related issue, locals have until 28 January to respond to a CEC consultation on a controversial idea for a citywide Parking Permit Diesel Surcharge. You can find it [[goo.gl/pVHwyD](http://goo.gl/pVHwyD)].



## Briefly



An application to erect a **gigantic, non-illuminated, pissoir-style** advertising-drum, for 5 years, at the **north-east corner of St Andrew Sq** Garden last month attracted objections from 27 members of the public (Ref. 17/15097/ADV). See our website (23.11.17).

The next meetings of the **Broughton History Society** will be held at 7pm in **Drummond Community High School** on 11 Dec (Christmas soirée) and 8 Jan (Peter Freshwater will talk on 'Edinburgh Buildings and the University Coat of Arms').

The **avocado-coloured toilet** which graced St Mark's Park over the summer and autumn months has vanished as **mysteriously** as it appeared. After various shifts in position, it was **last spotted** on the riverbank, presumably dumped by **bored youths** seeking light relief.

**Broughton St traders** are running a special Christmas event on Fri 8 Dec. Expect **festive offers and general jolliness** plus late-night opening hours from 5pm to 8pm.

CEC Planning Convener **Lewis Ritchie** was nominated as **Local Politician of the Year** last month in the *Herald's* annual competition. He declared himself 'Shocked, humbled, flabbergasted, ecstatic, confused, excited and surprised. Other than that I have no words!' It seemed a just recognition for his **calm, courteous and decisive presence** during the old Royal High School hearing in Sept. Then it was announced that he was taking an **indefinite leave of absence for health reasons**. And then a subsequent *Herald* report appeared detailing unrelated professional turbulence for which he has apologised. Ritchie is replaced as Planning Convener by **Cllr Neil Gardiner** (Pentland Hills ward), who brings to the post 25 years' experience of architecture, urban design and construction management.



**Issue no. 269** will be the last printed issue until February, as *Spurtle* staff take it in turns to climb into the **team snowhole** and sleep through the worst of the Festive Season. News coverage will continue online throughout: [<http://bit.ly/99jeuR>].

## Slow progress on Leith Walk

The seemingly endless convolutions of the Leith Walk Improvement Plan have taken various new twists.

Phase 4 (Iona St–McDonald Rd) is nearly over, with just a few snags to complete, such as the uneven flagstones outside Sainsbury's.

Phase 5 (McDonald Rd–Montgomery St) has now been removed from the LWIP, and will not be undertaken between January and July 2018 as promised. Instead, it will be addressed as part of the tramway extension to Newhaven, if that project gets the go-ahead next autumn.

At last month's meeting, LCCC reactions to the news were varied.. Some welcomed a short period of respite from disruptive roadworks, some just wanted the project over as soon as possible. Others argue that Phases 5 and 6 (Montgomery Street to the Playhouse) should go ahead in tandem. CEC hope to minimise tramwork-related stress through top-quality 'stakeholder engagement' starting in January.

Meanwhile, LCCC's Vice Chair Harald Tobermann is understatedly 'disappointed' that CEC delayed the public hearing on Traffic Regulation Order TRO-230-2 without telling members of the public until August. For now, the case remains on hold until at least 17 December.

## Scottish Ministers to decide on old Royal High

Duddingston House Properties and the Urbanist Group have made their next move in seeking to turn the old Royal High School into a luxury hotel.

As of November, they have two appeals to the DPEA against Edinburgh Council's refusal of two applications for alteration, restoration and refurbishment. They have submitted a further two appeals regarding planning permission and listed building consent. For those blessed with good eyes, endless patience and limited alternatives, staggering amounts of detail are available here: [[goo.gl/wGMEA3](http://goo.gl/wGMEA3)].

All four appeals will be considered conjointly, starting in early 2018. Two reporters have been appointed to weigh the evidence, and they will eventually make recommendations. However, the final determination will rest with Scottish Ministers as the case raises 'issues of national importance in terms of potential impacts on the historic environment, including the Old and New Towns of Edinburgh World Heritage Site, and in relation to potential economic and tourism benefits'.

When details of the legal schedule are clearer, we'll let you know. In the meantime, don't hold your breath.



## Homes with many stories

*Local resident Barclay Price has been researching the house histories of 19th-century Albany Street. Here he delves into No 19.*

Many Albany Street houses are rich in history, none more so than No 19. From 1828 to 1831, it housed George Hogarth and family, whose eldest daughter Catherine later married Charles Dickens. Although a solicitor, Hogarth's passion was music. In July 1829, he invited Felix Mendelssohn to stay during the composer's visit to Edinburgh and it was while in Albany Street that the latter began composing his *Scottish Symphony*.

In 1847, Number 19 also housed a remarkable first in medicine. Dr James Young Simpson, who had lived at No 22 for five years before moving to Queen Street, was caring for a Mrs Jane Carstairs from Cupar. Her first pregnancy having been traumatic, she had leased No 41 to be near the obstetrician, but had taken to No 19 (by this stage a lodging house) for the birth. Although Simpson had only discovered the properties of chloroform six days previously, on 8 November he administered it to ease Jane's labour. Simpson recounted: 'The child was born in about 25 minutes ... after the child was removed the patient awoke and observed that she had enjoyed a very comfortable sleep ... [W]hen the baby was brought in by the nurse it was a matter of no small difficulty to convince the mother that the child was really "her own living infant"'.

*Visit Price's comprehensive website at: [[goo.gl/5bTUan](http://goo.gl/5bTUan)] and for more on Catherine Hogarth see JRM's article of 2012: [[foo.gl/u89Tkd](http://foo.gl/u89Tkd)].*



## Far-sighted approach to city centre planning

When Edinburgh Council's City Centre Design Manager addressed the New Town & Broughton Council last month, many present were heartened.

Anna Herriman is heading a project to look holistically at a refurbishment of George, Castle and Hanover Streets, Charlotte and St Andrew Squares (see Issue 268). She promises coherent placemaking for Edinburgh citizens and city-centre residents, and seeks a counter-balance to piecemeal festival events aimed at visitors.

The project will look at uses as well as infrastructure, and be informed by next year's Central Edinburgh Transformation, which will lay out a future strategy for traffic in the capital. Perhaps it should also be informed by an even more wide-ranging review of the use and management of civic spaces, as promised for a City Centre Public Spaces Manifesto in 2015. Unfortunately, that Manifesto never saw the light of day and may not even have been started (see our website 11.3.16).

From a different well-placed source, *Spurtle* hears that the footway-creeping expansion of bars and restaurants along George Street is unlikely to return. However, we think the Council should take a firmer grip on the area, relieving Essential Edinburgh of as much responsibility as possible.

Initial consultations to clarify issues are scheduled for early December, with more following in the spring. Preliminary designs are expected in late April, and will be available for discussion at a drop-in event.



## Look out for: Herons

Without doubt one of the most distinctive birds to move into our city over the last 20 years is the Grey Heron. The name does not do this bird justice, with its striking long neck and legs, decorative head and neck plumes, spots and patches of pastel or slate grey finished off with a long, yellow, dagger-shaped bill. Herons, standing at over a metre tall, are difficult to miss.

These skilled hunters have benefited from increased fish stocks in cleaner rivers and improved air quality which have allowed amphibians to recolonise our parks and gardens. As they stand silently on riverbanks or stalk through our parks at dawn, they have a prehistoric appearance enhanced by a pterodactyl-like squawk as they ponderously beat the air with their wings to lift off.

Hérons are highly adapted hunters able to look both above and below their beaks without turning their heads. Their angled neck allows them to strike with pin-point accuracy from a distance. Contrary to appearances, they snatch rather than stab their prey, which is predominantly fish, invertebrates and amphibians. However, anything that will fit into their substantial crop – the predigestive pouch at the base of the bird's neck – needs to be wary of this patient killer.

If you want to see Herons at their most spectacular, many of them nest by the city's only remaining natural loch, Duddingston, where in spring their noisy rattling chicks make an extraordinary spectacle. — *Miles Forde*



## Phenomenal growth in New Town backwater

In his great poem *East Coker*, T.S. Eliot writes: 'What is the late November doing/With the disturbance of the spring/And creatures of the summer heat ...?'

In the garden around the Drummond tennis courts in East Scotland Street Lane, these sunflowers shone well into late November. Planted in August in poor soil, they flourished and rewarded us with multiple blooms. Meanwhile, under the nearby plum tree, the remarkable echium (Issue 263) still has an unexpected second flush of myriad violet-blue flowers on its arching 13ft stem.

Is this due, alarmingly, to global warming? Certainly, this has been a year of phenomenal growth in the allotments and gardens around the Lane. Vegetables and fruit have been in gorgeous abundance for the sharing. There has also been a welcome presence of bees and of birds, in particular, the wonderfully friendly dunnock or hedge sparrow – or more correctly the 'hedge accentor' – that scuttles in and about hedges and bushes emitting (apparent) shrill little notes of joie de vivre.

So, a year to rejoice in this oasis between Scotland Street and Bellevue Crescent, though marvels are not achieved without hard slog on our knees or contending with Auld Reekie's cauld blast, But there were days of heaven in 2017, and other *East Coker* lines that sing of 'Whisper of running streams .../The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry./The laughter in the garden/ Echoed ecstasy not lost ...'.

Here's to April, even it be the 'cruellest month'. — *JRM*



## Briefly

**What a waste.** Only 20% of households issued with 'kitchen caddies' for food compost actually use them. Apparently the other 80% fear bad smells, even though, when **rinsed and emptied regularly**, they are odourless. The mini-bins, that is; we can't speak for the rest of them.

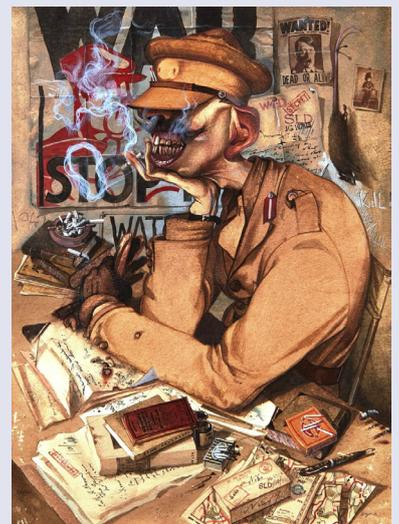
Cllr Susan Rae (Leith Walk) has received confirmation that the former **Powderhall railway line** remains safeguarded as a cycleway footpath in the **Edinburgh Local Development Plan**, and is a proposed QuietRoute within CEC's **2016 Active Travel Plan**. Proposals will be brought forward alongside development of the sites at **Powderhall and Meadowbank**, and Planning Convener Lesley Macinnes is already seeking talks with **Network Rail**.

Parents are concerned by potential problems around **mutual privacy** for children in the playground of **Broughton Primary School** and new residents in studio flats at adjacent **154 McDonald Rd**. A meeting with the developer has been arranged for Jan.

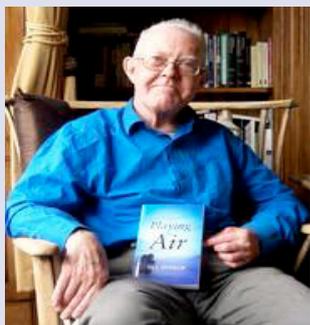
A mixed decision was returned on the rooftop '**Festival Village**' proposed for Waverley Mall (our website 6.11.17). Malones on the Mall was refused, for having a **detrimental impact** on the World Heritage Site, Conservation Area, and neighbouring buildings. **Permission was granted** for 3 other bar/seating areas and toilets for 6 months per year. **Noise conditions apply**.

Work has begun on the Simpson & Brown-designed **Bellevue Chapel** extension on Cornwallis Place (see our website 19.5.16).

This detail is from a strikingly macabre watercolour, ink and bodycolour work (30cm x 22cm) by John Byrne that will be put up for sale in an auction of Modern British and Contemporary Art at Lyon & Turnbull on 17 January 2018. It's titled 'Writer's Cramp', although whether it has any connection with Byrne's debut play of the same name (first performed on Calton Road in 1977), we have no idea. The work is estimated to fetch between £2k and £3k (plus fees).



# Moreover ...



*Spurtle* was greatly saddened to learn of the death on 10 Nov of **Eyre Place resident Bill Dunlop (1951–2017)**. He was at various times and to varying degrees an Edinburgh University Settlement worker, an academic historian, acclaimed playwright, folk-music devotee and **long-suffering NTBCC treasurer** with special responsibility for a website which only one person in **deepest New Zealand** knew how to operate. Dunlop will also be remembered for his typically erudite, amusing, laconic and peculiar time-slip thriller *Playing the Air*, published in 2013 and favourably reviewed by us in Issue 220. He was a thoroughly unusual and interesting man.—AM

Over a year since locals first reported it, **ineffective LED lighting on Dalmeny St** is to be redesigned in Dec, reports Cllr Marion Donaldson (Leith Walk). **Work will begin in Feb** and finish in Apr/May, just in time for the shorter nights of spring and summer. The **lengthy timespan is**, we hear, due to a **shortage of electricians** within, or subcontracted to, CEC.

A recent notice in **Hopetoun Crescent Garden** read. 'Last Sunday during the monthly clean-up, I picked up *three* separate piles of dog dirt. Most dog owners do pick up but if you are one of those who don't, please think of me!' There's something **vaguely unsettling** about this turn of phrase.

**Friends of HCG** reported other mixed news in their autumn newsletter. Good were the installation of (**mud-free**) **flagstones** around the Interpretation Panels, and laying-out of a **new path** between the middle gate and the Huntingdon Place railings. **Not so good** was deliberate damage done to **all the tree-interpretation panels**. One has vanished: 'Does someone object to Witch Hazel?'

The *Spurtle* team wish all our friends, contributors, advertisers and loyal subscribers a **very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year**.

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## AM DECORATING

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**Next meeting: 7pm, 15 January 2018**  
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[leithcentralcc.co.uk/meeting-dates](http://leithcentralcc.co.uk/meeting-dates)



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**Leith: 1st Friday of the month**  
1–2pm, 166 Great Junction Street  
**Leith Walk: 2nd Friday of the month**  
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**Royston/Wardieburn Community Centre:** Last Friday, 4–5pm  
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### Ben Macpherson MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Edinburgh Northern and Leith Constituency



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