

Spurtle



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BROUGHTON'S INDEPENDENT STIRRER Free

NIGHTMARE ON SANDY HILL



Local residents are still reeling from the Reporter's decision to allow new housing on Heriot ('Sandy') Hill (Issue 257), and the subsequent breakneck pace of work.

They are outraged that required amendments to the scheme will not go through a fresh planning application process, and some suspect substantial differences exist between the plans seen by the Reporter and those available to everybody else. If their worst fears are realised, this could mean the buildings and access road end up being higher than first thought.

They are concerned that three unidentified workers, masquerading as BT Open Reach staff, entered back greens without permission last month to reroute telephone lines. BT confirmed they were bogus.

Residents are alarmed at the extent and speed of earth removal, which seems to endanger existing concrete supports and now extends to the boundary with Claremont properties at the top of the hill. Council officials say the levelling prepares the site for trial excavation holes as required, and that terraces are more stable than a slope. This is of little comfort to those locals experiencing tremors, who have been advised to take photographs in case any new cracks appear.

Legal advice suggests there are no grounds on which to overturn the Reporter's decision, unless it can be proved he was biased owing to a personal interest in the Appeal decision. *Spurtle* knows of no such proof.

Locals have contacted Lothians list MSPs for help, but in a written response to Kezia Dugdale MSP, Kevin Stewart MSP, Minister for Local Government and Housing, refused to budge.

At last month's meeting of the New Town & Broughton Community Council, members variously described the Reporter's 'perverse decision' as 'absolutely shocking', 'a disgrace', and 'a fantastic example of how to undermine public confidence in the Planning system'.

FEWER ROOMS, MORE ROOM FOR VIEWS ... QUESTIONS

The public exhibition on 3 November of revised hotel plans for the old Royal High School provoked a wave of anti-climax.

The most startling element was an artist's impression of a drastically reduced western block blocking less of the view. But this was supported by little more than a woolly affirmation that the number of bedrooms would not fall below the minimum 125 stipulated by CEC at the outset. The eastern block will apparently stay as before.

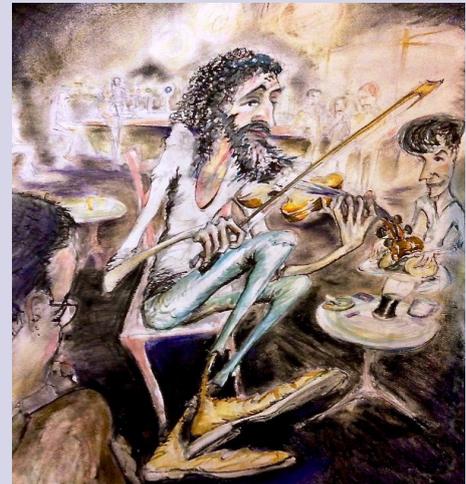
Duddingston House Properties and the Urbanist Group last year claimed their larger original scheme was essential to Rosewood Hotels' business plan. Now, they say a downscaled alternative is viable thanks to the pound's low value. No-one we've spoken to thinks this makes sense if Rosewood is still committing to a 35-year management term.

So what is going on? *Spurtle* continues to delve, but there is now widespread speculation that the deadline for gaining planning permission may be much earlier than the 2022 date circulated. If so, DHP et al. are in a hurry. A full planning application is expected early in the new year.

For more detailed coverage, see our website (3.11.16), which includes this thought-provoking and even-handed comment from @SSCEdinburgh: 'Are Incan terraces more or less appropriate than the music school's Japanese pavilions? Same dilemma. Hotel worse for wider setting of RHS. Music school worse for fabric of RHS building. Both approaches have a case.'



BOW, LEGS AND A BEARD



This fiddler in full flow is the late, great Angus Roderick Grant of Shooglenifty and latterly London Street, who died in October to widespread regret [goo.gl/4iQELZ]. He's captured here in all his hairy pomp by Leith-based illustrator (and former fellow Shoogler) Conrad Molleson. An exhibition of Molleson's affectionate, energetic and insightful studies of musicians showed at Bond CA on East London Street late last month, and you can see more of his work on the website at [conradmolleson.co.uk].

RBS SHOWS ITS HAND

Royal Bank of Scotland has finally submitted its Planning Permission in Principle (PPP) application for the huge site between Dundas Street, King George V Park, Eyre Place and Fettes Row/Royal Crescent (Ref. 16/05454/PPP).

As expected, it's aiming for the Moon to secure the best possible price for an area it has no intention of developing itself.

The residential-led proposal would include eight 8-storey 'pavilions' in 'a parkland setting', with porous east-west cycle and pedestrian routes. Retail uses would mostly cluster in a new public space fronting Dundas St.

Many locals are implacably opposed, not least those who may face 6 storeys where now there are only trees and sky. We also sympathise with those who doubt the area's geological stability, citing previous subsidence and ongoing mysterious midnight flood clearances of the RBS car park after rain.

Not everyone's averse, however. Some suggest to us that if the pavilion height could be reduced then this would by no means be a wholly awful proposal. The PPP should, they argue, be regarded as an opening bid from which troublesome elements can be trimmed to reach an acceptable compromise.

Admittedly, that is probably not a majority view and it will be interesting to see if it surfaces in public at NTBCC's next meeting on 12 December. The cut-off for responses to CEC is 18 December. See our website (14/11/16).

Briefly



This will be the last printed *Spurtle* until Feb 2017, as team members ready tompions and retire to caves for their annual two-month power-nap. Normal service will continue online. In the meantime, we wish all readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Broughton St Mary's Parish Church is collecting donations of food for Albany Street-based charity the **Rock Trust (RT)**. Tinned soup, meat, fish, beans, fruit; pasta and sauces; tea, coffee and cuppa-soups are all appreciated by the **young homeless people RT** works with. Please supply by **Sun 11 Dec**.

The **Broughton History Society** meets next on 5 Dec for its **Christmas Soirée**. It reconvenes at 7.30pm on 9 Jan in Drummond CHS for a talk by Chris Collins on **'Robert Adam's Lost Mansion of Bellevue'**, wherever that is.

The next meeting of the **Edinburgh Gay Mens's Book Group** will be on 25 January 2017 at 9 Howe St. It's a great opportunity to meet new people and discuss interesting books. **For more information** – including which titles they'll be reading this quarter – email [info@gaybookgroup.co.uk]

Two men received custodial sentences last month for **2 assaults and a robbery** over the summer. The pair attacked a 29-year-old man near **Waverley Station** on 16 July, then a 21-year-old homeless person on **Lothian Rd**. Detectives in Gayfield CID's **Violence Reduction Unit** tracked down the assailants. DI Grant Johnstone says extra officers will patrol the city centre over the coming weeks as part of **Operation Winter City**, and his team will have additional resources during the festive period.

Mather's on Broughton St reopened last month after a **major refurbishment**. Resplendent in shades of plum, **damson** and fresh vomit, it now glories in a new name: **The Empress**.

Demolition of the **St James Centre** has started. We understand (de)construction traffic will mostly enter via **Waterloo Place** and exit via **York Place and Leith Walk**. NTBCC will factor this in when considering upgrade plans for the **McDonald Rd–Picardy Place** section of Leith Walk at its 12 Dec meeting.

Bellevue Chapel's Christmas Market is on 17 Dec, 10am–1pm. Nosh, crafts, fashion, stocking-fillers (legs), home wares. Proceeds to the **Tearfund's Haiti Appeal**.

Sinning in the rain

It absolutely bucketed down in Edinburgh on 22–23 November, but only until 1am and only outside the Territorial Army Centre on East Claremont Street.

For 13 hours, Hepburn House was transformed into Southbridge Police Station, a setting in *Clique*, the new 6-part drama filming across the capital this autumn for BBC Three.

One scene involved a lawyer and his client emerging to face the Press with a statement. Another involved a night-time run to a car under highly realistic torrents, on this occasion supplied by 'rain machines' not Jupiter MacPluvius.

Clique has been created by Jess Brittain (previously part of the *Skins* writing team), and is a gritty thriller about 'childhood soulmates who begin their student life at Edinburgh University.'

'Led by their Economics Lecturer and an elite clique of girls, they are quickly drawn into a seductive world of lavish parties, populated by Edinburgh's highest-powered businessmen and women. But it is a world underpinned by sordid compromise.'

We anticipate Broughton figuring prominently.



Edinburgh: the bigger picture

Spurtle published the Cockburn Association's 2016 Lecture last month, and it makes interesting reading.

Cliff Hague, the organisation's Chair, outlined the economic challenges facing the capital, and the dangers attendant on Council penny-pinching and short-term financial fixes. He called instead for approaches which build on Edinburgh's 'place heritage', genuinely involve its citizens, and employ innovative thinking.

The capital's unique strengths lie in its blend of built and natural environments, said Hague, and an intangible heritage of learning, culture, novel ways of managing urban change, and civic involvement. They do not lie in its shopping malls, hotels, housing estates, and airport.

He singled out waste management for particular criticism, along with poor road surfaces, bad air quality, too few affordable homes, health inequality, and the 'hotchpotch of mediocrity' that is Princes Street's north side.

Edinburgh's population has grown by 9% in the last 10 years, and successful future growth will require carefully planned, not piecemeal, development of green-belt sites. He called for ambitious new environmental and energy standards, and suggested brownfield regeneration could be led by community land trusts focusing on synergies of design, training, economic development, and local social enterprises.

Turning to local governance, Hague called for an end to 'commercial confidentiality' in civic contracts. These exclude citizens from legitimate interest in what is being done to their city.

Looking towards Edinburgh 2050, he urged city leaders to sustain and enhance the capital's special quality as a place, to strengthen its civic identity, and to avoid the trap of displacing residents in favour of a heritage theme park. The unabridged text is available on our website here: [goo.gl/iHcQpm].



Beavering away in style

Beaverhall Art Studios threw open its doors on 2 days last month, inviting visitors to view and buy a bewildering range of beautifully crafted works. The former **Duncan's Chocolate Factory** at 27 **Beaverhall Rd** is now home to: **painters; illustrators; fabric, set and costume designers; ceramicists; milliners; glass designers; photographers; and charitable organisations.** The creation shown here is by **Sally-Ann Provan** of the **Edinburgh Hat Studio**.



Threat to St Andrew Square trees

A report commissioned by Essential Edinburgh has confirmed what many locals have suspected for ages. Excessive footfall and vehicle access is damaging trees in St Andrew Square.

The Potter Tree Consultancy concludes that 'significant dieback' in some of the tree crowns is due to soil compaction, 'and in some cases the spiral of decline has been set in motion and [is] advancing quickly'.

Crown reduction and deadwood removal would disguise the problem and reduce any immediate risk to passers-by. Root-collar excavation and mulching would help seven trees particularly at risk.

But in the long term, arresting the *symptoms* of decline requires a dedicated budget to pay for soil displacement equipment and compressed-air decompaction.

Arresting the causes of decline requires a fundamental rethink. At one point, the report unguardedly refers to St Andrew Square as a 'showground', and it is this kind of over-use which is at the root of the problem.

We note with interest that this year's festive shanty town is smaller than last year's. We'd like to think it is evidence of an Essential Edinburgh change of heart, but when we asked them in November for an explicit assurance of their commitment to ongoing decompaction strategies, no such assurance was given.

You can read the report in full at [goo.gl/qMmP4W], and a summary of its findings on our website (8.11.16).



Look out for: Dippers

When walking along the Water of Leith, you may be surprised to hear loud, clear, unfamiliar birdsong. This is most likely the all-year territorial singing of one of our most surprising and charming residents – the Dipper.

Dippers are closely related to thrushes, but have taken an extraordinary evolutionary detour to make use of the abundant invertebrate life in cleaner rivers. They can free-swim underwater like penguins for up to 30 seconds. In fast-moving streams, they skilfully angle their wings to drive themselves below the current where they can forage on the riverbed much as other thrushes do on land. With their impervious plumage, these birds nest beside or even under waterfalls where their nests are protected.

Dippers are easily recognised, perched on rocks along the river, by their striking white breast set against darker plumage, a bobbing habit, and distinctive rounded bodies. A sharp 'cheep' is a giveaway to their presence as their short, powerful wings propel them low and fast just above the surface.

Dippers thole the coldest weather and only stop singing if forced to abandon strongly defended territories when rivers freeze completely. Good luck to them over the festive period! — *Miles Forde*



Image: Wikipedia, Creative Commons.

Changing face of Broughton's 'Beaverlands'

Tourist Services (Edin) Ltd have gained planning permission in principle to change the use of 28 Beaverbank Place from industrial to residential (Ref. 16/03920/PPP).

The property has been used most recently as the conservation ironwork and brass foundry of Charles Laing & Sons Ltd, but until the 1940s was part of a complex of tannery buildings. An old lade stream ran along the northern boundary.

Fascinating photographs of the building's working interior, which date from 2012, are available on the Canmore website at [goo.gl/xbB37a]. We understand Edinburgh's traffic congestion played a part in Laing's decision to relocate.

Meanwhile, Alien Rock (AR) has gained planning consent to convert the chandler's warehouse at 23 Dunedin Street into an indoor climbing centre (Ref. 16/04575/FUL). AR's original centre continues at Pier Place, but the lease it holds on a second at West Bowling Green Street will expire next June. The new venture will open from 10am to 7pm (weekends) or 10pm (weekdays). In granting permission, officials dismissed three objections to do with parking, noise and operating times.



Briefly



The Yard (King George V Park/Eyre Place Lane) is now open to the public on **Sundays, 10am–5pm**. Recommended for primary-school children, a **2-hour session costs £5**. See [goo.gl/GbrSvy].

Peace on earth: pile-driving on the Shrubhill development site will cease on 23 Dec. Many locals have complained to **Leith Central Community Council** about developers felling **6 trees at Shrub Place**. A condition of planning permission already requires these to be replaced.

The **not-fit-for-purpose CEC Planning Portal** has been malfunctioning yet again. Complaints include the **non-appearance online** of timeous objections to JCDeaux's **intrusive bus shelters** on George St.

Neighbours have approached CEC **Planning Enforcement** after discovering that the new occupant of **Edinburgh's most luxurious garage** on E Scotland St Lane is not a car but a person. Other neighbours want to know what can be done about what looks like **commercial car valeting** on CEC land at the further end. In view of other shenanigans hereabouts, they are in no mood for soft soap.

Refined plans for '**new sustainable housing**' at the former B&Q site on Warriston Rd will be displayed on 3 and 5 Dec at **McDonald Rd Library** (see our website 24 Nov). You can **view them online** from 6 Dec at [goo.gl/JuQQoU].

A fundraiser for Mansfield Place-based **Waverley Care** and the Soko Fund will take place at 7.30pm in Broughton St Mary's Parish Church on 17 Dec. The **Scottish Chamber Choir** will perform in a festive concert of **seasonal music, carols and readings**. Tickets (£10, concs £5) on the door.

Lighting specialists KSLD have been highly commended in the prestigious **2016 Lux Awards** for bringing out the 'sparkle in the stonework' of the **Scott Monument**. Howe St-based design director Kevan Shaw described it as a '**phenomenal honour**'.

LCCC and NTBCC have been looking at Council proposals to **partially block Montgomery St access** (see our website 18.10.16). Individuals' opinions differ, but both CCs agree on the **near impossibility of reaching a conclusion** when so many other factors – e.g. trams and Picardy Place development – have yet to be decided.

Moreover ...

The **Scottish Chamber Orchestra** will move into a **£45m purpose-built HQ, studio space and 1,000-seat concert hall** off St Andrew Sq. The move to a site bought from **Royal Bank of Scotland** between Dundas House and Harvey Nicks has been generously backed by the **Dunard Fund**, with additional funds sought from CEC and the Scottish Govt among others. **This news is wholly welcome** (see our website, 16.11.16).

Police attending Nov's NTBCC meeting responded to public concerns about **more and more homeless people** in Edinburgh. As on previous occasions here, the officers presented homelessness as some people's **lifestyle choice** in a city where one can largely live for free on **public and private hand-outs**. They suggested that, at prime spots near cashpoint machines, beggars make **£18-20 (the price of a hostel bed per night) in an hour**. *Spurtle* has no expertise on this subject, but life on the streets looks nothing like a desired or desirable *choice* to us. **Can any reader supply facts?**

Spurtle mistakenly welcomed the arrival of **Celadon 2 U** on Rodney St last month. Celadon has in fact been there for ages. We were dazzled by the new **tables**.



The **Scottish Historic Buildings Trust** seeks permission to transform part of the **Glasite Meeting House** on Barony Street to secure the whole structure's future (Ref. 16/05648/LBC). It must **make money** to survive, and today's main Meeting Room – almost perfectly 19th-century, and gloomy, and airless, and full of pews – attracts no paying users. Without revenue, this **uniquely interesting place** lacks a viable future. With revenue, made possible by changes, it would possess far less authentic built-heritage value. In today's financial climate, there's no way around this dilemma. An **unsatisfactory fudge** looks likely, details of which you can read on our website (22.11.16). Faced with a choice between **sad-ghosted decline** for the Glasite building, and a future promising more light, fresh air and levity, *Spurtle* – albeit with **major reservations** – sides with the living and sways towards change.

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Edinburgh North and Leith



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3.30-4.30pm, McDonald Rd Library
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Next meetings on 19 Dec / 16 Jan, 7.00pm

McDonald Rd Library ALL WELCOME

leithcentralcc.co.uk/meeting-dates



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You're welcome to attend on **12 December at 7.30pm**
Broughton St Mary's Parish Church, Bellevue Crescent

www.ntbcc.org.uk